

## W. J. Wierenga/Wierengo Family of Muskegon

By Frances Harrington

Wibbe Jans Wierenga was born in Groningen, Netherlands, on April 28, 1823, to Jans Seigers Wierenga, a buckwheat miller, and Geertruit Entes Mulder. On April 13, 1848, he married Maria Jans Dijkema, daughter of Jan Sjabbes Dijkema and Mettje Oewes Van Duinen. Wibbe worked as a carriage maker, blacksmith, and a barrel maker throughout Groingen province. The couple had six children, Geertruida in 1849, Metje in 1852, Enno in 1855, Janneke in 1859, Johanna in 1862, and Alberdina in 1865. Alberdina died in 1866, and shortly after that, the family made the voyage to the United States, moving first to Patterson, New Jersey. In 1869, they made the move to Muskegon, Michigan.

As with many immigrants, their names were changed, probably to sound more "American". Wibbe was changed to Wilbur, Maria was known as Marie, Geertruida was changed to Gertrude, Metje was changed to Margaret "Maggie", Enno was changed to Andrew, Janneke was changed to Jennie, Johanna was changed to Josephine "Josie". Their surname was also changed from Wierenga to Wierengo. Wilbur supported his family by working as a carpenter and did quite well. He was able to retire around 1888. The family home was located on Forest City Street (which became First Street) near Bowery Street (which became Hamilton Avenue).

Gertrude was the first to marry. She married Henry B. Smith, who operated a grocery store on Ottawa Street for 51 years. They had 8 children, 3 died in infancy. She and Henry both died in September of 1924. Next was Margaret. In 1872, she married Christian Peterson who was a partner in the Henderson & Peterson City Flour Mill. They had 7 children, only 2 lived to adulthood. Three of their children died in September 1881, of Scarlet Fever. Christian died in 1889 and Margaret in 1933. Andrew married Jennie DeHaas, daughter of Catherine (Vandervere) and John DeHaas, in 1881. They had 2 children. Andrew died in 1894. His wife remarried William Reuther in 1912 and she died in 1940. In 1882, Jennie married Walter S. Horn, who was an agent for one of the brewing companies and an insurance and real estate salesman. They had no children. Walter died in 1910 and Jennie in 1931. Josephine was the last to marry in 1900 to John L. Taylor, who dealt in real estate. Josephine died in 1912 and John's death is unknown. They too, had no children.



Andrew, the only son, became a very successful businessman. After having worked in other grocery stores, at 19 years of age, he started his retail grocery business with \$178.00. In 1880, he started in the wholesale business. In 1883, he had a 66 x 70 foot, two-story, plus basement, brick block, called the Wierengo Block, built to house his business. It was located at Nos. 18,

20, & 22 Pine Street. The Wierengo Block building was the last carpentry job his father, Wilber, worked on before he retired. In an article of the Muskegon Chronicle in 1884, it was predicted that in 10 years, Andrew would be one of Muskegon's richest men. Andrew not only operated his wholesale business in Muskegon, but it extended for more than 100 miles around. He was one of the best known and most progressive businessmen in the city. In 1891, at 36, his annual sales were said to be about a quarter of a million dollars (approximately \$8,394,869 in 2022). His business had grown to such an extent that he traded the Wierengo Block to L. G. Mason for the property that is now Hackley Stadium, where he planned to build a new headquarters for his wholesale house.

In August of 1890, he purchased the "Hotel Cadillac Block" located at the corner of Western Avenue and Pine Street as an investment. When he purchased the hotel, he had plans to remodel it to house his wholesale business, but later decided to build on another location. The hotel was built in 1873 by Mr. S. A. Hoffstra and at that time called the "Hoffstra House". It was later known as "The Arlington" before becoming the "Hotel Cadillac", and then "The Wierengo". In 1893, the three story, 60 room hotel was remodeled and repainted and steam heating put in, and an addition put on for a culinary department. The dining room on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor had the capacity for seating 100 people. It was one of Muskegon's finest hotels.



Andrew was considered by many to be a kind hearted and generous man, often donating food to families in need and also to help with the local missions. He was instrumental in making the Union Depot on Western Avenue a reality by donating and soliciting funds for the project. Being a civic minded man, Andrew was one of the directors of the newly formed Chamber of Commerce and in 1893 became its Treasurer. He was a director and past Vice-President of the Wholesale Grocers Association of Michigan, and one of the original directors of the new

National Lumberman's Bank. He was also a charter member of the Muskegon Lodge, Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. A piece about Andrew from An Account of Muskegon County edited by J. L. Smith, said he "was a man of sterling character and marked business ability, loyal as a citizen and held in unqualified popular esteem". The Kalamazoo Gazette reported in 1894, that in 10 years Andrew had accumulated \$100,000 (\$3,551,211 in 2022).

Andrew was just 39 years old when he died after a short illness on October 6, 1894. His wholesale business was sold to George Hume and became one of the largest on the west side of the state. He and Jennie's 2 sons, Andrew age 12, and John age 8, were to inherit the hotel property, once they became of age. Andrew's wife Jennie leased out the hotel until it was sold some years later.

Mr. Wilbur Wierengo died at age 80 in 1903, Marie, his wife died in 1911 at 88. Wilbur, Marie, and the Wierengo children are all buried in Oakwood Cemetery, except for Margaret who is buried in Evergreen.

Sources: Muskegon Chronicle ([genealogybank.com](http://genealogybank.com)), Muskegon Enterprise February 1897 edition ([freepages.rootsweb.com](http://freepages.rootsweb.com)), The Advantages & Surroundings of Muskegon, Michigan (Board of Trade 1892), An Account of Muskegon County edited by J. L. Smith (Historic Michigan Vol. III (Hackley Library), [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com), [Familysearch.org](http://Familysearch.org), [findagrave.com](http://findagrave.com), photo of Wierengo Hotel (Lakeshore Museum Center), Kalamazoo Gazette ([genealogybank.com](http://genealogybank.com)), Monetary value are from [measuringworth.com](http://measuringworth.com).