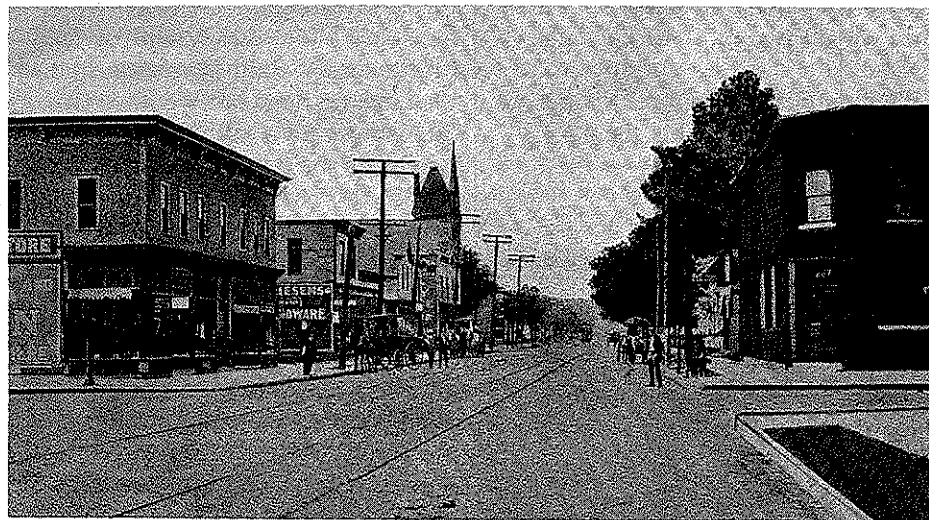


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West Leonard Street, looking West from
Alpine Avenue, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
(For more on Grand Rapids' West Side,
turn to West Side Stories, page 32.)

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Cover, 2—Photographs donated by Mrs. A. Van Aelst.

3—*From Mouldboard to Metric: A History of Loreburn & District*: p. 314.

4—*Harper's Weekly*: Vol. XXXI, No. 1583, April 23, 1887.

4—*Waukeet Centennial*: 1869-1969.

5—*Dynamic Dinsmore*: p. 31

6—*Illustrated London Daily News*: Nov. 7, 1891
9, 13—Photographs donated by Mrs. B. DeYoung.

10—*Door Amerika*: p. 53.

Out West: 11—Vol. 24, #6, June, 1906 p. 580;
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17—*A Pictorial History of the Great Lakes*: p. 109.

18—*De Provincie Gelderland*: p. 31.

19—Curt Door.

22—*Ware Gebeurtenis*.

24—*Wegen Gods in Gelra*.

25—*Het Wonder van de Negentiende Eeuw*.

27—*Seventy-fifth Anniversary: First Reformed Church, Paterson, New Jersey*.

37—*De Pelgrim Vaders van Het Westen*.

37—*Missionary Monthly*, Nov., 1934 p. 330.

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JOURNEY TO DESPAIR

Waukeee, Iowa, a rural village near Des Moines, witnessed the December 1905 wedding of James Douma and Clara Shaw. And that event launched the young newlyweds on a fifteen-year trek across the 1400 miles of North America, leading them from Iowa to the plains of South Dakota and Saskatchewan.

Farmers, the Doumas wanted nothing more than a piece of land with which to support their modest dreams, and that venture began near Mobridge, South Dakota. James had high hopes for their future in Walworth County. He had worked there before marrying, and had already acquired a parcel of land within a mile of the Missouri River. But until they could build a home on their own land, the Doumas rented another place near Selby which came with living quarters. That small house, built especially for them, framed the vista into which their imaginations had already sketched a flourishing farmstead.

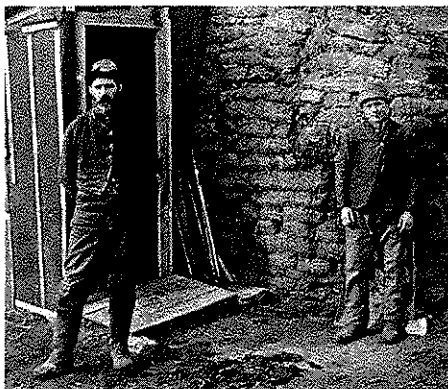
To that objective, they gave their best and all—a joyous expenditure of muscle and carefully gathered coins. James' proud accounting of Clara's homemaking nearly sings of her virtue and, not far behind, his own wisdom in marriage. "Clara is painting the woodwork," he reported. "She has oiled the floors and had enough left over to oil all the furniture. The clock, the bed, the tables and chairs all look like new. The lamp and the clock with a little gold paint are as bright as gold and

the stove shines like a mirror. Sister," he urged, "you must come to see us at your earliest convenience."

Clara's poultry prospered too as the "hens" were "laying to beat the band. Our tom turkey acts as our alarm clock. The turkeys roost on the hen house and every morning 'Tommy' will 'Gobble, gobble, gobble' until Clara lets the chickens out and then he is satisfied. . . . Clara has made quite a lot of garden and we got two more turkey eggs today."

Telling of his own work, James wrote, "You people [his sister's

"I tell you, a sod house is the best kind in Dakota."



family in Reasnor, Iowa] got ahead of me in sowing crops this year as I am not half done yet, but you see, we have been keeping house for only three weeks. . . . We had to wait until the house was built, and it was finished just three weeks ago today. I hauled the lumber and earned three dollars a day with the team. . . . The ponies are as faithful as ever. Doc

got hurt about two weeks before we left Newton [Iowa]. He got knocked down on his hip and it bothers him some, but they are all in the collar every day. I hitch all four to that old plow and they walk right off with it. I have rounds a mile long as it is just half a mile from one end of the field to the other."

The Doumas counted their precious cluster of livestock down to the last fresh egg. "We have two hens and a tom turkey with sixteen turkey eggs—eight from each hen. We have no hogs but we have two little cows and a calf. I bought the two cows the day we left Goddard for \$55.00. That was a mistake as cows are cheaper here, but I think they will make good milkers, so we will get the money back sometime."

Three months later James updated his report. The rain of that July day gave him time to write, but the much-needed moisture also increased the chances of a good harvest. Clara's chickens were multiplying rapidly. The 180 chicks were "growing like weeds." "Clara," he wrote, "is tickled all over about her chicks. She delights in sitting out

by the coop to feed them. The 46 youngest ones are just one week old and our oldest are not quite big enough to fly. Soon they will need to be enclosed."

No doubt work and the enthusiasm of beginning their lives together kept boredom at bay, but living six miles from the nearest crossroad town radically altered the Doumas' lives, and they missed their old neighbors and friends. "I suppose you are busy," James wrote, "but sister you must write often as your letters are greatly appreciated—coming from the old neighborhood where I used to know everybody. So don't wait so long. Tell me all the old news and the news about everybody and everything. I expect an answer within the next ten days."

Though the Doumas planned an eventual relocation on their own land near Evart, they were not yet prepared for that move in August when their landlord announced his intention to sell their rented home. By then they were expecting a child near the beginning of 1907, and since the landlord would not lease the house for a whole season, the Doumas began to plan a hasty move to their own land before the spring of 1907. James reported, "Clara and I were over to see our land yesterday to locate a well and a place to build. I think we can get water at 15 to 20 feet in a draw between the hills and then we can make us a dug-out in the hillside. That will be warm and cheap." Their "finest little boy in South Dakota" arrived on January 9, 1907, and reports of his first steps and "lively activity" accompanied James' hopeful expectations for 1908.

But Douma's correspondence in 1908 reveals that few of his plans had materialized. By then he and Clara had moved to an abandoned school-house in Evart a half mile from their farm, but the town itself had



disbanded. Although his crops were "looking fine," the late spring had prevented him from turning over a large acreage, but he did find some work on a county road crew at \$3.00 per day. Clara was also discouraged and James wrote, "Clara . . . wants to go home and see her folks. She wants me to sell out and come to Iowa too. But I can't get away as long as I have this land but . . . I think and hope I will have a chance to sell out."

In the summer of 1908, James wrote that Clara had taken the train

"We bought a new wagon and . . . a neighbor brought another load so we got half our stuff over in one trip."



to Waukee on the first of July. By then the Doumas had two children who, despite other disappointments, were the joy of their lives. Recalling Clara's departure, James said, "Clara and the babies departed for Waukee. . . . I hope they arrived safely at home by this time. We call our little boy 'Johnnie' and he just laughed like fun when the train started and was looking out of the window. I can still see him all the time. Grace was sound asleep. She is a very good baby. I wish you could see them. Johnnie is Papa's boy. He was on top of me all the time when I was at home and he thinks there is no one like sissy. He likes the chickies, the turkeys, and bossies. He likes to sit on my lap to drive and then he says ge-ap, ge-ap."

Clara and the children were back in Evart when James reported that their farm together with its sod house had been sold. "But I don't know," he continued, "how much will be left when all our debts have been paid." He inquired about rentable farms in Iowa, mainly for Clara's sake. "She wants to get out of here, he reported. "She says that everything has been against us while we have been here—and she is right." But James preferred staying. They had "plenty to eat and burn" and though they were "having a snug old winter" it was "not as bad as it was two years ago, and it don't effect us so much. I tell you a sod house is the best kind in Dakota. So now don't worry about us—and don't break your neck looking for a farm. If you know of one, let us know."

But there was no moving to Iowa. Instead the opening of the Cheyenne and Stand Rock Indian Reservation inspired Douma's hopes for a new chance just over the Missouri River. He declared, "We can see Mobridge from here, and

also the land which is being opened up to settlement." He urged his family in Iowa to join him, reporting, "Registration for the big land opening at the Cheyenne and Stand Rock Indian Reservation begins on the 4th of October and it lasts until the 20th. You should be able to get a round-trip ticket for \$16.00. Don't miss the chance. It costs only \$.25 to register. Are you coming? We will take care of you if you do."

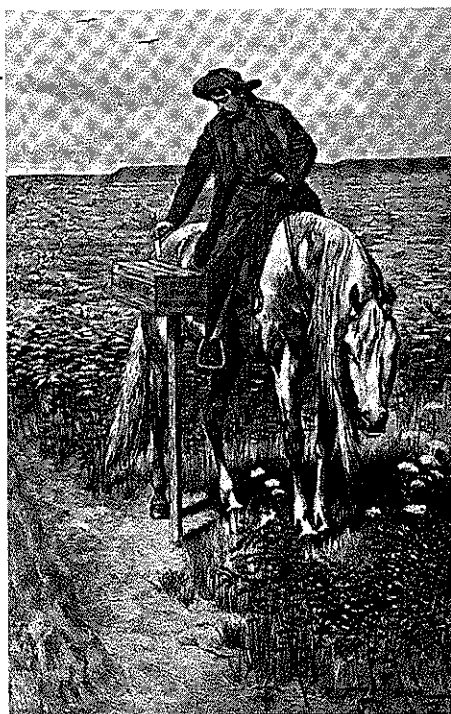
For the next eight months Douma's sister in Iowa received no news from South Dakota. But then, in a letter postmarked from Loreburn, Saskatchewan, James recounted momentous changes. "Dear Brother, Sister, and Family," he began.

"You will be surprised to learn that we are away up here in King George's domain, but such is the case and what is more, we have another little girl born on the 27th of June. Her name is Wemeltje Yitske (Winnie for short), and she is a nice and good girl for she sleeps most of the time. We are all well and happy and hope the same of you.

"We did not draw a number at all in the Reservation opening last winter so we thought we would emigrate. This is a great big country with lots of open prairie land. We moved up here in March and live on Clara's brother's homestead about eight miles from a railroad town.

"Clara has about 250 young chicks and 150 turkeys. . . . She wants you to come up and see her. She hasn't seen another woman since we moved up and that will soon be four months ago."

The beauty of the plains, he declared, was beyond anything in Iowa: "When we arrived here last spring on the 4th of April the prairie was covered with flowers. Do you believe that? You don't see so many



"Sister, you must write us often."

flowers down there that early, do you? . . . The days are very short here in the winter time. The sun sets 4 o'clock and does not rise until 8 the next day, but in the summer we have 16 hours of sunshine. We have the pleasure of viewing the Aurora Borealis a good many times and ordinarily we can see the tops of the elevators in Loreburn, but some mornings we can see the entire town."

As usual, James was enthusiastic

"I would of liked to of been down there and the girls could of went to school. They have a consolidated school right across the street from my mother's."



about his prospects. "We had a hail storm on the third of July," he wrote, "but our crop, being a little late, escaped damage. . . . A good team of horses is worth \$600 here. Lots of people use oxen and they are worth \$100 apiece. Land is selling at \$20 and up."

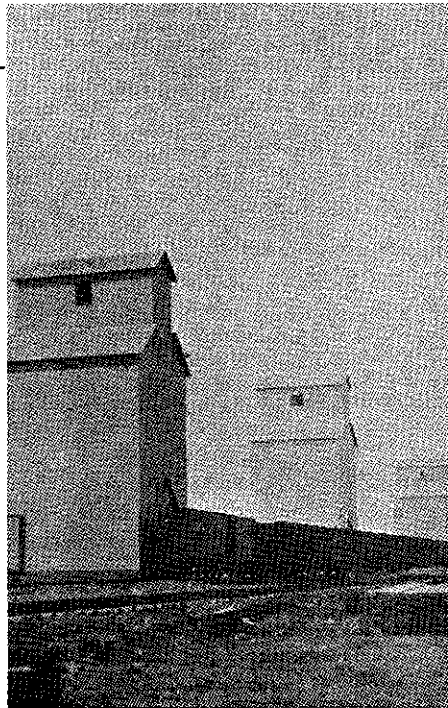
Though his harvest in 1910 was disappointing, Douma was only slightly dismayed. Reviewing the problems of their first Canadian season, James explained, "Our crop did not pay for itself and I will tell you why. The ground was not prepared right but that was not our fault because when we arrived it was time to put it in so we did not have time to work it right, but then we did not put in a very large acreage and we did not lose very much. But I did get some breaking to do at 3 and 3 1/2 dollars an acre and our chickens helped us some during the summer. This fall we sold about \$150 worth of chickens and turkeys and I cut 260 acres of flax so we had quite a lot of money after all. But it is nearly all gone and we could easily make good use of much more if we only had it. . . . I think we will be able to make more money this year as we now have four mares of which two are in foal plus one gelding and two calfs nearing two years in age. We have two cows and about 100 chickens and turkeys."

Actually the Doumas did migrate to Canada during a prosperous era. Following nearly three decades of agricultural depression, newly developed winter-hardened grains and their prices brought prosperity to the colder agricultural regions of North America. Moreover, Canada's program to open its Western Plains with land grants, railroad construction, and virtually free homesteads resulted in a boom-time economy. Towns followed railroads across the great Canadian Wheat

Belt, and by 1905 Saskatchewan became an independent province. To lure a productive populace, the Laurier administration, 1896–1911, distributed thousands of pamphlets and posters throughout Europe and the United States. Proclaiming Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba the “last best West,” this publicity attracted homesteaders from all over Europe and the States.

The Doumas, then, were legitimately realistic in their expectations of success. But the statistical averages demonstrating a general prosperity between 1900 and 1920 do not tell the stories of individual efforts which floundered into failure. Between 1912 and 1920 the Doumas resettled two more times, but they reaped little from their toil as early frost, drought, personal injuries, and cash shortages pitched them from gloom to despair.

Though 1911 was a good year for Canadian farmers, the Doumas were victimized by circumstances and poor judgments. They rented a farm near Loreburn but did not draw up a lease. When the owner arrived unexpectedly from Norway, the Doumas were forced to leave. They received \$100 for planting the crops, but with no place to go nearby, they sold most of their poultry at reduced prices and moved on. James reported, “We bought a new wagon, built a hay rack on it, covered it with canvas, loaded it with furniture and kids and moved west. We also took some chickens, our cows and a calf. A neighbor brought another load so we got about half our stuff over in one trip. But on the way we broke down once and . . . we also had a runaway. Our boy fell out of the wagon once and was nearly run over by a big load. After a week’s travel we finally arrived on the homestead which we had never seen before. But the land is worth the trip. It is



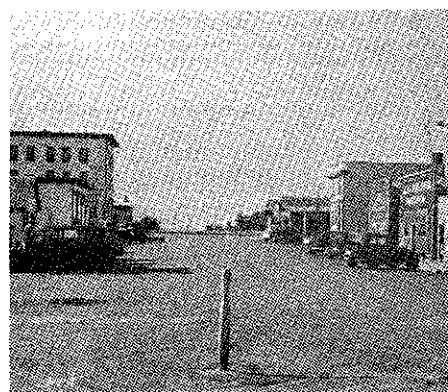
Dinsmore, elevator row 1915

alright. When we moved here we were thirty-six miles from a railroad but now they are building one only eight miles north of us.

“With all this moving around I did not make anything last year. We built a 20 x 24 frame house and had to draw some of the lumber from 70 miles off though most of it came from 24 miles away. But the lumber is not all paid for, and how I am going to get the money this year is more than I know.

“When we arrived last summer we did not get any land broken up

Mainstraet, Dinsmore



so we won’t raise a very big crop this year. It doesn’t pay very well to put in a crop on spring broken sod. We did put in 15 acres of oats and we expect to put in 10 acres of flax, but no wheat.

“Breaking up this old prairie is slow work because there are lots of stones in the ground and in spots they have to be dug out and drawn off before the ground can be plowed. But, if it is plowed good once, it does not have to be plowed again for two years—only disked and harrowed. The prospect for another big crop in this part of Canada is good. The ground was nice when I put my crop in and we are getting enough rain to make it grow.”

Continuing his letter after a three-week lapse, Douma wrote, “Since you would like to know what we are most in need of, I will tell you that it is money, but then I have not yet paid what I owe you and I hardly dare ask for any more, but I would like to borrow \$300 from somebody for two years. I will pay 8% interest because we have to pay 12% here at the bank, and that is too much. You see, our house is not plastered yet, and I don’t want to buy the stuff on time because the lumber companies charge too much that way and with interest to boot it all comes too high. Now, if you folks could lend me that much [\$300] for that long [two years] I could pay it back then. By that time we can prove up our claim and borrow money on our land. But we can’t do this until the land is ours. I think we can make enough money to carry us through the winter—but not to pay our debts.”

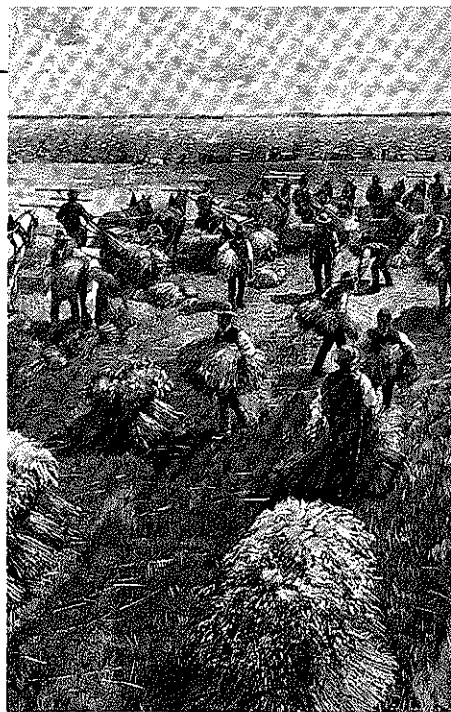
By 1914 the Doumas’ financial woes had not improved. James did receive a patent on his homestead, but by then Canada had entered the First World War and credit sources became scarce. As James put it, “Owing to a few crazy war lords in

Europe I won't be able to borrow any money as the money market is frozen up tighter than the Saskatchewan River in the winter when the ice gets four feet thick." He noted that some relief had been promised by the government which would "not allow the loan and machinery companies to force any collection that Fall and it is also going to supply those in need with the necessities of life including feed and seed for the next year."

Complicating James' narrow financial circumstances were a short harvest in 1913 and a total disaster in 1914. His 600-bushel yield in 1913 brought only \$230. The family could afford no new clothing, and their fourth child arrived that year. They had gotten through the winter of 1913, burning flax straw and buffalo chips for fuel, and the prospects for 1914 were even more bleak. His July letter that year reported, "The sky is just as bright as a red-hot poker day after day. We had only one fairly good rain this year and the crops are all drying up. We won't even get our seed back. For 20 miles East of us, the crops are gone and to the West as far as you can go. But to the North the crops are good. . . . We are living in hopes that we will have a bumper crop next year."

One week later James returned to his unfinished letter and added, "We have had no rain yet. There won't even be flax straw to be got and I don't know what we are going to do to keep warm this winter. We can't sell anything because there is no money in the country—no work, no crop, nothing but debts."

As the gloomy letters from Dinsmore accumulated in Iowa, James' sister responded with understandable perplexity. Why had he gone to Canada? So far away—with no evidence of success or the prospect of advancement. Why had



A threshing crew at harvest time.

he left Iowa in the first place? Surely the old farmstead in Reasnor would have provided a better living than the precarious plains of Saskatchewan. Implications of this sort pierced James' ego, and he was determined to justify his migrations. "Dear sister," he responded, "you often refer to the idea that if I had stayed on the old home place I would be much better off.

"You are getting to be quite a preacher. . . . Now I will give you my opinion. Had I not sold it and moved away I would by this time be the sole owner of a piece of real estate 3 x 6 feet just north of Pella.

Parents

Clara Shaw
Douwe James Douma

Children

Douwe John	born 1907
Grace	born 1908
Wemeltje Yitske (Winnie)	born 1910
Bertha Viola	born 1914
Charles James	born 1917

Whereas what I now have I would not exchange for all of Elk Creek Township. As far as the home farm is concerned, I have never had the least desire to be back on it. It does not even enter into my consideration—and as far as the present owner is concerned, I don't think he was ever very bright."

No doubt James was committed to the path he had taken, but his wife began to crumble under the burdens of child rearing, farm chores, repeated uprootings, and, above all, loneliness. Church attendance, which frequently broke refreshingly into the solitary existence of frontier families, was not a significant feature in the Douma correspondence.

James wrote nearly nothing of their religious activities, but while describing the churches near Dinsmore he declared, "We have church services at the school house every Sunday by the Presbyterians, but the minister is only a boy—a student. He doesn't preach very good. It is hardly worth while going to hear him. The Church of England people have services once in two weeks. They have a better preacher but they have too much ceremony about their meetings—so we do not attend them very often." It appears, then, that the Doumas found little relief from daily toil in the church, and Clara's longing for family connections, already evident in South Dakota, became more intense in Saskatchewan. Still, she supported her husband's determined quest during a decade of disappointments. More specifically, the tale of Clara's hardships in 1914 strains the limits of credibility.

Recounting these events, James explained, "I was going to write you and Mrs. Van Zee at the same time but . . . then something happened. I had borrowed a shotgun to shoot hawks with, and as this is hay-

making time up here, I went out to cut some, and while I was out, Clara laid down to nurse the baby [their fourth child] which was about two weeks old. And master John gets the gun to scare away a hawk, but before he got out of the door, in some mysterious way, the thing discharged directly at Mama. But as a special favor of fate, the entire charge went through the tea kettle which was on the cook stove and that broke the force. Still some of the shot penetrated the wall and hit Mama in the neck and shoulders—just 12 of them. Then we had to drive 20 miles to the nearest doctor and, he not being at home, we had to drive as many more to find another doctor. He took out four pellets of shot. The others were in too deep but the doctor said they might not bother her.

"Then just a week later, as I was hitching four horses to the binder, one of them wouldn't stand around just right, so I hit him and gave a jerk. The bit came out of his mouth and then I could not hold them. Clara came out to help stop them and in some way she fell in front of the platform and got caught on the guards. They dragged her about two rods and then the platform raised up and bounced over her. She was an awful looking sight. Her face was all skinned up. She had two cuts on one arm about three inches long and the other arm was bruised so badly that it was all blue. One knee had the skin rubbed off as big as a man's hand. We got her into the house, bathed her wounds with hot water and poured on lots of turpentine. Then we sent for a nurse in the neighborhood. She happened to be home and came over immediately with some medicine. Together, we sewed up and dressed Clara's wounds and then she looked and felt much better. (The nurse asked

me 'Why didn't you try to kill her in some more humane way?')

"And mind you, the baby was only three weeks old so we sent for an old English lady to stay with us until Clara was able to be up and around. She stayed with us 10 days and then she had to go and cook for a threshing crew. . . . By that time Clara was able to be up to boss the job so we got along pretty well. Just the same that took all of my time right in the harvest time, and instead of going out to make some money, we were money out all the time, and we did not have a very big crop last year."

Between 1915 and 1916 the Douma correspondence is unavailable, but the dual reports of Clara and James in 1917 give little evidence of improved conditions. Clara wrote of their family—the birth of another child, school, and Christmas.

"I'm sorry," she wrote to her sister-in-law, "that you have been bothered by your teeth. I know something about that. I have four broke off and they ulcerate all the time and it is so far to the dentist. I had a doctor pull out nine once and I was so sick afterwards—I have not got the nerve to try it again. I used to have such nice teeth and I never had a toothache until after Johnny was born, and now I can't get them fixed so I guess I won't have any.

"Why don't you come over. It is your turn. Your children are getting big. They can tend to things. Mine are all small and I hate to go trotting around with so many. In the winter it is too cold to go visiting and in the summer we have so much to do that we can't go. I would love to see you again. I wish it wasn't so far so we could see one another once in a while.

"We have a new boy [their fifth child]. He was born September 19. He is four months old and he can

almost sit up alone. He noticed objects as soon as he was born—he is awful smart and I wish you could see the kiddies. Our teacher had a program. John spoke a piece and was in a drill and so did Winnie. Their teacher gave John candy and Papa bought him a sled. Grace got a box of lead pencils and a breast pin. Winnie got a stove with some dishes off the tree and baby was also remembered. He got a box of candy from Santa. He was 3 months old and it was 30° below."

The farm kept the Doumas alive but little more as early frost in 1916 hit the wheat before it ripened. With livestock, milk, eggs, and a garden the family struggled through 1917. The next year brought no relief and 1919 brought some unnamed but overriding tragedy. In 1920 James wrote, "We are having some desperate cold weather—as low as 48° below zero. And then, with hardly any fuel and not even a fork full of straw for bedding and a cold stable, it is darned hard on the livestock. It is simply what Sherman called 'war'. . . . I hope we have a good thaw again soon so our cattle can get something to eat out on the prairie. If it don't, I don't know what will happen because feed is so scarce and high and we have so little money with which to buy.

"Well, I hate to write all these sobbing letters to you and burden you with all our troubles. You will think that things are worse than they really are because we could be much worse off. If only what happened last winter had not happened. . . . Oh what wouldn't I give to have that not to have happened. I can't concentrate on anything else for any length of time—so I will close now."

The precise nature of the Doumas' 1919 tragedy is not recorded in the preserved correspondence, but that

event bore heavily on Clara. In the last letter of the Douma collection, Clara dutifully reviews the numbers of their cows, horses, pigs, and chickens, but her heart is elsewhere. Without grain she was feeding the hogs and chickens boiled potatoes. "I am tired of raising chickens," she wrote. "Can't sell them for much and we never have enough feed."

She longed wearily for a year at home in Iowa. "I would of liked to went home this winter, but hadn't much money and no clothes to wear. I would of liked to of been down there and the girls could of went to school. They have a consolidated school right across the street from my mother's. But I hate to go visiting in the winter time with a bunch of kids. . . . When I do come down I am going to stay for a whole year and get to see all of you and my people too. I think I have earned a vacation. I have worked hard and went without clothes and lots of other things. We have never bought any new furniture. We still got all that Jim had when we were married 14 years ago. I have always been hoping that some day we will have something, but if we don't get a crop we will never have it any better. I feel like running away sometimes. I believe I could have done better single and alone. 'Ha-Ha.' But it is all over now—everything so high we can't buy any dried fruit or canned tomatoes. . . . This is hard world to live in. I will be glad when my time has come. There is nothing to live for anyway and we all have to go sometime."

Unexpected disappointments, shattered dreams and a grinding routine of lonely toil had reduced both James and Clara to despair in 1920. The record of their lives after that date must be available somewhere—in the memories of their children or still undiscovered

letters to their family. It would be heartening to uncover evidence of a

happier conclusion to their tale. Perhaps it will be found. —H.J.B.

NEXT TIME AROUND

Prospective Contents for Volume III, Number 1



The Liberation of the Netherlands May 5, 1945

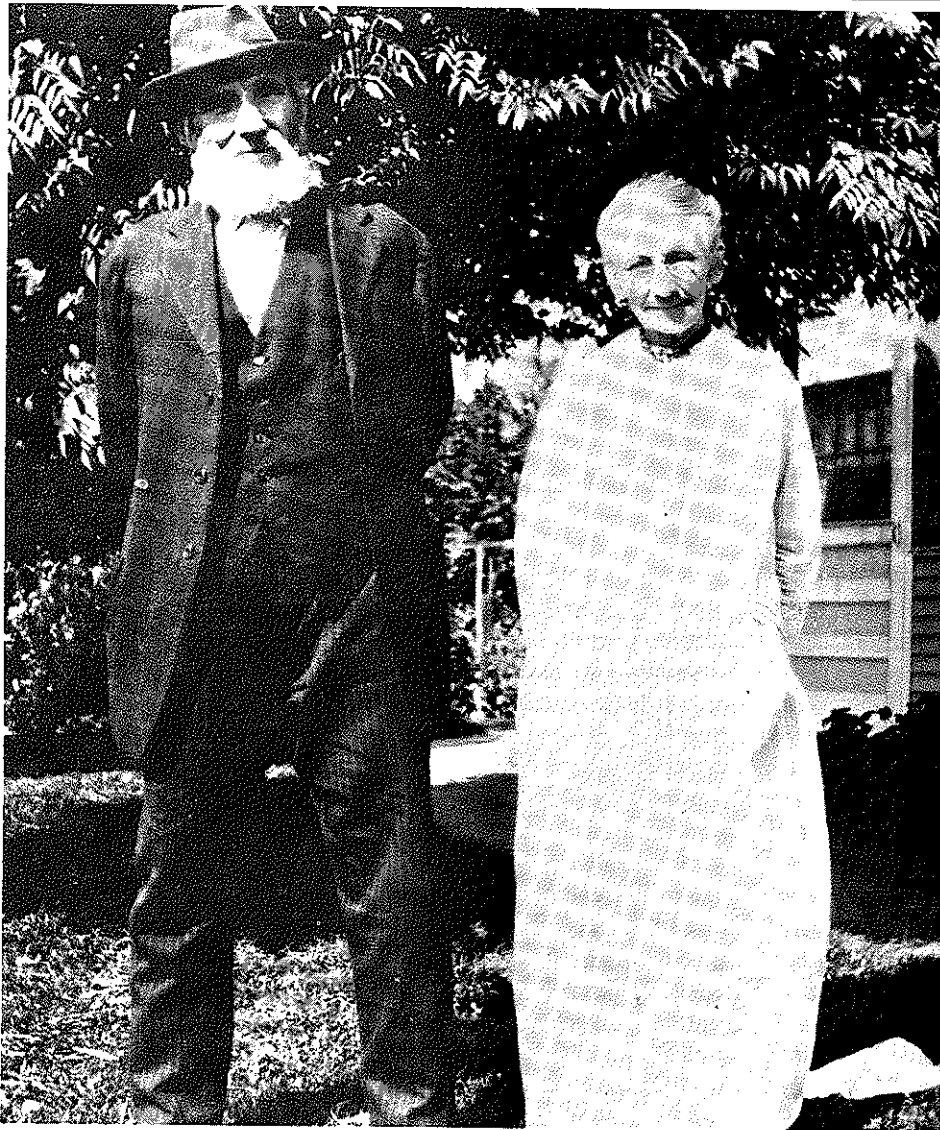
The Travels of Klaas De Vries: From Winnipeg to Oak Harbor, Washington

Teunis Vanden Hoek: Life in Iowa and South Dakota

Pilgrim Fathers of the West (continued)

Reminiscences of a Septuagenarian: Ralph Dekker in the Chicago Area
1890–1930

Alamosa, Colorado 1892–1893



THE A VINKS

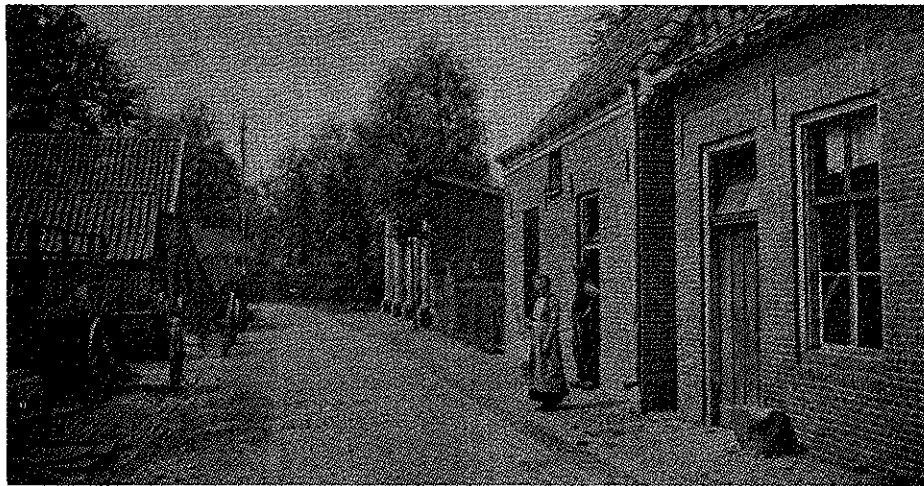
*From Borculo
to Ripon*
1869–1917

Between 1869–70 at least thirteen members of the Harm Avink family immigrated to West Michigan from Borculo in the Netherlands. They clustered on small farms in the Blendon-Hudsonville region until the turn of the century and then, as their small farms became economically obsolete, the Avink's descendants relocated in neighboring cities and villages to pursue employment as craftsmen and factory workers. In 1912 one of the Avink clan, Henry, took a more adventurous path when he migrated across the continent to resettle near Ripon, California. Thus, the Avink migration, which began in 1869, stretched across the Atlantic to the Mid-West and terminated near the Pacific coast, traversing about 5,000 miles.

For the early Michigan settlers Harm Avink's correspondence provides detailed descriptions of frontier farming in Blendon. And, even though the Avink letter collection, 1883–1909, begins fourteen years after the family immigrated, the letters clearly disclose the cycle of initial settlement and the efforts by which they gained moderate success.

Addressed to his in-laws, the Bouwmeester family, Harm Avink's correspondence reveals the changing status of his family and that of his neighbors. Clearing the land, draining the lowlands, and plowing up stumps and roots kept the Blendon farmers busy through many summers and winters, for, though Harm Avink purchased his farm in 1873, he still struggled with stubborn stumps in 1888. As he declared, "It is hard plowing here between the

(pictured) Henry and Dena Avink



stumps, and even though we have worked this land for fifteen years the oak and pine stumps are still hard." While both of his brothers, Arend Jan and Engbert, owned horses, Harm found them something of a luxury because "they can only be used for travel on the roads or for cultivating corn." And, furthermore, since they could not be left to roam in the woods like oxen, horses required pasture and winter feed which was "too expensive." So, to push through the root-strewn fields, Harm's oxen, "Kees" and "Hans," remained with him until 1892, when he bought his first team of horses, "Bill" and "Jim."

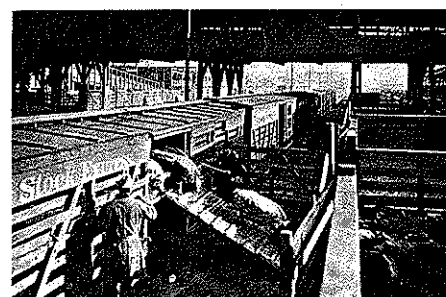
That same year Avink advised his brother-in-law and a friend named Levenkamp to come to America because "it is a land of plenty." Recounting his own experience, Harm wrote, "It is not as easy to become your own farmer here as it was twenty years ago because the land is more expensive now. Today, with a house and barn, a farm costs about \$2000. I place the value of my farm at about \$2000, and you know that, even with the money I borrowed from you, I had only \$600 when I arrived here. Today the land, house, barn, wagon, animals and all the rest are free of debt."

By 1889 Avink's friend, Leven-

Borculo, The Netherlands

kamp, did immigrate, but he settled in Iowa. "I can understand," Avink wrote, "that they do not come to see us because we are separated by over 600 miles, and it costs at least \$36.00 for them to travel here. . . . It is a shame, though, that we don't see each other after a separation of 28 years." Six years later the Avinks and Levenkamps were reunited, for, in 1904, Levenkamp came to Chicago along with a carload of livestock destined for the stockyards. Thus Avink wrote, "Gerrit Levenkamp was here last Spring. He went to Chicago with a cattle car carrying fattened hogs. From Chicago it is only 150 miles to this place. . . . Things are done on a large scale in Iowa—large farms and much livestock. . . . We had a letter from Levenkamps just this week.

"The pigs are sold directly from the pens and brought to Chicago by the carload."



They had a good harvest which sold at good prices. They have twelve horses, large and small, and they have over one hundred pigs. These are sold directly from the pens and brought to Chicago by the carload."

Over the years Avink had written that land in West Michigan had become expensive, whereas land out West was cheap. "Those who want to go West," he declared in 1904, "can get land from the government or the state for almost nothing. Every citizen can get 80 acres under the homestead law. He only has to work and live on the land for five years."

At 74 years of age, Avink had no intention of moving West, but he recognized the dim future which faced the small farmers. "Forty acres is not enough," he wrote in 1906. "It cannot support enough livestock. We have 7 cows and 7 pigs (two for breeding and 5 to fatten). We have two horses and over a hundred chickens. Hendrik, the son of brother Arend Jan, has sold his 40 acre farm for \$2,750. Now he has bought the land of his father-in-law Havighorst. That land is better."

"Better" land and more of it—these were the farmers' constant objectives, and the Avink's sought similar goods, but the second generation inherited too little land in Blendon. One of these, Henry, risked migrating to the West Coast. His record of the first years of the Afton colony coincides with the origins of the CRC in California.

Migrations into and across the Western plains were quite common for the Dutch immigrants, and by 1896 their rural villages peppered the landscape from Iowa to Oak Harbor, Washington. But, despite attractions such as fertile valleys and a warm climate, California did not gain successful Dutch settlements until about 1915. The first of these, Redlands, floundered and disinte-

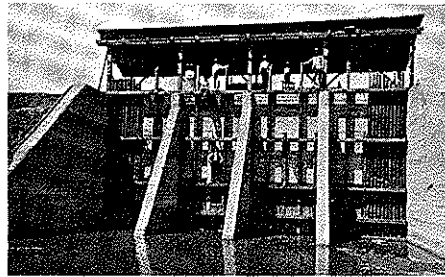
grated after several crop failures, but in 1914 these settlers reorganized in Los Angeles, where they also transferred the Christian Reformed Church of Redlands.

The presence of a Reformed church has always been a crucial ingredient for successful colony building among Dutch-Americans, and once that church took root in California, new settlers arrived at an increasing pace. In 1911 California had but one Christian Reformed congregation with about 10 families, while currently the state's 46 Christian Reformed churches gather nearly 16,000 adherents to Sunday worship in more than 30 cities and towns.

California's first four Christian Reformed congregations (Redlands, 1911; Hanford, 1912; Afton, 1914; Ripon, 1918) were not founded primarily by fresh immigrants from the Netherlands, but by Dutch-Americans who came to California after prior experiences in Michigan, Wisconsin, Montana, and elsewhere. And, in the tradition of their ancestors, these folk clustered together for mutual support.

Thus in 1912, when Henry and Dena Avink settled near Modesto, they joined a small cluster of Dutch-American migrants who had preceded them to that region. But at that time the Avinks and several other families were still searching for a more ideal location to found a "Holland" colony in California. Another group of migrants (the Konynenbergs, Weertmans, and others) were inclined to remain near Modesto in what Avink called the "Wood Colony."

Hoping to organize another community under the leadership of Egbert Stevens, the Schuiling, Nykamps, and Schaapmans investigated an area near Butte City, 100 miles up the San Joaquin Valley



Canal head gate near Butte City

from Modesto. After scouting that segment of the valley, Egbert Stevens purchased land from the Holland Land Company and urged his friends to join him. The Schaapmans remained behind, but Henry Avink joined the Stevens venture. By the spring of 1913 a small cluster of five or six families had moved to the Butte City area, where they began to erect homesteads near the east side of the Sacramento River.

Within a week after his June 7 arrival Avink had constructed a temporary shelter, and then he acquired some livestock and set fences. But, when the colonists discovered that their purchase agreements had not been properly recorded, they discontinued further improvements until the land agent, a Mr. Earl Baker, produced assurances concerning the legitimacy of their contracts. For the following two months the Avinks and their neighbors worked furiously, sowing crops and building more permanent farmsteads. But by mid-winter in 1913-14, Avink already began to fear for the success of the colony.

In December Avink's trusted friend, Thys Schuiling, returned to Montana. He found Butte City's summers too hot, and by then the city itself had been virtually destroyed by fire with little prospect of being rebuilt. When the first day of 1914 brought floods which forced the colonists to seek high ground in

row boats, Avink declared, "There is little chance now to get a thriving Holland colony here," and he added, "Great is the Sacramento Valley! But we have made our beds and we shall have to sleep on them."

Floods continued to disrupt the colony through February, and two local "American" families abandoned the region. But by March Avink's hopes were rekindled. Fruit trees were in bloom and wild barley grew lushly enough to feed the livestock. "It was," Avink wrote, "great barley country." Then several newcomers arrived and one of these, a Mr. Tubergen, opened a general store. The community also acquired a name and a post office. And, though the Dutch contingent favored naming the place "Pella," the "Americans" had their way and it became Afton. The Methodists permitted the "Hollanders" to rent their church, and on May 8, 1914, the Afton Christian Reformed congregation celebrated its organization¹ with guests from Modesto. But, that same month also brought natural miseries.

A hatch of black gnats swarmed through the valley, and for one whole day the Avinks could not leave their house. The insects remained with the Aftonites from May 12 through June 20 and by that time Avink noted, "One by one the drawbacks are piling up here and if things do not change we will leave."

The second fall season in Afton did restore some of Avink's original zeal as the weather permitted him to harvest a moderate yield of corn. The whole community joined hands

¹The founding members were Henry and Dena Avink, Mr. and Mrs. John Brouwer, Mr. and Mrs. E. Stevens, Mr. and Mrs. Thys Schuiling, Mr. and Mrs. G. Houtman, Mrs. Peter Houtman, Mr. and Mrs. Simon Piers, the Nykamp family, together with Walter and Gerrit Veurink.

in hauling gravel from the Sacramento River to improve the main road, and Avink distributed over 120 loads of fill around his house to channel flood waters away from his doorstep. When the first difficult year ended, Avink wrote, "The past year has been replete with disappointments of every kind. It is useless to enumerate them and we will hope that the new year will bring something better. However, our lives and health have been spared, and even that, to say nothing of the other blessings we have enjoyed, is above our merits. So, we will not complain but try to be thankful . . . and hope for a better future—and above all be resigned in His will who knoweth best. And, here comes 1915."

By the end of that year the Avinks were determined to leave Afton as soon as possible. The floods returned again and high water forced many of the residents to abandon their homes. Flood water polluted their wells and washed their fences down the river. "As usual," Avink commented, "no one ever saw so much water here before. The country is a sight again and has demonstrated its unequalled opportunities. Afton's main road, which Avink dubbed "Michigan Avenue," was nearly impassable, and the people were unable to gather for worship or consistory meetings. Several families declared that they were returning to Michigan.

After successive discouragements between 1913 and 1916 Avink urgently sought a way out of Afton. "It is becoming clear," he noted, "that except for land on the ridges it is going to be too wet here for alfalfa." He communicated these dismal conclusions to Mr. Konynenberg in Modesto, and in reply Konynenberg urged Avink to



"I don't think I shall ever forget Mt. Shasta glistening in the bright sunlight."

sell and move back to Modesto.

"Yes!" Avink noted, "But to sell?"

With the return of the black gnats in the spring of 1916 the Aftonites began to bicker among themselves. Petty disagreements occupied the attention of the consistory, and nearly every resident sought an exit from Afton. One group, Avink among them, investigated a site located another hundred miles up the valley, in Montague, near the Oregon border. Avink was well impressed by that region. Its volcanic ash and loam soil was, he declared, "good for alfalfa, potatoes and truck garden crops." There he also observed the first growth of timothy and clover he had seen since leaving Michigan.

The Montague land agent, a Mr. Harlow, drove the land lookers to a variety of locations which were suitable for colonization. "The scenery here was simply grand," Avink wrote, "and I do not think I shall ever be able to forget it—especially Mt. Shasta glistening in the bright sunlight and the Little Shasta River winding through the valley with clover, timothy and alfalfa along its banks." But the Aftonites could not agree on the desirability of Montague. Egbert Stevens and his adherents considered the Mt. Shasta area poor for alfalfa

and generally lacking in agricultural potential. Avink had little patience with that view because he was desperately longing to abandon the Afton venture. He hammered a "For Sale" sign on his mail box and advertised his farm in the *Landowner's Bulletin*.²

When 1916 finally passed, Avink noted, "In a material sense we have made some progress, but if we could, 'get out of here,' as Nykamp puts it, we would do so and quickly—which goes to show that things are not as they should be . . . our church is also retrograde in many ways. As a 'Holland Colony' it is decidedly dismal."

The following summer Avink visited the Modesto area and found it very attractive. "Ripon is a nice bright little town," he wrote, "and it seems to have a future. The church which our people have built is situated in the middle of the town—south of the railroad depot. The surrounding country is such that it is too bad no more of our people settle there." He travelled through his old neighborhood and met old friends. "Modesto," he noted, "has grown more beautiful. And many more industries have been added. We stopped at Konynenbergs who were just finished with dinner. I spoke to him about locating there again by

²This publication, he later discovered, was fraudulent. It published nothing.

renting or otherwise."

Upon returning to Afton, Avink wrote, "Taking into consideration what one finds out there [Modesto and Ripon], one cannot but reflect on the folly of ever locating here and expecting a 'Holland Colony.' Four months later Avink moved. He held an auction and left his farm unsold. With about \$700 acquired from the auction the Avinks trekked back to Ripon, where they found lodging and employment. Afton had been a mistake and Avink agreed with Konynenberg, who asserted, "Those people who were taken in by Butte City looked with 'Eastern' eyes."

Ripon's thriving new church contributed significantly to Avink's interest in that village. He had been a committed and active leader within the Afton congregation from its beginning, and during his residence there he hosted all the itinerant pastors who served the scattered Christian Reformed congregations of California.³ Since Afton had no regular pastor, Avink and others filled the vacuum by reading sermons. Sacramental celebrations, installations, and family visitings were scheduled to coincide with the periodic availability of ordained pastors. Thus, the prospect of joining a flourishing congregation

which could soon support the work of a full-time pastor⁴ strengthened Avink's attachment to Ripon. And, when the Ripon church selected its first officers on February 4, 1918, Avink embraced his election as elder and clerk enthusiastically. The Afton colony finally disintegrated in 1919 but long before its final days Ripon attracted a regular flow of members from the hapless colony on the Sacramento River.⁵ On the first Sunday when Avink and others from Afton worshipped in Ripon, the guest pastor, Rev. Jacob Vissia, announced, "Afton komt hier."

—H.J.B.

³These itinerents included:

Leonard P. Brink	1913-1914
Jacob Bolt	1911-1914
F. J. Drost	1910-1914
Fr. W. Stuart	1913-1919
Jacob Vissia	1915-1919

⁴Ripon's first pastor, Peter J. Hoekenga, came to Los Angeles in 1918 and moved to Ripon in 1919.

⁵Among the families following Avink to the Ripon area were: Jacob Vander Mey; Henry Ykema; S. Ulfes; the Hoekstra family, and the Nykamps. Thys Schuiling, who left Afton for Montana in 1914, later returned to Ripon.

"The church which our people have built is situated in the middle of the town."

ATTENTIE!

Allen die voornemens zijn zich in Californie te vestigen, kan ik geen gunstiger streek aanbevelen als Modesto, Stanislaus County, centrum van het groote irrigatie-district, opkomende stad, eerste dairy County in Californie Meer Chr. Geref. menschen noodig om een gemeente te vormen. Schrijf aan

E. STEVENS,

Modesto, Cal.

R. R. 4.

P. S.—Hij heeft geen land te verkopen.

ATTENTION!

To all who are interested in moving to California; I can suggest no place more favorable than Modesto in Stanislaus County. It is the center of a great irrigation district with a growing city and the best dairy country in California. We need more Christian Reformed people in order to organize a congregation. Write to

E. STEVENS

R. R. 4

Modesto, California

P.S. He has no land to sell.



RIPON CA.

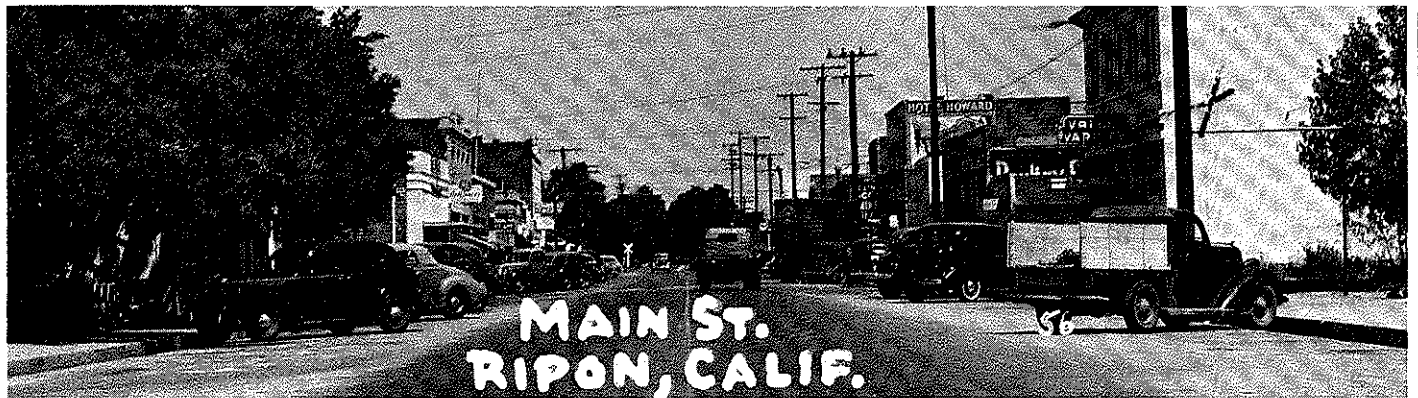
"From Ripon, California"

October 7, 1920

The *Volksfreund*

Orange City, Iowa

by Sam Travaille



Ripon, California, is located on the main line of the Southern Pacific San Joaquin Valley railroad and about 80 miles east of San Francisco. The state highway from Frisco to Los Angeles leads through the city. It is a small but busy town with a population of six or seven hundred. Modesto, a city

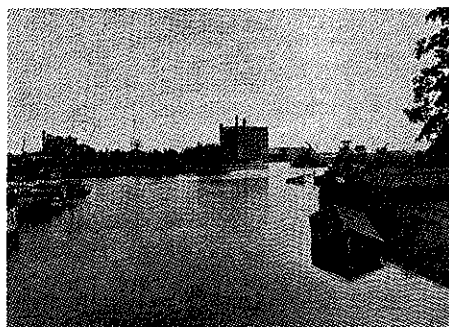
with a population of 1200, is 10 miles to the southeast of Ripon, and Stockton, with a population of 28,000, is 18 miles to the northwest.

The main business seems to be dairy farming, though a lot of fruit are also grown, and there are a number of chicken ranches in the area. Many crops are grown here—all that anyone could imagine in one place—several varieties of corn, barley, wheat, sunflowers, sweet potatoes, peanuts, alfalfa, sweet clover, green beans, and several kinds of watermelon. There are also vineyards and orchards here with olive, fig, almond, peach, apricot, and still other trees that we have not

yet seen during our two-week stay here.

In 1918 about seven families founded a Christian Reformed congregation here, and it now has 75 families who live in Ripon and its surrounding area. Most of the church members are farmers.

Presently the farmers are harvesting their sixth cutting of alfalfa. The soil is a sand loam, and



Looking down Stockton harbor (bottom left). A Modesto street scene (bottom right).

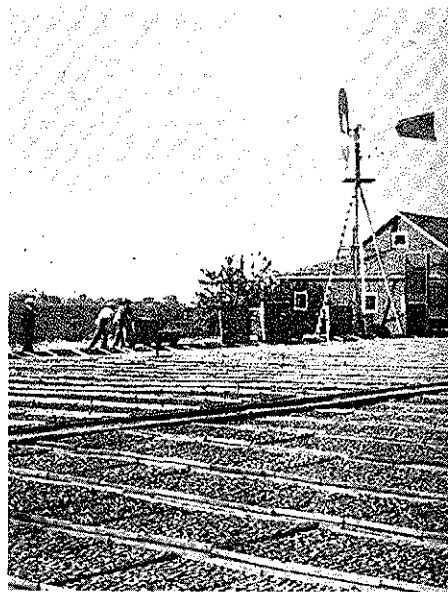




coming from Iowa, it is hard to believe that such soil can be so fertile. The land is irrigated with mountain water and occasionally you can see the pumping stations which distribute the water. In 1920 they irrigated 5 times and harvested from 7 to 10 tons of alfalfa per acre. The cattle here are primarily Holstein and Jersey though some farmers also have Geurnsey, Durham, and Airshyre cows.

Land is getting more expensive . . . but many farms are still being sold here. Those who bought farms last spring are able to earn from two to three thousand dollars on a 20 acre farm. Land sells from between \$350 and \$850 per acre depending on the quality of the soil and improvements such as buildings, roads, and drainage. Those who wish to begin farming here should have between six and ten thousand dollars. There are virtually no farms for rent as available land is usually purchased immediately.

Things are not so good here for factory workers and people without



some savings. But those with skills, including some Dutch people in Ripon, work in Modesto and earn about 7 dollars per day. For those

A Stanislaus County dairy herd pastured on alfalfa (top). Drying fruit (top center). The block method of irrigation (bottom left). Cutting alfalfa (bottom center). Pumping station (bottom right).



who want to milk cows and have small savings, there is a future here. That is the general feeling of most of the people to whom we talked here. Most Dutchmen here come from Michigan and after that I think the Montana people are the second largest group. Still people have also come from all the other states, and I am personally acquainted with the Palensteins from Winnipeg, Canada.

We predict a good future for our people and church in California . . . the Ripon congregation celebrated Mission Day on Labor Day and collected \$250. In Hanford, about 150 miles from here, the congregation hopes to have Rev. Heynen as pastor.

Concerning the weather, the nights are fairly cool, but when the sun rises over the Sierra Nevada it warms up soon. There are hardly any mosquitos here—and in Iowa they tried to frighten us with talk about mosquitos. There is no malarial fever here either—everybody likes this country.

—Translation by Elske Hörchner

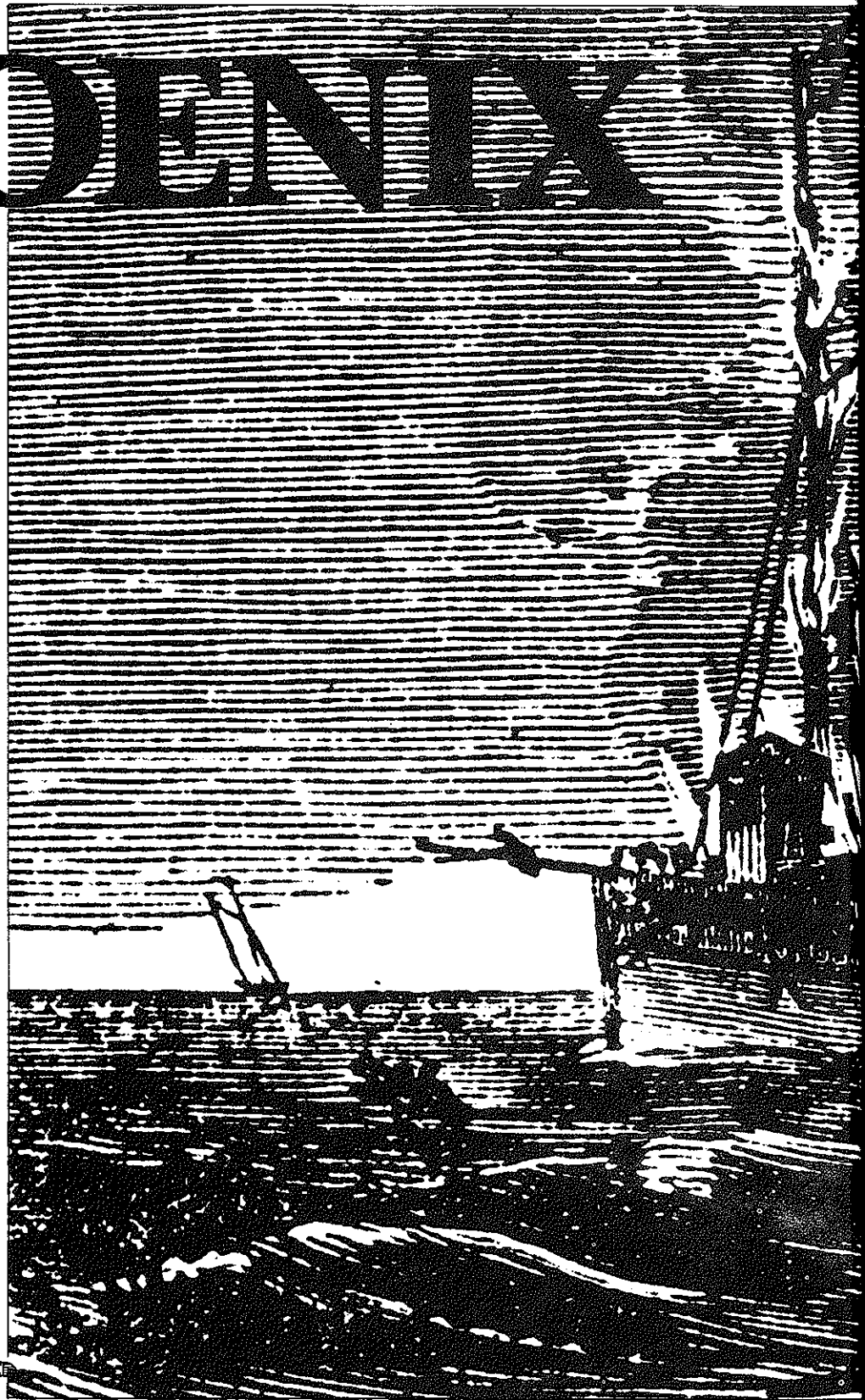
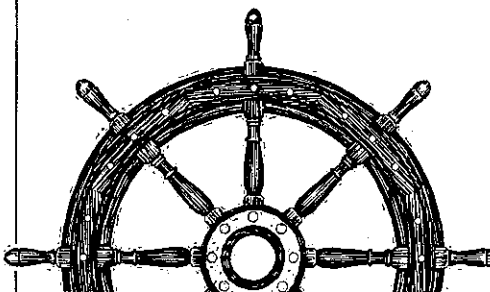


The Burning of the

PHOENIX

November 21, 1847

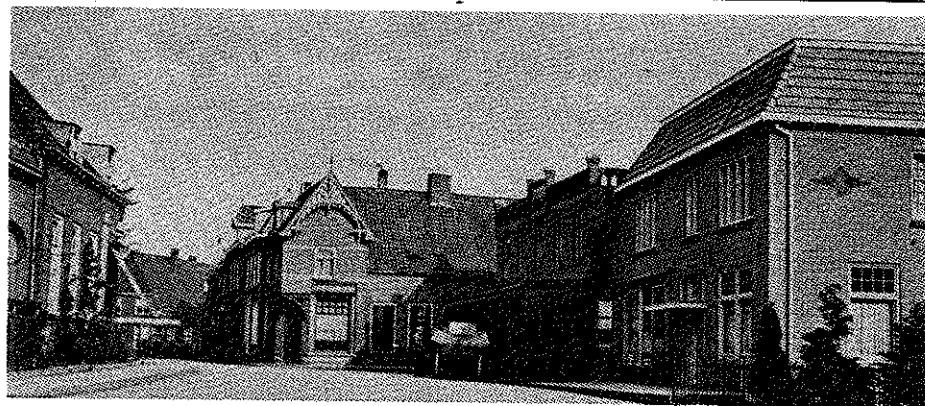
The most balanced account of the "Phoenix" disaster calculates that about 200 passengers were drowned or burned to death. Over the past 138 years the events of that mournful and tragic November morning have been investigated, recorded, and recounted time and again as the pathetic sights of dying children and tearful parents have inspired the creativity of novelists, poets, and historians alike. Some of that literature has been reprinted here to recapture this memorable event.





Until the 1840's, large numbers of Dutch immigrants were not attracted to the United States, but then their numbers increased by the hundreds and thousands.¹ A similar surge of emigration or "America Fever" occurred among the Germanic and Irish folk when agricultural disasters (the potato blight) and related economic hardship threatened the survival of field hands and small farmers. The economic strain was less severe in the Netherlands than in Ireland, but for a particular segment of Netherlanders, agricultural failures combined with religious discontent to heighten the attraction of America, for there, both religious and economic opportunities provided an alternative to the gloomy prospects which prevailed in the Netherlands between 1845 and 1857.

In 1846, during this high tide of immigration, the small Christian Seceded congregation in Varsseveld was deeply disturbed when two of its leading members announced their interest in joining the throng of emigrants. By that time Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte and his followers had already departed from the nearby city of Arnhem,² and the publicity which preceded that event had been widely distributed among the Christian Seceded congregations. In that context, it is hardly surprising to discover that the Varsseveld consistory "spoke much about America." Two of the congregation's officers, Elder A. Koolenbrander and Deacon Dirk W. Navis, were leading advocates of emigration, and they convinced their reluctant consistorial colleagues to inform the congregation's poor folk of plans to establish a colony in North America. That notation concluded with the



Varsseveld

proviso, "No one should be compelled to emigrate."

Throughout the discussion Varsseveld's pastor, J. Wildenbeest, opposed emigration, and he made a point of recording his views in article six of the August 3, 1846, minutes, which read, "Rev. Wildenbeest expressed the opinion that he was against leaving for America." No doubt he feared a serious diminution in the numbers of his parishioners, but he was also concerned about the loss of resources required to tend the needy. Consequently the consistory also discussed the legitimacy of its financial claims on those who were leaving, because the loss of their support threatened the congregation's benevolent capacities. The decision was "to have the Elders speak to those who expected to emigrate."³ The results of these encounters are not recorded in the Varsseveld minutes, but since the church lost at least two of its officers and a total of seven families, Wildenbeest's concerns did stem from solid foundations.

Including husbands, wives, and dependent children, at least 28 people left Varsseveld in 1847. Their travels across the Atlantic to New York and overland to Buffalo proceeded without exceptional difficulties. In Buffalo they boarded the "Phoenix," a steam driven propeller

ship built in 1845. The voyage from Buffalo began on November 11, 1847, and proceeded according to plan. On Lake Erie, the "Phoenix" stopped at Cleveland and Detroit before going north on Lake Huron to the Mackinac Straits, where they turned southward, sailing toward Chicago. En route the immigrant passengers were planning to debark in Sheboygan, but within sight of that port, the ship caught fire and burned until the lake itself quenched the inferno. Of the 28 immigrants from Varsseveld, only one, a daughter of Lammert Oberink, survived. The total loss of life has never been precisely known, but estimates generally assert that, of some 250 passengers, only about 43 survived. The most balanced account⁴ of the "Phoenix" disaster calculates that about 200 passengers were drowned or burned to death.

—H.J.B.

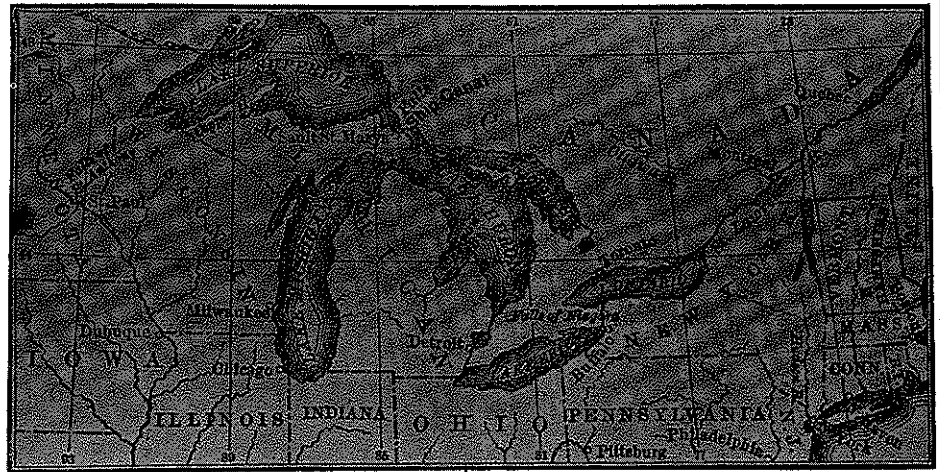
¹Between 1838-1840 fewer than 100 emigrants sailed to the U.S. annually, but in the mid 1840's these numbers rose to 791 in 1845 and peaked at 2,631 in 1847.

²Varsseveld in the province of Gelderland is located about 21 miles east of Arnhem and 4 miles west of the German border.

³Minutes, 1846-1847, Varsseveld Consistory. Microfilm in Calvin College Archives.

⁴John H. Yzenbaard, "Shattered Dreams: The Burning of the Phoenix," *Inland Seas*, Vol. 30, 1974, pp. 159-167.

An oral tradition which still exists in the Varsseveld region¹ asserts that the Rev. Wildenbeest's opposition to the immigration became so hostile that he would not even pray for the safe-keeping of his departing parishioners. Then, when news of the disaster filtered back to Varsseveld, many of the folk there considered the shipwreck to be God's punishment for disobedience and a clear confirmation of their pastor's views. Though this tale cannot be confirmed, Robert Swierenga's list of *Dutch Immigrants to the United States*... (Scholarly Resources, Delaware, 1983) contains no record of further emigration from Varsseveld between 1847 and 1880. Thus, the "Phoenix" disaster and Pastor Wildenbeest's opposition to emigration may have halted the migration from that village. Yet, it is also true that prospective immigrants often relied on reports from friends who preceded them before leaving their ancestral villages. And, since the initial surge of migration from Varsseveld did not reach its destination, no encouraging reports could have been sent back to the village.



Trial By Fire

Martin Dekker

The story of the "Phoenix" has survived mainly in an oral tradition, but with telling the story from one generation to the other, much was lost—the name of the ship, the time, the place, and other specific incidents. Only the main features remained—the fire aboard the ship and the frightful loss of life. But in the weeks and months following the tragedy, both American and Dutch newspapers devoted much space to the event.

From these reports it is clear that misfortune plagued the "Phoenix" from the very outset of its final run. She encountered tempestuous weather on the journey to Fairport, Ohio, and there, on the night of the 13th, the Captain, B.G. Sweet, fell, bruising his left knee severely. Due to inflammation and severe pain, he took to his cabin on the 16th where

he was confined for the remainder of the trip, and chief officer Watts, a veteran Great Lakes sailor from Cleveland, then functioned as Captain.

From Lake Huron up to Lake Michigan the ship encountered balmy weather and calm seas and the trip was rather uneventful for a few days. Such delightful conditions of travel found these Dutch immigrants promenading around the decks of the "Phoenix." The sound of their wooden "klompen" could be heard all around the vessel. The men in their dark, baggy trousers and coats with striped shirts and small, dark, visored caps smoked their pipes and talked of their future in the new world. The women, with their winged lace headdresses, kept a watchful eye on the large number of children. There was an air of excitement among them. It was autumn on the lakes and it was beautiful.

There, strolling around the deck, was Hendrick J. Landeweerd, his wife, and 8 children. Only four daughters, Gerdina, Teuntje, Hendrika, and Hanna, would survive the "Phoenix" holocaust. Arend Kolenbrander, his wife, and six children with about 45 others from Varsseveld mingled with the rest of the immigrants. From the Varsseveld

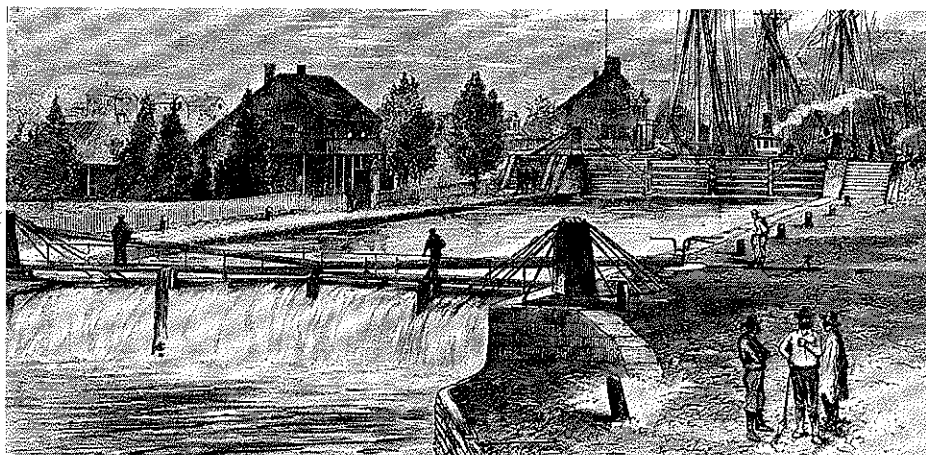
Martin Dekker, a Sheboygan native and long-time history teacher at the Grand Rapids Christian High School, has devoted years of study to the "Phoenix Disaster." With Mr. Dekker's permission, Origins has edited portions of his dramatic "Trial By Fire: The Story of the 'Phoenix'" to provide a connected narrative of this event.

¹My source for this account is the late G. H. Ligterink, who was most helpful and gracious in directing me in a search for immigrant letters in 1976.—H.J.B.

group but one would survive the fire and water. From Winterswijk came Hendrik W. Onnink, his wife, and five children. They too would be lost. The names of "Phoenix" victims and survivors are still familiar in the Sheboygan County area—Wilterdink, Navis, Lubbers, Geerlings, Oonk, Oberink, Meengs, Ten Dolle, Pieterpol, and Geurkink.

Beyond the Straits of Mackinac, strong gale-like winds roared across the water, sweeping the decks all day and all night. The mate deemed it advisable to lay by and wait for a change of weather. On the morning of the 18th, the "Phoenix" was again underway. On the 20th, the weather turned foul, and she was compelled to put into Manitowoc to wait out the storm and replenish her fuel.

Some hours later, when the wind abated and the seas ran more calmly, Captain Sweet gave the order to continue the voyage. The lines were cast off and the "Phoenix" headed out into the lake, turning her prow due South on a course for Sheboygan, 25 miles away. Out on the dark lake the "Phoenix" showed her running lights, and the boiler room was busy with the firemen cramming the furnaces with the now ample supply of wood. At one o'clock on Sunday morning, all seemed well about the "Phoenix." Almost all of the passengers were asleep. The waves had subsided to a dead swell, and there was little or no wind. The air was bitter and cold for it was late November. The lights of Sheboygan could already be seen. The few Hollanders who were awake at this hour watched the shoreline with keen anticipation, because over there to the Southwest, just beyond Sheboygan, lay Oostburg and Cedar Grove where many of them planned to settle with relatives and friends who had preceded them. Their hearts were glad with the prospect



Ship-canal, Sault St. Marie

of ending a journey begun 4,000 miles away.

The firemen continued stoking the furnaces furiously as the "Phoenix" plowed on toward Sheboygan, but a few of the immigrants who had not gone to sleep became suspiciously aware that something was wrong in the engine room. They protested that there was danger of some kind but were rebuffed. Soon smoke began to roll out of the boiler room. Engineer House was one of the first to discover the fire, and soon the news swept across the deck and through the passageways. The captain and his clerk had been aroused by the cry of fire. For the first time since the 16th of November, the captain left his room and hurried out on deck as best he could with the clerk.

The Sheboygan *Mercury* of the 26th reported the Captain as saying that here he met the first engineer hurrying fore to aft and inquired of him why the engines had stopped. He answered that there was no water in the boilers. Later reports stated that when a fireman had discovered that the pumps were not supplying the boilers with sufficient water, he informed the second engineer, William Owens, who was on duty. Evidently Owens paid little attention

to the report. Later the fireman reported again saying that the water was getting dangerously low, and he suggested that they call the first engineer. This Owens refused to do. Shortly before four o'clock, when smoke was first discovered and traced to its source, it was found that the boilers had become red hot and set fire to the woodwork and the cords of wood surrounding it. It rapidly spread around the underside of the deck. Three pumps and several lines of water buckets were put in operation immediately. The flames were too quick, however, and in a short time, the general alarm had to be sounded.

Nothing could be done to combat the conflagration, and it was evident even to the unpracticed eye that the "Phoenix" was doomed. A scene of the utmost confusion ensued. Passengers and crew alike were thrown into a panic. Passengers ran back and forth clad only in their night clothes. The "Phoenix" had but two little lifeboats available, but they could carry few of the hundreds on board. In the fierce and lurid light of the burning ship these two boats were lowered.

The first mate met Captain Sweet on deck and prevailed upon him to enter one of the boats though he wished to remain with his ship. He

was almost entirely helpless because of his injury, and he was helped into a lifeboat already loaded with 21 immigrants. The other boat, containing the mate, was also loaded and shoved off for the shore with 22 more aboard.

With the launching of the lifeboats at about 4:45 A.M., some 250 souls were left behind on the doomed "Phoenix." Most of them were the Dutch immigrants who, though their destination was close at hand, now faced a calamity to stagger the imagination. As the flames spread to the middle section of the vessel, the frantic passengers retreated to the bow and stern. Meanwhile, the situation on the "Phoenix" became increasingly desperate, but hope was not lost, for the people imagined that the lifeboats would certainly discharge their passengers and return. This faint hope buoyed the spirits of the cowering passengers. Then, too, the ghastly flames which lighted the sky would surely signal help from Sheboygan or from other vessels that might be in the vicinity. But with each passing moment, hope yielded to despair.

The flames continued to make rapid progress extending from amid ship fore and aft. Foot by foot the flames crept forward, and as the heat became intense, the crew and passengers crowded to each little oasis on the bow and stern in the vain hope of escaping torture by fire. Realizing their horrible fate, men, women, and children, became frantic and ungovernable. There was little choice—to jump overboard meant a grave in the icy waters of Lake Michigan while to remain on board assured a horrible death from fire. Some, in order to put an end to their misery, jumped into the lake. The cabin and everything else available was hastily torn apart and together with doors, ladders, chests,

wooden bulkheads, and furniture, were thrown into the water to serve as floats. Captain Sweet reported to the Sheboygan *Mercury* that the ladies from the cabin assembled near the stern, and, when the flames reached them, they all rushed overboard and were drowned. Some sought to escape death by ascending the shrouds, clinging to the ratlines and rigging up to the very crosstrees, but the fire climbed the tarred ropes and forced them to drop upon the burning deck or into the icy waters.¹ Some tried to swim ashore, but were lost. Others were found on their floats literally killed by the cold.

The hull became a complete bed of fire, and flames burst from her sides, hissing as the slow lake swells broke against the ship. A mother was seen to hug her shrieking infant to her bosom and rush from the maddening flames into the devouring lake. She sank and rose, screamed for help, but, with a bubbling groan, she sank to rise no more. Several of the young immigrants, who had planned to marry as soon as they had chosen their new homes, joined hands and jumped into the water so that they would not be parted in death. Brothers and sisters mingled their tears and kisses to soothe their pangs. A young girl who jumped into the water managed to get her hands on one of the boats as it was leaving the ship, but, forced to choose between the loss of one or all, the occupants loosened her hold and allowed her to perish. Whole families held hands as they leaped into the water to perish together. Other families were frightfully separated.

At the time when the "Phoenix" holocaust was taking place, two ships were docked in Sheboygan harbor: the schooner "Liberty" and the propellor "Delaware." Captain

Porter of the "Liberty" manned his lifeboats and headed for the "Phoenix" as there was no wind to sail his craft. In the gray November dawn, the "Phoenix" appeared like a great torch, and with all the strength they could muster, his crew pulled the oars as they went on their errand of mercy. When the alarm was first sounded on the "Delaware," she began immediately to raise steam but in spite of these efforts, an hour and a quarter elapsed before the "Delaware" reached the wreck which, by that time, had burned to the water's edge. The "Delaware" was the first to arrive, followed closely by the "Liberty" crew and many small boats from the shore. All of them arrived at about 7 o'clock. But long before then the passengers died. Only 3 men were found alive in the water. Mr. Donahue, the clerk, and Mr. Long, of Milwaukee, were hanging to the rudder chains. Mr. House, the engineer, was drifting on a door. Others, who jumped overboard and had lingered long on drifting wreckage, lost their hold in the numbing cold and perished. Some were found later, dead on their floats.

As the account of the disaster spread throughout the country it caused a great deal of discussion. In New York, the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* commented, "Beyond all accidents we ever heard of, we regard this burning of the 'Phoenix' as the most unnecessary, wanton, horrible, and murderous—one that demands the most vigorous investigation and appropriate punishment."

The Wisconsin *Argus* of December 7 reported, "Twenty-five Hollanders—all that were saved from the 150 on board the 'Phoenix'—are at

¹Most propeller ships of that day combined steam and sail power, hence the reference to ratlines, crosstrees, and riggings.

Phoenix Information

Crew Lost

D. W. Keller, steward, Cleveland; J. C. Smith, saloon keeper, Buffalo; Newell Merrill, second mate, Ohio City; William Owen, second engineer, Toledo; Hugh Robinson, first porter, Chicago; John Nugent, first fireman, Buffalo; Thomas Halsey, deckhand; George _____, deckhand; Thomas Fortui, deckhand, River St. Clair; John and August Murdock, deckhands, Scotchmen, Canada; Luther Southward, wheelsman, New Bedford; Horace Tisdale, cabin boy; two colored cooks; total 15.

Crew Saved

B. G. Sweet, Captain, Cleveland; T. S. Donahue, clerk, River St. Clair; M. W. House, engineer, Cleveland; H. Watts, first mate, Cleveland; A. G. Kelso, wheelsman, Ohio City; John Mann, deckhand, Cleveland; E. Watts, second porter, Cleveland; Michael O'Brien, fireman, Buffalo; total 8

Passengers Lost

Mr. West, wife and child, Racine; Mr. Fink and wife, Southport; Mr. Heath and sister, Littleport (Waukegan); Mrs. J. Long and child, Milwaukee; J. Burrows, Chicago; David Blish, Southport; two Misses Hazelton, Sheboygan; To this number must be added the Hollanders and others lost, making a total of 148 passengers lost. Note: Other accounts put the lost number as high as 250.

Hollanders Lost

From Winterswijk Hendrik J. Siebelink, wife & 2 children
Teunis Koffers, wife & 3 children
Dirk J. Wilterdink, wife & 2 children
Gerrit J. Oonk, wife & 2 children
Jan Albert Sikkink, wife & five children
Hendrik W. Onnink, wife & 3 children
Gerrit J. Geurkink & 4 children
Hendrik W. Kooyers, wife & 2 children
Hendrik J. Nijweide, wife & 5 children
Mrs. Jan B. Esselinkpas & 5 children

Mrs. H. J. Wilterdink & 3 children
Mrs. J. W. Oonk & 2 sons
Total—over 50

From Varsseveld Arend Colenbrander, wife & 6 children
Roelof Wildenbeest, wife & child
H. J. Te Kotte & son
Lammert Oberink, wife & 5 children
Dirk Gielik, wife & children
Dirk W. Navis, mother, wife & 5 children
William Kravenbrink
Nebbelink & family
Jan Brusse, Toeves family, Demkes family
Total—about 50

From Oosterbeek Hendrikus Bruijtel, wife & 4 children

From Holten Hendrik J. Landeweerd, wife & 4 children
Beumer, wife & children
Lubbers, wife & 2 children
G. Hommers, wife & 2 children
Total—19

From Appeldoorn Wilhelm Geerlings & Hendrikje Geerlings, (Hendrikje Geerlings lost her life because she went back to get a wrap for Alberta, the baby, only a few months old, and when she returned, the lifeboats were gone.)
Total—2

Total Hollanders lost—About 127 (Note: Most other accounts put this figure much higher.)

Hollanders Saved

From Winterswijk Hendrik J. Esselinkpas b. 1813, d. 1901 Holland, MI
Beerdendina Willink b. 1811, d. _____
Hendrik J. Wilterdink, b. 1807, d. 1891 Gibbsville
Willemina Ten Dollen, later Mrs. H. J. Wilterdink b. 1829, d. 1914 Gibbsville, WI.
Jan W. Oonk, b. 1795, d. 1877 Gibbsville, WI.
Johanna Oonk, later Mrs. H. J. Ruselink, b. 1825 & 1853 Gibbsville, WI.

Harmina Oonk, later Mrs. Jan Guerink, b. 1832, d. 1904 Gibbsville, WI.
Janna H. Oonk, later Mrs. B. William Pietsenpol, b. 1833, d. 1903 Gibbsville
Hiram Ruselink, b. 1815, d. 1896 Gibbsville, WI.
Dirk A. Voskuil, b. 1817, d. 1901 Cedar Grove, WI.
Total—10

From Varsseveld Gerritje Oberink, later Mrs. H. J. Beernink b. 1825, d. 1858 Milwaukee, WI.
(the only one of the Varsseveld emigrants saved.)

From Holten Teuntje Landeweerd later Mrs. Jan Berend Wissink b. 1825, d. 1857
Teunis Schuppert, d. 1856 at Cedar Grove, WI.
Mrs. T. Schuppert, nee Gerdina Landeweerd, d. 5/10/1848 Cedar Grove, WI.
Hendrika Landeweerd, later Mrs. D. A. Voskuil, b. 1827, d. 1884 Cedar Grove, WI.
Hanna Gerdina Landeweerd, later Mrs. Henry Meengs, b. 1844, d. 1915 Cedar Grove, WI.
Jan Berend Wissink b. 1812, d. 1886
Total—7

From Appeldoorn Gerrit Geerlings, b. 1802, d. 1884
Mrs. Antje Geerlings, b. 1801, d. 1885 and children Henry J. 1837-1901; Jacob 1839-1906; Altje, later Mrs. Wm. Tellier, 1841-1898; Gerritje, later Mrs. B. Vander Las, 1844-1893; Alberta Geerlings, the baby, who died soon after the Phoenix disaster.
Total—7
All the members of the Geerlings family lived and died in Milwaukee except Mrs. Vander Las, who died in Holland, Iowa.

Total Hollanders saved—25

This additional data about the casualties and survivors of the "Phoenix" disaster was donated to the Archives by Dr. Roger Voskuil (a descendant of one survivor) from Santa Barbara, California

1834 1884 DE AFSCHIEDING

1984 tolls a 150th anniversary for many Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and North America. Unfortunately this occasion will attract only slight notice in the New World because we have become increasingly unaware of its significance. Formerly the secession of 1834 was venerated with nearly as much devotion as the Reformation itself because our parents traced the vitality of their faith directly to this 1834 religious quickening.

More than a revival, the *afschieding* was a religious revolt which fragmented the unity of the constituted Reformed Church in the Netherlands. The insurrection took shape on a Tuesday evening, the 14th of October, when 137 members of the Ulrum, Groningen congregation joined their pastor, Hendrik De Cock, in signing the first official act of secession. From their gathering place in the home of the widow Geertje Koster the seceders announced that they had returned to the old truths proclaimed by the 1618 Synod of Dordrecht and to the doctrines contained in the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession. They also affirmed that they comprised the only faithful remnant of the Calvinist Reformation in the Netherlands.

Neighboring Groningers, who would not join the rebels, considered them ignorant or pretentious, and Rev. De Cock's colleagues in the pastorate of the state church assured each other that he had gone mad. But the revolt spread, reaching into

Wapenveld mill (near Zwolle) used for worship by Anthony Brummelkamp after he was ejected from the pulpit at Hattem.



all the protestant provinces of the Netherlands. By 1836 the dissidents had organized more than 125 congregations and their six young pastors (at 34 De Cock was the oldest) established regional circuits through which their horse-drawn wagons rattled and creaked along narrow lanes leading to small gatherings of faithful followers.

They assembled in barns, shops, and cottages, and when the crowds grew they resorted to pastures and open fields where farm wagons served as pulpits.

De Cock worked primarily among the Groningers, and his first ally, Rev. Hendrik P. Scholte, organized churches in Utrecht and South Holland. Less an itinerant, Gazelle F. Meerburg preached among the seceders of North Brabant, while Anthony Brummelkamp teamed with his brother-in-law, Albertus C. Van Raalte, to spearhead the movement in the Eastern provinces of Overijssel, Drenthe, and Gelderland. In the far Northwest, Leeuwarden became the center from which Rev. Simon Van Velzen organized the secession in Friesland. And in Germany, where religious revolt had stirred among the border-folk of Grafschaft Bentheim, A. C. Van Raalte slipped past the watchmen in 1838 to

organize a separated and illegal church in Uelsen.

Intrigue and suspense surrounded the early years of the secession as both the state and the constituted Reformed Church sought to encircle the tide of rebellion with laws which restricted new religious gatherings. When attendance at such services surpassed twenty, local law officers broke up the meetings and fined both their leaders and hosts. Consequently the seceders met secretly, and they often posted sentries to alert the worship-



Hendrik De Cock

pers of impending difficulties. In some areas the congregations divided into small groups to avoid legal penalties, but the aura of oppression and persecution also inspired ingenious subterfuges involving secret passageways and hasty retreats into the night. The unity which oppression gives the oppressed helped keep the seceders together until 1840 when internal conflicts fragmented the movement.

For some seceders, and particularly for those who organized the

Church Under The Cross (between 1838 and 1844), persecution reinforced their belief that they were indeed the only legitimate remnant of orthodoxy in the Netherlands. Thus, when H. P. Scholte and most other seceders sought to avoid continued harassment by gaining official recognition, the *Church Under The Cross* refused to join what they considered an unholy compromise. They preferred to remain apart—a persecuted fragment thrust out of the constituted church because it abhorred their faithful witness. Then, because



Albertus C. Van Raalte

no ordained pastors joined their cause, the elders of the "Cross Churches" resorted to lay ordination.

These folk were also distinguished by their conviction that true preaching always inspired fear and trembling, for they constantly elevated mankind's wretched and unworthy state. But the "Cross Churches" had no monopoly on that posture for a major segment of seceders also favored this stern side of the gospel. That issue also highlighted the 1840 controversy which

resulted in Rev. H. P. Scholte's ejection. Scholte had asserted that Rev. Simon Van Velzen preached a dead and joyless gospel which lacked the comfort of forgiveness. When Scholte refused to retract his assertion, the 1840 Synod sent him packing. But Scholte paid little attention to the synodical judgment. He continued to serve the churches under his influence while both training and ordaining several pastors to assist him in Utrecht, South Holland, and Zeeland. Six years later both he and the vast majority of his adherents immigrated to Pella, Iowa.

The Scholte affair involved a good deal more than his personal clash with Van Velzen because the two pastors represented contrasting and widely supported viewpoints within the secession. These differences became gradually apparent as the leaders of the *afscheiding* began to focus their attention on their own beliefs rather than those of the church they had rejected. They were easily united in opposing the liberal doctrines of the state church and pronouncement of its 1816 Synod, but they disagreed when they began to define precise alternatives to the Netherlands Reformed Church.

After 1840 the seceders fragmented into three major groups. Scholte's party emphasized the local autonomy of each congregation while De Cock's adherents relied upon synodical authority to maintain orthodoxy. Albertus C. Van Raalte and Brummelkamp took a position mid-way between their cohorts. For this middle party, synodical authority was important but not ultimately binding. In an associated issue, the three segments also parted company, for in assessing the authority of the church rules adopted by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1619, Scholte argued for congregational independence while De

Cock urged a nearly complete adoption of the Seventeenth Century rules. In the middle again, Anthony Brummelkamp and Van Raalte found the rules useful but in need of modification to conform to the demands of their own time and place.

There were no radical theological differences within the secession, but it contained two major variants of emphasis. De Cock, Van Velzen, and their supporters highlighted the complete futility of all human effort at attaining salvation and peace with God, while the other pastors refused

Van Raalte, Scholte, and the "Cross Churches," the immigrants transplanted these same religious strains in North America. Thus the denominational identities which continue among the immigrant's descendants find their origins in the *afschieding* of 1834.

Though the general lines of descent display astounding complexities, it is clear that the Christian Reformed church and its Protestant Reformed offshoot originated from De Cock's adherents while the Reformed Church in America attracted

among the followers of L. G. C. Ledeboer. Related to all of these were a number of independent preachers who stormed in and out of the *afschieding* as they pursued their own peculiar objectives. Two of these, H. J. Buddingh and R. W. Duim merit further attention because they were both influential and interesting.

For this commemorative year we should emphasize the common origins which all these denominations possess in the religious revolt of 1834. In their own ways each of these churches and their parishioners have come to 1984 along paths which lead back to the still simple and isolated village near the North Sea—Ulrum, in Groningen.

—H.J.B.



A secret gathering of seceders.

to dwell on such themes. The differences were rather subtle for, while all of the preachers asserted mankind's complete dependence on Divine grace, they differed in the degree to which they focused on the hopelessly sinful condition of the graceless state.

The seceders who immigrated to the New World treasured these religious distinctions, and they insisted on a precise reestablishment of Old World piety in Michigan, Illinois, New Jersey, and Iowa. Just as the secession in the Netherlands cultivated the parties of De Cock,

Van Raalte and his disciples. The Scholte party is more difficult to trace because his independentism did not foster the growth of a denomination. Nonetheless, Scholte's emphasis on Millennialism bore direct offspring among the followers of H. Bultema in 1918 for he asserted that his dispensational views derived from the writing of H. P. Scholte. The Netherlands Reformed Church in America has remained faithful to the theological posture of the "Cross Churches" and their near allies

Endnote

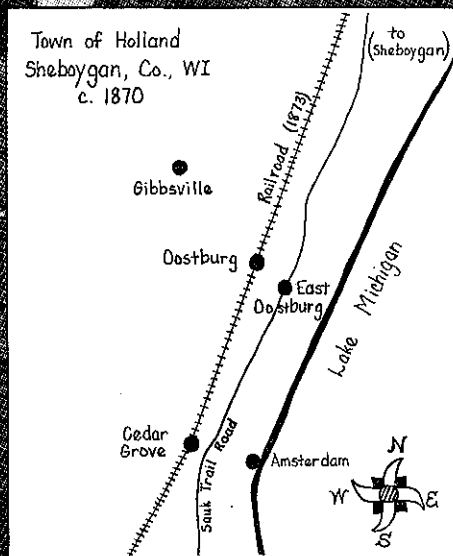
Information about the leaders of the *Afschieding* is abundantly available. Their standard biographies were written between 1915 and 1920 by J. A. Wormser in a series entitled, *Een Schat in Aarden Vaten* (E. J. Bosch: Nijverdal). H. P. Scholte, by Lubbertus Oostendorp is a very detailed and successful analysis of the Pella founder. A. C. Van Raalte's biography has been written time and again, but none of the authors has escaped the pitfalls of hagiography. The most recent, by Albert Hyma, *Albertus Van Raalte* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1947) is poorly written and badly organized. General studies of the *Afschieding*, J. C. Rullman's *De Afschieding in de Nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk der XIX^e eeuw* (J. H. Kok: Kampen, 1930) and H. Algra's *Het Wonder Van de 19^{de} eeuw*, provide brief but accurate sketches of the *Afschieding's* leaders.

Jacobus DeRooy

Rural Wisconsin Diarist and Preacher

Jacobus De Rooy was active in Wisconsin from 1866 until his death in 1884, founding one church and serving as the first pastor of another. His years in the state reveal much not only about this most interesting preacher but also about life on America's rural frontier.

When in 1866 Jacobus De Rooy arrived in Holland Township—in Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, about forty-five miles north of Milwaukee and including the villages of Cedar Grove and Oostburg—the area was by no means unsettled. In fact, Dutch immigrants had begun settling in this part of the county as early as 1845. Its location had much to offer: to the east, Lake Michigan, then plentifully supplied with sturgeon and whitefish, promised a fishing industry as well as speedy travel by means of sailing and steam ships; to the north and south, Sheboygan and Milwaukee provided potential markets for lumber, fish, and farm products and supplied pioneers with manufactured goods and other essentials; and within the township, good soil and abundant



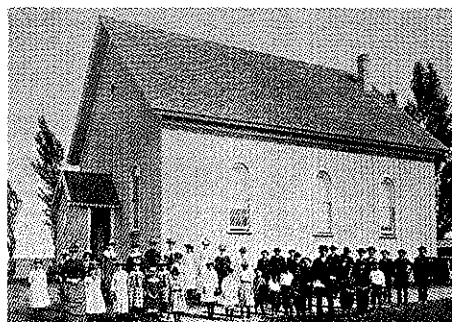
Robert J. De Smith is an English Professor at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa and a native of Oostburg, Wisconsin.

forests made a nearly self-sufficient life possible.

Reports of the early Dutch pioneers' success in the Town of Holland (organized with that name in 1848) trickled back through places like Milwaukee, which had its own Dutch community by 1845, and Wayne County, New York to the Netherlands. These reports encouraged Dominie Pieter Zonne, a disciple of Pella's Rev. H. P. Scholte, to immigrate along with a few families to Wisconsin rather than join Van Raalte's struggling community in Michigan.¹ Zonne and his group arrived in Holland Township in the late summer of 1847, establishing the first church among the area's Dutch, the Presbyterian Church of Cedar Grove. By 1850 there were about 20 families in the township, and by 1856 a second church, the Dutch Reformed Church of Oostburg, had been established. Finally, in the same year that De Rooy came to Wisconsin, controversy split a Dutch group that had been worshipping independently in a log house northeast of Oostburg. A portion of that group established themselves in Gibbville, a few miles northwest, and on October 18, 1866, were organized as part of the "*Ware Nederlandsche Gereformeerde Gemeente*," the Christian Reformed Church (Tuuk 589). Thus the denominational affiliations of the area's Dutch were varied, a fact which was to affect De Rooy's work (he influenced the history of each of these denominations in the township).

In 1866, De Rooy was invited to work among the Dutch in Milwaukee. To Milwaukee he traveled, probably preaching along the way. Soon after he arrived, however, he apparently made the acquaintance of Koene Van der Schuur, minister of the Dutch Reformed Church at Oostburg, who encouraged De Rooy

to come north. We can imagine that De Rooy either walked the distance or found a ride in an open wagon with someone headed for Holland Township or perhaps further north to Sheboygan or even Green Bay. He probably traveled along the Sauk Trail Road, which often ran in sight



First house of worship in Oostburg

of Lake Michigan. He may have stopped first in Amsterdam, a fishing community east of Cedar Grove and on the lakeshore. He may also have passed through Cedar Grove, where he would have seen a schoolhouse, several shops, and thriving farms around the village. But De Rooy established himself in Oostburg, five miles northeast of Cedar Grove and on the Sauk Trail Road.

De Rooy's most important asset had always been his ability as a preacher, and he became popular with a large portion of Vander Schuur's congregation. That body would liked to have called De Rooy officially as a second minister, but since De Rooy was a layman, without the formal training or credentials required by the denomination, the classis would not allow such a call. In fact, they barred De Rooy from preaching in Oostburg's Dutch Reformed Church. Consequently, De Rooy was once again an itinerant, preaching in barns and homes.

De Rooy's following increased as his preaching continued to attract

and hold many of the township's Dutch. These people, including about half of Vander Schuur's congregation, were energetic enough to decide on building a church in Oostburg near the Dutch Reformed Church.² After some discussion, the group decided to associate with the Presbyterian Church, as Zonne had earlier done in Cedar Grove. Probably, affiliation with that denomination presented no problems in doctrine or church polity to the members at Oostburg or their pastor, while allowing the latter a bit more latitude than he had found in the Reformed Church.

Not everyone agrees that De Rooy's accomplishment in Oostburg was a work of piety and powerful preaching. Noting his facility in moving from one denomination to another, Rev. Daniel Zwiers calls De Rooy a "*'dwaalsterren aan den kerkilijken hemel'*"—a wandering star in the ecclesiastical sky ("*Historische Schets*" 3). Zwiers may have his tongue in his cheek, but another writer, Rev. John Hoffman, certainly does not. Hoffman, who served the Reformed Church in Oostburg from 1874–1881, describes De Rooy in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*:

The second church organized among the Sheboygan Dutch was the Reformed Church of Oostburg. . . . The Rev. K. Van der Schuur was its first minister, serving for a number of years. From this organization later sprang the Pres-

¹While in Milwaukee, Zonne wrote to friends in the Netherlands, explaining why Wisconsin was a more favorable spot for settling than Van Raalte's Michigan. The letter is quoted in Henry S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1955, p. 206.

²Later, when Oostburg was relocated to be close to the railroad, this building was moved cross-lots on skids pulled by draught animals to a site in the present village of Oostburg.

byterian Church of Oostburg. It owes its origin to a vagrant preacher by the name of Jacob De Roo. He came from Paterson, New Jersey, where he had had charge of an independent church, and was wandering through the West in search of another field of labor. Reverend Van der Schuur's church seemed to offer a tempting bait. When the doors of the church were not opened to him, Reverend De Roo began to preach in barns, and by his eloquence and flattering manners ingratiated himself with the people. As a consequence, more than half of Reverend Van der Schuur's congregation seceded and soon organized a Presbyterian Church there (466).

De Rooy's popularity was certainly not universal.

In February of 1869 Jacobus De Rooy began keeping a diary. The manuscript remained in his library at Oostburg when he died, and eventually the First Christian Reformed Church of Oostburg donated it, along with some other of De Rooy's writings, to Calvin's Archives.³ Judging from the kinds of entries he makes, De Rooy intended this diary to be primarily a personal record of his own relationship with God. He repeatedly records his spiritual struggles, struggles against the "Enemy" who robs him of sleep and attacks the peace he has in the Lord. For example, his entry for April 24 begins, "A day of struggle and I was sometimes despondent and spent because I experienced so many attacks of the Enemy in my soul and also because I cannot live for the Lord as I gladly want to do." He struggles as well with his own inadequacy and with the physical hardships of a rural pastorate. At one point, he describes an attempt to attend a meeting of the presbytery which was thwarted by an April snowstorm. He and two elders had set out at five A.M. in an open

wagon, but "When we had traveled ten or fifteen miles, a snowstorm came up, so that the trip looked dangerous. . . . We decided to turn back, convinced that at such a time of the year, when the signs of storms are not dependable, such a trip is not to be made in an open wagon. The cold numbed us so much that we were forced to walk some miles [beside the wagon] in order to warm ourselves up" (April 12).

Later, in one of the most vivid scenes he records, De Rooy describes a storm and makes a spiritual application:

Last night I was very frightened by a terrible storm which brought heavy rain and hail. The house began to split apart so that water penetrated into it. I had just laid in bed a little while when the storm came up. I jumped from my bed and moved with great fear, asking the Lord to spare me and us all, although I was alone in my room, whereupon the Lord quickly gave deliverance.

I began to think about the Judgment Day, how terrible that will be, for I stood alone on my floor full of fear. Where could I go since no matter where I ran I could not escape that storm? I thought, so will it be also when the Lord comes on the clouds (May 26).

De Rooy constantly has his finger on his spiritual, as well as his physical, pulse and in a single entry he could express both joy and struggle. Regarding his experiences one Sunday, he writes, "Oh! this day was precious to me and to many with me because the Lord saw fit to give visible tokens of his love and presence, through which I was strengthened in body and spirit and my soul lay at the feet of the Lord and melted in tears. But although I was thusly placed [at the Lord's feet], I still had to experience the Enemy's attacks on me in my inability in the work of the Lord. He tortured me with the

things of this life through which I quickly lost the peace of my soul" (Apr. 4). A great deal of De Rooy's effectiveness as a preacher rests on his ability to express publicly, as he does here privately, the gripping struggles of the Christian. His diary shows what De Rooy felt; his popularity as a preacher hints that he could make others feel as well.

De Rooy also seems to have kept this diary as a record of his work in the Presbyterian Church at Oostburg. For instance, he is always careful to record the number of children he catechized each week, often thirty or more if the weather was good but sometimes none if snow or rain intervened. He also notes all the visits he receives or makes in a certain day, and pays special attention to the house visitation he made with an elder in the spring. He is never specific about any difficulties or problems within the congregation, though he refers to more than one. He writes then in abstract terms, as if jotting down a shorthand reminder to himself: He was, after all, writing for himself and not for a public audience.

Though Holland Township was prospering in the 1860's, De Rooy's diary testifies to the harshness of rural life in the period. The winter of 1869 seems to have been an especially difficult one; at least, De Rooy tells of snowstorms on Feb. 3, Feb. 13, Apr. 1, and Apr. 12. The snow made travel dangerous or impossible (as in the entry already cited), complicating the life of a

³In a sketch of the Oostburg CRC, Rev. E. J. Tuuk (who served in Oostburg 1907-1911) writes in *The Banner*: "The greater portion of Rev. De Rooy's library is still in the parsonage at Oostburg. Hid among these books I found a diary of this pious soul, and also a few sermons written out in full, which indeed, are very interesting" (Sept. 9, 1909, 590).

pastor whose congregation was scattered on farms throughout the countryside. And winter brought other dangers as well: in one of his first entries, De Rooy paints a miniature portrait of the weathering out of a storm, quaint only because the danger passed quickly and harmlessly:

Today we had a great snowstorm, and it was impossible for us to go out. Late in the afternoon we discovered a fire upstairs in the house! The fire was a result of the carelessness of the housekeeper who had hung her clothes too close to the stove pipe (Feb. 3).

Spring, the season of renewed life and hope, was also a season of loss and sadness for De Rooy and his congregation. De Rooy mentions the deaths of seven people in the spring of 1869, five of them children. One family, the Wiekamps, lost two children within two weeks in April. Writes De Rooy, "In the evening I got the news that the second child of Wiekamp had died, which touched me deeply. That same evening at 8:30 I went over and visited the sad family and spoke with them and prayed, and I came home tired and weary" (Apr. 27). De Rooy conducted the funerals of most of those he mentions as having died: a dominie's task is not easy in these circumstances.

But De Rooy does not record hardship only. He talks of visits with friends when he was able to converse at length about the Lord's work in his own and in his friends' lives. He takes special delight in recording what the Lord is able to do through him. For instance, early in March he received a letter from Grand Rapids which told him about the conversion of the daughter of a friend of his, a renewal accomplished, he writes, "as a result of my insignificant labor" (Mar. 5). And

later, while visiting, "I had the pleasure of finding a man and wife who desired to join the congregation" (June 2). There is never a boastful tone to these kinds of entries; De Rooy wishes only to keep a record of God's ways with him. He is grateful to be an instrument of God's will.

The high point of De Rooy's week, appropriately enough, was Sunday. Often, he describes his preaching days as those in which he is able to do the Lord's work despite any difficulties he may have been experiencing. His entry for May 9 is typical:

Today I preached in the morning and the afternoon. Oh! what a blessed day it was for me and for many of my flock since the Lord saw fit to refresh our hearts with the streams of His love through the living preaching of His word. I was able to preach despite all obstacles and was able to taste the peace of the Lord again.

He goes on to say that in the evening "the enemy came to vex me again," thus reinforcing what becomes almost a pattern in De Rooy's diary. He goes to the pulpit burdened, even ill, but as he says at one point, "the Lord did not make me stand there alone" (May 16). Once, he says that he was so burdened by the events of the past week that all he could remember of his sermon preparation was the division of his text, yet when it is time to preach, he finds he is able.

Records of some of De Rooy's auditors (in Paterson) witness to his effectiveness as a preacher. What De Rooy reveals about himself in his diary might have surprised those who heard him, for he seems to struggle constantly with inadequacy and sinfulness. For instance, he confesses, ". . . I was incessantly fearful of whether I would actually get to heaven. I continually desire to be

with the Lord, but in view of my many sins, and my inclination toward sinning—so that the process of sanctification does not go forward in me—I do not consider myself worthy for Heaven" (April 16). But these struggles do not hinder his preaching; rather they inspired him to preach God's word from his heart. Behind De Rooy the compelling preacher is De Rooy the diarist, recording his diurnal struggles. He moved his listeners because he could tell them about their own failings and about a God who brings salvation to depraved man. Again, there is no hint of pride, only wonderment and gratitude: "I preached in the morning and in the afternoon, and the Lord poured out grace to me so that I became alive during my activities, to my great surprise since I was so deaf and dead when I went to the pulpit" (May 30).

De Rooy's diary also stands as an interesting account of the men and women who were active in and around Oostburg in the late 1860's. Pieter Daane—that most well-known patriarch of Oostburg—is mentioned again and again (he was an elder in De Rooy's church in 1869). Other prominent names, still familiar to anyone from the area, include Brethower, De Munck, De Witte, and Wiekamp (and a man named J. De Smit is mentioned at least once, to the delight of this author). On two occasions, De Rooy mentions meeting Dominie Dunnewold—John Willem Dunnewold—who served the Gibbsville Reformed Church from 1868–87.

Cities, as well as citizens, made their impression on De Rooy. He had this to say about Sheboygan: "I went to Sheboygan, and, as is usual whenever I go to the city, it was a soul-devastating day. Oh! how the life of that world is a desolation for the heart that looks for the Lord"

(May 11).

While De Rooy's diary continues only through March of 1870, his labor in Holland Township continued for some fourteen years, until his death in 1884. De Rooy served the Presbyterian Church which he had founded at Oostburg until 1875, when he became disturbed with the union of the "Old" and "New School" Presbyterians and left his church. Twenty-five members of De Rooy's Oostburg Presbyterian Church were apparently equally disturbed by this development in their denomination, for on November 16, 1875, they attended a congregational meeting of the small Christian Reformed Church which had been meeting in Gibbsville since 1866. This must have been an exciting meeting since these twenty-five people were, at their request, accepted into the Christian Reformed Church there, an event which nearly doubled the size of the congregation.

The leaders of this meeting, Rev. W. Greves and Rev. J. Schepers, who were representatives of Classis Illinois, acted with a great deal of discretion and foresight, realizing that such a radical change in this church's membership called for a complete reorganization. The present consistory willingly resigned, and new officers were elected. Two of the new officers (there were 4 elected), A. Zuurmond and J. H. Wiggers, figure prominently in De Rooy's diary: at least half of the new consistory had been active in De Rooy's Presbyterian Church.

The group and its leaders showed further insight when they recognized that the geographical focus of the congregation had shifted with the accession of members from Oostburg and the lakeshore and decided to move their place of meeting to Oostburg. Oostburg had recently begun to make its own

move, from its original location on the Sauk Trail Road—now called East Oostburg—to the railroad crossing about two miles west, largely following the initiative of the enterprising Pieter Daane who, foreseeing the benefits of being near the railroad when it was completed in 1873, agreed to build a depot for the railroad company if that company would designate the location as one of its crossings. Daane moved his general store to the new crossing, and by 1875 the community was showing signs of prosperity and growth. Oostburg was the logical focal point for the revitalized Christian Reformed Church, and they built a meeting house there in 1875.

While De Rooy seems not to have been a part of these proceedings, his sympathy with the congregation's new members and his popularity as a preacher soon brought him and this group together. De Rooy received the necessary classical approval to become the first minister of the Oostburg CRC. While De Rooy lacked formal training, his charisma, his knowledge of the area and its people, and his acquaintance with many members of the church made him an attractive choice for a classis who had struggled long with the pastorless Gibbsville group. De Rooy's last years were perhaps his most stable: the Oostburg CRC, along with the town, saw steady growth during these years and had about 120 members when Jacobus De Rooy died on January 14, 1884, just one hundred years ago. He was buried in the Haartman cemetery, one mile north of Oostburg.

De Rooy's legacy continued long after his death. Among his other talents, he was also an apparently shrewd businessman. He owned a large plot of land near the center of the village, which he willed to the church at his death. In 1908, a new

church building was erected on that property. But De Rooy had stipulated that the church support his surviving sister (in Holland) from the estate, so his estate was not settled until 1923, when the sister died in the Netherlands.

In many ways De Rooy seems to be a strange and even perfervid man. His movement from denomination to denomination, and much more his spiritual temper, are difficult to understand. This author would not have been comfortable having a cup of coffee with De Rooy. Recently I had an opportunity to peruse the writings of John Bunyan, an exercise which helped me to place De Rooy and his diary in their spiritual context. Though 200 years separate Bunyan and De Rooy (Bunyan died in 1688), they are similar in many ways. Both were lay preachers, each having learned a trade: Bunyan was a tinker and De Rooy a barber. Both were essentially independent in their ecclesiology. Bunyan was a separatist, imprisoned for preaching without a license; De Rooy's denominational affiliations were nothing if not flexible. In addition, both were powerful and extremely popular preachers. Charles Doe, Bunyan's early editor, remarked that if people were given one day's notice, Bunyan could pack any meeting house, a description which would seem to fit De Rooy as well.

But more importantly, both viewed the Christian life as one of almost constant struggle. The pattern of despair and relief in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* (his spiritual autobiography), is remarkably like that of De Rooy in his diary. Both men felt the Spirit move in their lives and were almost constantly aware of its ebb and flow. We should, I suppose,

(continued on page 36)

WEST SIDE STORIES

Marlene De Groot

At the turn of the century the largest Dutch-immigrant neighborhood in Grand Rapids clustered on the city's West End, an area surrounding West Leonard Street and Alpine Avenue. It provided a home for over one thousand Dutch households, and our research attempted to discover something about the origins of this community and the nature of the people who settled there. We wanted to know why people came there and how they made their living on the West Side after immigrating. David Vander Stel's recently completed doctoral dissertation, *Dutch Immigrant Neighborhoods in the City of Grand Rapids: 1848-1900* identified the West Side as a place which attracted large numbers of Zeelanders and Frisians, and we conducted interviews with several persons who originated in those Dutch provinces.

Since much work has also been done on the history of the older congregations in the area for anniversary publications, we decided to focus on the older businesses in the area, thereby gaining insights into the social aspects of life in the West Leonard-Alpine neighborhood. And we hoped to glean most of our information from interviews with older members of the community.

Like many other Calvin students who enjoy going out for dessert in Grand Rapids, we were quite familiar with Arnie's Restaurant and Bakery. And rumor had it that the enterprise first began in the West End through the efforts of the Son-

neveld family. So we decided to start our project there. After confirming our suspicion that Arnie's desserts were as good at their West Leonard location as at Breton Village, we asked for directions to the offices of Buttercup Bakery.

Walking into the office, we were greeted by a secretary who seemed quite busy. Looking up from her typewriter, she asked us if she could help us with something. In the meantime a Mr. Bob Sonneveld came in from another office to talk to her. Sure he could spare a few minutes. So, we were shuffled into an adjacent office and he cleared off some chairs for us to sit on. Before he had a chance to seat himself, a colleague of his came in and asked him a few things. Judging by Mr. Sonneveld's age, he wouldn't have personal memories of the turn of the century, but yes, he remembered a bit about the history of the area from looking at old photographs. There were board sidewalks, and West Leonard used to be a dirt road, he said. The bakery was established around 1905 by the Sonneveld family. He was not sure why the Sonnevelds came to G.R., but his uncle would know. Again a colleague asked if he could interrupt. It was clear that this office was the nerve center of the bakery, and when we suggested a meeting with "Uncle" Bob, Mr. Sonneveld agreed that such a visit might be more useful for our quest. So, after he telephoned Uncle Bob, he led us across a driveway and into the bakery.

There, the aroma of fresh-baked bread enveloped us. Employees clad

in white were pulling huge trays of breads and rolls out of even bigger ovens, stirring massive cauldrons of what looked like icing, and cutting up batter into manageable pieces. This was where the real action of the bakery took place. Trying not to get in the way of the workers, we followed Mr. Sonneveld to an office tucked up in the corner of the warehouse-type building. We were greeted by Bob Senior, an older-looking man wearing blue jeans and a plaid shirt, both of which bore evidence of having seen some activity in the bakery. Bob Junior disappeared, and we found some seats in the office. It was much less cluttered than the other offices, and its only modern equipment was a telephone and an adding machine. Besides a calendar from some company, the only wall decoration was a plaque with a simple picture and the inscription: "Give us this day our daily bread."

Finally the story began. Uncle Bob Sonneveld's father, Arnold Nicholas, was born in the Netherlands, in Ede, Gelderland. Ede was a farming community, but he worked as an apprentice baker. When he was in his early twenties, he and two of his brothers decided to immigrate to America. That was in 1904, he thought. "Do you know why they came to America?" I asked. "Well," he explained, "they were young and full of adventure. There was much talk of America, and they were excited by the idea of a New World." Besides, it was a good time to start a business in America and they wanted to establish a bakery. Why to

G.R.? It was a good, Dutch community, they had heard. When they first arrived, the brothers boarded with Dutch families and attended Trinity Reformed Church. Within a few years Father married a Dutch girl from the West Side, a DeKorne. She had been born on the West Side and went to the Turner Dutch Reformed Church on 11th and West Leonard. Married in the afternoon, the couple didn't enjoy a long honeymoon. Arnold had to be at work at midnight to bake fresh bread for early-morning customers.

The bakery was begun in 1905, and first operated out of a building on Plainfield and Danforth. Within a few years they moved to a new location on 9th and Alpine. Specializing in Dutch products, they served mostly Dutch customers. There was a feeling of kinship among the Dutch, and the immigrants naturally supported each other's businesses. Baked goods were sold in a retail store and were also delivered to neighborhood homes by horse and wagon. Later on they expanded their sales to supply local grocery stores. All of the Sonneveld children worked in the bakery, with the boys generally doing the baking and the girls working on sales at the retail store.

Having moved from a farming community in Gelderland to an urban community in America, father Sonneveld often made trips back to the old country, because he still felt attachment to his rural village of the Netherlands. But his son Bob declared, "Father was more loyal to the country of America." America had given him and his family many advantages. He had eight children, all of whom had the opportunity to work in an expanding business. They joined the children of other Dutch immigrants by attending a Christian school in the neigh-

borhood: The Alpine Avenue "Rehoboth" Christian School.

Before he finished his story, Bob Senior was interrupted by three middle-aged women who, judging by their white clothing and floured hands, had been working hard in the bakery. After straightening out an order for a birthday cake to be picked up that evening, all three of them gave him a peck on the cheek and best wishes for an upcoming trip to Florida. Not bad employee-employer relations, I thought.

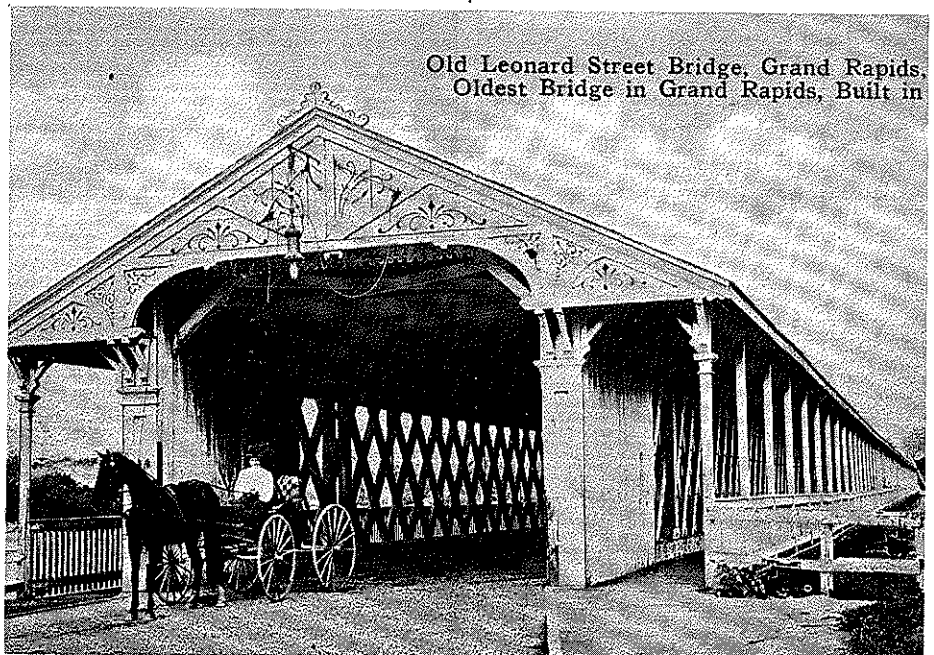
"Those were my sisters," he explained with an affectionate smile after they had left. Despite the growth of the company, Buttercup Bakery is still a family business.

De Vries' Jewelry is another business which has served the West End community for years. It was established in 1901 by the father of Gerald De Vries who came to Grand Rapids from Friesland when he was four years old. When father De Vries died in 1921, his wife ran the business (very capably according to others with whom we talked), for about

thirty years. Wandering into this story last spring, we were approached by the present proprietor, Gerald De Vries, Sr. He showed us portraits of his parents hanging on the wall, as well as very old postcards of West Leonard Street. Bent over an old bench, intent upon his jewelry repair, was Mr. De Vries' middle-aged son. Attending other customers was Mr. De Vries' college-aged grandson. Service for more than three generations is an asset any business would be proud of.

Every old-timer of the West End remembers stories about the Great Flood. Edward and Mrs. Heyboer are no exception. According to them, early in the spring of 1904 an unusually large amount of snow melted and caused the water of the Grand River to flow over its banks and flood the streets of the West End. Mr. Heyboer claims that in some places the water was as deep as two feet. A mark on the street light post at the corner of Quarry and West Leonard still shows the height of the water level that eventful spring. The homes of residents in

Old Leonard Street Bridge, built in 1879.



the area were not equipped to withstand the water. Basements were shallow and sewers were high because of the bed of rock underlying the soil in the area. As a result, very many Dutch immigrant families were once again fighting their traditional enemy: the water. Most families were evacuated and lived with relatives or friends, according to Hattie Morsink. A few weeks' time and the combined efforts of friends and neighbors managed to bring the neighborhood back to normal.

Mr. Heyboer also remembers being notified one day in 1918 that he was required to have a driver's license for the operation of his vehicle. Up to that time there had been no such thing. Mr. Heyboer and other drivers dutifully showed up at the office and for the meager price of one dollar, purchased a license. No driving test was required. He still has a copy of this first license.

A visit with Cornelia and Andrew Hage is very rewarding for those interested in the good 'ole days of the West End. Their Gift Shop on West Leonard has seen much use by West Enders, and its proprietors have distinct memories of many of them. We entered the shop and browsed around, looking at the assortment of gift items such as teacups, porcelain figurines, music boxes, and greeting cards. The noise of our footsteps on the squeaky, worn, plank floor alerted the attention of Cornelia Hage, who was busy pricing things at the cash register. When she heard of our research project she called down her brother Andrew from an upper room which served as an office.

They were two of seven children, both of their parents having immigrated to West Grand Rapids from the Netherlands. Mother Hage came

with her five sisters and her mother from Zeeland. Their grandfather had been a captain who died at sea, and moving to America seemed to be the best alternative for this widow. Father Hage came to America alone in 1890 at the young age of seventeen. His uncle, John Oosse had written to him that his employer wanted more Dutch craftsmen to work in his factory. John Hage began by working at Bissel Sweeper Company from seven in the morning until six at night. Saturdays he got off early—at three o'clock. His weekly wages amounted to ten or twelve dollars a week.

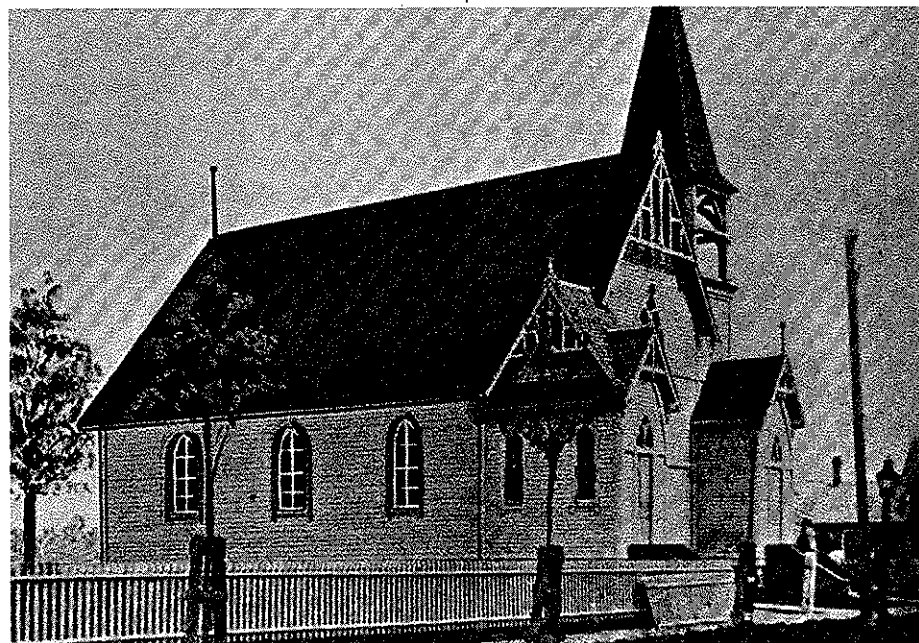
Like many of his fellow immigrants, John Hage did not want to work in the factory all his life. Within ten years he used the money he had saved, and borrowed an additional one thousand dollars, in order to buy some land on West Leonard. A shop, including living quarters, was built on this parcel of land. Half of it he rented, while John Hage used the other half for his barber shop. Uncle John Oosse had

Alpine Avenue CRC, 1881

taught him the barber business. When he was thirty, John Hage married the twenty-five year old Anna Verhyke. They both attended Alpine CRC and were blessed with seven children. Considering America their new country, they never went back to visit the Netherlands.

Despite their loyalty to America, the immigrants displayed little evidence of interaction with Americans from differing ethnic backgrounds. The Dutch community kept to itself, said the Hages, except for the few Dutch politicians. A staunch Republican, John Hage once said: "Never look for good times during a Democratic government." And his children now agree. The Dutch immigrants in the West End voted Republican, while the Polish Catholics, the other half of their ward, tended to vote Democratic. Andrew Hage recalls that local politicians were paid two dollars a day plus travel expenses to sit on the legislature in Lansing: "Those were the days," he sighs.

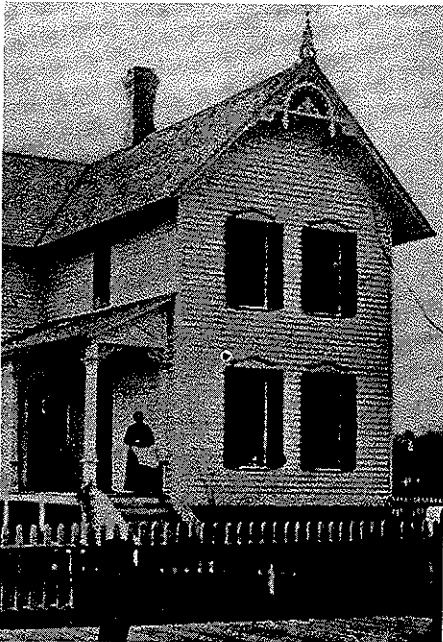
The Hage children all went to the old Alpine Christian School, and so



had little opportunity to interact with the Polish, Lithuanian, and German children who lived near their neighborhood. But sometimes these people did shop in the business area on West Leonard. "The Polish kids looked really funny," remarks Andrew. "They wore bonnets and shawls and long dresses and stood around in groups jabbering some funny language." Passing each other's schools the Catholic and Protestant children would often taunt each other, sometimes even throwing rocks and fighting. However, these ethnic groups basically kept to their own neighborhoods, with the Lithuanians and Polish on the east side of Alpine Avenue and north of Leonard. Germans lived to the south east of the Dutch community. For a while the Christian school actually taught its students the Dutch language so they could understand the Dutch sermons in the churches.

Streetcars were the most popular mode of transportation for the early immigrant. They ran regularly down

The first parsonage, Alpine Avenue CRC.



West Leonard toward the factories downtown. The driver of the electrically-powered streetcar was called the motorman. The person who collected fares and helped people get on and off at the back of the car was the conductor. At the railway tracks the conductor would have to get off and signal to the motorman to indicate whether or not a train was coming. When the way was clear, the streetcar would proceed across the tracks and the conductor would jump on the back of the streetcar. Sometimes when the car stopped at the corner near Hage's shop, some mischievous children would jerk the arm of the streetcar off the electrical cable above it. Then the conductor would have to get off, climb on top of the streetcar, and repair the connection.

A later visit with Mr. Neil Mieras revealed more information about these incidents. Mr. Mieras confessed to having been one of these pranksters, and admitted that it was great fun. Those streetcars were very noisy, and shook his bedroom on West Leonard when he was a child. The Inter-Urban trains were especially heavy. Larger than the average streetcar, some of the Inter-Urban trains carried freight from the depot at West Leonard and Crosby to places as far away as Muskegon and Kalamazoo.

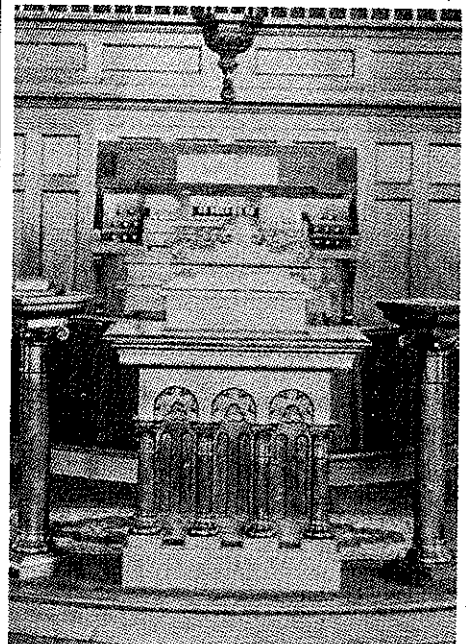
Like the Hage's father, Neil Mieras' father came in his teens, joining his aunt and uncle in Michigan. He had left his parents and seven brothers and sisters behind in Krabendijk, Zeeland, and spent his first few years in a furniture factory. He wanted to earn enough money to pay for his family to join him. The fare was fifty dollars per person, and he only earned five to seven dollars a week, so it would take a long time before he could sponsor them. But, after attending the Reformed church

one Sunday morning, Mieras and some others met a Mr. Van Dyk who offered to lend him \$250. So it was possible for his family to make the trip over the ocean. Niel Mieras' grandfather was a fisherman in the Netherlands. When the oysters froze one year he decided to take up his son's offer to join him in America. Carving furniture in a factory sounded much more agreeable to him than carrying wet oyster bags on his back.

As it ended up, Mieras Shoes was established in the early 1920s. Their small store held shelves of shoes, a pot-bellied stove, and two benches for customers to try on their shoes. The benches came from the 7th Reformed Church which used to be across the road from the shoe store. Neil Mieras remembers women coming in to buy high ladies shoes. He demonstrated how they would slowly and modestly lift their dark skirts so he could lace them up. Later on, of course, it was different.

No one, in reminiscing about the old West End community, can avoid

Interior, West Leonard CRC, 1889.



describing how times have changed. The old Mieras shoe store is a fraction of the size of the present retail area and stock warehouse. The company now operates three stores and has obtained a computer to keep track of inventory. "Yet, it's a personal business," says Mr. Mieras. I overheard him reminiscing with one customer about how she used to be brought in by her mother. Now she brings her own children. "We have even served some fifth generation customers," he claimed.

Andrew Hage remembers the day when the *Morning Herald* (then a Grand Rapids daily) announced that there would be aeroplanes flying over Grand Rapids on a certain date. School let out for the afternoon so everyone could watch the aeroplanes. He also remembers the first radio in the area. Because the listener had to wear headphones, he and his schoolmates would have to stand in line to listen to it. Hattie Morsink, who moved from a farm in Borculo, Michigan, to find a job in the city, talks about the first time an

autocar passed by their fields. They had no electricity in their home.

"Now you have microwaves, TVs, radios, computers, and other gadgets . . . Airplanes, jets, men walking on the moon . . . And that all happened in my lifetime."

Special thanks to:

Hattie Morsink
Cornelia and Andrew Hage
Bob Sonneveld, Sr.
Neil Mieras
Mr. and Mrs. Edward Heyboer
Gerald De Vries

During the past year, two Calvin College students, Marlene De Groot and Wilma Ringnalda, conducted an oral history project on the West Side of Grand Rapids. Their efforts were supported by the Dirk Jellema Oral History Fund and the results of their research have been deposited in the College and Seminary Archives. Marlene De Groot's description of this project appears here as "West Side Stories."

Alpine Ave. Rehoboth School



Jacobus DeRooy

(continued from page 31)

be careful in making connections between Bunyan's published autobiography and De Rooy's private diary. The former was intended for the edification of Bunyan's readers while the latter was a private record of God's dealings with one man. And yet De Rooy seemed to have a sense that, like Bunyan's Christian (in *Pilgrim's Progress*), his life was an arena for the larger struggles of mankind with the forces of the devil and of the world. Implicit in De Rooy's record, I think, is the idea that his spiritual life can in some way be an example to other travelers on the road to Heaven.

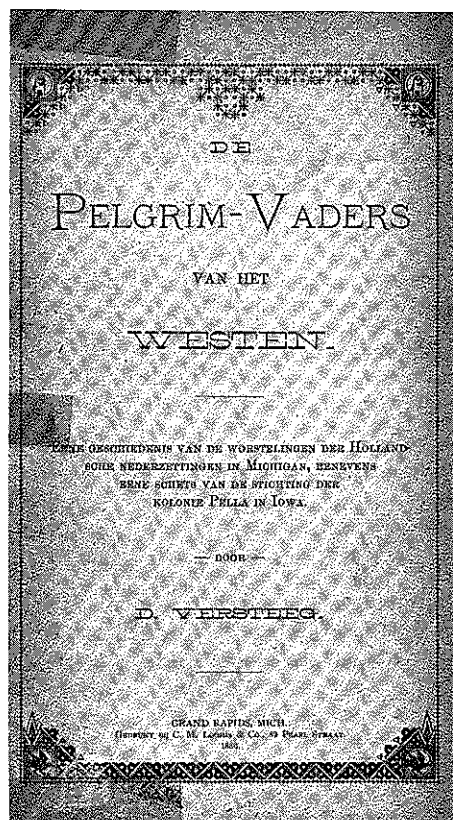
Put most succinctly, both men had the drive and spirit of St. Paul, who was imprisoned for the gospel (like Bunyan) and whose travels for the gospel carried him far and wide (like De Rooy). While I don't mean to place these three preachers on the same level, I don't suppose I would have been entirely comfortable having coffee with Bunyan, or with Paul. De Rooy, for all his quirks, devoted his life to ministering to God's people and to preaching God's gospel wherever he could.

De Rooy, Jacobus. *Diary*, MS. Jacobus De Rooy Papers. Archives of the Calvin College Library. (The sometimes loose translations from the Dutch are the author's.)

Hoffman, Rev. John. "The Dutch Settlements of Sheboygan County." *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 2 (1919): 464-466.

Tuuk, Rev. E. J. "Christian Reformed Church of Oostburg, Wis." *The Banner* 9 Sept. 1909, 589-590.

Zwiers, Rev. Daniel. "*Historische Schets van de Chr. Geref. Gemeente te Oostburg, Wis.*," MS (1913). Archives of the Calvin College Library.



THE BEGINNING OF THE COLONIZATION IN MICHIGAN

Already before Scholte and Van Raalte came to America, several Hollanders had migrated thither, scattered among the Americans or in the state of Wisconsin. Those who had settled in Wisconsin sent such glowing reports about that state to the Netherlands that Van Raalte and other emigration leaders firmly intended to direct the flow of immigration to Wisconsin, expecting to dot its plains and woodlands with Dutch settlements. According to their proposed plan, they intended to buy and occupy an extensive tract of land. In its center they planned to use a sizeable piece of land to erect a church, school, and other buildings which would be needed for the proper administration of community affairs. The whole area was to be a large colony of towns and farms.

With that very plan in mind, the Rev. Van Raalte and company sailed from the Netherlands on the bark "The Southerner" on October 2, 1846, and landed in New York on November 17. The group received much help and sympathy from the descendants of the original Dutch settlers who had migrated to America in the 1600's.

Upon their arrival in New York, the immigrants encountered much difficulty from Dutch and German swindlers, who ostensibly were

Published in 1886, Dingman Versteeg's *Pelgrim Vaders van het Westen* was the first book-length account of nineteenth century immigration from the Netherlands to the U.S. Its two hundred pages contain many first-hand accounts of immigrant experiences and Versteeg was able to interview several original colonists. Many of his generalizations have been altered by more recent study, but the stories and personal accounts in Versteeg's book continue to be valuable and interesting.

During the early 1970s Rev. William K. Reinsma (pictured below) translated and edited Versteeg's book and *Origins* will publish parts of that translation over the next few issues. Rev. Reinsma contributed a great deal to promote the Calvin College and Seminary Archives during his tenure here as archivist between 1965 and 1971. As an emeritated pastor, Reinsma now lives in Lynden, Washington but continues to translate books and other documents from both Dutch and Latin. One of his ongoing projects is a translation of Dr. Abraham Kuyper's *The Angels of God*.



looking out for the welfare of the newcomers, but who, in reality, were interested only in the Dutch people's money. Van Raalte, however, was prepared for such people—here and elsewhere—and successfully managed to resist their maneuvers and escape their clutches.

Van Raalte's courage was unflagging on the trip from New York to Detroit. He was the very soul of the group. His party consisted largely of farmers unaccustomed to the rigors of travel. They were willing enough to work, but found that they could not because of their utter unfamiliarity with the new language, the customs, the money, etc. Van Raalte therefore declared that there was only one man who could assist. That man, apparently, was B. Grootenhuis, an individual who served as Van Raalte's right hand from the time of their arrival in America until the year 1850.¹

One simply has to admire the spiritual energy of the small man with the penetrating eyes. The care of the entire company rested on him. When the people were sick he was doctor to them. When they needed counsel he gave it. When people moved to new areas he furnished addresses and references. He drew up contracts. He supervised the shipment of goods and often walked beyond physical endurance.

One is not surprised, therefore, that when writing about his wife he commented, "At times her soul's barometer is too low." She bore not only the vicissitudes of her husband in her heart, but she was a cultured, refined, well-educated, urbane lady accustomed to moving in the highest circles of society. Now she was placed in a circle of people whom she could not elevate to her standards and to whose standards she could not fully stoop. The language

and the mores were unfamiliar to her. An added aggravation was the fact that traveling conditions were not always pleasant and proper. On the trip from Albany to Buffalo, for example, the passengers were herded into leaking cars, even though good ones were available. All these factors contributed greatly to the discomfort of all, especially one like Mrs. Van Raalte.

Already on the trip to Michigan from New York, the far-sighted leader Van Raalte observed that it would be difficult to retain the Dutch language. He said, "I fear that we need to work more for the preservation of the Dutch than for learning the English language." He also believed that it would be necessary to found Dutch-American towns.

One fact greatly impressed Van Raalte on the trip from Buffalo to Detroit. During all those days aboard ship he saw no one drink a drop of wine or beer. Some played cards in separate rooms, but no one consumed liquor or gambled for money in playing cards.

Van Raalte's only plan was to go to Milwaukee and from thence search for a suitable area to establish his colony in Wisconsin. And yet, it appears that he was already wavering in his intention to settle in Wisconsin, due to bits of information he picked up from various individuals while enroute to Wisconsin. He relates, "In New York a man from the province Zeeland, who traveled extensively through the West,² but was now living in New York and conducting a flourishing business there, asked me why I wanted to penetrate into the unknown wilds? Why not settle in Michigan which was already beginning to develop, had some railroads, and was nearer to markets?" (Stemmen, p. 90).

It took more than a single remark

to deflect such a determined man as Van Raalte from his planned course of going to Milwaukee. He says, "When we arrive in Detroit we will first rest a few days and take some time to decide whether we shall winter there or go directly to Milwaukee. I would rather do the latter so that I can spend time with my family. I have several good prospects and leads to investigate in Milwaukee. There is much to be investigated and explored there. Perhaps, however, my wife will prefer to spend the winter in Detroit" (Stemmen, p. 76).

The group finally arrived in Detroit. From a letter dated December 16, 1846, and from oral information given by B. Grootenhuis it is possible to learn the reason why Michigan was chosen over Wisconsin.

¹The original here does not clearly state that the author refers to Van Raalte and to B. Grootenhuis referred to above. But the things mentioned surely apply to Van Raalte and agree with what is known of him.

²The term "the West" did not designate the Pacific Northwest, but the area including Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, etc. This was considered to be the western outpost. That is why the RCA Seminary in Holland, Michigan, is called Western Seminary.

BOOKS

Siouxland: A History of Sioux County, Iowa. By G. Nelson Nieuwenhuis. Sioux County Historical Society, 1983. \$14.95.

Sioux County, located in the northwestern corner of Iowa, now has its own historian. G. Nelson Nieuwenhuis,* the author of the encyclopedic and exhaustive work, *Siouxland*, credits Frederick Manfred, an author born and raised in Sioux County, for suggesting *Siouxland* as the book's title. In the first chapter, the author writes about how the prairie was formed geologically and several subsequent chapters contain his narrative of the early history of the area now known as Sioux County. Here we read about the Indians, explorers, and government surveyors who played significant, and at times, tragic roles in the history of this part of Iowa. Politically organized Sioux County is the subject of chapters seven through

ten and this descriptive section is followed by the author's comments on the first English settlers in the region. Next, Nieuwenhuis devotes several pages to the more important towns in the county and his informative separate sketches of each locality will more than satisfy those desiring to know more about past and present conditions in such Dutch enclaves as Sioux Center, Orange City and Hospers. Twentieth century Sioux County is the focus of the final chapters. Here, the author writes extensively about Sioux County's more recent history, educational endeavors, economic progress, farm life, and religious institutions.

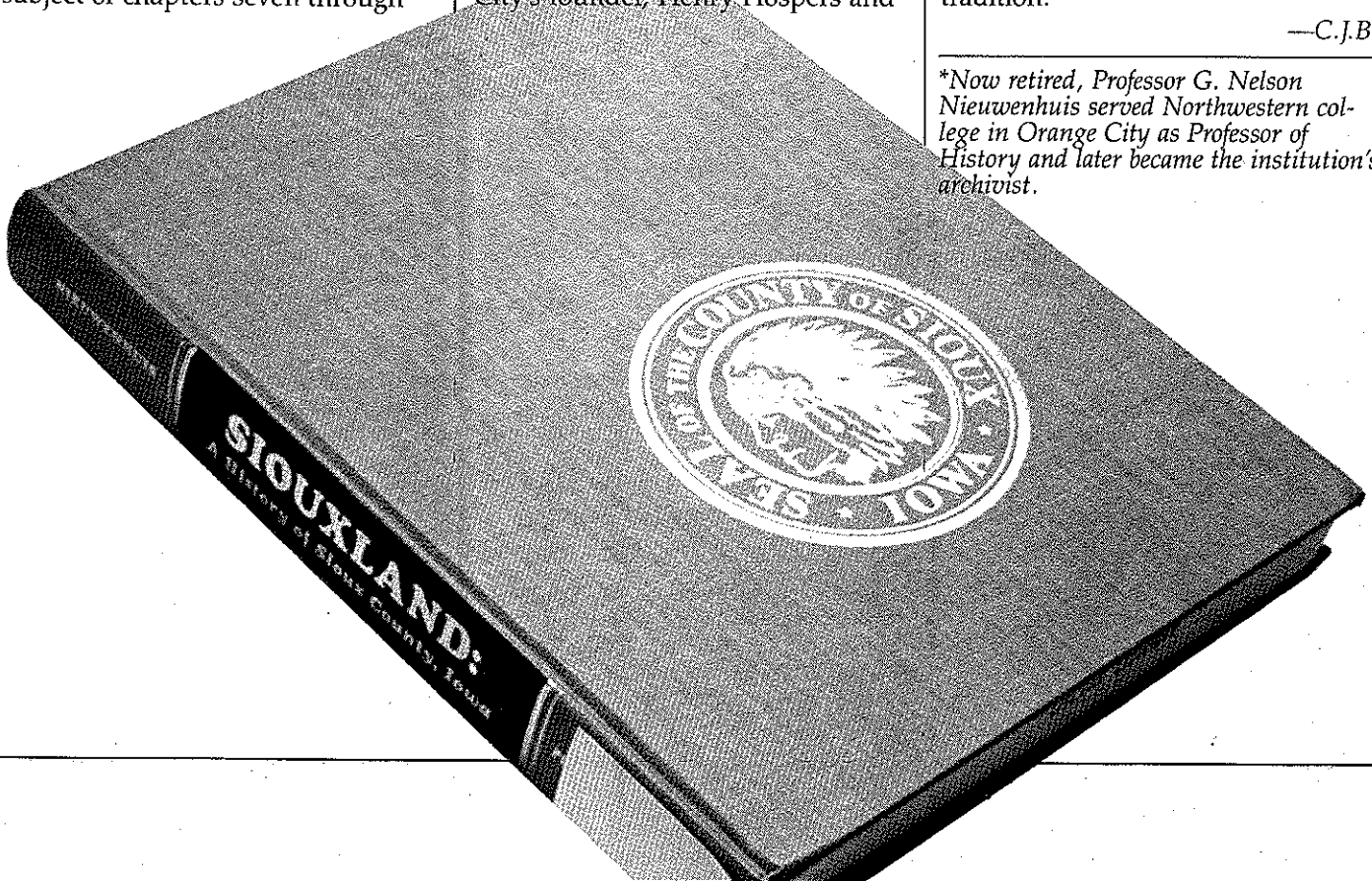
Especially significant for those who wish to know more about the Dutch in Sioux County are the author's comments about Orange City, Sioux Center and Hospers. The history of these communities comes alive in the author's observations concerning the actions of Orange City's founder, Henry Hospers and

the activities of two Reformed Church ministers, Seine Bolks and James De Free. Both men spent many years in the early Sioux County Dutch settlements. The book's many illustrations picture these and other pioneers, many early churches and schools, town main streets, and rural scenes. Anyone viewing these pictures and portraits will see before him, and in his mind's eye, Sioux County then and now.

In his final chapter "Sum and Substance" the author states, "Sioux County, therefore, stands out among the counties of Iowa as uniquely reflecting a strong Reformed-Calvinistic heritage," and consequently, many aspects of his book *Siouxland* reflect how the early settlers cherished their religious values, gained strength from them, and made Sioux County a place where yet today, as Nieuwenhuis notes, "... 69.5% of the population adheres to some church belonging to the Reformed tradition."

—C.J.B.

*Now retired, Professor G. Nelson Nieuwenhuis served Northwestern college in Orange City as Professor of History and later became the institution's archivist.



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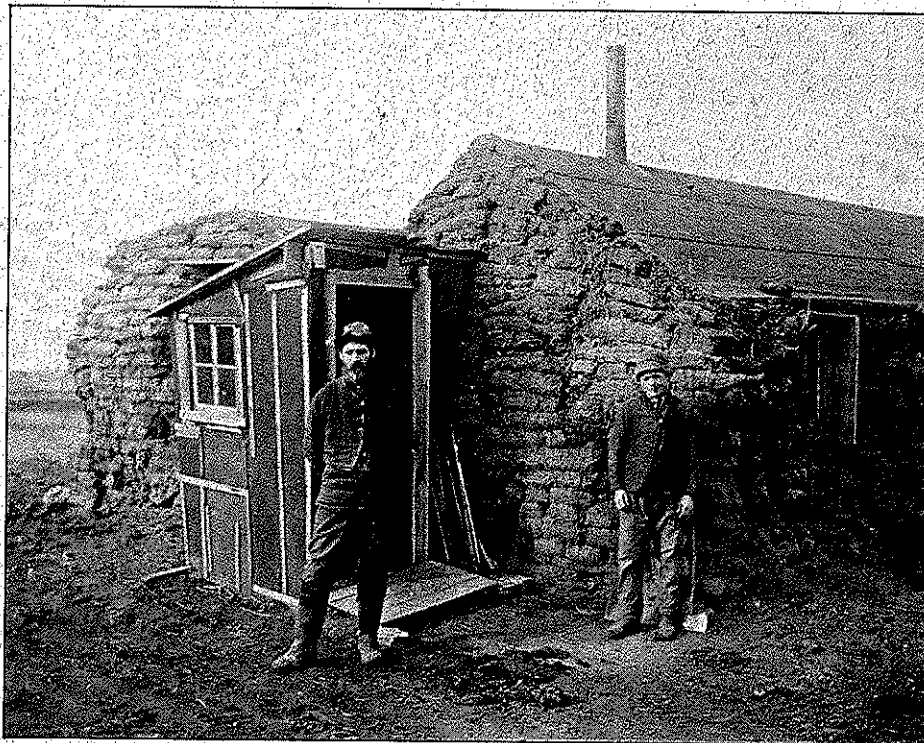
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