



Times Union photo by Skip Dickstein

**CHECK IN** — Thelma Bradt registers Bradt relatives Friday for the family's reunion at the Desmond Americana.

## 312 gather for family's first reunion

**By Grace O'Connor**

Staff writer

**COLONIE** — Brothers Albert and Arent Andriessen Bradt arrived in Albany from Fredrikstad, Norway, in 1637 on the Dutch ship *Rensselaerswyck*. On Friday, 312 of their descendants checked in at the Desmond Americana for a family reunion.

Most registered as Bradt but whether they signed-in as Bratt, Brodt, Brott, van der Zee or a seemingly unrelated married name, they were clearly Bradts at heart.

Cynthia Biasca flew in from California to see the results of two years of long-distance planning for the first Bradt family gathering. Long interested in family genealogy, she said with a smile, "This took us 350 years to accomplish."

The registration table drew more than family members signing up for the three-day event. Passers-by — curious about the Bradt T-shirts, mugs and tote bags offered for sale — stopped to see what was happening.

"What is it?" one man asked. "Is it a company?"

Thelma Bradt answered, "It's a family reunion." And, heavens no, she said, "I don't know them all. I know a handful. I've only been a Bradt 39 years."

Her husband, Ken Bradt, of Sarasota, Fla., worked for two years with Biasca to reunite the family in the area where it all began.

Working with them, making local contacts and arrangements for the reunion, was Ken Bradt's nephew, Dale Atherton-Ely and his wife, Karen,

of West Glensville. They are among the 8 percent attending from the Capital District.

Among the family members are van der Zees — a family line that originated on the trip across the Atlantic when Albert Bradt's wife gave birth to a son during a violent storm. They named him Storm van der Zee, or storm on the sea. Some of his descendants dropped the surname Bradt, starting a line of van der Zees.

Albert Bradt, whom the Dutch called "De Noorman" for the Norseman, ran a sawmill on the creek that is still called the Normans Kill. De Noorman was described as "a feisty fellow" who often tangled with the law.

Albert Bradt, who had three wives before he died in 1686, was a founder of the First Lutheran Church in Albany in an era when being a Lutheran was reason to arrest a man. The current congregation of that church sent congratulations to the Bradts on their reunion.

Arent Bradt moved to Schenectady where he was an original patentee, or recipient of a land grant.

The brothers came to America via Holland. For generations the Bradts intermarried with the Dutch, so the family's heritage is primarily Dutch, with its true roots documented as Norwegian.

But this weekend Bradts came from everywhere.

Mary Jane Bradt-Hughes and her husband Otis, an auto mechanic, arrived from Pleasantgrove, Utah, with her brother, landscaper Ross Bradt

and his wife, Gean. "Love of family brought us here," Bradt-Hughes said. From the day the invitation arrived, "We didn't hesitate a minute."

Biasca explained getting the group together meant looking for Bradts in every telephone directory from every metropolitan area.

"I was already corresponding with 40 to 50 relatives and by the time we were ready to send invitations, we had contacted 180 people and sent out letters to 600 more."

Garrett Bradt and his cousin, Lyle Butler, arrived from San Diego together. "We're anxious to meet distant relatives," Garrett Bradt said.

Butler said his late mother, Lila Bradt Butler, had been extremely interested in tracing family history. "That's another reason we're here," he said.

Their contribution to the exhibit area was a history of Col. Garrett Bradt, who was born in Albany in 1827 but headed West during the gold rush. "He was our grandfather," Garrett Bradt said. "My father and I were both named for him."

The gold chaser from Albany later served as chief of San Francisco police before moving to San Diego where he became involved in politics.

Today, the family will tour the cities of Albany and Schenectady and enjoy a Hudson River cruise. The gathering will end at noon Sunday with the formation of a Bradt Family Association.

Biasca and Ken Bradt say the association will make it much easier to track down family members for future reunions. That is, unless they wait another 350 years for the next one.