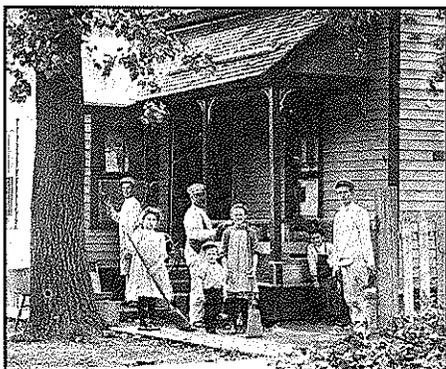


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# Recollections of Johan Nicolay

Roseland, Illinois  
and Lark, North Dakota

This episode from the Nicolay family's experiences occurred between 1905-1907 and was written from the viewpoint of Johan Nicolay who accompanied his father Rentze Nicolay on a migration from Roseland, Illinois to Lark, North Dakota.

Rentze Nicolay, identified as "the father" throughout this account immigrated with his wife, Grietje Van Keulen, in 1888. Census records indicate that two of their five surviving children,\* George and Henry, were born in the Netherlands. The author, Johan was born in Orange City, Iowa just before the family moved to Roseland. Census information suggests that Rentze and Grietje first settled in Iowa and moved to Roseland in 1900 where Rentze and his oldest two boys became house painters. They lived at 394 West 10th Street from 1900 to 1906.

Johan begins his story with a description of conditions in Roseland which caused the family to migrate to Lark, North Dakota. The Nicolays were successful farmers in that region until 1921 when the agricultural depression, which preceded the general depression of the thirties, forced them off their homestead. Thereafter, and particularly between 1933 and 1960 Johan and his wife Christina Van Den Berg operated a Watkins Products distributorship in Hull, North Dakota. Although Johan died in 1956, his wife lived on until 1984. The following recollection of Johan's pioneer experiences (1905-1907) has been edited for length and to insert paragraph structures. In general the style, syntax and spelling are Johan Nicolay's.

*Editor*

*(image behind text) Farming in the west, from Illustrated News of the World, November 7, 1891, pp. 456-7.*

\* The 1890 census records five living children and also the birth of five others who did not survive.

The Father [Rentze Nicolay] was a painter and decorator by trade and the 2 oldest sons [George and Henry] helped him. They were well satisfied as they had very much work and owned 3 good properties. The Lord was good and blessed them. Their homes were located in Roseland, Chicago, Ill. At the time of this story the labor Union was beginning to get very strict [aggressive], so that all laborers working for themselves were forced to join the Union. About this time the Union hired men to molest and if necessary kill the workers who opposed the Union and for conscience sake would not join the Union. Many time a milkman delivering milk to customers with horse and wagon in the early morning were found either killed or cruelly beaten lying in the ditch, milk wagon overturned, other non Union workers were treated the same way, so that a man working for himself was constantly in danger unless he joined the Union. The father of this story was visited quite often by officials of the Union to persuade him to join the Union, and was told either to join or suffer the consequences. The Father would reply that for conscience sake he could not join because some of the money he would pay to be a member would be used to pay these men who were called "thugs" to mutilate or even kill non Union members.

Many a time I remember after the Father and sons had finished painting and decorating a new home, the whole job would be tottally spoiled by smearing tar inside and outside of the homes or damaging their work in one way or another, although the Authorities tried to put a stop to such practices it was to no avail, and after several months of working under this strain

and circumstances the Father finally decided to apply to Authorities for a liscence to carry a revolver, so that if need arose he could protect himself and his 2 sons. You can well imagine that from that time on the Father went with fear in his heart to his work each morning. How well does the writer of this story recall the fervent prayers and petitions of the father before the throne of Grace at the breakfast table to ask God for Guidance and protection for the day.

The summer and fall went by in this way the Father carrying the concealed revolver, working under a strain of fear. The climax came one day in October. The father and the two brothers were finishing painting a large two story building. And while the Father was upon the ladder trimming the gable of the building on the street front, the oldest son was close to the ladder on the sidewalk watching and alert for any suspicious caracters. The other brother was at the back of the house watching the alley, when all at once 2 men came out of the ally on a run to get to Father upon the high ladder—to throw the ladder over which if accomplished would kill the father, but the brother in back of the house gave the alarm and hollered "There they come." At the same time the Father called down to the oldest son "George get away from the ladder." Just as the two men came close to the ladder the Father drew his revolver and shot down in the side walk. of course these two men had not expected Father to be ready for them, so they ran off. In no time a crowd had gathered and a policeman came to find out what all the excitement was about and to arrest father, but when he learned the truth and when the father produced his per-

mit and explained he only fired the revolver to protect his life, the policeman was satisfied.

You can well imagine that the Father and sons were so upset that there was no more painting done that day. For some time the Father had been planning to find some other work and it so happened that a land Co. in Chicago had agents in Chicago trying to get people to go out west to locate on a homestead of 160 acres and buy [an additional] 160 acres from this land Co. who had bought up a great amount of land in N.Dak. This land Co. would go out west with the people and help locate them on these barren prairy tracts. An agent got in touch with Father and persuaded him to go along with some 5 or 6 other men from Roseland to N. Dak. If they were satisfied after seeing N. Dak. and would settle down on homesteads, the trip would be financed by the land Co. So after much debating and praying about this, the father finally decided to join the group and take a trip to N. Dak. So the time was set to make the trip in Nov. this was the year 1905.

Of course many rumors were heard about N. Dak. being a very cold climate and Indian country. So the mother persuaded the father to dress warm, to make sure and wear winter under clothing. So the Father and 3 other men from church at Roseland and the land agent left Chicago by train. They arrived at Mandan a town west of the Missouri River 5 miles west of Bismarck the capital of N. Dak. And from Mandan they rode in a spring wagon drawn by 2 horses west about 50 miles. There were no railroads or no automobiles or highways west of the Missouri River, just prairy trails and at that time the stage coach ran from

Mandan along the Black hills trail through South Dak. It was prairy, prairy, an occasional rancher, but miles and miles apart. The fall weather was warm and invigorating so that the men had to shed most of their warm clothing. This was a great change to be out on the open prairies of N. Dak. Never before had any of these men been outside of Chicago. But after driving and looking around for a few days, they decided to locate as close together as possible on homesteads of 160 acres. Also buying an adjoining 160 acres from the land Co. so they now were ready to go back home to prepare to get ready to come out to settle on their homesteads in the spring of 1906. They had to pay \$8 an acre for the land bought.

During the winter months work in painting and decorating was at a stand still so these few men gathered together occasionally making plans for the coming spring and urging other holland church famalies to also go along so they would astablish a cologny or settlement of our church people. Of course many there were that didn't approve of this movement. The minister of the church tried to talk them out of this absord notion because said he, "That is no white man's land, all there are is Russions, and Indians, and the climate." The winters are so severe that the

jackrabbits freeze stiff on the prairies. Plans were made and a few more men with famalys promised to go along to locate in March.

It was decided that the oldest boy, George, would stay in Chicago for the summer with the mother and the two girls while the father with the second boy Hendriekus (Henry) and Johan (John) the youngest boy, age 13 would go to the homestead to build a home for the family. About the 18th of March they took a train from Chicago for N. Dak. That was to be some experience for all but especially for the only 2 boys in the Company. When they arrived in Mandan N Dak. they stayed over night and next morning the agents of the land Co. drove them all out in the two spring wagons to take us to our homesteads.

We arrived in early evening at Flascher, a small village, which con-

sisted of a small hotel, a general store, a post office and a few houses. Here we were to stay over night, 10 miles from our homestead. The few people were happy to welcome us, and one small boy was riding a Indian pony. Henry and John admired the horse & rider as this was all so new and strange, never having seen a pony and boy in the saddle before. So this young lad asked John to have a ride on the pony. He was scared but anxious to ride the pony. So after the boy had helped John into the saddle, there he sat. The pony didn't move and John did not know what to do next, the men, women, & children were laughing and one man said ride him Johnie. Push the lines. Of course Johnie took the lines and pushed the lines to the ponies head, you can imagine the fun and laughter from the small crowd.



*Nicolay house at  
394 West 110th Place,  
Roseland.*

*Roseland First CRC,  
about 1900.*

They all had a good nights rest and the next morning they bade farewell to the last little town they would see, in the early afternoon we arrived at our homestead but [had] no shelter of any kind so a rancher who had his ranch just east of our homestead offered to give us shelter untill we could put up some tents to live in. Three of the men who came along decided they wanted to see the land east of



Bismarck about 80 or 100 mi. east before deciding where to locate. Because the Father of the boys also was a kind of sub agent, he had to go along, so the two boys stayed with this rancher who was a widower with 2 grown sons, until the father would be back, that would be about 3 or 4 days.

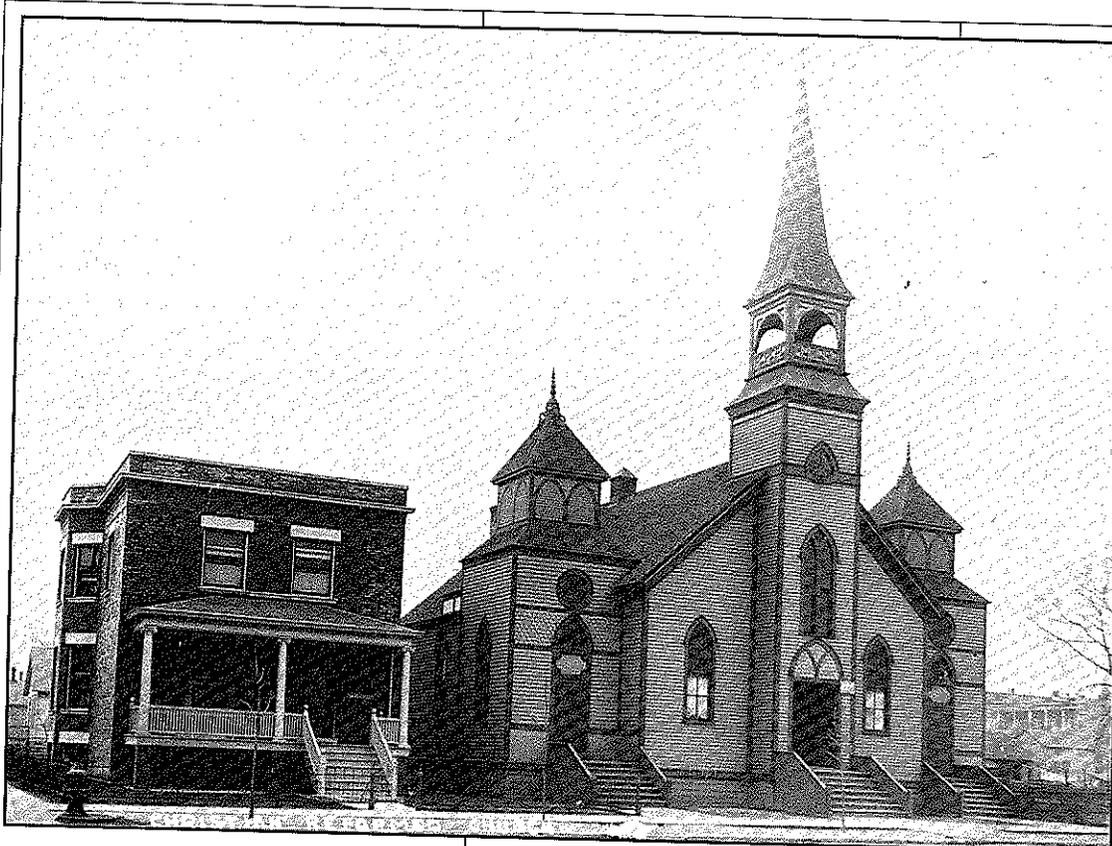
Their ranch house was built of sod, had two rooms and a dirt floor. That was some change for our two boys coming from the city of Chicago. When it was time for chores the men folks went to the barns made also from sods with poles and hey for roofs, so the boys went in the house to get acquainted. The kerosene lamps were lit and the boys thought it quite spooky. After a while Henry & John began to feel queer. They began to itch all over, and began to scratch. When the men folks came in to make supper, they just laughed at them and

said, "You will get used to that." It doesn't bother us any. Very little supper was eaten by the boys as the itching and scratching was getting unbearable. So the Rancher told the boys to take off all their clothes, and then to rub each other in with Kerosene. Then they discovered that the sod house was infested with fleas. They pestered the boys continuously so that sleeping was impossible.

The next morning the boys were in very low spirits and cried being lonesome for their home & mother way back in Chicago. A good deal of the day was spent in chasing fleas out of their clothing and in rubbing with kerosene, but by this time the boys were full of bumps from scratching. To make it more miserable, along towards afternoon it became cloudy and it began to rain, so that the boys were forced to stay inside the sod house. By this

time the youngest boy John became really homesick for Mother so both boys were crying and wishing they had never come to N. Dak. Towards evening when the men again left the boys alone to do their chores, John crying, told his brother Henry that they better leave this place and start walking back to Chicago.

Henry who was 4 years older [seventeen] tried his best to comfort John but to no avail. John had his mind made up and prepared to run away from this horrid dismal flea infested house. But Henry said it will be dark soon and we don't know where to go to. We can't stay out in the rain and alone on the prairie. But Johnie's mind was made up and he started off. So all Henry could do was to tag along and try to calm Johnie down and keep him company. You can well imagine how worried these ranch-



*Roseland Second CRC,  
about 1900*

hollered. "Thank God Henry there is a mother there." By this time the women hearing the boys crying and talking, exclaimed to her husband, who also came out of the house, "Why Will there's some boys out there in the rain." The boys by this time approached and Johny cried, "Oh please, please take us in your house."

The woman & her husband who were to be our neighbors

ers were not finding the two boys in the house. They called and went outside, but it was already getting dark, so anxiously they awaited the coming morning.

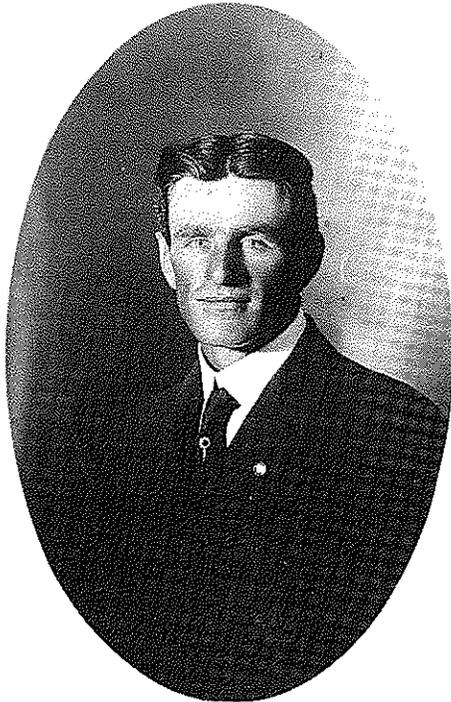
The boys all this time were walking in the rain going west argueing, crying and Henry wanted to go back to the ranch from where they had run away but the rain had soaked them to the skin and as long as they kept on walking the wet clothes felt good and the fleas quit biting. So at times praying and crying for the Mother so far away and at times scolding and quarreling they wandered in the dark, soon they came to a creek and they waded across. Now that was a very dangerous thing to do as in this creek there were deep holes with from 6 to 10 feet of water in places, but this the boys did not know, and the Lord sent His guardian angel to guide and protect these sorrowing

boys. By this time it was very dark and the walking not so easy. Sometimes they would stumble and fall into rabbit holes or badger holes or get tangled up in the long grass.

How long they had aimlesly wandered around they could not tell, but all at once Johnie through his tears saw a light to the south of them and Johnie let out a schrick and said, "Look, look over there is a light, thank God there's a light, thats where we are going. Maybe there is a mother over there." So the boys walked for the light, which was about 2 miles away. When they got closer they heard a dog barking, which terrified them but they kept on walking, the dog was a big huskie and barked, and barked, so that the woman of the house opened the door and called "Here Wallie, come here, be quiet, what are you barking at." At the sound of her voice Johnie let out a shriek and

were very kind people and, took the boys in. Between sobs they told their pitifull story of running away from the other place, Johny crying. I want my mother, I want to go back to Chicago. Those miserable fleas nearly drove us crazy. Now it so happened that this home was not a sod house but a frame building, with a attic, also they had two small boys of their own, the oldest about 10 years old. Naturally our boys felt at home with these folks and remained with them for about a month. The next morning the rain had quit and the sun was shining. About 8 or 9 o'clock, one of the ranchers from where the boys had run away came riding on his horse, looking for the run away boys. You can imagine how relieved he was to see the boys and that they were safe.

The boys enjoyed those good folks and about 3 days later their



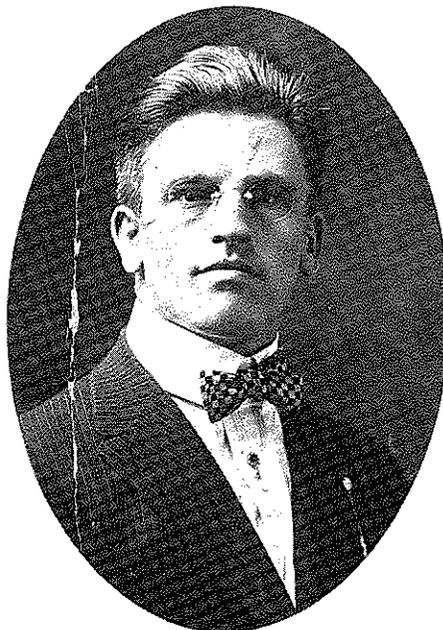
Johan Nicolay

father came to them and he also had to stay with these folks who's name were Mr. & Mrs. James. They had homesteaded the year before and had already built their house and barn. But the father and boys wished to begin making a home on their homestead, so they arranged with Mr. James to go to Mandan 50 miles away to buy a team of horses, a wagon, some tents and a braking plow to brake the sod, cooking utensils, stove, etc. Of course it took them one day to get to Mandan, another day to do up their business, and the third day to get back to their home. So the days passed by quite fast and the boys began to enjoy themselves playing with each other and the dog "Wallie."

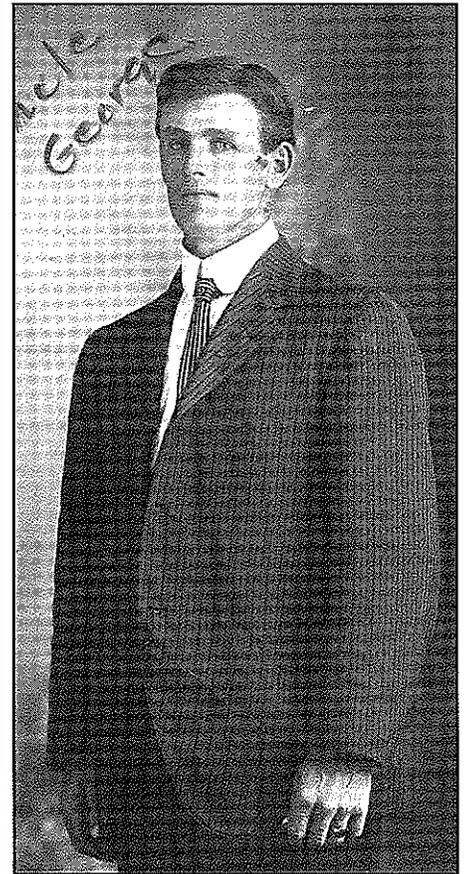
These folks Mr. & Mrs. James lived 1/2 mile south & west of the homestead so the father and the boys began to experience what it was to break the prairie to prepare the ground for a few acres of gar-

den potatoes and some wheat. Of course the father had to make a few trips to Mandan, so while he would be gone 3 days the boys would stay with the "Jame's." The father and Henry and Johnie had 2 fair sized tents on the homestead. One was the kitchen to prepare the meals and the other tent was the bedroom to be occupied until they could build the sod house. By this time a month had gone by, and the sod house started, that was no small job as the sod was cut in 18 inch lengths and loaded on a flat box in the wagon and hauled to the place where the sod house was under construction. So by the time the walls were about ready for the roof, the father again had to make a 3 day trip to Mandan to buy the windows and roof boards & roofing.

More imagrants of different nationalaties and churches were also building new homes to the West & North, that year. Some English folks had settled to the South so that the vast stretch of prairy was beginning to look more and



Henry Nicolay

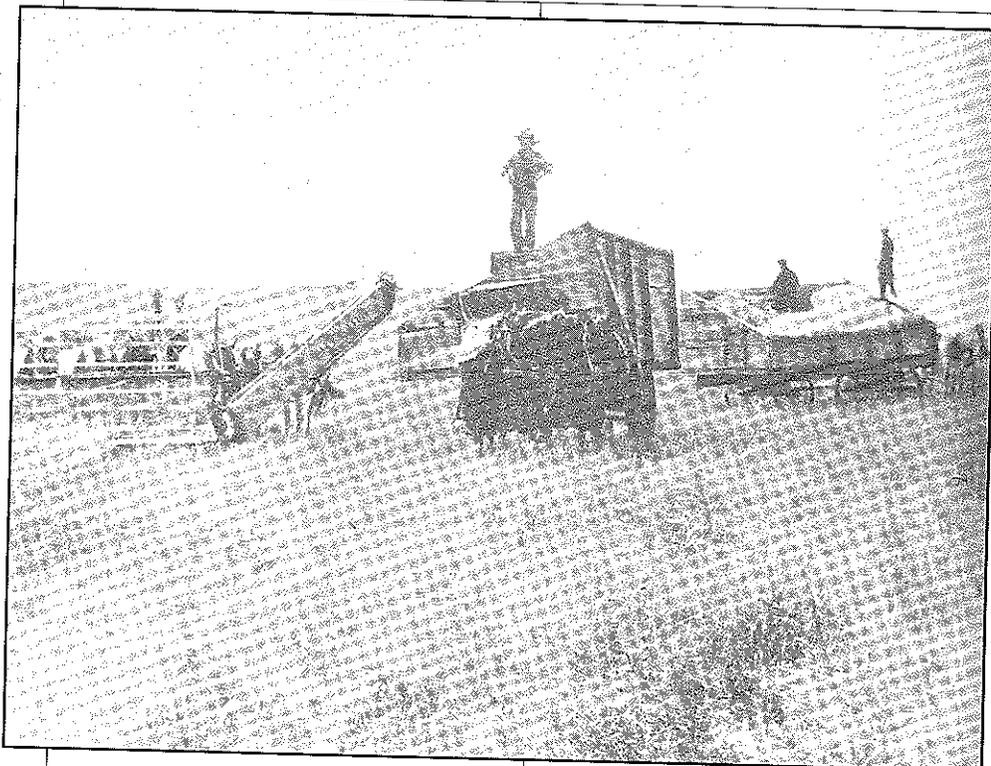


George Nicolay

more like a farming country. There wasn't much to do for Johnie but loiter around and it happened many a night that it would begin to thunder and lightning, the wind coming in gales, the rain pouring down, that the tents would be torn up and turned over so that the boys & father would have to spend the remainder of the night perched or sitting on boards inside the sod house, without a roof overhead. Next morning every thing had to be dried out and the tents again staked down.

There was a rancher 2 miles west of here that homesteaded and put up ranch buildings, barns & corals. He took in 500 head of range cattle from various ranchers miles away to herd these cattle for the summer, to graze on the luscious grass in the

*(right) Johan,  
harvesting grain  
(below) Christina  
Van Den Berg  
Nicolay, feeding  
chickens*



hills about 5 to 8 miles to the West. He hired one of the brothers of the ranch where our boys had run away, to herd those 500 head of cattle. As Johnie didn't have much to do, he also was hired to help herd these cows for wages—for the meager wages of board and clothing which didn't amount to more than shoes, socks, overhauls & shirts. Of course this was a great thrill for Johnie as now he could learn to ride a real Indian pony and be a real cowboy only he never was allowed to carry a gun. After several attempts at riding the pony and being bucked off occasionally, Johnie finally mastered the trick of riding. So now for about 2 months Johnie was a cowboy.

At sunrise each morning Johnie would be helping herd these 500 cows all day. That was a nice easy job, just watching the cattle so they would not stray away from the main herd, which some days would take much riding as on stormy and windy days the cattle would be rather restless and nervous. There were at least 10 large bulls with large horns who would fight and bellow and paw. Still Johnie enjoyed it all quite well. Occasionally seeing coyotes, antelope, or a stray wolf. Sometimes the pony, scared of a large rattlesnake, reared but with the large bull whip Johnie soon would kill the rattler.

One warm day in the afternoon the sky became overcast and clouds began to gather the thunder began to roll and the lightning streaked through the sky. The herd began to want to scatter and the bulls were bellowing and pawing the ground. This other cowboy came on a gallop to Johnie and said "This will be a bad storm, you will have to ride around this side of the herd to keep the cattle from getting away, and I'll ride around the other side of the

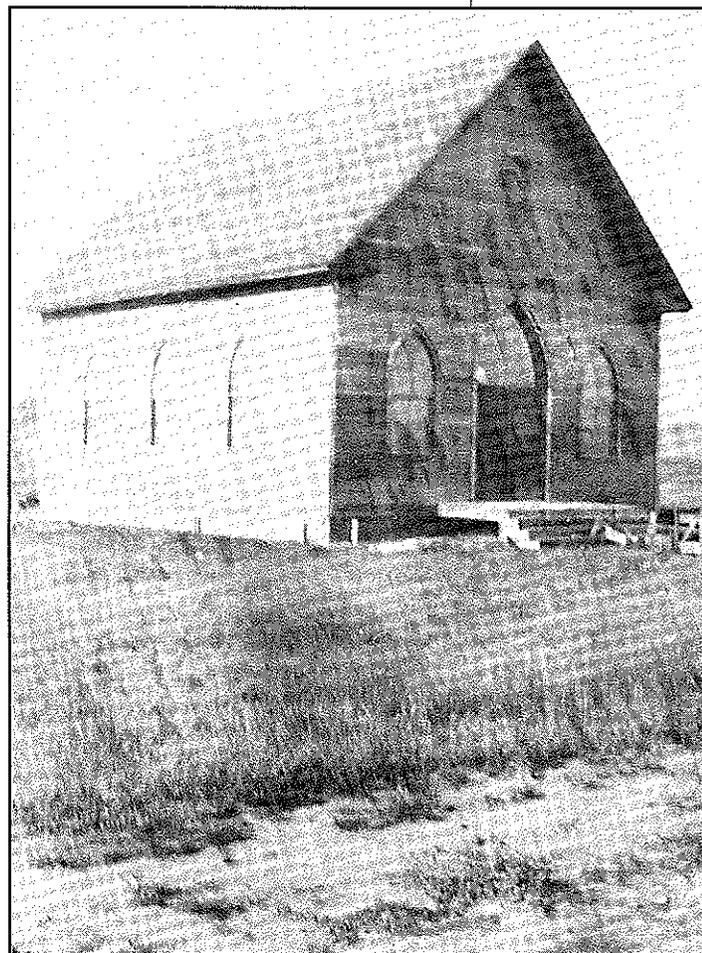
herd. Try your best to keep the cattle in a bunch."

By this time the sky had become dark and very soon the thunder and lightning flashed and streaked across the sky. Johnie had put on his slicker (raincoat) and was riding back and forth around the cattle really scared by this time and soon the rain began to come down. The wind increased and became a real cloud burst. The hail began to pelt and Johnie couldn't see any cows, the pony began to buck and before Johnie could get off of the pony to put the saddle over his head for protection against the hail, the pony bucked him off. So all Johnie could do was to lay on the grass with the hail pelting him, it was a terrific storm which lasted at least 20 to 30 minutes.

It was a miracle that the stampeding cattle hadn't trampled Johnie to death. Again the Lord was merciful and saved Johnie. After the storm nothing was to be seen of the cows or the pony and so Johnie tried desperately to wade through the hail which covered the prairie, and walked back to the ranch at least 4 miles. All Johnie could remember was stumbling in the door and for 2 days he was in bed half conscious and sore all over from the hail bruises and a severe headache. The other cowboy had seen the hail coming and galloped as fast as his horse could run for the little shack and corrals where we would eat our dinners and which was built in the hills. He came out without any discomfort, but had left the cattle by themselves. The cattle had disappeared with the storm. It took at least two months to gather some of the cattle together again as most of the cattle, that were not killed by the storm or drowned in crossing the creeks, landed finally back with their owners.

The Land Co. had hired a rancher to brake 40 acres of sod in the 1/4 Sec. the Father had bought. The last of April was on a Saturday and Henry & Johnie had managed to disc and drill those 40 acres in wheat. Sat. afternoon it began to rain and by Sunday morning the 1st of May it was snowing with a high wind so that it was a blizzard which lasted for 2 days & nights, this was very fine for the wheat sown in the sod, but you can imagine what a discomfort this was for Henry and his father living in a tent. So our good neighbors, the Jame's, offered them shelter until after the storm. Johnie had just been staying with the rancher with the 500 head of cattle for about a week or ten days. The rancher and his cowboy had a hard time in caring for those cattle all through the snow storm, as they didn't have hardly enough hay to feed all those cattle. After the storm the sun came out real warm and within 3 days the snow was all gone. And the wheat on the 40 acres was all growing so that you could see the rows.

About the middle of June the Father and Henry had about completed the sod house, at least the roof was on and Father could do without Henry. As Johnie now was again with his father, Henry hired out to a rancher 40 miles to the West for the summer and received for his wages, a cow and a young heifer calf. So now the father and Johnie worked on the sod house, putting in the windows and doors, and the floor. One afternoon as the Father left the house for a few minutes to get something he needed, on going back to the house, as he neared the door lo & behold in the door was a large rattlesnake all coiled up, ready to strike. Its a good thing that a rattler gives warning by shaking his rattles which no one



*Lark CRC, original structure*

can ignore. So the father quite surprized stepped back and went to the tent and came back with a 22 rifle, and shot the rattlesnake which was about 3 ft. long. The water for cooking & drinking had to be hauled in a barrel on a stone boat drawn by 2 horses from the creek which ran by the homestead about 80 rods to the West. You can imagine that the water didn't stay fresh very long, so that for drinking it was not very refreshing. The summer went by all too quickly and that year, the first year of homesteading was quite an experience for our Chicago people, not being used to country life at all. Also on the lonesome unsettled prairie there now had arisen quite a few homesteaders or farmers, so that by sum-

mer the neighbors East, West, South & North were quite a number. All people from different nationalities and denominations—some Methodists, and some Baptists and far to the North a few seventh day adventists.

Sundays, were and had been kept by resting and reading religious literature and the bible. The neighbors felt that we all should come together on Sundays and start a Sunday school. So from that time on for at least a year, they all enjoyed the Sundays gathering together as a mixed Sunday school. There existed a warm fellowship amongst them all and occasionally a visiting student from various churches came over to preach the Word of God to them. Some time in

August, the sod house finished, the father wrote back to the mother and son & two daughters in Chicago that all was in readiness for them and to come. Back in Chicago the family had to ship the furniture, but most of it was too nice to put in a sod house and had to be sold. What could be used and needed was shipped by freight to Mandan, from there they would have to haul it in wagons for 50 miles. When the family finally landed by train in Mandan the father greeted them all and was glad to see his loved family again.

After a good nights rest they all began the journey the next morning in the wagon, 3 sitting on the spring seat. That was a never to be forgotten trip. The mother was not used to pioneering nor the others, but it was the hardest on the mother who had it so nice and convenient in Chicago, and had now come to the wild west prairies of Dakota to endure hardships. When our mother and the 3 children were getting tired after riding for about 4 or 5 hours, they camped off the trail beside a haystack by some rancher and had a picnic lunch and rested up. The journey lasted so long that the Mother would ask Father if over those hills which they were crossing they would come to the end of the world.

At last in the evening they arrived at the homestead, all tired and weary, but glad and thankful to be reunited as a family again. You can well imagine what the hardships were when you remember the luxuries and conveniences enjoyed by the fam. back in the city of Chicago—water and seuridge and electric lights, a gas stove for cooking, 4 bedrooms all nicely furnished, stores to buy food and clothing near by. Most of all was missed the gathering together and

going to church on Sundays to listen to the minister breaking the bread of life. Yes, that spiritual life was missed by all. But as God called Mozes to go to a strange country and he obeyed and was blessed by the Lord, so also our sturdy pioneers believed that the Lord also was here in the wilds of N. Dak. and would bless them.

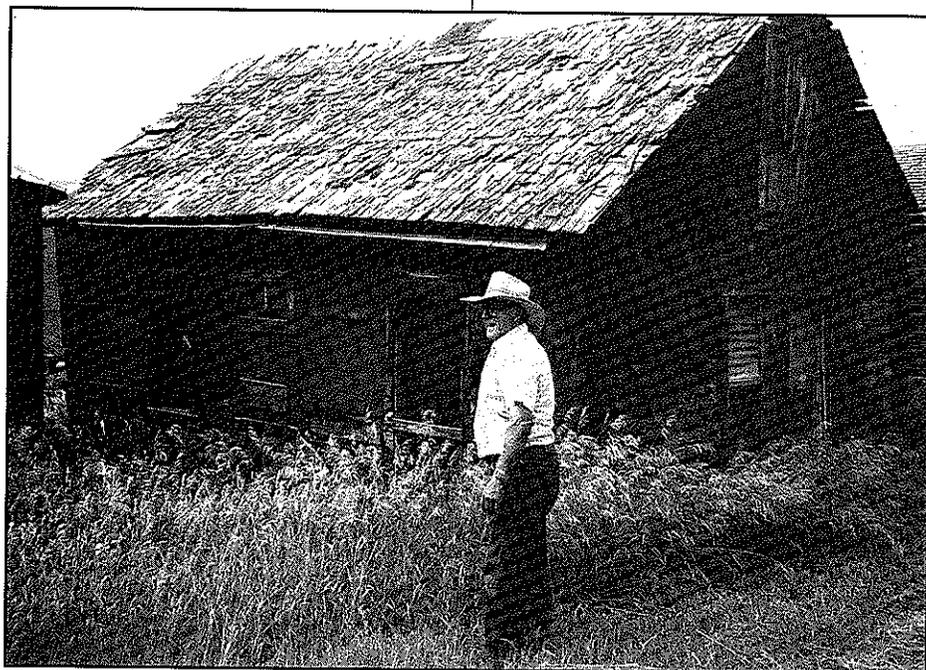
The first evening as the fam. were together in their sod house, they had so much to talk about. Before bed time the father sat at the table, the room lit only by a kerosine lamp, and gave thanks to God for the blessing and guidance received thus far, and read a portion of scripture to comfort them all. The sod house had a sod wall through the center so their was a kitchen and front room, which was also used as the bedroom for the parents and the two girls. The ceiling was of rough board with a square hole to go into the attic under the roof. The boys would have to put up a ladder and with a lantern for light crawl up to their beds in the attic. The nights were cool so

that they could really enjoy the sleep.

Now it was about the last of August and the first wheat harvest was about to begin. By exchanging work with the neighbors, the wheat was cut and tied in bundles. There were no binders but sweep rakes, drawn by horses, the sickle would cut the grain and large arms would swing around to sweep the grain off the sickle on to a platform and one person with a fork would walk along and rake the grain off of the platform in long rows. Then other men, boys and women would tie the wheat in bundles. It would take many days to get 40 acres cut and tied in bundles. But now they had their 40 acres of wheat in bundles. Next the neighbors would come with hay rakes and pick up these bundles of wheat and bring them to the stacker, this man would build large stacks. And later on in the fall a thrashing machine drawn by 8 horses would come to do the thrashing, some years later big steam engines were used to thrash

out the grain. These city farmers felt quite elated on being blessed with a crop to be thrashed the first year. Grass had been cut and hauled into stacks for the winter feed for their few horses and cows.

It was the custom for ranchers and farmers alike to plow furrows around the stacks about 1 rod apart and a rod away from the stacks to protect them from prairie fires. Of course this was all so new and strange to these early settlers. They couldn't see the reason for all these precautions. It was on the morning of Nov. the second, that this famaly was sitting at the breakfast table enjoying a good breakfast. As custom was whenever one of the fam. had a birthday, that day would be a joyfull, thankfull day, and the mother already the day before would bake a birthday cake and cookies. The Father would ask a blessing also for the one whose birthday it was. Then came the congradulations and then breakfast with chocolate milk, cookies & cake. After the meal the Father



1990 remnant of  
Van Den Berg homestead

would take down the large Holland fam. bible and read a suitable portion of scripture and they would join in the singing of a Holland psalm.

On this morning the family was barely through with breakfast when a clattering noise was heard outside. The neighbor was coming in the wagon, the horses galloping as fast as they could run the neighbor yelling, "Fire, Priary Fire." On coming outside the smoke was already thick and blowing from the N. West straight over the sod house. They all gathered hay forks and blankets and gunny sacks, wherewith they would try to whip out the fire. The prairy fire had started about 8 miles N. West of there. A careless pioneer had emptied the hot ashes from the stove inside his firebrake, but the wind became stronger each minute and blew the hot ashes over the fire brake into the prairy which in no time was a wall of fire racing on before the wind, and spreading out so that when the wall of fire was nearing the hay stacks and wheat stacks the flames were a mile wide and about 20 ft. high devouring everything in its path.

The men had plowed fire brakes around the stacks and burned the stuble between the furroughs. And with much hard work whipping out the sparks that threatened to burn the stacks, they finally succeeded in saving the 8 grain stacks. They were nearly overcome by inhaling the smoke and their clothing, hair, face & hands were more or less burned. All the hay stacks were

Oct 5 - 1910  
Act 1.

Den 5 octobrn 1910 is avonds 8 uur vergaderde den Kerkeraad ten huize van W. Vogel. De vergadering werd geopend door den pres G. den Besten met gebed.

Act 2.

Den pres verzoekt den heer de notulen voor te lezen, dewilken werden aangenomen en goedgekeurd

Act 3.

Er word ten hafe gebracht dat br G. den Besten 'a's 4 januarie 1911 afreed als ouderling, dat ten dieneinde twee candidaaten moesten gesteld worden.

Act 4.

Daar br G. den Besten zich herkiesbaar stelde word door den Kerkeraad het tweetal gesteld als volgt: G. den Besten en P. van den Berg.

Act 5.

Daar het noodzakelijk gevoont is op Dankdag Gemeenteverg te houden, ten einde door stemming een van den voorgestelde kandidaaten te kiezen, wordt de verg eenige andere dag te moeten stellen worden velen, zoo niet allen, op genoemde Dankdag niet tegenwoordig, konsten zyn.

Act 6.

Met algemeene toestemming word besloten den Stewarding te houden den 3 Decbr 1910

Act 7.

Den eerste vergadering, word besloten, te houden by R. Nicolay.

Vervolgens word den vergadering gesproken door R. Nicolay met dankzegging.

Pres G. den Besten. Schriba R. Nicolay.

Q  
R  
S  
T  
U  
V  
W  
X  
Y  
Z

Page from Lark, North Dakota CRC consistory minutes signed by Clerk R. Nicolay.

burned and many ranchers lost a lot of cattle burned to death, also the roofs of many sod barns & houses.

They found mother and the 2 girls sitting in the firebrake outside their sod house. The mother had the famaly bible in her lap. They too had quite a scare. And the mother had been praying fervantly for the protection of the loved ones. As this fire started the 2nd of Nov. it was too late in the season to make new hay so with a few loads of hay bought and some straw, the few horses and 2 cows had to pull through the winter.

The thrashing of the wheat and

flax was quite a thrill. All the neighbors for miles around would help each other with the thrashing and the women would make the meals. This thrashing would last from a month to 6 weeks. Then before the winter would set in they would have to go with team & wagon and haul the wheat and flax to Mandan to the market and come back with flour, groceries, clothing, etc.

That first winter was overly cold, often 35 and 40 below zero, with a foot of snow on the level. After a snow storm or blizzard in 1910 which lasted 3 days, the snow banks were 6 to 8 ft. deep and the sod barn was completely covered over. In a blizzard the men folks often would not get to the barn to care & feed the animals for days and would have to tie clothes lines around them, tied to the house to try to get to the barn, so they would

not get lost. In the latter part of the winter some times the coal would be about all gone. For days they would burn flax straw to cook with and keep warm because the snow would be too deep for the horses to pull a load of coal. The sod houses generally could be kept quite warm with not too much fuel, but under the roof it would be very cold, the boys would sleep up there and slept warm with enough blankets, but in the morning the steam from their mouths would be frozen to the blankets.

A 1991 survey of World War II veterans in the Christian Reformed Church indicates that the typical survivor served from three to five years in any one of the three branches of military service. Sixty-four percent experienced combat, half in the Pacific theater. The vets, on average, served a full year in combat zones. Furthermore, every veteran's life was altered significantly by the culture shock which followed induction orders.\*

It is clear too that the returning veterans (about 1,400) heavily influenced the character of the CRC and

\* The data gathered for this study came from fifty-eight survey respondents and can, therefore, provide little more than suggestive conclusions. US Army, 61 percent; Navy, 10 percent; Air Force, 6 percent; WAC and WAVES combined, 3 percent. Pacific, 51 percent; Northern Europe, 37 percent; North Africa and Italy, 12 percent.

See also "The CRC and WW II" in *Origins*, Volume VII, no. 2, pp. 33-41, which estimates at least 100,000 CRC men were casualties of the world wars in World War II.

its related institutions. Many (70 percent) used the GI Bill to attend a variety of schools before settling into careers and acquiring leadership positions as pastors and teachers or on church councils, committees, and Christian-school boards. Of respondents to the survey, 87 percent became either elders or deacons, and only 5 percent accepted no official duties in their local congregations.

During military service the vets encountered a variety of chaplains. Of these the most respected, in descending rank order, were Baptists, Lutherans, Christian Reformed, Roman Catholics and Presbyterians. It is not surprising that the Baptists

50  
years ago

## US Veterans from World War II

H.J. Brinks

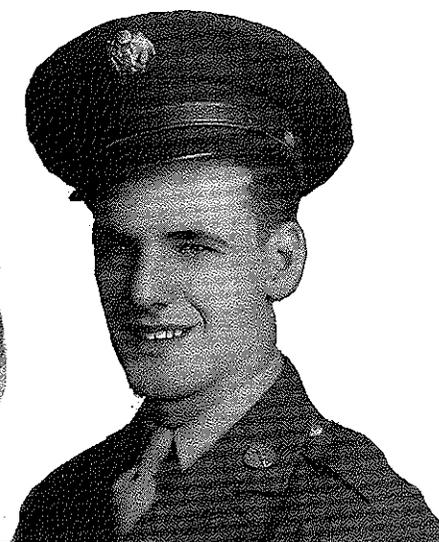
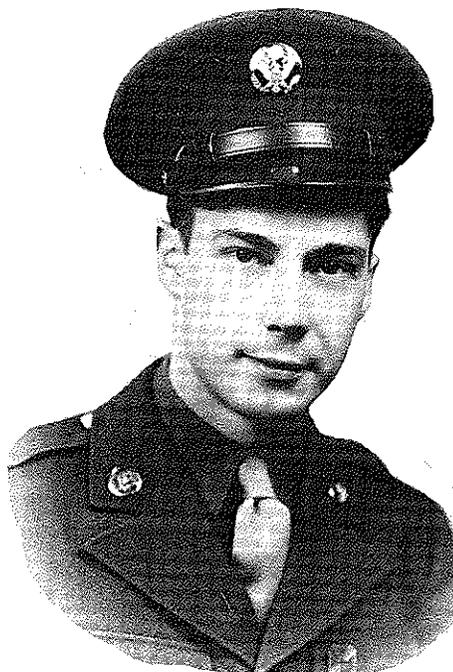
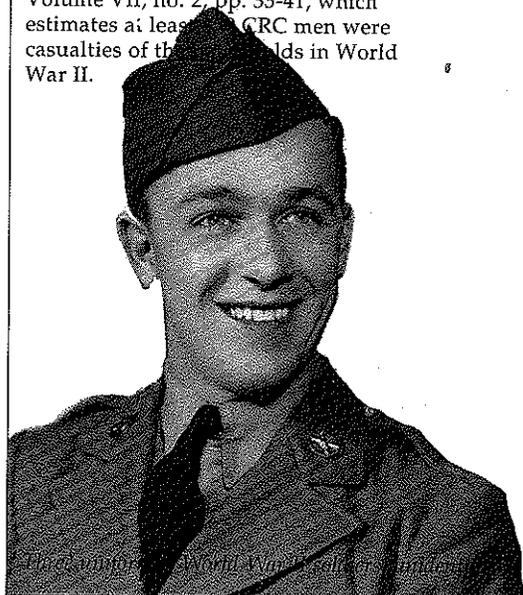


Photo courtesy of World War II Veterans' Association

gained the highest approval rate (23 percent) because they were and are the largest religious group in the USA and therefore have more chaplains than any other group. That the minuscule CRC even appears on the list at all results primarily from the fact that its chaplains and soldiers were on the lookout for each other. CRC, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic chaplains each rated the highest regard from about 10 percent of the respondents. In-



# THE ARMY AND YOU

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terestingly, the largest single group of veterans, (28 percent) indicated no sustained experience with any chaplain.\*

When asked for the religious affiliations of their three closest

\* The statistical spread was 28 percent, no chaplain; 23 percent, Baptist; CRC, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic, 40 percent combined. The balance, 9 percent, mentioned Methodist, Nazarene, and independent.

### SERVICEMEN'S CLUBS

- CAMP ROBINSON, ARK.**: Chr. Ref. men meet at Chapel No. 6 every Sunday morning at 9:30 o'clock. All those of Reformed faith are welcome to meet with us for an hour of Christian fellowship. The chapel is located on 22nd, between Nebraska and Arkansas.
- CAMP GALLAN, CALIF.**: Monday at 6:30 p. m. in the West Chapel, under the direction of Rev. G. Boerslyn, 3793 Harman Ave., San Diego, Calif. Telephone T-0728.
- CAMP COOKE, CALIF.**: Contact Cpl. C. J. Fortina, Hq. Co., 26th Arm'd Engr. Bn., APO 265.
- CAMP McQUAID, CALIF.**: At the Camp Chapel at 7:30 p. m. Bible Class and fellowship.
- FORT ORD, MONTEREY, ETC., CALIF.**: Sunday at 6:00 p. m., Young People's Rally: at 7 p. m., divine service in the Presbyterian Church at Monterey.
- CAMP CARSON, COLO.**: The Reformed Service Club meets every Monday at 8 P. M., at the 89th Division Artillery Chapel, 15th and F Sts., and would like to have all Christian Reformed and Reformed men meet with us as often as possible.
- WASHINGTON, D. C.**: The Chr. Ref. Church meets in the Washington Club, 17th and K Sts., N.W., Washington, D. C. Entrance on 17th Street opposite the Y. W. C. A. Services at 9:45 A. M. and at 4:30 P. M.
- At 5:30 P. M. the Young Calvinist Club meets. It is well attended. An invitation is extended to all service men and women.
- CAMP STEWART, GA.**, in Chapel No. 4, at 2:00 p. m. every Sunday.
- CHANUTE FIELD, ILL.**: Every Tuesday at 8 p.m. in Chapel No. 4.
- FORT RILEY, KANS.**: Time: Sunday, 2:30 p. m. Place: Basement of the Post Chapel.
- FORT KNOX, KY.**: Time: 2:00 p. m. Place: Chapel 3, near Guest House. Contact Pvt. Gerald Rozenboom, Co. C, 1st Bn., A.F.R.T.C.
- CAMP CROWDER, MO.**: Chapel 800, LaClada Ave., near Lewis. Fellowship Hour..... 5:45 P. M., Sunday.
- JEFFERSON BARRACKS, MO.**: See Pfc. John Ver Heul, Gen. Mess Office, Bldg. 26.
- FORT LEONARD WOOD, MO.**: Time: Every Sunday at 2:30 p. m. Place: Chapel No. 5, Kansas and Nebraska St., E.R.T.C. area.
- CAMP BUTNER, N. C.**: Special Troops Chapel, Bldg. No. T902, located on E. St., between 19th and 20th Sts.
- FORT BRAGG, N. C.**, at Parish House Bldg., No. 310 (Take bus to Post Headquarters, this is opposite from meeting place).
- CAMP DAVID, N. C.**, at the Station Complement Chapel, 19th and D Sts., at 2:30 o'clock each Sunday afternoon.
- CAMP GRUBER, OKLA.**: Time: Every Sunday evening at 7 p. m. Place: Chapel No. 10, D Ave. and 10th St.
- FORT SILL, OKLA.**, at Chapel No. 6.
- TULSA, OKLA.**: Contact Cpl. Cornelius Swier, P. O. Box 881, Tulsa Detachment, 1st Ferrying Group, Air Transport Command, Hangar No. 5, Municipal Airport, Tulsa 2, Oklahoma.
- FORT BLESS, TEXAS**, Every Sunday at 5:30 p.m., at the Manhattan Presb. Church, 1201 N. Piedras St., one block north of Five Points, in El Paso.
- CAMP BOWIE, TEXAS**, at No. 6 Chapel, at 7:00 p. m. every Thursday.
- CORPUS CHRISTI N. A. STA., TEXAS**, at Corpus Christi YMCA, on 5th St. Sunday at 6:30 in Room A of afternoon at 2:30, at Trng. Bn. Wednesday at 7:30, each Tuesday evening 8 p.m. in the 5th Regt.



### CHAPTER I

#### WELCOME HOME, VETERAN

*Where Do We Go From Here?*

**WELCOME HOME, veteran.** You've done a great job. You have saved our way of life—ours and down together. Now we want to give you a hand. We are grateful—no bank. And one way we can show it is by helping you to get back into the old swing of things at home.

So—what's on your mind, veteran, as you slip out of that uniform and into your civilian clothes about getting back to your old job? Or completing your education? Do you want vocational training for a new kind of job? Do you need medical attention, or maybe a lay in a hospital? Are you looking forward to a little business of your own, or life down on the farm?

Just what do you want? What do you need? We think we can help you get what you want and need. That's our story and we'll stick to it. That is the purpose of these pages—to help you get oriented as you pass from military into civilian life.

The passage from the ranks of your outfit into the pleasant pattern of life in your old home town shouldn't be too rough. It needn't be, because your country, your own State of Illinois, your community, and many public and private organizations are ready to give you a hand over the rough spots to a productive and happy civilian life.

It isn't matters what your problem is, there are people and ways to help you solve it. You and your dependents are entitled to many benefits and services.

(far left)  
The Army  
and You

(left)  
"Welcome  
Home"  
brochure

(top)  
Servicemen's  
Clubs list  
from Young  
Calvinist,  
January 1944,  
p. 41.

friends, the vets responding to the survey once again cited a wide spectrum of denominations, but the list contrasts interestingly with their ranking of chaplains. Roman Catholic friendships were cited most frequently (22.3 percent); friendships with Baptists, Lutherans and Christian Reformed per-

sons follow rather distantly (13.6, 11.6, and 10 percent respectively). Other groups mentioned between four and seven times were Jews, Methodists, Presbyterians and the Reformed Church in America. The remaining fifteen denominations listed in the survey were cited only once or twice.

We have all heard about "fox hole" conversions—near-death encounters which radically transform lives. Such experiences are, doubtless, valid, but it is noteworthy that a majority of CRC vets reported that ordinary worship services produced the most memorable of their religious encounters during their military days. Ten respondents identified specific services (Easter, Christmas, Lord's Supper), but over half (55 percent) recalled church worship in various settings as the most spiritually vital of their religious activities. Another 30 percent highlighted the Lord's calming presence as their spiritual high-water marks. For about 10 percent, experiencing the unity of all believers stood above other spiritual enrichments. A few, just 5 percent, reported dramatic life-altering encounters as the chief of their religious experiences during military service. One veteran asserted emphatically, "There are unbelievers in fox holes."

The most commonly cited "religious lesson learned from military experience" was gaining an appreciation for other faith groups. Repeatedly the veterans asserted that they acquired soul mates among Baptists, Catholics, Methodists, and nearly every other religious group, including Jews. Most (54 percent) returned to the Christian Reformed Church with hopes of expanding its ecumenical horizons. Nonetheless, only 23 percent expressed a serious discontent with the CRC's narrow

definition of orthodoxy. One of these urged that the CRC take care to avoid substituting "Dutch" blood for Christ's blood. Whatever their misgivings, a large majority (65 percent) asserted that military service increased their appreciation of the CRC, and nearly all (95 percent) cited mission outreach as their favored denominational program. Of these, 40 percent named the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee specifically.

Of course, flesh and blood persons do not conform to research-survey profiles. Individual experiences will not suit up very precisely to a survey's Sears Roebuck tailoring. To avoid the homogenized conclusions of survey research and to add the human interest of specific recollections, only the voices of real veterans will suffice.

The public remarks quoted below were delivered in 1945 by a veteran who had served four years in the Army Air Force. They remain continually pertinent, and they demonstrate a passionate vitality that no survey can provide.

"We, the veterans of World War II, are very happy to be here this evening. We are grateful for this opportunity to thank you for all you did for us while we were away. We assure you that your prayers, letters, and thoughts of us while we were in the midst of a hostile atmosphere were appreciated and answered by our gracious covenant God. We want to take this opportunity to testify that God did not leave us nor forsake us even when at times we forgot about him. We really learned what it means to have a friend in Jesus and in our loneliness to enjoy

the fellowship of his Spirit. We humbly thank God and you for all you did for us.

We learned many things while we were away—some good and some bad. We've seen life and, more particularly, American church and social life as it really is. It's terrible and cannot be fully described. We are a drunken, selfish, immoral, and godless nation, and our churches in general are pitiable. All this caused us to appreciate the marvelous heritage which we in the CRC have. We're not bragging when we say that the CRC has the most wonderful heritage of any people. We're humbly proud of and thankful for our doctrines.

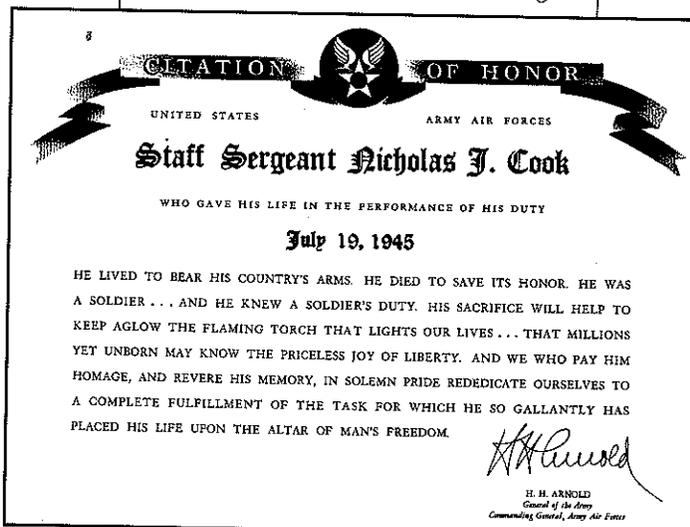
That shouldn't blind us to some of our weaknesses nor to the good points of some of the denominations and persons less fortunate than we are. Some of them put us to shame on many points. God in his marvelous grace has, in general, blessed none of them like us, but, comparatively, we are still so cold, still so selfish, still so stingy, and still so passive. We are like blocks of ice without warmth and activity. We drink in God's favor from day to day and from week to week, shutting ourselves up into our little selfish world while demanding more and more comforting

words from God. Folks, that's all wrong. Christianity isn't passive—it's active. The early apostles and disciples didn't continuously sit down and wait to be fed spiritual things; they didn't drink in continuously after they saw what God desired of them. They went out and were active. We can't always be on the defensive. Wars can't be won that way. We as Christians and as a church must go over to the *offensive*.

While recalling a spectrum of memorable experiences Rev. Sidney Newhouse, a retired CRC minister, recalls several deeply moving vignettes. Sid's commitment to become a pastor also grew out of these and other wartime encounters.

*October 1944, England.* Sunday vesper discussion, disagreeing about how conversion takes place, suddenly or gradually. The chaplain intervened gently: "Men, remember when the convoy was off Newfoundland. The evening breeze was soft and warm from the southeast. You could set your watch by the moment we crossed that squall line and with the crackle of lightning the wind suddenly blew strong and cold from the northwest. Three days out of Liverpool the breeze was from the east in the morning and from the west at night, and I defy you to tell me just when it changed. In John 3 Jesus compares the working of the Holy Spirit to the wind. Why don't we just leave the "how" of conversion to him and just be concerned that it happens?"

*January or February 1945, Germany.* No real worship for weeks, and I was talking about it with Alva White, company armorer. He said, "But haven't you





heard? We are going to have services tonight?"

"We are? Where?"

"Right here in my quarters."

"But . . . who's the chaplain anyway?"

"You are, boy. You are!"

"Hey, I'm no chaplain . . ."

"Get on your knees and get into your Bible. I'll get the men here; you get the message."

I spoke about Peter's walking on the water (appropriately). With the work of two other Christians, this was the first of a series of three weekly meetings whenever possible until our unit broke up during the summer: worship, Bible study, prayer and praise. Most impressive meeting: twenty-three men jammed into the

kitchen of a battle-scarred German farmhouse as I shared Psalm 23 with them. Before daybreak the company began beating paths through minefields. It was the last evening and the last Scripture for one of the drivers before he went out to die on the wintry fields of death.

1945. "A strapping six-foot German trooper lay on his back in the shallow ditch along the roadside, with just one little wound visible in his forehead. The first dead enemy I'd seen. My immediate thought: What a waste. Somebody's son . . . brother . . . husband . . . father. It was hard for me to be a soldier."

June 1945. "The war is over. Sunday morning, and through the open windows of our billet and from the open windows of the church next door comes the sound of hymns, sung in German, but to familiar tunes. I never saw so many men crying at one time. The foolishness of war!"

January 1946. "A small Dutch



(top) Alexandria, Louisiana, Servicemen's Home entrance 1420 5th Street. Host: Rev. Edward Boeve'.

(left) Alexandria, Louisiana, meeting in First Presbyterian Church basement, in 1941.

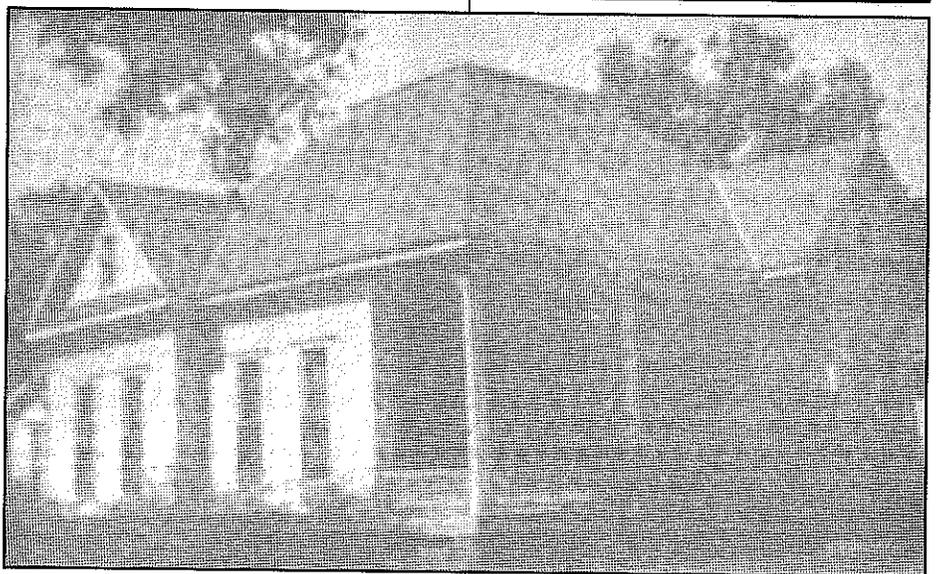
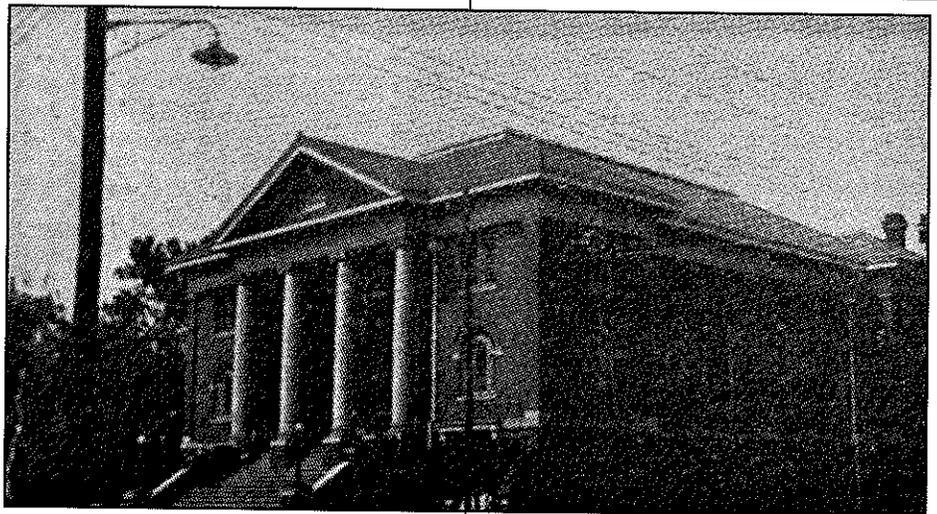
militia squad whom we displaced when we moved into a button factory simply moved up the road to stay in an empty house. In sympathy for their being so rudely displaced, I went to visit them that evening. Their stove was giving off more smoke than heat on a bitingly cold January evening. American troops would have been griping about their discomfort or boasting of booze and broads. Instead, these men had a lively discussion going about the political future of the Netherlands—and the man stoking the smoking stove, a socialist, was holding his end of the argument against nine or ten conservatives! How utterly different from Americans!”

Many vets were comforted by an overwhelming sense of God’s presence, an epiphany which often came unexpectedly, as in the parable of the hidden treasure. One such experience, set in the flat plains of Kansas, follows.

“The troop train on which we were traveling after leaving Fort Riley, Kansas, was moving across the wide-open spaces in deepening darkness. As I stood on a platform between cars looking out into the gloom and then up at the stars in the broad expanse of sky, I felt both loneliness and apprehension about the future, but also a kind of peace as I thought that the great God of the darkness and the stars was my Father for the sake of Christ.”

And, finally, the lesson of Christian unity, which nearly every veteran in the survey heralded, is beautifully embodied in a vignette by Rev. William Ribbens.

“I participated in a nighttime patrol that took a small farm community, sending the German soldiers back as prisoners. Each of us was assigned a strategic spot to hold until the line troops



went through in the morning. Then we could sleep. I was assigned a makeshift, second-floor apartment in one of the farmhouses. When I lay down to sleep on a kitchen couch, I took the clip out of my rifle before placing the rifle on the floor. At noon I was awakened by the father in that small apartment. It was time to eat; the table was set for four—the father and mother, their twenty-year-old daughter whose fiancé was on the Russian front, and me. I took the seat offered me, whereupon the father bowed his head and led us in prayer. I was a US soldier in enemy

*From Young Calvinist, December 1942, p. 23.*

*(top) First Presbyterian Church*

*(above) Servicemen’s Home in Alexandria,  
Louisiana*

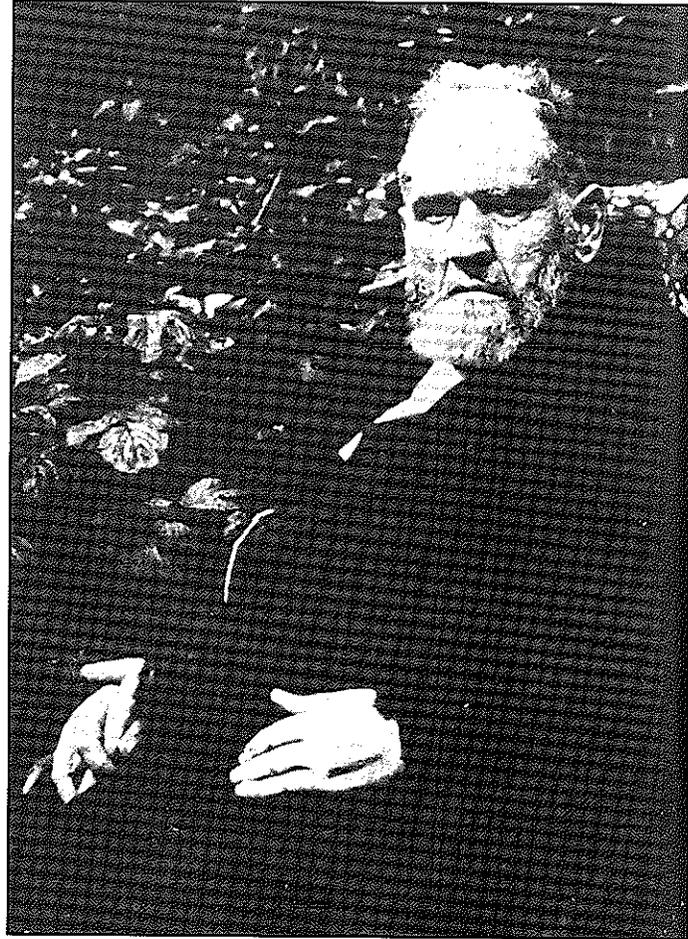
territory, and now I was being included in a prayer of thanksgiving and a humble meal. We were united at the throne of grace and peace.”

# Johannes Jager: THE PROPHET VISITS IOWA, 1914

H.J. Brinks

Johannes Jager was a heroic figure among the Germans who emigrated from the Old Reformed Churches of East Friesland. That northern German province, together with Emden, its major city, held a distinguished position during the Reformation era. Emden was a refuge for persecuted Calvinists during the sixteenth century, and the Polish refugee, John 'A Lasco, preached and taught there during the 1540s. Under his direction most of the province became Calvinist rather than Lutheran, and thousands of Dutch Calvinists found a safe exile in East Friesland while Philip II and the Duke of Alva sought to exterminate the Reformation in Holland. In the Netherlands, East Friesland is still known as "The Little Ship of Christ."

Amid conflicts with both the German-preaching Lutherans and the Catholics of the counter-Reformation, the Reformed churches of East Friesland adopted Dutch as their official language. High German was associated with the Lutherans; Dutch became the signature of many Reformed churches. Further, Germany's



*Photo of Professor Johannes Jager c. 1920.*

Reformed clerics studied at the universities of Groningen, Leiden, and Utrecht, where such leading theologians as Gijsbert Voetius trained pastors for Reformed churches throughout Europe.

Thus, the East Frisians of the nineteenth century inherited both the Calvinism of John 'A Lasco and the Dutch language of the Calvinistic refugees who swarmed into their province during the sixteenth century. It is that tradition which explains the trilingual skills of Iowa's East Frisians. These people were deeply loyal to the churches of their native province and, when the Old Reformed congregations of Germany began to exchange Dutch for High German, their immigrant cousins in Iowa followed suit.

The language transition in Germany's Old Reformed churches occurred during the 1890s, and it was accompanied by heated debates within the denomination. These debates reflected cultural transformations in the Germanic provinces after they were consolidated during the 1870s under the leadership of Otto von

Bismarck. Bismarck also spearheaded a pan-Germanic cultural renaissance, and in the rising tide of German nationalism, use of the Dutch language in the state-supported Reformed Church gave way to High German. Schools and other governmental agencies also became Germanized. The Old Reformed Church, however, resisted and used Dutch until near the turn of the century. By that time Professor Johannes Jager had become the leading advocate of Germanization within the Old Reformed Church. As the instructor of the denomination's pastors, Jager had a predominant influence, and when these Emden Seminary graduates came to the United States, they became agents of Germanization within the Iowa churches. By 1900 these Iowa pastors, like their cohorts in Germany, switched from Dutch to German in worship services.

It is understandable, then, that Johannes Jager's visit to Iowa inspired enthusiastic responses among the East Frisian pastors and parishioners there. But the professor was well regarded by all the Reformed denominations in that region, and the German Presbyterian Seminary at Dubuque, Iowa, attempted to lure Jager from Germany on several occasions. Quite understandably, then, Jager used the Dubuque Seminary as a home base when he visited the East Frisian settlements of Iowa in 1914.

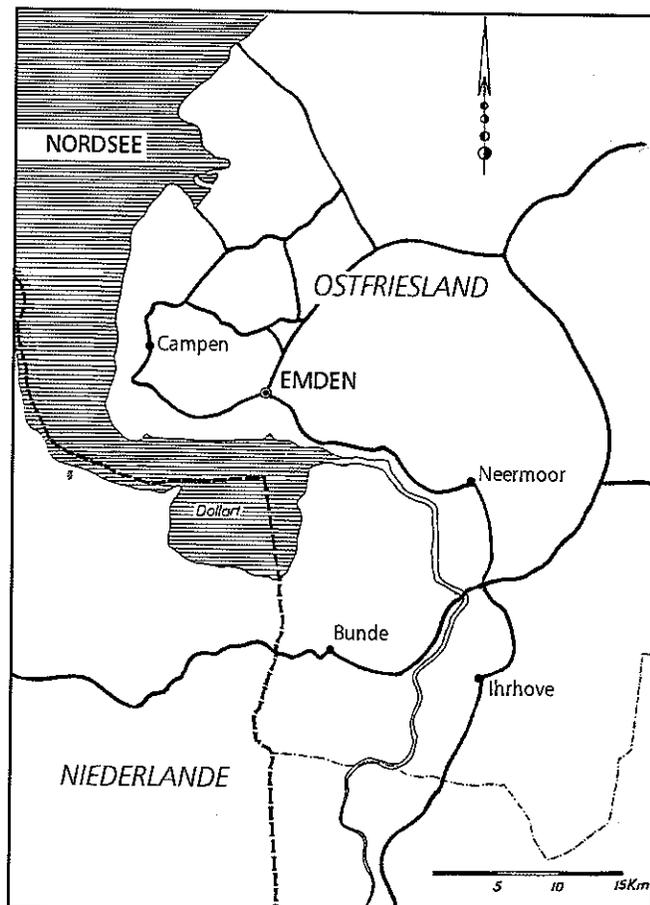
Unfortunately, the professor's plans for an extended tour ended abruptly when war broke out between Germany, France, and England. Attempting to reach his homeland before all the routes were closed by the conflict, Jager hastened from Iowa to New York, where he sought passage to Germany. Because German ships were already blockaded in Europe, Jager could find no direct route of travel, and he, together with some nine hundred other German nationals, booked passage on a neutral Dutch ship. Then, as they were boarding the ship,

Jager reported, his countrymen broke out in a chorus of patriotic German songs, and he feared that the nearby English and French sailors would telegraph ahead to alert their navies about the Dutch ship which had embarked with a huge number of Germans aboard.

Apparently his fears were groundless. But when the ship approached the English Channel blockade after a safe voyage across the Atlantic, French officers boarded the vessel to inspect its cargo and discovered that the passengers were predominantly German (only a fourth of the twelve hundred passengers were Dutch or English). The French commandeered the Dutch vessel, steering it into the port of Brest. While the Dutch and English passengers remained behind, the Germans were led on a day-long march to a church which functioned as a detainment center. En route, the sixty-four-year-old Jager collapsed and was then transported to his imprisonment on a cart.

Amid the confusion Jager and his sixteen-year-old son were separated, but after he regained consciousness, he was able to communicate with an officer who provided a room for both the German pastor and his son. Because of Jager's injury, the commanding officer sought to provide medical assistance for the old gentleman, and in the process he discovered that Jager was a minister. While examining Jager's papers, the officer asked, "Pastor, why are you here?" "Only because I am a German," he answered, and he continued to implore that, at sixty-four, he could certainly be no threat to the French and that his young son was equally harmless. The officer walked away with an expression which convinced Jager that help was forthcoming.

That same day the officer returned in the company of a general, who issued an order to release any prisoners over the age of sixty and any children of sixteen and under. Of the nine hundred prison-



Maps of East Friesland in G.J. Beuker's *Umkehr und Erneuerung* (published by the Evangelical Old Reformed Church in 1988).

(top) Emden harbor scene, c. 1900.

(below) View from tower of City Hall in Emden, c. 1900.

ers, only Jager and his son qualified for the exemption and, upon their release, the officer returned them to the ship by auto, whereupon they resumed their homeward journey through the Netherlands. Reunited with his family and students at Emden, Jager reported his harrowing experience in the church's periodical, *Der Grenzboten*, and he also commented on America's attitudes toward Germany.

He noted that outside of New York it was virtually impossible to acquire a reliable German newspaper, and that fact, in itself, accounted for the misinformation which circulated in America. Even the Germans of Iowa had begun to assume that Kaiser Wilhelm was a "war lord," but Jager reminded them that "war lord" was hardly a justifiable title for the Kaiser had been a man of peace for forty years. The primary cause of such misconceptions, Jager insisted, was the general conquest of the English language in the United States, for since the British provided their viewpoint in a language which virtually everyone read, the German position was scarcely known. Thus, Jager concluded, "Americans pay high respect to German science, art, skilled workmanship and the like, but the German nation is less respected."

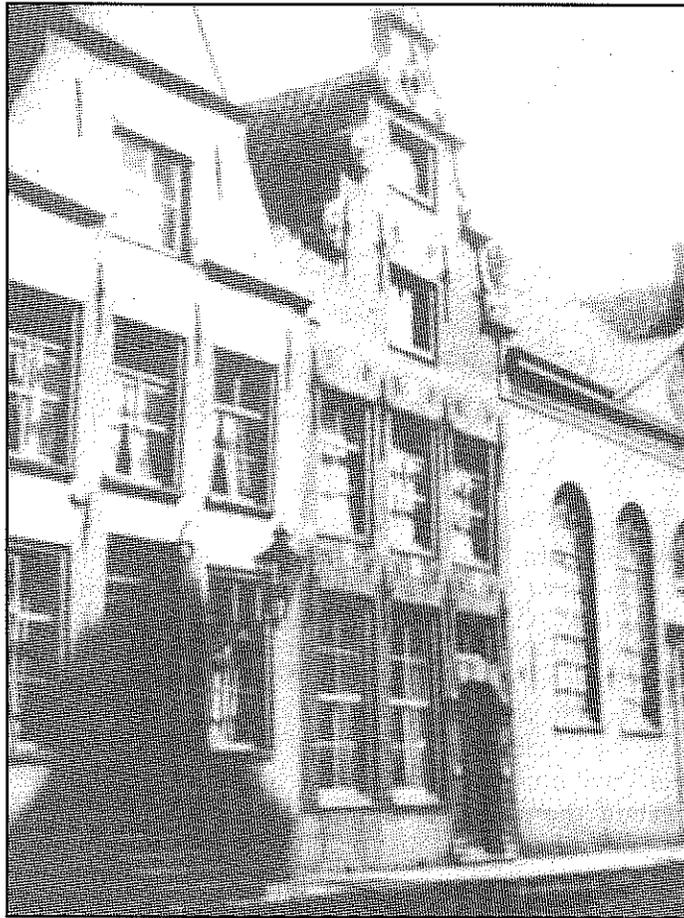
Jager's impression of the Iowan East Frisians was generally favorable. He reported that, along with achieving prosperity, they had also maintained the doctrine and discipline of the Reformed faith. Furthermore, the Dubuque Seminary, headed by the son of Nicholas M. Steffens,\* gave evidence of the community's vitality. With two hundred students and ten professors, the Iowa school far surpassed Jager's seminary in Emden.



Furthermore, the Dubuque institution had become an interdenominational nucleus, attracting loyalty from German Presbyterians and from Germans in both the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America. The school had also provided a basis for establishing a new denomination which used German exclusively, but that institutional potential was demolished by the First World War.

American nationalism and the war's indiscriminate anti-German sentiment not only curbed the expansion

\* N.M. Steffens had been a leading and highly respected pastor in the Old Reformed Church prior to his immigration. In America he taught theology at the Western Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in America (1884-1895 and 1903-1912).



*Theological school, parsonage, and church in Emden c. 1920.*

of German-American institutions but also the use of the German language. Following the war, the East Frisians of Iowa reestablished familial ties with their European relatives, but they no longer acquired their pastors from their native province, for, as English usage became more general among them, they acquired ministers from the Christian Reformed Church, without regard to ethnicity. The Second World War weakened the bonds between the old- and new-world Germans even further, creating barriers to the maintenance of family ties among the East Frisians. Recently, though, the immigrants' descendants have acquired a lively interest in their Germanic origins.

*The pattern of language usage in Classis East Friesland varied considerably as the following chart indicates.*

Language Usage in the Minutes of Churches  
founded Prior to 1900\*

Name of Church	Period Dutch Language Use	Period German Language Use	English
Ackley, IA	1868-1936		1936
Bunde, MN	1887-1895	1895-1933	1933
Emden, MN**	1917-1934	1890-1917	1934
Lincoln Center, IA		1882-1939	1939
Ostfriesland, IA		1896-1935	1935
Parkersburg, IA		1891-1942	1942
Ridott, IL	1866-1905	1905-1935	1935
Wellsburg, IA***	1867-1920	1920-1934	1934
Wright/ Kanawha, IA	1897-1910	1910-1932	1932

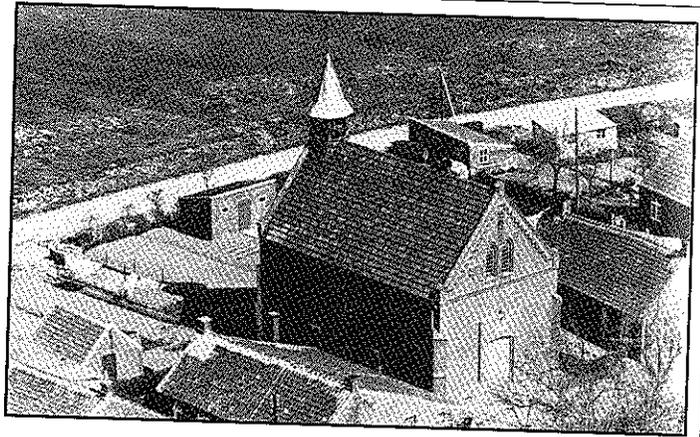
\* Egbert Kolthoff, "Etwas von den deutschen Gemeinde der christ. reformierten Kirche in Amerika," *Grensboode* 20 (9 November 1902): 3-4, reported that of ten Frisian churches in North America, five used German and Dutch, while five others used German exclusively.

\*\* This curious reversal (German-Dutch-English) was probably a wartime expedient to avoid anti-German persecution.

\*\*\* Obo Haupt, the secretary for the Wellsburg CRC, kept the minutes successively in Dutch, German, and English. He, like most of the ministers and many parishioners in Classis Friesland, were trilingual. Unfortunately this phenomenon diminished and disappeared after World War II.



Old Reformed Church in Bunde, 1920.



Old Reformed Church in Kampen.

Immigrant Ministers from the  
ORC to the CRC in North America

Name	Date of Immigration	Destination
J.B. De Beer	1866	CRC Holland/Niekerk, MI
Klaas B. Weiland	1868	CRC Ridott, IL
Nicholas M. Steffens	1872	RCA Silver Creek, IL
Gerrit K. Hemkes	1877	CRC Vriesland, MI
Jan H. Vos	1881	CRC Grand Rapids, MI
Willem R. Smidt	1882	CRC Ridott, IL
John Plesscher	1885	CRC Lincoln Center, IA
Herman Potgeter	1889	CRC Ridott, IL
Jan H. Schultz	1892	CRC Bunde, MN
Hendericus Beuker	1893	CRC Muskegon, MI
Frederick Schuurmann	1912	CRC Emden, MI

The data for this table was gathered from the various *Yearbooks* of the CRC and *Honderd Veertig Jaar Gemeenten en Predikanten van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (Leusden: Algemeen Bureau van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, 1974), together with church report columns in the *Grensbode* 1883-1900.

The ORC, concentrated in the province of Friesland and the Graafschap Bentheim of Germany, lost a large percentage of its ministers to emigration. Thirty percent of the pastorate from Friesland and 15 percent from Bentheim were drawn to the New World. Several of the denomination's native sons were also attracted to the Netherlands, but the most astounding number of migrants consisted of those 52 percent who came from the Netherlands to serve the border churches briefly before returning to a life-long career in the Netherlands. These transients, were not significant leaders but the departing native sons seriously depleted the ranks of intellect by drifting to the Netherlands or sailing to the New World. In short, the ORC suffered a very serious "brain drain" during the 19th century.

# Menzo Dornbush

## Minister on the Canadian Prairies: 1950-1962

by David Zandstra

Following the destruction of World War II, hundreds of Dutch families, often with little to lose, were ready to emigrate anywhere for a better home. Canada, with a shortage of farm laborers began to welcome immigrants to supplement its agricultural work force in 1947. This marriage of interests, though not made in heaven, led many Dutch families to transplant themselves to the plains of central Canada. There, working in labor-intensive sugar-beet production, many would start new homes. Each family that emigrated to the prairies was sponsored by a Canadian farmer who promised to provide work and housing for them. This sponsorship was in fact a kind of indenture that lasted for one year.

The postwar Dutch migration to Canada differed significantly from the earlier Dutch migrations to the United States. Before 1865 the Dutch came primarily to unsettled

areas where they formed colonies in which most members were acquainted with each other. In Canada, families emigrated individually and were settled where there were few if any Dutch neighbors. Because the farms were widely spaced on the Canadian prairies, the immigrant families were effectively isolated from other Dutch families. Forced often to live in substandard housing and unable to communicate, they felt very much alone. The church became the liberating agent which brought far-flung families together to worship, and to socialize with other Dutch-speaking people.

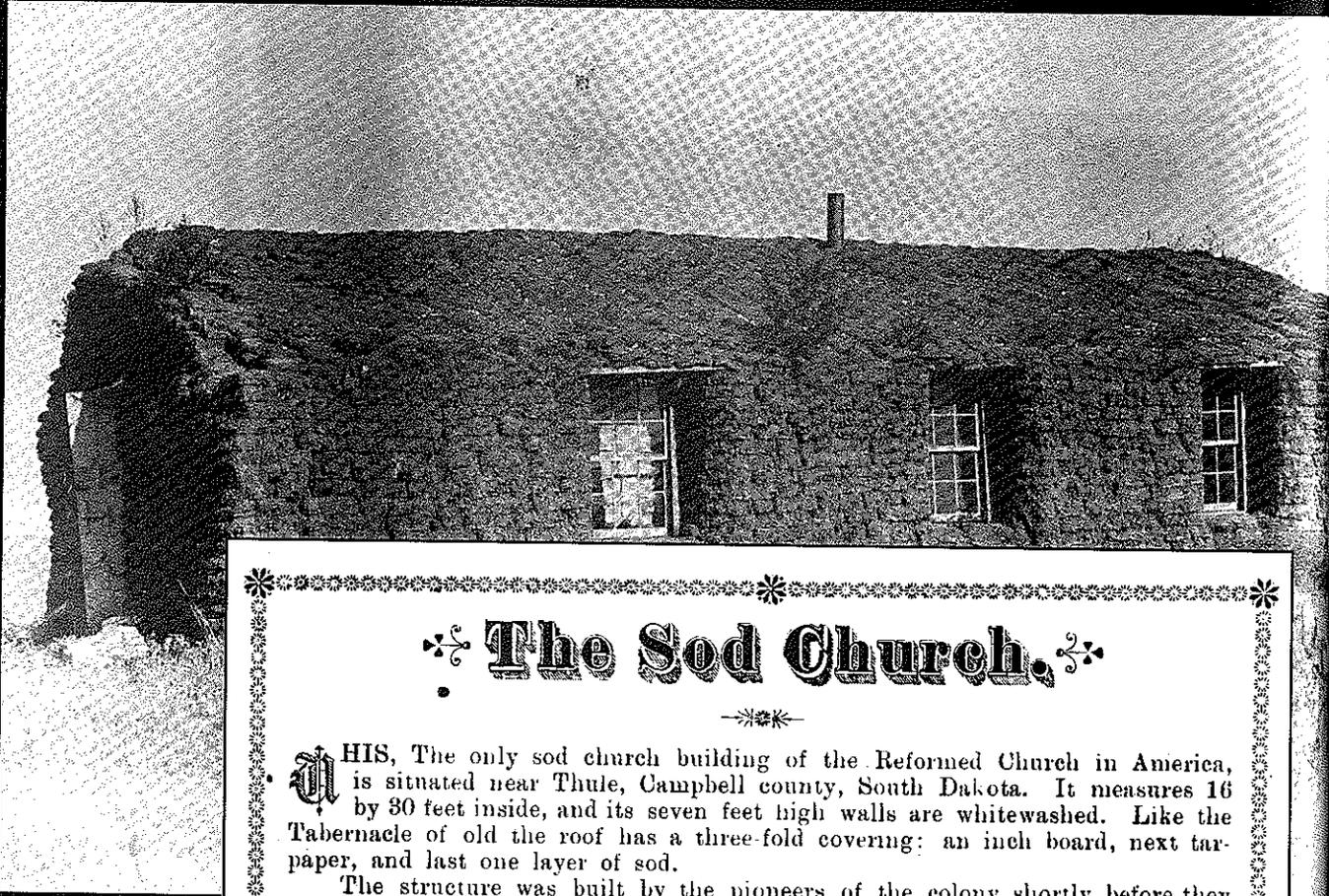
Pastors who accepted calls to serve the Canadian immigrants were called "home missionaries." This misleading title stemmed from the church agency which hired them, the Home Missions Board. Actually the ministers were church extension-workers attempting to coalesce widely dispersed Dutch families into functioning churches. As late as 1947 there were only thirteen widely scattered Christian Reformed churches in Canada. The

CRC feared that the isolated newcomers might try English-speaking churches and soon lose interest. Then, without a church connection, their spiritual life would wane, and both parents and children would abandon regular worship. On the other hand, if these Dutch believers were helped to survive the trauma of emigration and resettlement, new and powerful churches could be organized.

The synod of the Christian Reformed Church, which had learned of this need and opportunity, created an Immigration Committee for Canada in 1946 to coordinate work with its counterpart in the Netherlands, the Christelijke Emigratie Centrale (Christian Emigration Society). The Home Missions Board was the synodical agency supervising the project. With representatives of the Dutch and Canadian governments and their respective immigrant committees working together, a smooth process developed to identify, place, and contact immigrant families. The plan was to locate the immigrant families and

*continued on page 26*

David Zandstra, a frequent contributor to *Origins*, teaches history at Illiana Christian High School in Lansing, Illinois.



## ❖ The Sod Church. ❖

**T**HIS, The only sod church building of the Reformed Church in America, is situated near Thule, Campbell county, South Dakota. It measures 16 by 30 feet inside, and its seven feet high walls are whitewashed. Like the Tabernacle of old the roof has a three-fold covering: an inch board, next tarpaper, and last one layer of sod.

The structure was built by the pioneers of the colony shortly before they were, on the eighth day of October, 1886, organized into the

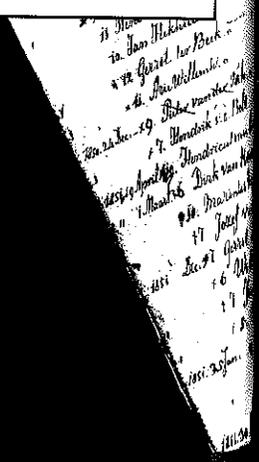
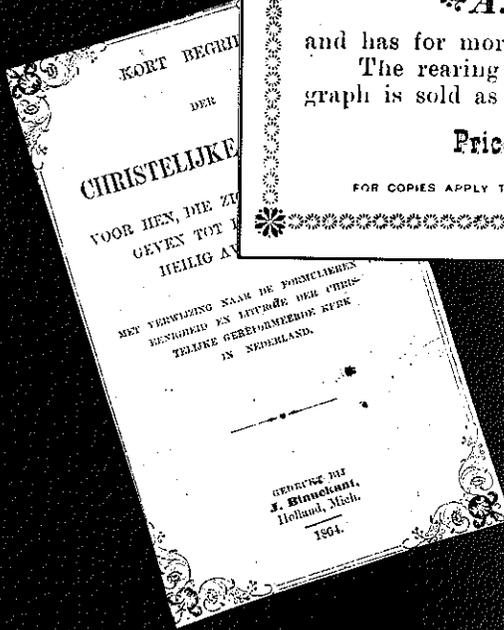
### ❖ A. C. VAN RAALTE CHURCH, ❖

and has for more than five years been used for divine worship.

The rearing of a more permanent building is contemplated, and this photograph is sold as a souvenir, while the proceeds will be applied to the new church.

**Price of Large Photos, 50 cts. Cabinet Size, 25 cts.**

FOR COPIES APPLY TO O. LEPELTAK, THULE, S. D., OR FRED K. J. ZWEMER, MISSIONARY OF THE CLASSIS OF DAKOTA



THE  
ROLL BOOK  
FOR  
SUPERINTENDENTS  
OF  
SABBATH SCHOOLS



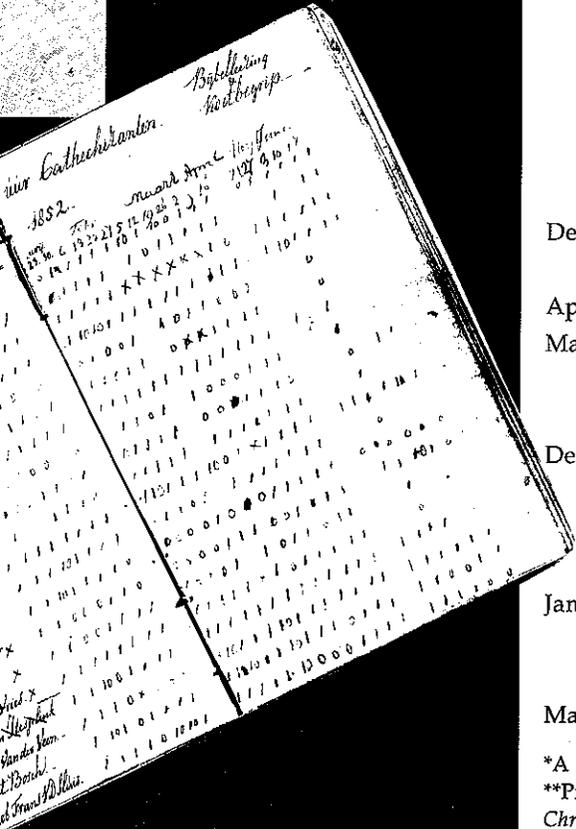
**Rev. Albertus C. van Raalte's  
Catechism Attendance Booklet**

1851 - 1855 in Holland, Michigan\*

Boys		List of 10 o'clock Catechism Students	Bible Reading Short Survey**	
Birthday	Age	Names	Nov-Dec 1851	Jan-June 1852
	12	Pieter Pfanstiele		
	9	Renke De Vries		
	11	Hendrik Hiddink		
	10	Jan Hekhuis		
	12	Gerrit ter Beek		
	11	Arie Willemse		
Dec 24	9	Pieter van der Tak		
	7	Hendrik van der Belt		
Apr 19	10	Hendricus van Lente		
Mar 1	6	Dirk van Raalte		
	10	Marinus Kuytje		
	7	Jozef Verplanken		
Dec	7	Gerrit Doesburg		
	6	Willem Visscher		
	7	Jan Dykema		
	5	Uilke de Vries		
Jan 25	9	Gerrit Jan Hesselink		
	11	Arent Vander Veen		
	12	Gerrit Bosch		
Mar 30	11	Jacob Frans van der Sluis		

*Apparently van Raalte indicated present with a slash mark (/) and absent with a zero (0).*

\*A 1995 acquisition from a donor who requests anonymity.  
\*\*Probably refers to the standard text of that era entitled, *Kort Begrip der Christelijke Religie* (a short survey of the Christian religion for those who would like to prepare for participation in the Lord's Supper).



help them find a new church home in Canada. Thus, the Canadian government, working with the immigration committees, placed many families in selected areas such as Winnipeg, Portage la Prairie, and Brandon, Manitoba. Immigrants who had not contacted the Christian Emigration Society were randomly placed by the Canadian government wherever there was a need or a sponsor. Dutch communities in Fort William, Ontario and Saskatoon and Regina, Saskatchewan, originated in this way.

To fulfill synod's plan, the immi-

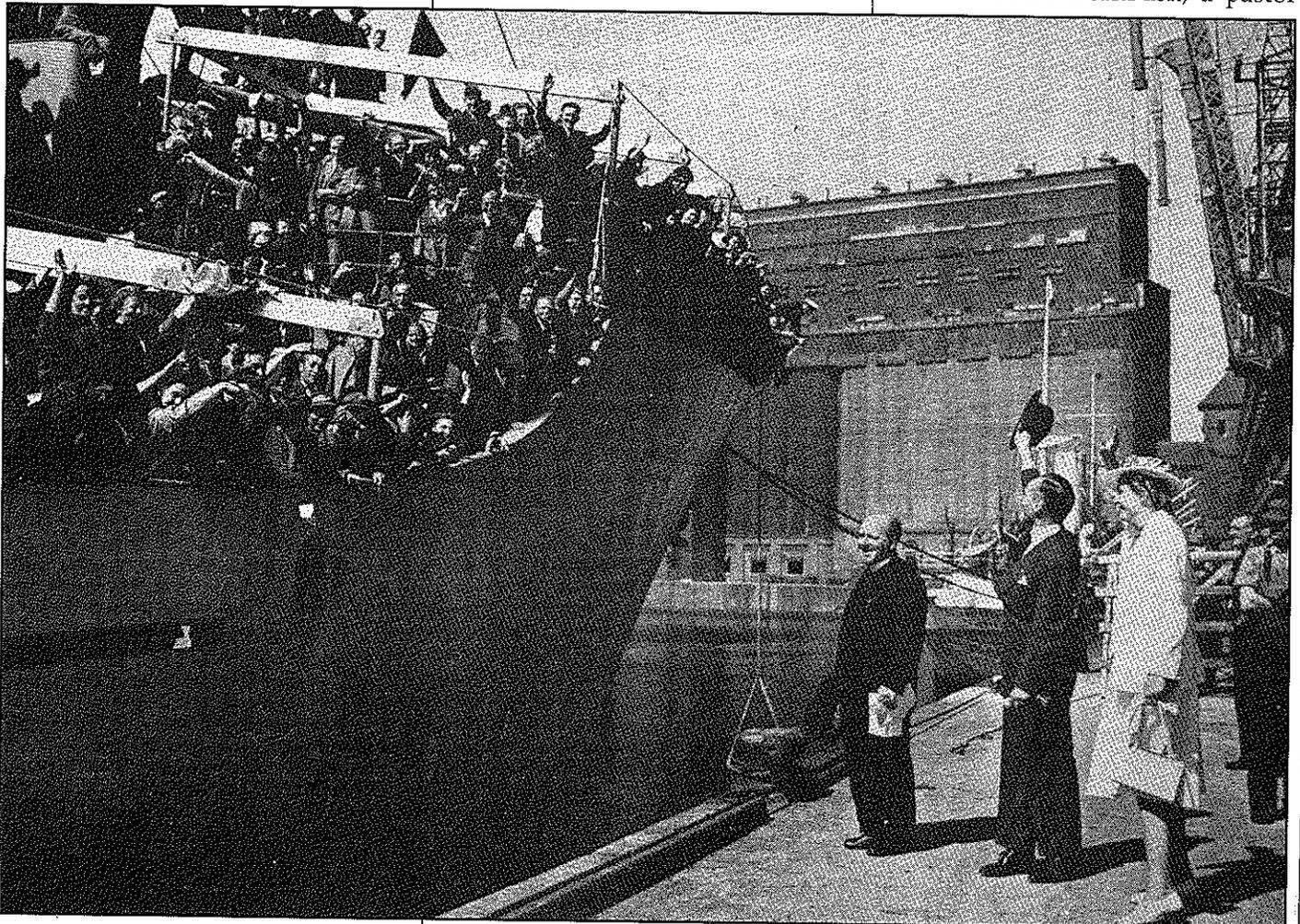
gration committee appointed field men who worked closely with the Canadian government. Mr. J. Vander Vliet, serving as field man in Ontario, supervised all the other field men in Canada. He was particularly effective in western Ontario and the western provinces where he located farmers who wanted immigrant help. Thereafter he linked these farmers with specific families through the emigration committee. The Canadian government allowed the field men considerable latitude in this work because it was mutually beneficial. When the Dutch families arrived, field men or pastors met them at local rail stations and delivered them to their sponsors. The field men

also helped resolve attitude problems and language barriers with the sponsors. Immigrants who came independently were also offered assistance.

Rev. Arie Disselkoe, among others in the Winnipeg Christian Reformed Church, quickly anticipated the needs of the immigrants who would soon be arriving. When they began to come in 1947, he was overwhelmed by the swelling numbers of people. In 1948 the Winnipeg congregation requested pastors from Classis Minnesota to fill the Winnipeg pulpit once a month, thus allowing Disselkoe more time to serve the rapidly growing group of immigrants.

Rev. Menzo Dornbush, a pastor

*Arrival of Dutch Immigrants.*  
*Knickerbocker Magazine, August 1947, p. 28.*





Map of Canada.

in Volga, South Dakota, unknowingly was being drawn into the immigrant ministry through the efforts of the Winnipeg congregation and Classis Minnesota. His first direct exposure was a classical appointment to preach in Winnipeg in the fall of 1948. He wrote,

That Sunday in Winnipeg with all those new immigrants was for us a brand new experience. It was really exciting, and we enjoyed that Sunday . . . very much. Mom even mentioned afterwards that it might be interesting to work among the immigrants. I thought so too . . . .

Classis, which met later that fall, was reminded by the Winnipeg church of the great need for a home missionary in the Portage la Prairie area. Several calls to prospective ministers had been declined.

After pastoring six years in Volga, where he had recently helped start a Christian school,

Dornbush thought it might be time for a new calling. Concerned about his limited proficiency in Dutch, he was assured by Rev. Disselkoe that he had little to fear. Disselkoe suggested not only that his Dutch was adequate (although nineteenth-century in style) but also that the new Canadians were all eager to learn English.

Dornbush promptly received a call to be a home missionary in Portage la Prairie (Portage) "to carry out the work wherever necessary throughout central Canada." His parish encompassed the entire Canadian Central Time Zone. Towns such as Fort William (now Thunder Bay) and Brandon soon became part of Dornbush's circuit. As more immigrants arrived and others moved about seeking better employment, he followed them to Regina, Saskatoon, Emo, and elsewhere.

Moving to Portage la Prairie

meant major changes for Dornbush, his wife, and their nine children. January 1950 introduced them to Canada's cruel winters. That month, one of the coldest on record, featured temperatures dipping to minus forty and whole days when they stayed below zero. Warmer clothing was required. In anticipation of improved living conditions in Manitoba, the Dornbush family had purchased with borrowed money their first electric stove and refrigerator. Dornbush also sold his 1937 Chevrolet and replaced it with a used 1950 Nash. Knowing that his new assignment required considerable driving, he resolved to have reliable transportation. That car eventually saved the Home Missions Board large sums of money. Dornbush often used its full reclining seats for overnight sleeping while he was traveling between the Dutch settlements. Because his salary more than doubled as a result of his move to Canada, (\$1,500 to \$3,600 per year) and because the Home Missions Board also paid a mileage fee to support his extensive driving, Dornbush was finally able to live, as was always promised in a minister's letter of call, "without financial cares."

The family soon became keenly aware of the often subtle cultural differences between the United States and Canada. One of the Dornbush children entering her new Canadian school was severely reprimanded by the teacher when she innocently asked what she was supposed to do after being instructed to take out her "scribbler"

(a tablet). The Dornbushes were actually learning two cultures and languages at the same time. The Dutch language became a necessary part of their daily life; even religious services were in Dutch. As a language bridge for the immigrants and the Dornbush children, catechism and Sunday school were conducted in English, with Dutch added when needed. The immigrants learned English and the Dornbushes learned Dutch. Dornbush became so proficient that even his idiomatic Dutch was correct. Often new parishioners asked him when he had emigrated from the Netherlands and were surprised to be told that he had never been there.

Immediately after settling into the recently purchased parsonage,

Dornbush began calling on isolated immigrant families. Remembering his initial call to the Bagot area, about fifteen miles from Portage, the pastor wrote,

In spite of bitter cold, stinging wind and drifting snow, it was high time to begin the work to which we had been called. I had been informed of a recently-arrived family, now snowbound, with no opportunity to meet with us on Sundays. They had as yet not received any visit from members of our group at Portage. Mr. Grotenboer (a lay church leader) kindly offered to accompany me. Together we traveled the fifteen miles west to the Bagot village. The highway was snow bare except where there was a set of buildings to stop the wind and cause some snow drifts. At Bagot we turned north on a side road.

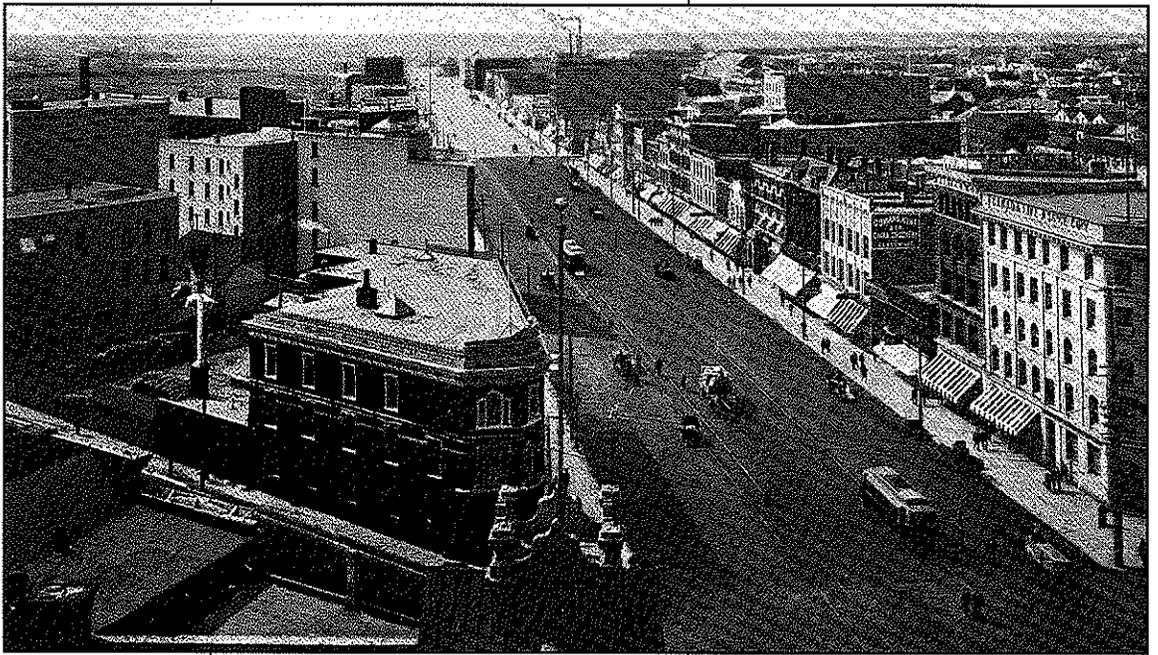
The first mile was still passable, but from there it was snow blocked. We left the car and tramped through the snow, facing a biting minus fifteen degree wind. We could feel the cold penetrate to the skin. We had to walk about a mile and a half to reach our destination. I felt the effects for several days thereafter. The family was overjoyed to see us. All discomfort was forgotten amid the warm Christian fellowship we experienced there. We encouraged them in their temporary isolation and welcomed them into our fellowship. They looked forward to meeting all the others of our Portage group and uniting with them each Lord's Day.

*(below & opposite) Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1950's.*



MAN, BRUCE, WINNIPEG

Sunday services were conducted in the Portage West End Hall, a long building with a low ceiling and a noisy furnace. Because it was a popular Saturday night dance hall, worshipers and dancers occasionally passed each other at the door. Transportation to the church was by any means available—taxis, canvas-covered pickups, vintage automobiles, hitch-



hiking, and even a jeep that emigrated from Holland (emigrants were not permitted to remove much cash from the Netherlands, though they were allowed to take consumer goods). But the joy was real. After a week of isolation they were united in social and religious fellowship. Dornbush recalls,

Before and after services it was a beehive of activity and talking. Each would have stories to tell of their new experiences, their misunderstandings or disputes with their boss (sponsor). Sunday was the one day that they could give expression to their woes, troubles, disappointments, about being homesick, and whatnot. It was also a day to receive encouragement, to find joy in hearing God's Word, to sing His praise, to unburden their hearts in prayer and to experience warm fellowship.

With a growing number of families and strong enthusiasm, the Portage group decided to organize into a regular church. Following the approval of Classis Minnesota, the

Portage la Prairie church was organized on May 2, 1950.

Unfortunately, farm employment in the Portage area was seasonal. Though most immigrant families were farmers and agricultural production in Portage was very good, new employees were needed primarily during the months of sugar beet production. Sugar beets did require many hands for hoeing, thinning, and harvesting (prior to extensive mechanization), but this work lasted only about ten weeks. With a truncated annual income and no resources to purchase farms, the immigrants had limited economic prospects. Consequently, some families moved to British Columbia to work in the forest products industry; others went to Ontario to work on cattle farms. Still others simply drifted from job to job, going as far away as the lumber camps near Lake Nipigon. As a result, membership rolls in the Portage church changed constantly, and church attendance fluctuated. Each spring, when new families arrived, attendance rose to about 150,

but as winter set in, the numbers declined to fewer than 60. Portage became a feeder church for other Reformed communities. But as long as its doors were kept open, large Dutch families, knowing there would be a church home for them, could accept the opportunity to emigrate. The farmers of Portage preferred these large families to hoe, thin, and top the sugar beets. After a year's labor they were free to establish a permanent home elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Dornbush also tended a growing Dutch community in Fort William, Ontario, about five hundred miles east of Portage on the shores of Lake Superior. Although the immigration committee had not selected that site and had advised families not to settle there, independent families, led by the Ypmas, moved there as early as 1948. Because they could work year-round on the local dairy farms and even purchase farms, more families came. When Dornbush arrived in 1950, there were seven families meeting at the Ypma home

for worship. He scheduled one Sunday a month to minister to the needs of this emerging church community and traveled by train, by auto, and occasionally by air. Several times his life was imperiled by the severe winter cold or bad road conditions. Once while he was flying in a light plane in extreme cold, an oil line ruptured, but the pilot was able to land safely.

In Fort William services were improvised to fit the circumstances. Dornbush's automobile became a church bus. He and other members with cars collected the far-flung families in time for a two o'clock service. By November of 1950 this fast-growing congregation was an organized church, and soon it pur-

chased an unused country school to convert into a sanctuary. Wood cut from the acreage behind the building supplied fuel for the stove in winter. Less than two years later the Fort William church had seventy-two families and was able to call its own pastor.

Much of Rev. Dornbush's task was to help the Europeans acclimate to North American culture. New arrivals were often baffled, so when Dornbush received a list of newcomers, he met them at the train to serve as their interpreter and to negotiate arrangements with them and their sponsors. Dornbush recalls,

They needed help in shopping for groceries. With products all hav-

ing English names, a bit of explaining was necessary, if they were to know what they were buying. The self-help picking things off the shelves, using push carts, this being on their own without a clerk to help them—it was all a brand new experience. How they appreciated having someone along on their first shopping trip, and especially someone who could speak and explain in Dutch.

Other needs such as doctors' appointments required his services as interpreter. When the inevitable misunderstandings between immigrants and Canadian sponsors arose, he was called upon to mediate. Visiting hospitalized parishioners, who were often isolated by



*Dornbush Family, 1950, in Portage, Manitoba.*

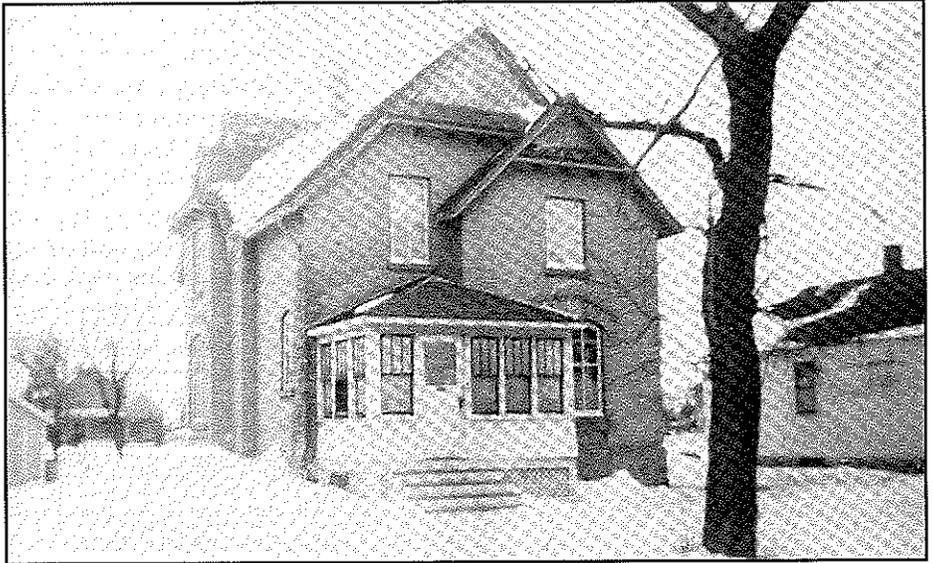
language and distantly separated from families, was particularly rewarding for him. Recent arrivals were often entertained in the Dornbush home. The parsonage also became the post office for immigrants without a permanent address.

A number of families had been placed eighty miles west of Portage near the town of Brandon. Dornbush initiated contact with them in February of 1950 and recalls,

Two families lived about fifteen to twenty miles south of Brandon, one about ten miles west, one seven miles north, and one at least twenty-five miles northeast. I called on each of these families, and we agreed to meet together for a worship service at the home of a newly married couple living north of Brandon. The service was held on February 26 at two o'clock. The family living west of Brandon could come with their car, the one northeast would be brought by their sponsor, and I would provide transportation for the two families living south of Brandon. There were 20 people present, and all were thankful that we could make a beginning of worshiping together each Sunday.

Dornbush soon found a more suitable setting for services. It was the Church of the Nazarene, available for two dollars per Sunday, where an afternoon service was sandwiched between the regular Nazarene services. The only provision demanded by the Nazarenes was that there would be no smoking in or near the sanctuary. Although most of the immigrants were heavy smokers, they faithfully observed the ban.

Commenting on his hectic schedule, Dornbush says,



*Parsonage in Portage, Manitoba, c. 1950.*

With the start of services in Brandon, my general Sunday schedule was to conduct the forenoon service in Portage, followed by the young people's catechism class, and then do the same in Brandon in the afternoon. Until they obtained their own means of transportation some months later, I taxied to and from church the two families living south of Brandon.

Each Sunday Dornbush preached a minimum of three sermons and led two catechism classes. Lunch was a quick cup of coffee and sandwiches eaten while driving. If he didn't arrive at a service, a reading sermon was delivered by an elder.

Although it was not recommended by the church immigration committee, several Dutch families located in Saskatchewan, and the Canadian government had also placed other immigrants there. So six months after Dornbush arrived in Portage, he contacted several families in the Saskatoon area. His first service there was conducted in the Koopman home with sixteen persons present. But because of his heavy schedule elsewhere, his visits there were relatively infrequent.

The following May (1951) his extended parish brought him to Regina, where still other immigrants had located. Services were initiated in the Cruson home with twelve persons present. When Fort William demanded less of Dornbush's time, he switched his energies to the people in Saskatchewan, offering them a more regular administration of the Word and sacraments. He also presided at weddings, which were always scheduled on Saturdays when Dornbush was present for services the next day.

My ministry to the families scattered widely to various localities in Saskatchewan would at times require my being away for several days, or even a week, in a stretch. Most of the roads were gravel in those days. The Trans Canada wasn't there yet. Clouds of dust would rise wherever I drove. The car would really get dusty, not only outside, but even inside! As long as we had the Nash, my "bed" was always ready in the right half of the car, saving the Home Missions Board any expense for my lodging at night. I could quite safely park on

a side road to retire at sundown and rise at the new day's dawn. Washing and shaving could be done wherever I stopped for breakfast. On a later occasion, when I was driving a Chevy without sleeping accommodations, one immigrant family offered to have me stay overnight if I would care to sleep on the davenport. They were pleased when I was willing to accept such humble accommodations.

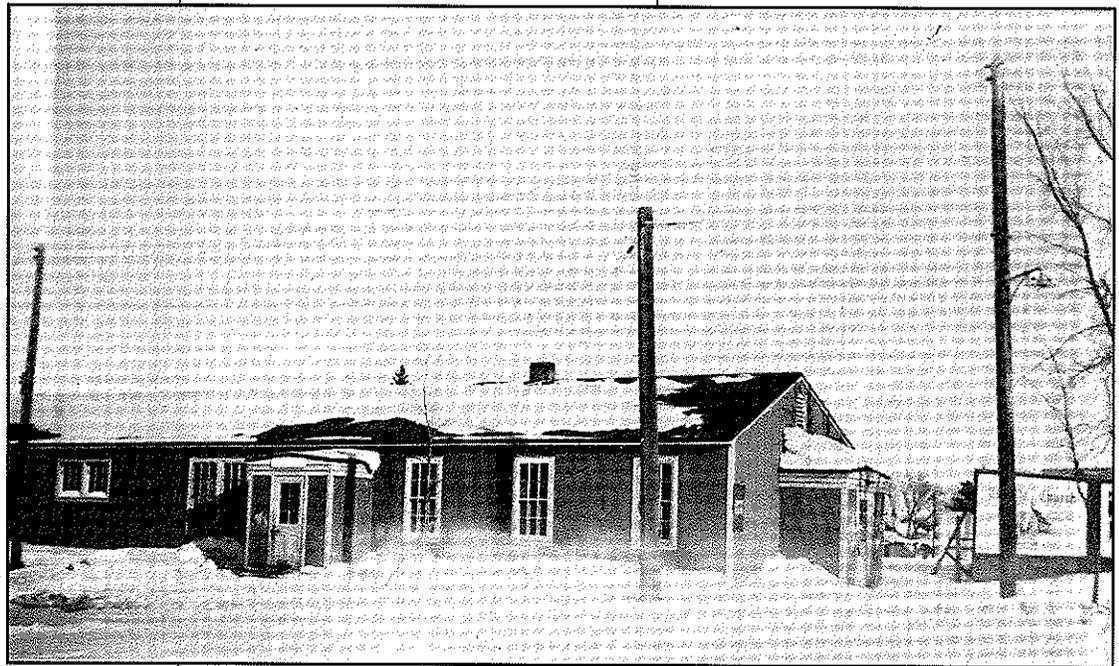
With the workload increasing steadily in Saskatchewan, the Home Missions Board called Rev. G. Vander Ziel to labor in Saskatoon. Dornbush was relieved of his responsibilities there in September 1953.

Constant traveling and poor sleeping accommodations took their toll, and Dornbush developed serious back problems in 1952. On one occasion while driving to Saskatoon, he was forced to spend three days in a hotel and was carried back to Portage. After several weeks of various therapies, including a body cast, he slowly recovered.

Much of Dornbush's pastoral and ministerial work had a decidedly social quality to it. Comforting the lonesome, visiting the isolated, encouraging families to move where other Dutch were concentrating, and consoling the bereaved made his work meaningful but endless. (Once Dornbush and his wife made a casket for a stillborn infant and then conducted a brief committal.) A service in or visit to remote places such as Somerset, Manitoba

(sixty miles southwest of Portage), Flin Flon (five-hundred miles northwest of Portage), or Melfort, Saskatchewan (two-hundred miles north of Regina) was fairly typical. Reuniting families and friends separated since immigration was particularly rewarding. Realizing the enormous size of his task and seeing it completed, he and his family became landed immigrants

twenty-two. Even with an increased salary, meeting the various needs of his children was a constant exercise in economy. But having endured the Great Depression at his first charge in Atwood, Michigan, he knew how to extract full value from every dollar. Each summer he and his wife canned an enormous variety of vegetables, fruits, and meat. His garden, his only hobby, pro-



West End Hall — first structure used by Portage CRC, c. 1950.

duced most of the vegetables for their canning endeavors. Other foods, articles of clothing, and necessary items were regularly purchased on sale or used. Survival meant frugality. One daughter who had eaten bad squash as a child refused for years to try squash because of the unpalatable memories. When a son left home to attend college, even more austere measures were instituted. A special "lean beef" became the staple protein on their table. It was horse meat, a secret kept from the children for many years. Some financial relief

themselves, and the pastor refused to consider calls from the USA. Dornbush also ministered briefly in Emo, Ontario, three-hundred miles southwest of Portage. Immigrants from Winnipeg, Portage, and elsewhere were drawn there by available farmland. As the home missionary, Dornbush occasionally conducted services and family visitation there. But by 1953 Rev. Disselkoen became the regular home missionary for eastern Manitoba and western Ontario, relieving Dornbush of that assignment.

Dornbush and his wife, Cynthia, had come to Canada with nine children, ranging in age from six to



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„Woodlots”. De bomen leveren niet alleen producten, om op de boerderij te gebruiken, ze zijn ook belangrijk als windbrekers, vermindering van het teruglopen van water en ondergrondse waterreservoirs te vullen.

„Shelter-Belts”. Beschutting voor huizen, gebouwen enz. levert brandstof en materiaal voor omheining, bescherming crogge, tuinen en boomgaard. Behalve het feit, dat ze de boerderij storen en meer waarde geven, zijn ze belangrijke factoren voor de bescherming van grond.

Vraag naar dit boekje over bomen op de boerderij bij Uw plaatselijke manager

PH-203

**The Canadian Bank of Commerce**

Advertisement, lumber and farms, Calvinist Contact, December 15, 1953, p. 3.

followed as the older children married and found employment in Canada.

Brandon, Manitoba, provided Dornbush with the greatest satisfactions of his ministry because in that place he was able to establish a mission, lead it to becoming a congregation, and serve as its pastor (1958-1961) before leaving the prairie provinces in 1962. Brandon's origins were similar to those of Portage, but, unlike Portage, Brandon grew vigorously into a strong, vi-

able church. Because the employment base was stable there, new arrivals stayed. In addition to farming a large number of parishioners found employment in the local mental hospital, and others served as bakers, carpenters, mechanics, and the like. Under the sponsorship of the Winnipeg and Portage consistories and the leadership of Pastor Dornbush, organization of the Brandon church was completed on November 19, 1951, with a membership of nineteen families and several individuals. By 1953 thirty families and a number of individuals were in regular attendance.

Although there was some transient membership similar to that of Portage, Dornbush realized that in Brandon many were there to stay. To give the church a sense of permanence, a place of worship was vital. Under Dornbush's direction, a site was selected and construction plans initiated. In April 1954, however, the local Knox United Church approached Dornbush asking if his church might be interested in purchasing its building. The original plans were quickly abandoned, and by summer the Brandon group was occupying its "new" church.

To further complicate his life, Dornbush received a call to Taber, Alberta. His work in Manitoba had clearly become centered in Brandon rather than Portage. Dornbush recalled that

The question was: Should I continue as home missionary, stationed in Brandon, or should I resume a regular pastorate at Taber? As home missionary I had had very little time for study. In this respect a change would be welcome; I would have more time for study. I really *needed* this change. On the other hand, I also felt the great need for guidance and help in Brandon. I was at a loss as to what to do. I prayed

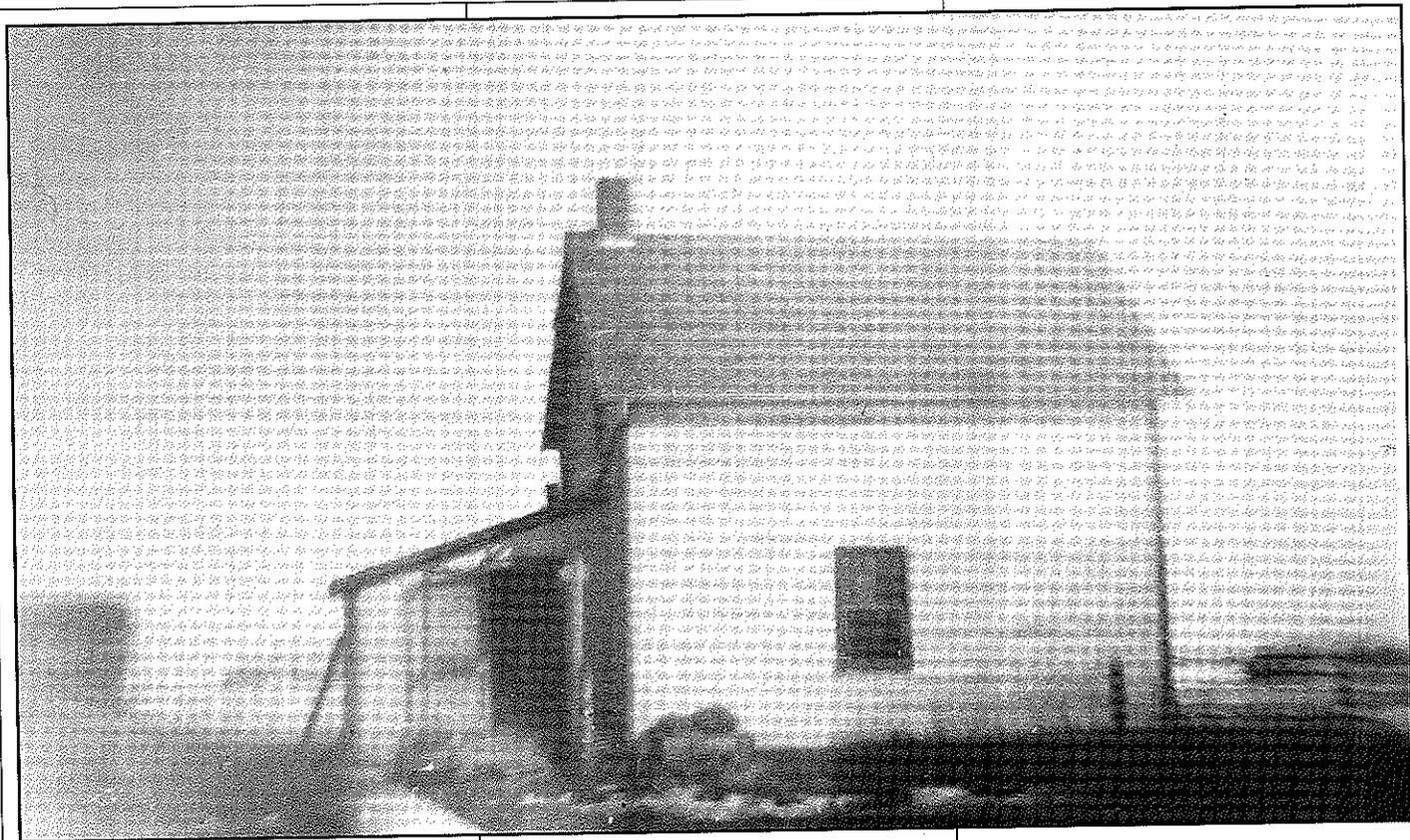
about it. I must say that this was the hardest time I ever had in such a situation.

To give the call honest consideration, Dornbush traveled by train to Taber. There, compelled by the scarcity of ministers and the pleas of his hosts to accept their invitation, he decided to do so. To soften this disruption for his family and allow time to finish his tasks in Brandon, he was given six months to move to Taber. In Brandon all the matters pertaining to a new, growing church had to be settled—before he left, if possible. Completing the acquisition and financing of the church, purchasing a parsonage, obtaining permission from classis to call a minister, and developing a realistic budget for the congregation were all unfinished. By June these affairs, including finding a pastor, were resolved. Recalling his own feelings, Dornbush says,

The congregation of Brandon needed all the help I could give. Now that it was graduating from the status of home mission . . . I was thankful that I had been able to help the Brandon congregation.

During this period the home missions era in Manitoba was winding down. The Portage congregation had served its main purpose, namely to receive and welcome large farm families into Canada and to give them the opportunity of choosing where to settle. The Portage church was declining and would soon no longer exist.

The Dornbush family arrived in Taber on Dominion Day 1955. While his labor there was successful and rewarding, it was often uncomfortable. He was highly embarrassed when the household movers refused to accept anything but cash. Since it was a holiday, he had to



*Immigrant housing near Portage in 1950s.*

borrow cash from several of his new parishioners. In addition, the parsonage was much smaller than any of his previous homes. Fortunately, only five of his children were then at home (the others either married or attending college). To accommodate everyone, they all slept in the basement. The upper floor was used as a kitchen, study, dining room, and living room. The house had been built below street level, so moisture tended to collect in the basement. So during his residence there, Dornbush personally hauled in topsoil to raise the yard and to reduce the drainage problem. At the same time he also landscaped the whole yard, though he scarcely had the time. He reports,

With the scarcity of ministers in southern Alberta, I was soon preaching in neighboring

churches, such as Burdett, Iron Springs, Granum, Bellevue, and Vauxhall. My one 'charge,' however, was Taber and I was glad that I had more time for study.

Dornbush's income shrank when he accepted the call to Taber, but there were perks which pleasantly surprised him. The Taber congregation, in the Dutch custom, paid his utility bills, which was a new experience for him. Also, living in Alberta was less expensive than living in Manitoba. Natural gas was very reasonable, and the cost of health services was heavily subsidized by the provincial government.

Taber's proximity to Vauxhall enabled Dornbush to provide a consistent level of ministry to that fledgling congregation.

As time went on, Taber's neighboring congregations were each getting a pastor of their own.

The congregation of Vauxhall (twenty-four miles from Taber), however, had not yet graduated from the home mission stage. Its home missionary was living in Calgary, quite some distance away. Since he also had other groups under his care, it was difficult for him to come to Vauxhall very often. For this reason it was arranged that I give some extra attention to Vauxhall, helping out with catechism and leading services there at stated times on a regular basis (once or twice a month in the afternoon). This arrangement was agreeable to all parties concerned. The Taber consistory was sympathetic and was very happy to cooperate. I found the Vauxhall congregation to be a plucky and appreciative group, and it was a joy to minister to them. Mom even acquired a music pupil there. She rode along with me to give lessons when I went there for the evening young people's catechism class.

The Taber church was in a farming community built on sugar beet production and other vegetables. Each farmer held an acreage contract with the sugar beet factory in town. But there were also "church contracts" that a congregation could acquire and the Taber Christian Reformed Church negotiated an acreage allotment which the members operated to help the church meet budget and denominational quotas.

The Dornbush family enjoyed their tenure in Taber. During the summer there was ample work on the nearby farms for the children. With regular social contacts they made lasting friendships and even learned more Dutch. Mrs. Dornbush gladly performed her role as director and teacher of the church's Vacation Bible School. She was even approached by the church at Lethbridge (forty-eight miles away) to organize a Vacation Bible School, which she ably did. Dornbush, who had to bring her there daily, used the forenoon hours to study in a local city park.

After serving a pleasant two and a half years in Taber, Dornbush received a totally unexpected call from the Brandon church, which he had nursed as a home missionary. Rev. J. De Jong had served briefly but was forced by age and declining health to retire. After another eighteen months and nine ministerial declines, the congregation decided to invite the man who had worked there from the beginning as the home missionary. His tenure in Brandon was recalled fondly as a time of peace and unity. In the ab-

sence of a pastor, discord had developed over the transition to English services.

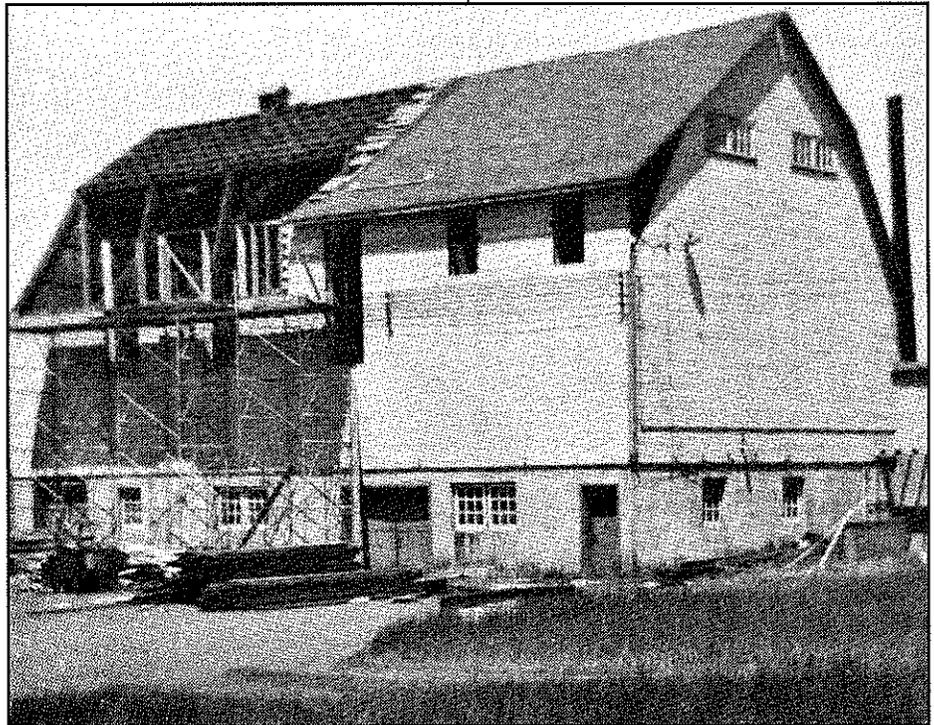
They very much needed a minister to help them in their turbulent situation. I was hoping all along that they wouldn't have to wait much longer before having a pastor of their own. I did not expect it, but there it was; this call, I would almost say, was unwelcome. Why not someone else rather than me? Besides, we'd been in Taber only a good two and a half years. Welcome or not, I would have to give it prayerful consideration and ask, 'Where does the Lord want me to be?' The upshot was that I could not refuse to go. I accepted, therefore, but with this provision—we would not leave Taber till we had completed at least three full years of service there.

During the remaining months I could be helping Taber call a minister. Since the congregation at Vauxhall was not yet able to call a minister of their own, it was thought advisable to have

the two congregations (Taber and Vauxhall) call a pastor jointly. Classis gladly approved of this proposal, and plans were made accordingly. My successor would then officially be pastor of both congregations. Families and individuals of both congregations would contribute toward the pastor's salary. Such an arrangement would be quite a saving for the Fund for Needy Churches.

When Dornbush and his wife returned to Brandon only his youngest son came along. The others had married or were working and attending schools elsewhere.

"Our feeling upon arriving in Brandon was like 'coming back home.' We had been so thoroughly involved there from the very beginning that these people almost seemed like part of our family. The old acquaintances were especially happy to have us back," Dornbush recalls. At the same time Brandon had also changed. Membership had grown from thirty to fifty families.



*Twenty-fifth anniversary booklet, Thunder Bay, Ontario. A barn being transformed into the Thunder Bay, Ontario CRC, 1953.*

Church groups had been organized and also a Christian school society. The language question had become a volatile issue as well. Dornbush had to address each of these issues.

He first crafted a plan to move the congregation toward more English services. He reasoned,

For the sake of the children, more English was needed. Yet I felt that we should be very cautious for the time being. We [needed] to continue with a Dutch service every Sunday for the sake of the elderly, yet [we] needed more English services for the

sake of the youth and children."

His first plan, designed to soften various strong positions of the membership, called for three services each Sunday—two English and one Dutch. After a year of poor attendance at all services a revised plan called for a Dutch service and an English service. Later (1961) the consistory designed a schedule to have both services in English once a month. More English services were to be phased in over several years' time, and the membership was to be given advance notice of any

planned changes. For the remainder of his tenure in Brandon this issue was put to rest.

While in Brandon, Dornbush and his wife enjoyed their first extensive vacation in Europe. Frugal living, which had been their constant habit, served them well on that holiday. Because he served on the Canadian Immigration Committee, he was able to obtain free passage. The shipping lines requested chaplains of that agency to serve the immigrant travelers. Since everyone else on the committee had taken a tour, Dornbush then took his turn.



Saskatoon,  
Saskatchewan in  
Calvinist Contact,  
October 1, 1953,  
cover page.

In Europe he rented a Simca automobile (identical to what he was driving in Canada) which had reclining seats. This car became their mobile motel as they traveled in the Netherlands and elsewhere. While on the Continent he took the opportunity to purchase a fine-grade woolen suit which he used for twenty-five years. He even timed his return to Canada so that he could attend a classical meeting on the way back to Brandon.

should add too that Brandon's consistory was very generous in allowing us so many weeks of absence. During that period they had to make-do with having reading services.

Upon his return to Brandon, he was greeted by parishioners eager to hear of his travels but also by a serious rift over the creation of a Christian school. Families were defecting to other communities and churches because no school had

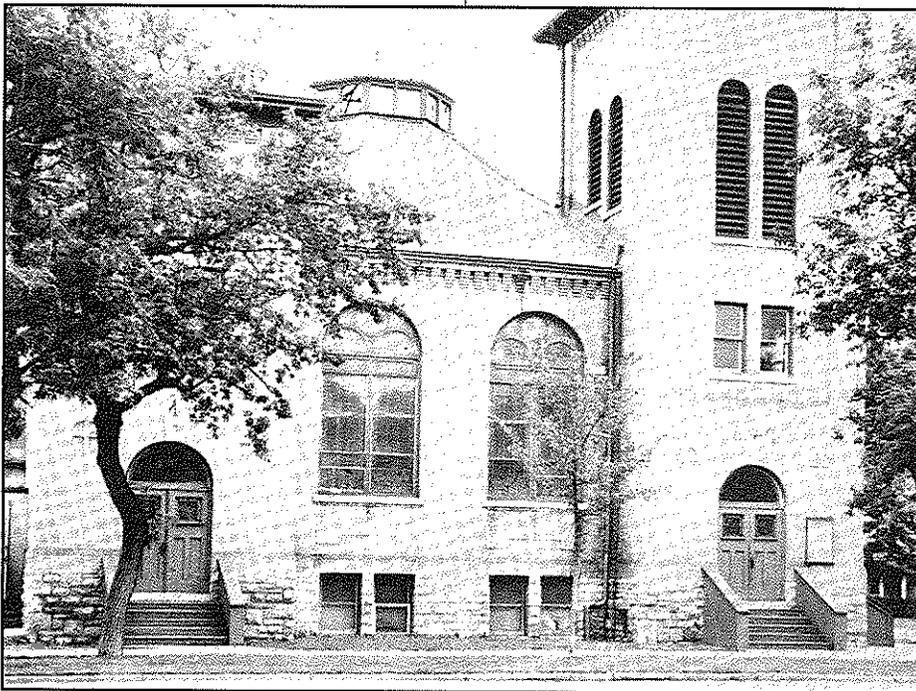
brand new building for this purpose. By waiting, we continued to lose families which otherwise would have stayed in Brandon. Had the congregation and school continued to expand, the stronger congregation could then have taken steps to look for larger and more adequate facilities in some new location. But this was not to be. I surely was very disappointed.

Nevertheless, Dornbush remained a popular pastor with a gift to defuse explosive issues.

In early 1962 Dornbush received a call to a regular pastorate in the United States. Though some of the home missionaries who, like Dornbush, had come to Canada were ready to leave, he and his wife were not. "Both of us enjoyed our work and living in Canada and we had no special desire to leave. We decided to continue our ministry in Brandon."

A few months later he received another call—to the Maritime Provinces of Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. He recognized real needs there, similar to those which had brought him to the Prairie Provinces twelve years earlier. Large numbers of new immigrants were locating there without any spiritual guidance. "The Home Missions Board and the sponsoring consistory of Brockville, Ontario, had extended various calls, but to no avail. Someone was really needed there." With his youngest son leaving for college and with prospects of a more comfortable salary, a move from the western prairies looked desirable. He bade farewell to Brandon in late 1962 and moved to Prince Edward Island, where he served until his retirement.

Dornbush can look back with satisfaction, noting that of all the



*Brandon CRC purchased from the United Church of Canada in 1954.*

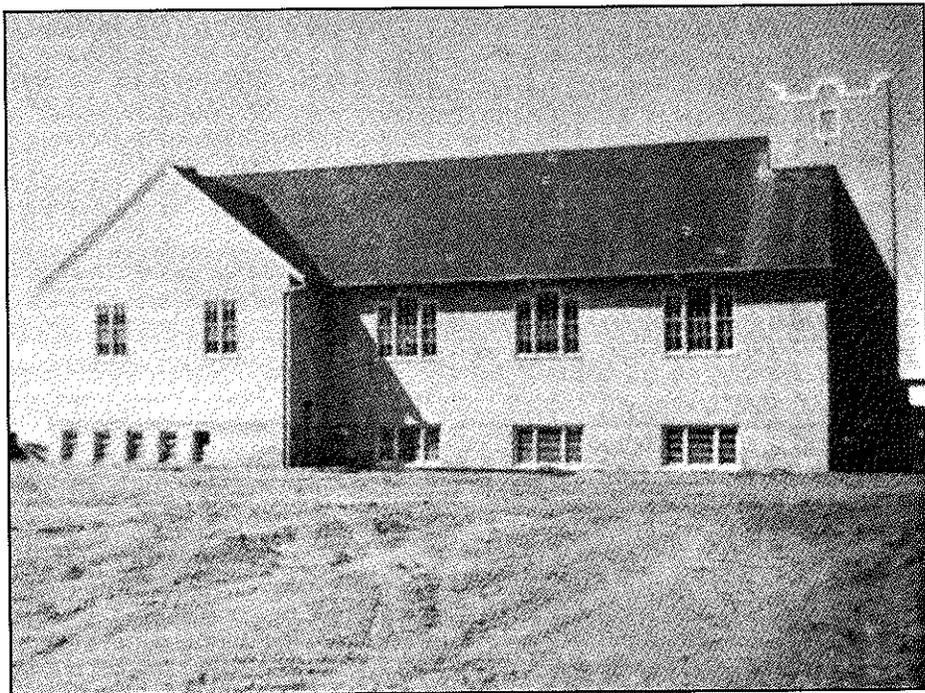
Dornbush was fully aware of what his trip meant to the Brandon congregation. He writes,

The members of our church in Brandon shared our excitement. They enjoyed the prospect of our seeing their fatherland and meeting some of their relatives. Several gave us the address of their dear ones in Holland, indicating that we would be welcome to lodge overnight. How good they all were in offering all this help. I

been started. Dornbush pushed quickly to establish a school.

We made inquiries about the possibility of starting a Christian school in the annex of our church building, which was large enough to be divided into two rooms of adequate size. It seemed that our goal was about to be realized. The Christian School Society met to consider our plan, but the outcome was a deep disappointment. There were those who did not favor starting in this humble way. They thought it better to wait till we could put up a

churches in which he labored, only the church in Portage, as anticipated, did not endure. Fond memories of his service are reflected in the warm receptions he received whenever he revisited his former parishioners.

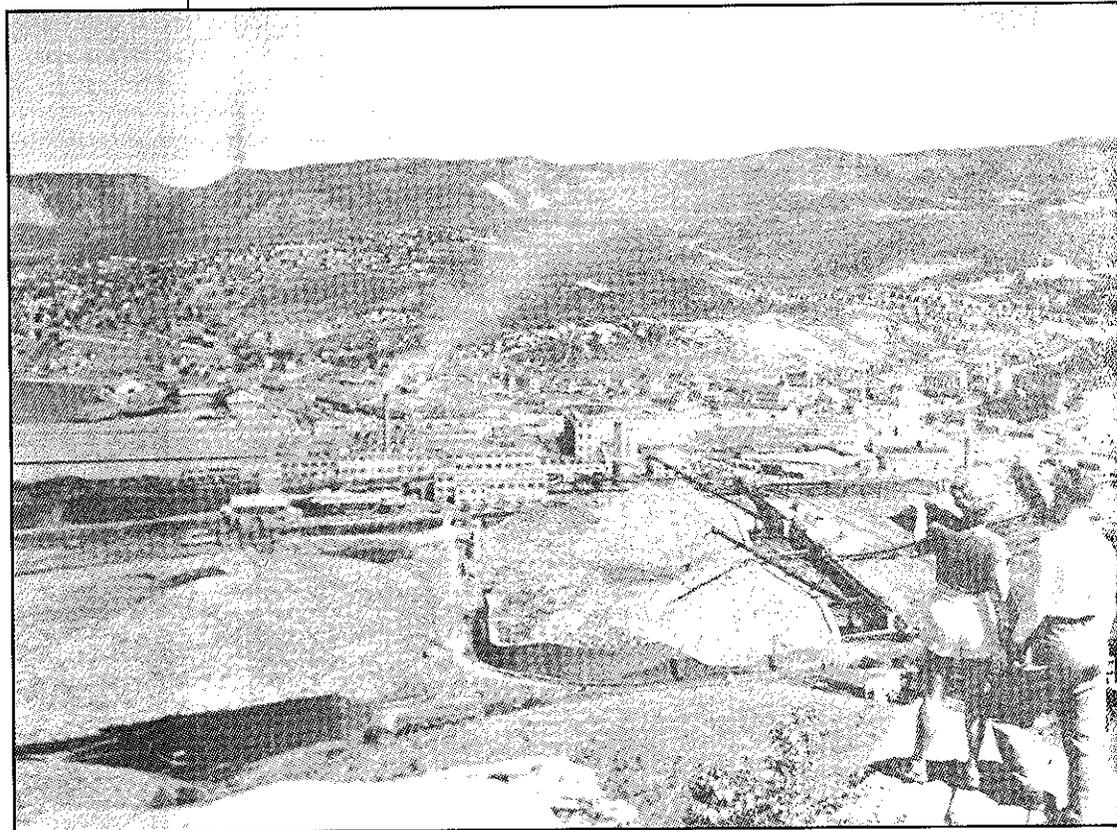


*Iron Springs twenty-fifth anniversary booklet, p. 7, side view of church, 1954.*

*Brook, Newfoundland. Calvinist Contact, Nov. 15, 1953, cover page.*

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# Turf Shipping

Nicholas Fridsma

**M**y father Jouke Fridsma was *turfskipper* in the Frisian village of Scharnegoutum (Skearnegoutum), about a half-hour's walk from Sneek (Snits). The size of his barge was thirty-three tons; its length was fifty-five feet. The main cabin in the rear had approximately eight by eight feet of floor space. All closets and cabinets were built inside the walls. One wall was left open for the turf stove, on which all the cooking was done and which also served for heat. The bed was under the rear part of the deck with doors opening to the cabin. The cabin in the front of the barge (called *durk*) was very small; it had two beds,

one on each side, built in the walls.

With a mainsail and a foresail you could call it a sailing vessel. Sometimes, however, when the winds were contrary or flat, a horse would be hired to pull the boat and at times even my oldest brother, Meindert, and my sister, Julia, were called upon to do the pulling. For short distances, poles were used to push the boat along.

My parents lived on this barge with six children, year around. Although the cabin space was very small, the family lived there most of the time. There was always plenty of fresh air and the cabins were well ventilated. When sailing, the

scenery was never boring because it was always changing. Two oaken barrels, scraped and varnished, were filled with rain water for drinking, and water for washing was always around us for the taking.

Family life was not much different from that on the land; only the children's schooling was greatly interrupted when away from the home village. I now realize that traveling to different provinces and big cities with more advanced

*Turf piles near Hoogeveen c. 1900, from Jan A. Niemeijer's Drente d'olde lantschap (Assen, Van Gorcum, 1982), p. 130.*

This article is taken from Fridsma's letter answering a question penned by the late Gerrit Dragt of Lakewood, Ohio, on



November 28, 1977. The author, Nicholas Fridsma, shown here, provides credentials for his answer with this introduction, "Bernard Fridsma and I are both sons of a *turfskipper*, from the Sneek (Snits) area in Friesland (Fryslan). We both were born on a *turfskip*, I in 1899 and Bernard in 1905. We lived on this barge until our departure for the USA in 1911. What I write, therefore, will reflect my actual experience on this vessel for eleven years."



civilization was an education by itself.

We have so far told something about the *turfskip*, and now come to the turf. Turf, as you know, is called peat in the United States. First of all, we must distinguish between two kinds of turf, *lange turf* and *baggelaars*. *Baggelaars* is the Dutch word, in Fryslan we called them *hurde turf* (hard turf). The *lange turf* (long turf) was softer.

The shape of *lange turf* was approximately four by four inches thick and one foot long. The pieces of *hurde turf* were about six inches square and about two inches thick. The *lange turf* was found in the province of Groningen. It comes in heavy layers of six to eight feet on

top of flat, sandy soils. The *hurde turf* is dug up below the top soil and is found in the province of Overijssel. The sizes given above are that of turf which is dry and ready for burning. When the *lange turf* is cut, it is considerably larger but shrinks greatly in the process of drying. The *hurde turf* is dug up and spread over the land, and is later cut up in squares, much like you cut up a sheet cake.

My father hauled the *lange turf* from a place called Emmer-Compascuum in the province of Groningen. It took several days to get there, depending on the wind and the traffic on the canals. We had to go through quite a number of locks, where only three or four vessels could be accommodated at a time, sometimes causing hours of

delay. Later on, a new canal was dug in the province of Drenthe, providing a route which became faster for us, because of less traffic and fewer locks. The square turf, as I will call it now, was brought in from the province of Overijssel, and this journey took about two days.

The purchase of turf might also be interesting to you. The *lange turf*, when dried, was built up in heaps, called "day work" piles. I suppose they were called by this name because it took a day to put them up. Some piles were twice as big and were called "two-day piles." They were covered with a very heavy coating of peat moss, to keep the turf dry. Upon arriving at Emmer-Compascuum, my father would go out to the peat territory and examine the contents of the piles by re-

Stacking turf to dry.



moving a small part of the peat moss. He was interested only in turf used for fuel. Some pieces were very hard, for kitchen stoves, others were a bit softer and scaly. They were good for bakers' ovens. Still others were of a very spongy texture and were taken to a factory to be ground up into a very dry peat moss for use as bedding for horses. One had to be quite an expert to buy the proper kind of hard turf for fuel, because women did not like the kind that left a red ash, which soiled their foot-stove ash trays. By examining the turf, my father could tell whether it would leave off a nice yellow ash. When such piles were discovered, he bought them.

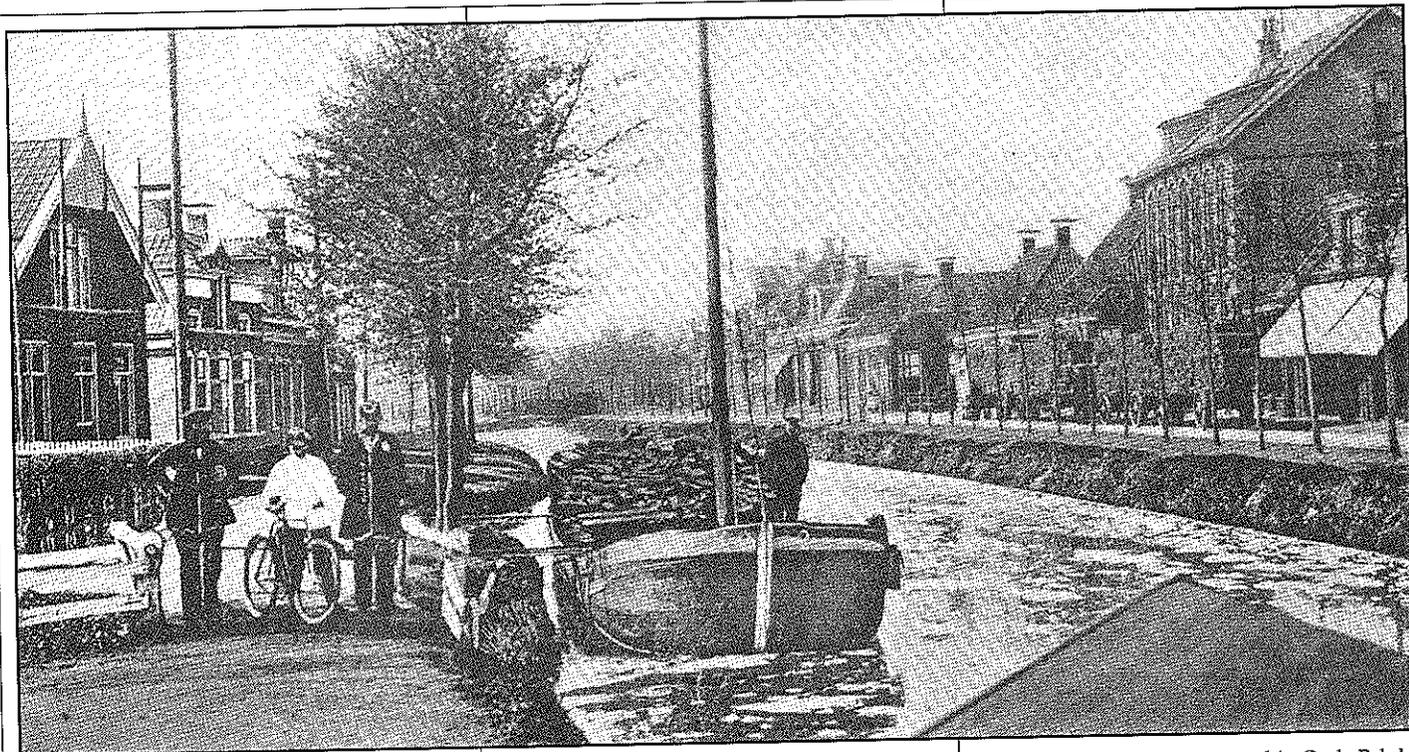
The barge would be brought into the neighborhood and made ready for loading. From the barge to the land, planks were laid over which wheelbarrows full of turf would be wheeled and dumped into the hull of the *skip*. Someone would stow the pieces of turf in layers one on top of the other until the hull was filled. When it was filled level with the deck, the stowing was continued to a height of five or six feet on top of the deck, depending on the weight and how far the barge could be loaded down. When the full load was on board, chains were attached to keep the load from shifting. A trench down the middle of the load accommodated the lowering of the

mast for stable bridges with low clearance. The top of the load was covered with boards for walking and also for keeping the turf dry. After that things could be made ready and brought in ship-shape for the return journey.

Bringing a load of square turf from Overijssel was slightly different. It was brought to our vessel in small barges which would pull up parallel to our *skip*. Baskets were used to transfer the turf from the barges. From there on, the process was very similar to that used with

*Turf barge on a canal near Hoogeveen c. 1900, from Jan A. Niemeijer's Drente d'olde lantschap (Assen, Van Gorcum, 1982), p. 110.*





the *lange turf*. With square turf, which was heavier, the load would not extend as high as with *lange turf*. Since square turf was used a great deal for foot-warming stoves as well as for cooking and heating, one had to be careful to purchase the right kind. Defective squares, which were not fit for foot warming, were called "salty" turf.

When the barge was loaded with either kind of turf, those sleeping in the front cabin would each morning have to return to the living quarters in back by walking over the load. A ladder was used at each end for getting on and getting off.

The disposal of the turf in the home village was by sale to my father's customers—homeowners, storekeepers and bakeries. Orders were delivered by handcart and usually stored in the attics of the houses, or sometimes in sheds.

During a part of the summer, when the newly-cut turf was in the drying process, most *turfskippers* would look for other cargo. Some-

times it would be a load of hay for a farmer, a load of potatoes for a factory, or a load of sugar beets for a sugar mill. Once we transported a cargo of bricks.

In 1971 we visited Friesland, Emmer-Compascuum and Overijssel, and found that everything I have been writing about, the whole turf industry, is now dead as a doornail.

Natural gas found in Friesland now does everything that turf once did. Trucking has replaced all shipping by water. The lakes and the larger waterways are now filled with all kinds of craft used for vacation trips, fishing, boating, camping, swimming, and the like. I recommend that you spend a water sport vacation in Friesland some time.

*Nicholas Fridma*

*Turf barge on a canal in Oude Pekela, Groningen.*

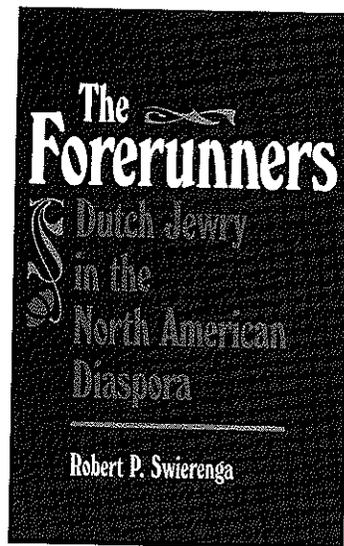
# BOOKS

Review by Conrad J. Bult

**The Forerunners, Dutch Jewry in the North American Diaspora.** Robert P. Swierenga. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994. \$37.95.

For approximately a generation, Robert Swierenga has written about the migration of Dutch folk to America and their adjustment to life in the New World. An estimated 6,556 Dutch Jews came to the USA from 1800-1880 and these are the people to whom Swierenga has directed his scholarly interest. He identifies the 1800-1830 period as the most flourishing Dutch-Jewish era, a time when they "... provided leadership in synagogue, school and society" (p. 320). After 1830, Dutch Jews found themselves overwhelmed by the flood of German Jews coming to America. Gradually, during the next few decades, Dutch Jews in America lost many of their Dutch characteristics and their orthodoxy. By 1900 the distinctiveness of the Dutch Jewish element in American Jewry had been blurred. Dutch Jews were no longer identifiable as a separate component of American Jewry, even though they still cherished a few religious rituals associated with synagogue membership.

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century Jews in the Netherlands found their well-being threatened by Napoleonic wars, conquests, and laws designed to make them more Dutch than Jewish. In Amsterdam Jews lost their



monopoly of their communal meat markets which meant that kosher meat could be purchased from private butchers. Consequently, profits from this enterprise were no longer available to fund Jewish poor relief. Already poor, many became impoverished and by 1859 more than 50 percent of Amsterdam's Jews were on the dole.

Jews coming from Holland to America settled in large cities, not on farms or in small communities. Swierenga has used city directories, synagogue archives, relevant personal papers and census records exhaustively so that little else can be discovered about Dutch Jews who lived in New York City, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Chicago and San Francisco. Nor are Jews in Buffalo, De-

troit, Pittsburgh, St. Louis and Toledo neglected. For Jews in America, New York was their "bastion," in New Orleans they were "a secular lot," in Great Lakes cities "the restless ones," and in San Francisco "an instant elite." By the use of such expressive characterizations Swierenga attempts to capture the essence of each Jewish community. Many families are mentioned by name including Reverend Samuel Meyer Isaacs who "... like his Dutch Calvinist counterparts in the Midwest, was a fiery champion of the old ways in religion" (p. 87).

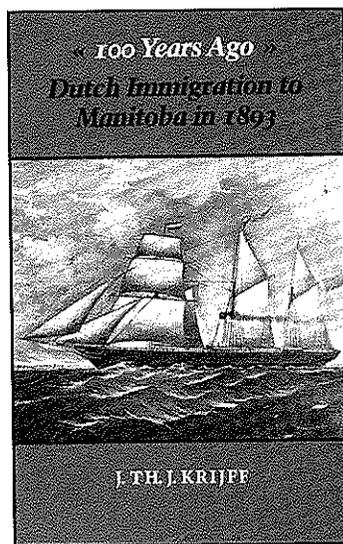
Swierenga does not draw a great many parallels between Dutch Jews who settled in urban centers and Dutch Calvinists who came to the Midwest. Yet, those who read his book will easily recognize the similarity of intellectual, religious and social tensions embodied in the Reformed immigrant heritage. During the nineteenth century traditionalists and integrationists were alive and well in both Christian and Jewish enclaves. What to retain and what to jettison was always the question and this dilemma, though not a vital aspect of today's American Jewry, remains a haunting reality for many who even now find the American way of life at odds with the ideas of their immigrant ancestors. Swierenga's scholarly and fact-filled book gives Dutch Jewry its rightful niche in American history.

**100 Years Ago: Dutch Immigration to Manitoba in 1893.** J.Th.J. Krijff. Windsor, Ontario: Electra Press, 1993. Canada. \$11.95.

In 1968 at the age of nineteen, Krijff left the Netherlands for Canada where he earned a B.A. in economics at the University of Calgary. After working a few years in a bank, he returned to the Netherlands and in 1992 received an M.A. in history from the University of Leiden. The focus of his continuing research is the early relationship between Canada and the Netherlands.

On April 1, 1893, sixty-eight migrants boarded the three-masted schooner, the *Sea Horse*, and left the Netherlands for England. Among these numbers were many young men and a few families. On April 6 they sailed from England for Canada on the S.S. *Numidian*, a new vehicle constructed of steel. Conditions were less than pleasant for the 914 below-deck passengers who had the use of only one toilet. The *Numidian* docked in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on April 17. After enduring a five-day train trip, the weary sixty-eight arrived in Winnipeg on April 22.

Depressed agricultural conditions in Gronigen, Drenthe and Friesland coupled with unemployment and slave wages, particularly in the peat bog areas of Friesland, eventually led to social unrest and a search on the part of those adversely affected for ways to better



their lot. Well-known religious leaders concerned with unhappy social and economic conditions formed a Committee for Emigration which paved the way for the sixty-eight who left the Netherlands for Manitoba in 1893. The Committee favored Canada since most good land in the United States was already settled. Also, much too costly were trips to either the East Indies or South Africa. Though little is known about the sixty-eight, Krijff mentions a few by name who came from Friesland and speculates about the status of these migrants, whom he thinks cannot necessarily be considered as uneducated or poor, though most were probably members of the working class. This illustrated monograph contains biographical material on the members of the Committee for Emigration,

the names of the sixty-eight steerage passengers on the *Numidian* and two lengthy letters dated 1893 written from Canada to the Netherlands by L.R.J.A. Roosmale Nepveu, a member of the Committee for Emigration.

Readers of this book will share the author's hope for more information about the historically elusive folk who came to Western Canada before the turn of the century.

# FOR THE FUTURE

The topics listed below are being researched, and articles about them will appear in future issues of *Origins*.

The Wreck of the William & Mary, 1853  
by Loren Lemmen

Working Together for Good: An RCA/CRC  
Family Heritage by Thomas Boslooper

The Dutch and Their Neighbors in Grand Rapids  
by James D. Bratt

The Dutch of Highland, Indiana by  
David Zandstra

Holland Michigan in Transition by Hero Bratt

The Case of Rev. Henry Wierenga, 1925  
by H. J. Brinks

Baxter Christian School Days by John Pastoor

Christian Education in Northern New Jersey

Frontier Women: A Different View of  
Immigration

Another Look at Grand Rapids' West-Side Dutch  
by H. J. Brinks, et al.

More About Pella by Muriel Kooi

Grand Haven — The Dutch Fishing Industry  
by H.J. Brinks



C.W. Stehouwer with delivery truck. Broadway Ave. CRC in background (ca. 1910).

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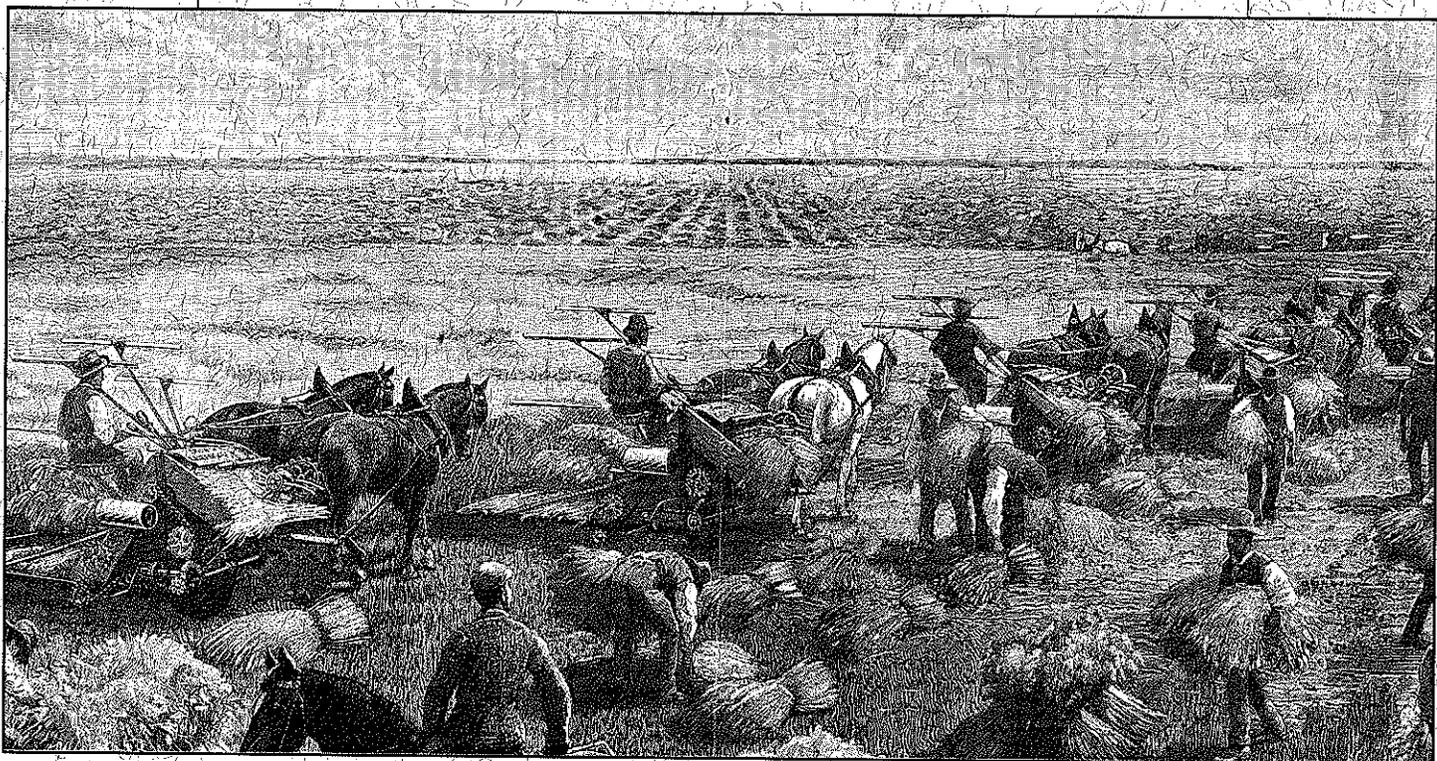
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