

The Evolution of a Name

FREDERICK FEIKE MANFRED

[There was considerable stir in literary circles when in the spring of 1952, an author whose name was already well known, suddenly announced that he would henceforth be known by another name. "How do you pronounce 'Manfred,' Fred?" asked the *New Yorker* in reporting the change of name. In this article Mr. Manfred, a member of the *ANS*, discusses in detail the evolution of his name and the reasons for the change. See "Editor's Page."]

I WAS BAPTIZED as Frederick Feikema, despite strenuous objections from all the old Feikema great-uncles who claimed I should be given the name of Feike Feikes Feikema, the customary name of the family *stamhalder* (oldest male child born to the oldest male ad infinitum). But my father (who was born Feike Feikes Feikema but who used the first name of Frank) was for Americanizing it some, and for honoring his wife's (my mother's) father, Frederick von Engen. So Frederick I became. However, I was called Feike by many relatives and bore this as a nickname all through high school and college and into life, though I was always called Fred or Frederick by my intimates, such as mother, brothers, father, wife.

When it came time to publish my first book, the old question of what to do with my last name, Feikema, came up. People just would not pronounce it correctly. They'd say Fy-keem'-ah, Fy-kame'-ah, or Fee-keem'-ah, or Feek'-a-ma, or Fyk'-ma, etc. My editor suggested using my nickname, Feike, along with Feikema. This would help pronounce my last name, he thought. But not so. They'd get the first right, but mangle the second as usual. At the same time I regretted losing Frederick. A nickname is one thing (it is a casual catch at your being) but your real name is the one your mother and father and your wife, and very close friends use. I wanted Frederick back. But I also decided that in taking it back I'd add a new name which Americans would be able to pronounce.

I began to look around, ask around. I asked all the relatives if they knew what Feike and Feikema meant. None seemed to know.

I next asked Professor Konstantine Reichart, who taught in the Foreign Language Department at the University of Minnesota here. (He's now at Yale University.) Konstantine spent some time digging and came up with the following: that "Frederick" and "Feike" and "freedom" and "friend" had the same Indo-European root in *fri-du* or *pri-tu* with *pri* meaning 'love,' 'friendship,' 'peace,' that over the centuries through a process of vocal nicknaming or petnaming in the Frisian language (possibly also in other Teutonic dialects) the Germanic or Old Frisic-Anglo-Saxon name of "Fridurik" became "Feike"—"Fridurik" became "Friducho" which became "Friccho" which became "Ficco" which became "Feike," that the ending of "Feikema" was still the old *ma* from ancient times (the old Aryan root for the word we now use as 'man'), that therefore Feikema meant, anglicized, Fredman, (Frederickman), or Manfred. I liked the last very much. It was as Anglo-Saxon as a man could make it. Even morons couldn't help but pronounce it, or spell it right. A perfect name for one who wanted a trademark that the American and English public could pronounce. At about the same time my wife and I heard Tschaikovsky's MANFRED played on the radio, and the ease with which the announcer pronounced the name convinced us. Armed with this information, I attended the next family (Feikema) reunion at Sioux Falls.

Upon closer inquiry I discovered that the great-uncle and great-aunt still alive remembered that my grampa's translation of Feike as Frank was wrong, that good Frisians didn't do so because the Franks had once been hated enemies, that Frank had been given to my father's father by the immigration officer at the port of entry. The officer told my grandfather that Feike and Feikema would be too tough to pronounce in America, that he had better adopt an American name. When grandfather didn't know what to choose, the officer asked where he was from. "Franeker," said grampa. "Well, that's it. Make it Frank." And so it became Frank, and after that all the firstborns or Feikes in the United States were called Frank! The great-uncle and great-aunt also remembered that the Feikes in the other families, upon coming to America, always translated it to Fred or Frederick, e.g., Feike Groene now called himself Frederick Green. This tied it down. And it was a case of where scholarship helped awaken the memory of aged immigrants as to old customs back in the Old Country. When I told them that be-

cause of business reasons I was going to *add* (not change) Manfred to my legal name of Frederick Feikema, they agreed that it was a good translation and a good sounding name in their ears. Some of the younger Feikemas, who had dealings with the world (most Feikemas are farmers and so don't feel the need for a change,) accepted it enthusiastically, and one family beat me to it, that is, adding Manfred to their name. I suggested that all male children be given the middle name of Feikema so that our descendants would always know where Manfred came from. In my own case I was going to give my son, when he came, the name of Frederick Feikema Manfred which would be the *stamhalder's* name, which would have the same meaning as Feike Feikes Feikema, that is, Frederick the-Feike-man of the Manfreds. As the great-uncle explained it to me, Feike Feikes Feikema meant Feike Feike's 'feike'-man, that is, Feike has a son meaning 'peace' 'friend,' and besides being a nickname for Frederick, also meant 'firstborn male of the firstborn male of the firstborn male.' (Incidentally, this was the only meaning the family remembered: Feike meant 'the first one.' My mother's people believed that Frederick meant 'head of the house.') Thus Feike Feike's Feikema means the 'Firstborn Firstborn's *firstborn manchild*.'

The long Feike line began back in the early 1700's. A fellow named Feike Sierks, a *huisman* or *boer*, of Klein-Lankum, Friesland, started it off. He died in 1767. He was married in Franeker and lived near it. He named his son Feike Feike's Feikema, II. And so on, until my grampa was named Feike Feike's Feikema, V, and my father Feike Feikes Feikema, VI, and I, well, I was supposed to have been Feike Feikes Feikema, VII, but instead am now calling myself Frederick Feikema Manfred, VII, and will name my son Frederick Feikema Manfred, VIII. It is also interesting to note that for those seven generations the firstborn child was always male, that there was a heavy predominance of males in all those families, that my father, for example, had seven sons (one died at birth) and no daughters, but that now dad has six granddaughters and no grandsons! (I have two daughters, Freya and Marya.) It is also interesting to contemplate the odd historical accident that gave me a grandfather on my mother's side with the name of Frederick, a name which was given me, and which, by great luck, turns out to be the original for Feike.