

# Origins

Historical Magazine of The Archives  
*Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary*  
Volume XXI • Number 1 • 2003



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*Historical Magazine  
of The Archives*

Calvin College and  
Calvin Theological Seminary  
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*Origins* is designed to publicize  
and advance the objectives of  
The Archives. These goals  
include the gathering,  
organization, and study of  
historical materials produced by  
the day-to-day activities of the  
Christian Reformed Church, its  
institutions, communities,  
and people.

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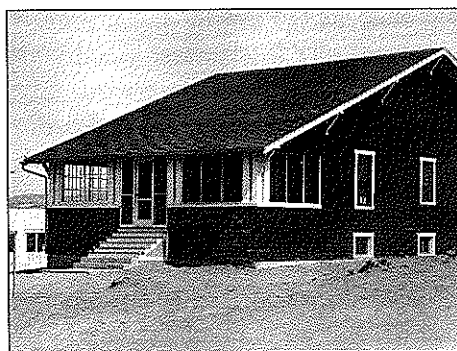
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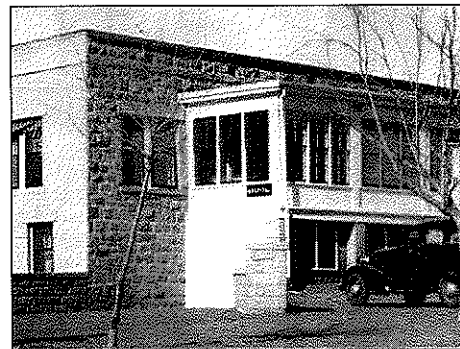
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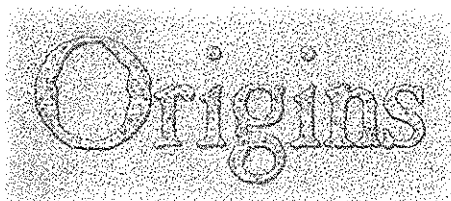
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## This Issue

In recognition of the centennial of the founding of mission efforts at Rehoboth, New Mexico, all the articles in this issue of *Origins* focus on topics having to do with Rehoboth. Dr. Henry Ippel has spent many hours since retirement in 1984 on gathering and organizing the documents relating to Rehoboth and conducting meticulous research in various archival sources and periodicals in an effort to document information not contained in the gathered documents. In his pieces, he further has applied his skill as a historian in recounting the first years and personnel of the mission effort. Dr. Peter DeBoer, also trained as a historian, spent most of his teaching career in the education department as an authority on the history of education. He details the career of Dr. Richard Pousma at Rehoboth Hospital and then carefully analyzes what led to Pousma's leaving the hospital and the work of formal missions.☪

## Available On-Line

We have just had the Heritage Hall website redesigned by a recent Computer Science and Information System graduate, Chris Harms. The redesign resulted from Calvin College establishing guidelines for college web sites in an effort to provide visual similarity among the various sites. As part of our redesign, we have brought the *Origins* pages up to date and added links to text versions of the book reviews from recent years. Also, from our "Family History Resources" link you can now obtain a listing and brief descriptions of all of the family histories that have been donated to our collection as well as all of the material in our Dutch Immigrant Letters collection. Although our main URL remains [www.calvin.edu/hh/](http://www.calvin.edu/hh/), the redesign required our other URLs to be changed, except for the digital photo archives and Christian Reformed Ministers database. If you have bookmarked any of our sites, please revisit those sites via our main page and edit your bookmarks. We also continued adding to our database of CRC ministers. Data for twenty new ministers was added since our report last fall and we have scanned and added nearly 1500 images since that

report. Currently we have images loaded for 72 percent of the 2,762 ministers.☪

## News from the Archives

During the past six months we have completed organizing records from a variety of twentieth century organizations related to the Dutch in North America. Among the major collections completed are an addition of 24 cubic feet to the archives of Calvin Theological Seminary, 18 cubic feet from the Social Research Center added to the Calvin College collection. We processed records from the General Secretary's office of the CRCNA files, and such various related groups as Dynamic Youth, Christian Reformed Conference Grounds, The Committee for Women in the Christian Reformed Church. We also arranged approximately 35 cubic feet of records from various Christian schools and other agencies related to the Dutch in North America.

Archival records from 90 CRCNA congregations (seven more than last year) were received, microfilmed and returned. We also microfilmed the records of three Christian school organizations. The microfilm copies are stored in our vault and are avail-

able only with the written permission of the individual congregation or school.

We are pleased to report that our proofreading work on the historical directory of the Christian Reformed Church has been completed and the manuscript materials are now being designed for production in book form. Data is as accurate as we could determine as of last December and publication is anticipated this summer. The fall issue of *Origins* will have publication information.

Our translators have been particularly productive during the cold winter that still lingers over Canada and the Midwest United States. This work includes congregational and classical minutes and immigrant letters.

### Staff

Richard Harms continues as the curator of the Archives, housed in Heritage Hall at Calvin College. Other staff members are: Hendrina Van Spronsen, office manager; Wendy Blankespoor, librarian and cataloging archivist; Boukje Leegwater, departmental assistant; Dr. Robert Bolt, field agent and assistant archivist; Nateisha De Cruz, Susan Potter and Linnelle

Rooks, student assistants. We have a very faithful and dedicated corps of volunteers including: Floyd Antonides, Rev. Henry DeMots, Ed Gerritsen, Fred Greidanus, Hendrick Harms, John Hiemstra, Dr. Henry Ippel, Helen Meulink, Rev. Gerrit Sheeres, and Rev. Leonard Sweetman.¶

### Endowment Fund

The Friends of the Archives Endowment Fund declined with the overall downward trend of stock and bond values. In January 2003 the endowment fund's market value stood at \$233,940, a decline of 15 percent from the previous January. The fund's value currently stands at the level it was at in January 1999. We are grateful that recent contributions have been higher than during previous years. These gifts will increase the fund's value during the coming year. Thank you to all who support our work beyond the subscription cost. This generosity allows us to keep subscriptions at \$10 per year.¶



Richard H. Harms

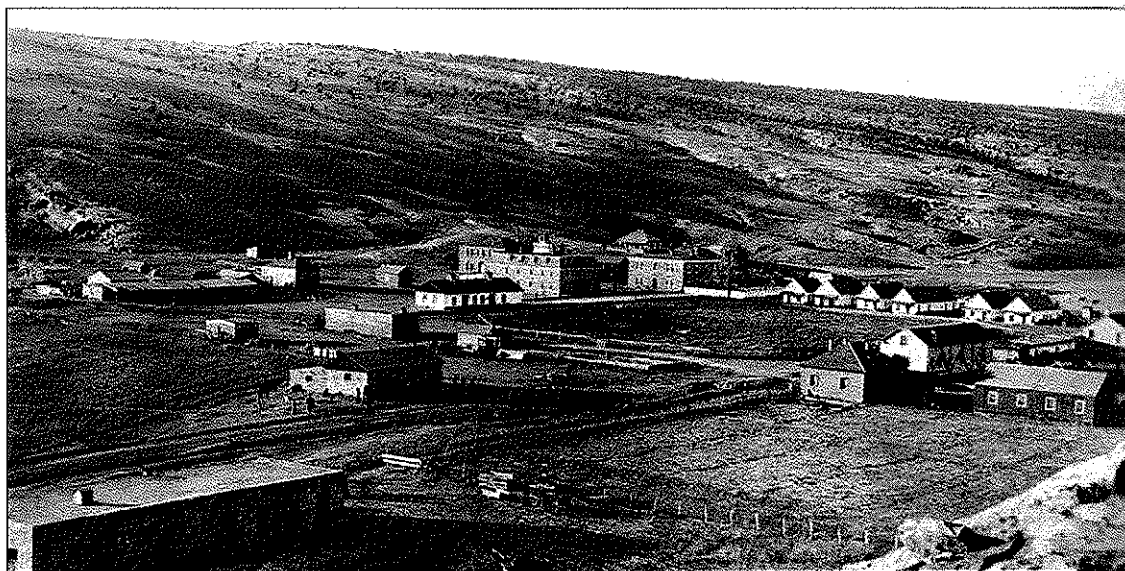
# Making Room for Rehoboth

Henry Ippel

What a strange sight! Several representatives of a church based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, following the Santa Fe Railroad tracks in the shadow of the Red Rocks east of Gallup, New Mexico, seeking a place to establish a mission among the Navajo Indians. The first Christian Reformed mission to the Indians had

The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) was the only religious group active in the area, having purchased the building and taken over operations from the Methodist Church.

Soon after the arrival of the Christian Reformed missionaries, Bible classes for the children were introduced as a spiritual "entering wedge"



Fort Defiance was agency headquarters for the US Department of the Interior on the Navajo Reservation. All photos from: Archives, Calvin College.

begun in 1896 when Rev. and Mrs. Herman Fryling and Mr. and Mrs. Andrew VanderWagen arrived in Fort Defiance, Arizona, confident that the Lord had provided an excellent opportunity to bring the Gospel to the Indians of the Southwest. Military activities at the fort had ceased after the American Civil War and now the facilities served as agency headquarters for the United States Department of Interior on the Navajo Reservation; a government boarding school for Navajo children was also in operation.

into the community, with the children returning to their homes to tell parents and friends the Bible stories and Gospel message. Indeed by 1900, several children had expressed a desire to be baptized, and a young man, William Thornton, became the first native to receive the sacrament and be accepted into the church as a fellow Christian. Fryling was confident they were doing the Lord's work—until Franciscan fathers also established a mission near the fort. Now he reported that "the same Indian children whom

*Henry Ippel is professor of history emeritus at Calvin College, and former co-editor of the "Friends of the Archives" newsletter. He has spent years gathering and organizing the documentary history of Rehoboth.*



Rev. Herman Fryling (kneeling) went to the mission field in 1896, his first wife, Kate, died the next year. This photo was taken near Cienega, Arizona in 1898 with his second wife, Jennie, seated against the wagon wheel. The couple standing are Andrew and Effie VanderWagen, seated are probably Mr. and Mrs. James DeGroot.

he had in Bible class for religious instruction were forced to attend the instruction of the Roman Catholic priest the next day!" Moreover, he feared that the priests "biased" the minds of the Navajos against the Protestant missionaries as bearers of "untruth."<sup>1</sup>

The Board of Missions (then called the Board of Heathen Missions) of the CRC sought a solution to this by sending its secretary, Dr. Henry Beets, to Washington, DC, to discuss the matter with the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The commissioner's response was not too promising. He could not prevent this interference or competition since all churches had equal rights on the reservation, although he would encourage the fort's superintendent to permit Fryling to catechize the school children in his home.<sup>2</sup>

The hope to establish a purely

Protestant mission at Fort Defiance was gone. As a result, pioneer missionaries Fryling, VanderWagen and Rev. Leonard P. Brink began the search for another place in the Southwest where the CRC could do mission work unencumbered by competition from other religious groups and from government agencies on the Navajo Reservation.

Guiding their search was the experience of earlier missions to Native Americans in seventeenth-century New England. John Eliot (1604-1690), called the "Apostle to the American Indians," had been instrumental in establishing fourteen Indian settlements which he called "Prayer Villages" because they were designed to bring Indians together in a settled community of industry, commerce, education and church governed according to a pattern given in Exodus 18:17-26. The CRC missionaries and

members of the governing board also spoke in terms of finding a place to set up a community which would bring to one place Navajo Christians who would have a textile industry utilizing the wool of the Navajo shepherders, a trading post on location, a bakery to bake bread for the local trading posts, and a school to teach natives in industrial arts, farming, grazing, carpentry, and brick making. In summary, a place to introduce the Indians to the benefits of western culture and civilization.

Fryling noted that by 1901 "the Lord had given us converts" and then "we began to realize that having created spiritual needs we also had created material needs as well for them to be able to live according to a Christian standard and build a Christian home and form a Christian community. We as missionaries were therefore instructed (by the board) to look for a suitable location for an industrial institution where we would be able to colonize our future converts and provide means and ways for them to enjoy a Christian life." This sentiment was echoed in an article which appeared in *The Banner of Truth* (January 1902).<sup>3</sup> A recent convert, Ruth Cleveland, had returned to her home to herd sheep but returned as well to the influence of a pagan environment. This prompted the writer, Brink, to express the hope that "young maidens like our Ruth could find employment and enjoy Christian fellowship and training in a



*Rev. Fryling and some of his male students at Fort Defiance.*

Mission and Industrial School as our Board of Heathen Missions is contemplating.”<sup>4</sup>

So a search began for a suitable location for such a community. In 1930 Brink detailed how the site was chosen. A place off the reservation with a source of water, with some prospect of raising a garden, and not too far from the railroad and readily accessible to the Indians was desired. With these considerations in mind, Fryling, VanderWagen and Brink began to evaluate various locations. Traveling by buggy over barely visible wagon tracks, Fryling and Brink left Fort Defiance, heading southward and westward as the terrain permitted. VanderWagen joined them on the second day. They went as far west as Navajo Springs and north to Tanner Springs in Arizona but failed to find a suitable site. Alone, Brink ventured eastward and near Crownpoint, New Mexico, he found a water source, right

below the ridge of the mountains, which appeared promising. The water could be piped down, requiring no pumping or hauling. Early the next year (1902) Rev. Evert Breen (sent by the Mission Board) came and was favorably impressed. The place was named Mission Springs. The Synod of 1902 approved the location.

The actual beginning turned to disappointment. When Brink returned to take up a homestead he discovered that the crystal clear spring which had previously appeared so inviting was now dry. His search for another water source was in vain. The Mission Board sent out their best men, Rev. Evert Breen and Rev. Johannes Groen, to find a better site. By the time they arrived, it had been decided that somewhere west of the Red Rocks, about a half dozen miles to the north-east of Gallup, was the most promising location.

Testing for water in that vicinity led

to the discovery of the Smith Ranch, a mile west of the Zuni siding on the Santa Fe Railroad, about six miles east of Gallup, totaling 320 acres. Smith held squatter's rights and 120 acres had been fenced. The ranch consisted of a one-story house of seven rooms, two wells, a pumping engine, a windmill, a six-hundred-gallon tank badly weathered and leaking, several outbuildings and cattle corrals. Fryling took up the homestead in the name of the board and the ranch was purchased for \$1,650. Since the sale of half of the site was designated to support a public school, this land could not be purchased until after New Mexico became a state in 1912. The selection of the Smith Ranch as the location for the mission to the Navajos was a good one. It satisfied the need for an adequate water supply and it was readily accessible to the railroad station and businesses of Gallup and, in time, to Highway 66 and Interstate 40.

There was some confusion as to who sold this land to the mission, James Smith, a white man; or Mike Smith, a Navajo. According to John George, when the Navajos returned from Fort Sumner in 1868, some of them settled around Fort Wingate and the Church Rock community. Among them was Ashihi Biye who is now over 100 years old. He says his grandparents and parents camped around the Rehoboth area . . . and had a summer camp where the Rehoboth Mission is now. Then came a white man with a herd of long-horned cattle. Through an agreement with Ashihi Biye, he built a house and slaughter house in the area. This rancher became a good friend of Ashihi and for three years they worked the ranch together. When he left another rancher known as James Smith took over the place. This man gave Ashihi an American name, Mike Smith, and Mike continued to help on the ranch. It was James Smith who sold the land to the missionaries.<sup>5</sup>

The name "Rehoboth" was suggested by Breen. From the story in Genesis, the patriarch Isaac, like Brink, Groen and Breen, had been searching for land and water but whenever his men dug a well the Philistines interfered. Isaac and his men persisted, gained a foothold and a well and gave the site a Hebrew word for "land" or "broad place." Appropriately the sign at the entrance of

Rehoboth carries the message: "He has made room for us, we shall flourish in the land. Genesis 26:22."

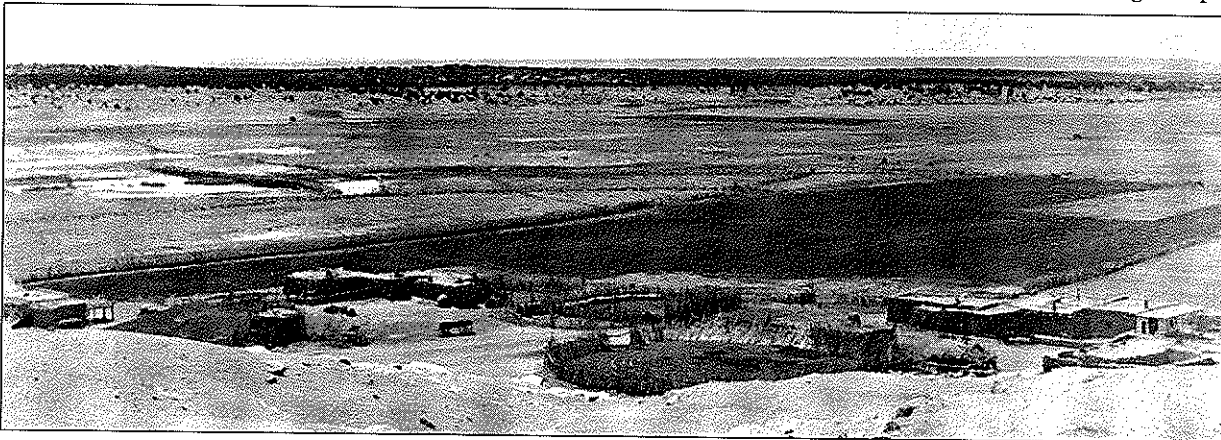
Immediately upon acquisition of the Smith Ranch, Brink was instructed to erect an adobe building (20x70 feet) for a store and residence for the storekeeper, Mr. Woodgate. At the same time Nellie Noordhoff, a graduate nurse from Zeeland, Michigan, was appointed as teacher, nurse, matron and bakery supervisor. The relationship between the bakery and the store came about because one of the popular items at trading posts was "American bread" which became a source of income at Rehoboth. To manage the trading post as well as teach industrial arts, tend the cattle, transport provisions, maintain the buildings, supervise the heating, and engage in all the other odd jobs, Dick VanderWagen (brother of Andrew) was appointed.

Unfortunately the trading post and store venture did not succeed. The first report in Board of Missions minutes revealed a deficit of \$127.<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to determine how much potential the store had for success. Noordhoff recalled that the Indians would pawn a silver button, beads or bracelets for a half pound of sugar (or less). They would also come to trade in their mutton and of course to "purchase" American bread. She recounted an incident in which several Indians came into the store to pur-

chase a few loaves. However, she was alone in the store and the bread was in the milk house back of the building. She went for the bread as quickly as she could, but discovered that some of the Indians had left and some overalls were missing. "I ran after them, opened their blankets, and there I found the overalls which I took back to the store."<sup>7</sup> Another reason given for its demise was the store's failure to provide liquor on its premises as other trading posts were suspected of doing.

The opportunity to catechize children, as was done at Fort Defiance and Tohatchi, New Mexico, was not possible due to the absence of a government school in the area. Therefore Noordhoff and Brink, who was called the "principal," hoped to establish a day school. However the mission premises were not on the reservation and only a few Indians lived in the area. Further, as Noordhoff reported, the Indians told time from the position of the sun, but they would not know the specific time school began in the morning. Therefore it was decided to establish a boarding school for Navajo children. The board secretary, Henry Beets, argued for the wisdom of this decision by noting that missionaries working in the government boarding schools in Fort Defiance and Tohatchi could only teach catechism for an hour per week, whereas religious principles should be

reinforced every day of the week. Since all other denominations had grasped this idea and focused on boarding schools, the Christian Reformed Church must do likewise.



*The Smith Ranch, chosen as the site for a mission station, was well removed from competing mission efforts.*

So, in response to the urging of Beets, a boarding school was begun at Rehoboth with the inspiration from other denominations, with the model of Eliot's "Prayer Villages" and in imitation of the government Indian boarding schools, a common institution established by the United States on Indian reservations. The boarding school actually was a compromise with the vision of a community peopled by

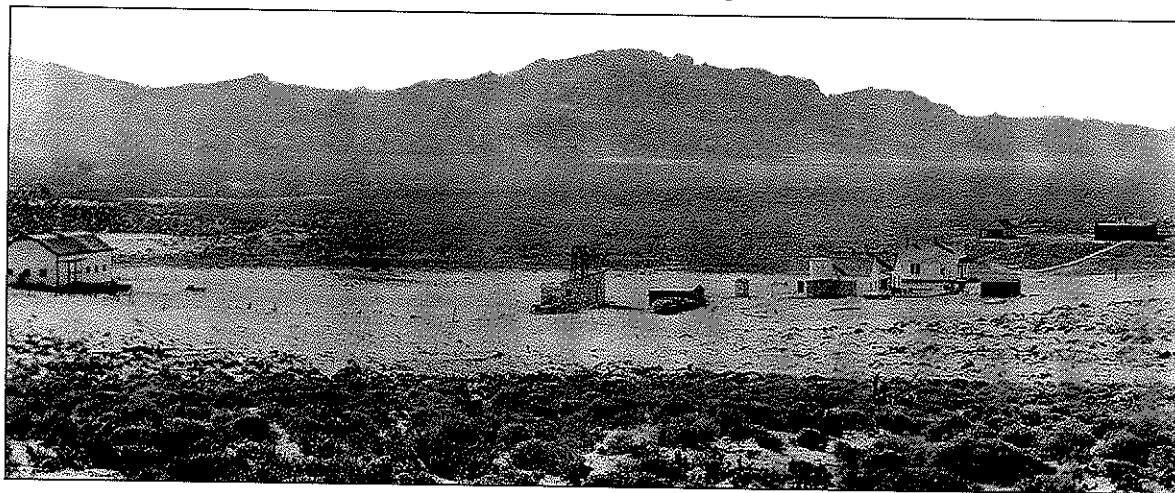
times done to get children in the government schools. Finally the first six children, ranging from 5 to 11 years of age, were found by VanderWagen, evidently near the ZI Ranch (north of Zuni), about 40 miles away. A report in *The Banner* in 1905 identified their families as "well-to-do" Indians.<sup>8</sup> What that meant in 1903 is difficult to determine, but it may indicate why these parents were

Many years later, Andrew VanderWagen reported that he picked up a hitchhiker while driving from Gallup to Zuni. When the man took his seat in the car he spoke good English. VanderWagen recognized a familiar voice and a face with a small scar on the lip. In fact he recalled that the man was John Eliot, whom as a child he had brought to Rehoboth in December 1903 and whose harelip had

been repaired while at the school. During the conversation, Eliot admitted that during his life he unsuccessfully tried to set Christianity aside. Rehoboth had made too great an impression on his heart and on that of his mother, who had learned of Christ through his telling of his school experiences.<sup>9</sup>

Nellie Noordhoff later recounted her experiences in those very early days at Rehoboth. She and Dick VanderWagen were the sole white folk at the mission. What follows are excerpts from her handwritten memories:

When the first children came in December 1903, they stared at the strange surroundings and strange people. Their clothing consisted of nothing but flour sack material so tight around their bodies that I could hardly get my scissors in between cloth and skin to cut it off. . . . As soon as we had some hot water we tried to give them a bath, but the poor youngsters were afraid of water and did not dare to go into the tub. However by coaxing them with their "new" clothes we succeeded. . . . Then finally it was time to retire but they were not accustomed to beds or removing their clothing. They were accustomed to sleeping on the floor of their hogan. But we laid the springs on the floor and eventually



Rehoboth in 1909.

Navajos drawn off the reservation, where they lived as nomadic sheep grazers in scattered camps. Therefore, rather than establish a Navajo community at Rehoboth, the boarding school was a more workable option. As one early student said, "The only difference between Rehoboth and the government schools was that the latter marched their students to classes and meals and recreation while at Rehoboth they also marched them to church."

To obtain children for a boarding school required an agreement by Native American parents to relinquish their children for many months of the year to a primitive school run by white missionaries. Initially Andrew VanderWagen, the missionary in Zuni, found it very difficult to persuade parents to send their children to the school. No compulsion could be brought on the parents as was some-

interested in education for their children and were willing to send them to this emerging boarding school.

The records do not show the native names of these four boys and two girls. Brink, Noordhoff and Dick VanderWagen could not understand or perhaps pronounce the names of the children. Therefore the missionaries selected names: Albert Gardiner, James Evans, Clarissa Pierson, John Eliot and Henry Whipple, taking the names of famous figures in American religious history. The sole exception was that one girl received the name Gertrude Alger. Nellie Noordhoff said that because she was the first lady at Rehoboth, the Mission Board gave permission to name this girl after her mother. These children were related to one another, so we may assume they came from the same area, perhaps the same camp, or the same large family.

they slept in their beds, but we placed chairs against them to prevent them from falling out!

Meals were also a challenge. Sitting on a chair was strange and they were inclined to sit some distance from the table. They did not understand our prayers. They took the food with their hands, but we showed them how to use a knife and fork, but they preferred fingers.

Before school I would prepare our food, peel potatoes, etc., and then at noon I would boil them and make further preparations. When I baked bread I would set it in the morning, knead it at noon, and bake it in the evening. . . . On Saturday afternoon, accompanied by two boys, we would go into the hills to visit Indians in their hogans, to whom I would dispense medicine. Later these Indians would come to the mission. Between their coughs they complained of a cold and requested medicine. Actually they were very fond of the sweet tasting liquid. If I knew they did not need it, I made it a little bitter which I knew would not hurt them, but when they took it "what a face they would make" and their cold was cured at once!

The first thing I taught the children when they could understand me a little was "Thou God seest me" and the hymn "Pass me not, O Gentle Savior, hear my humble cry," which they learned to sing very nicely.

We had school the whole year round with no summer vacation. Their parents would visit them and stay for two or three days, sleeping in the dormitory on the floor. They enjoyed watching their children receiving a bath!<sup>10</sup>

Nellie Noordhoff did not write about her associations with Dick VanderWagen, but the close working relationship as the sole staff at Rehoboth culminated in their marriage in April 1905. The sequel to this marriage was unexpected. Within months, on September 27, Dr. Edward J. Davis, a Gallup physician, examined Nellie and declared her condition critical, on the borderline of serious mental trouble, which prompted his



*Rev. Jacob Bolt on the mission field, 1914.*

suggestion that she leave the mission field to remove her from the concern over her children. Brink took charge of the school in addition to his other tasks and asked the Mission Board for a replacement school teacher as quickly as possible. The departure of the VanderWagens was an unpredictable end to the first and short chapter



*As with so many on the mission field, Rev. L.P. Brink (in coveralls) did whatever was needed in addition to preaching.*

in the history of the beginnings of mission work at Rehoboth.

The six students in the initial class in 1903 were joined by several others the next year and by 1907 thirty-two students were enrolled. In 1909 the staff declared that "Rehoboth is

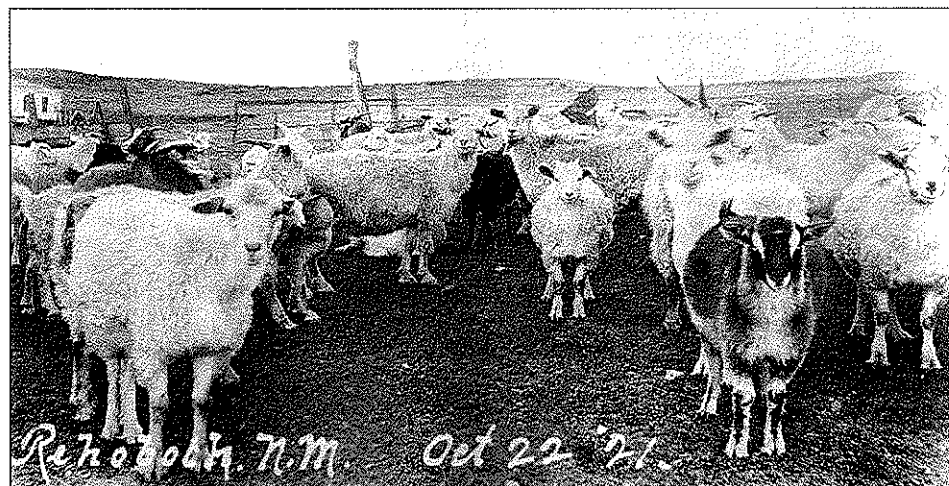
growing in influence and popularity," but the enrollment was limited to the number of beds in the dormitory. In 1913, with fifty-two pupils in attendance, the dormitory for boys and girls was filled to capacity. When, however, new dormitories were completed in 1917 the enrollment immediately jumped to 100, with a waiting list for

new admissions. During the 1920s, 30s, and 40s the enrollment remained around 120 until the first school bus was obtained. The bus allowed for day students and the inception of a high school

in the late 1940s removed the "bed" restriction. The number of students in the elementary, middle and high school continued to grow so that after a hundred years of existence Rehoboth can provide education to over 400 students.

The increased number of the boarding students required more land and additional buildings. The first addition to the original Smith Ranch purchase was a donation in 1906 of eighty acres by the Santa Fe Railroad. Ten years later, a parcel of 480 acres was purchased from the same railroad company. The federal government had encouraged the development of the transcontinental railroad system by donating land on each side of the railroad right of way for its maintenance buildings and sidings but also to be sold to finance the system. That purchase of 1916 was especially required because the well which had made the original purchase in 1902 so attractive was actually on railroad property. The third addition occurred in 1917, when eighty acres were purchased from John and Jennie Spyker. John Spyker was a retired builder from Zeeland, Michigan, who had been hired by the Mission Board in 1912 as industrial superintendent and industrial arts teacher. During his stay in Rehoboth he had purchased a parcel from the railroad and upon leaving, sold his holdings to the mission.

In 1921 two ranches, each 160 acres, lying directly west of the original purchase, came up for sale and were purchased. A year later, mission personnel learned that New Mexico was placing on the market the remaining part of Section 16 school land, which had been occupied by the Smith Ranch. The savvy committee of Rehoboth workers advised the Mission Board in May 1921 to hold off on any purchase because they had information that the price of this land was about to drop from \$10 to \$3 for each of the 320 acres.<sup>11</sup> The final land acquisition in 1928 came as a donation from Katherine Rosbach, that of her homestead of 320 acres. Early in her tenure, begun in 1905, she had made her claim to land adjacent to the mission



property and upon her retirement deeded her homestead to the Christian Reformed Church, which she had served faithfully. So twenty-five years after the pioneers Brink, VanderWagen and Fryling decided that a ranch six miles east of Gallup would be a good location for the mission, Rehoboth had grown to 1,920 acres.

Indisputably, the task of beginning a boarding school was overwhelming. Nellie Noordhoff indeed had been a matron to these young and fearful children—a teacher of children struggling to become bilingual, a nurse to her charges and their families, and a housekeeper and cook. Besides, she had to keep careful record of the finances of the school; expenses of the children and the staff had to be kept separate and reports had to be sent to the board monthly, semiannually and annually. In reviewing the financial arrangements, it is apparent that running a mission was a new and mysterious enterprise for the board. Evidently it was not accustomed to providing for the day-to-day expenses of such an enterprise with petty cash. The staff, for instance, requested “some money” because occasionally they were required to purchase items with cash at the Gallup stores; cash was also needed to pay the Indian help. Added to the request was the promise that unused money could be deposited in a

Gallup bank until needed. Nellie’s heart and soul were in her work, but also her purse, for the records show that during the few years she served at Rehoboth she set aside a fifth of her personal income to pay for a student’s education.

Dick VanderWagen was initially in charge of the store, tended the cattle and horses, maintained the buildings, which were old and many constructed of old railroad ties, and transported supplies from Gallup. Mr. and Mrs. Steven Schreur (he had been a successful farmer and carpenter from Fremont, Michigan) were sent to the field in 1904. Mrs. Schreur was Noordhoff’s assistant and Mr. Schreur was expected to “teach the first principles of manual labor.” Unfortunately he could not adapt to the high altitude and became bed ridden. Another assistant arrived in February 1905. She was the sixteen-year-old Matilda Van Dyken. A few months later a Miss Leys appeared on the scene, but her arrival was greeted with apprehension by Noordhoff, who wrote the board, “I greatly fear that she will not stay. She is terribly homesick and feels that life is too hard for her and insists she came here only as a trial.”<sup>12</sup> Noordhoff was discouraged because she had counted the days until Leys arrived, who then seemed unwilling to stay.

The establishment of a boarding

school was not limited to the care and instruction of children. From its inception the board and the staff sought to make the enterprise as self-sufficient as possible. Therefore, besides the acquisition of a few cattle and horses in the initial purchase agreement, the staff envisioned an enlarged farm. By September 1904 the old ranch had two heifers, two calves, three steers, two milk cows and 250 sheep. The latter would require a shepherd at a salary of \$5 per month.<sup>13</sup>

The records of Rehoboth are replete with references to the constant battle with the forces of nature in New Mexico, which included hail, sandstorms, drought, frost, quicksand and natural predators. In 1904 the water from the open well was found to be contaminated. Brink, with a strong rope tied under his arms, descended on a ladder to explore the well. His helpers thought they were pulling him up in response to his shout "pull her up." Instead they found a dead lamb on the end of the rope. A year later the board was informed that three head of cattle perished in adobe and quicksand.

In 1908 several acres of sagebrush

were removed and the plowed area was planted with potatoes. This was an experiment with dry farming since the water supply did not permit irrigation. Later a better pump was installed. By this time the sheep herd had grown to 400 head which, with several beef cattle and milk cows, required a distinctive Rehoboth brand. Subsequent reports tell of chickens on the farm so that the boarding school could boast of "home products" of eggs, meat, butter and milk. In 1914, for instance, Beets suggested the purchase of more land for dry farming and for grazing room for horses and cattle.

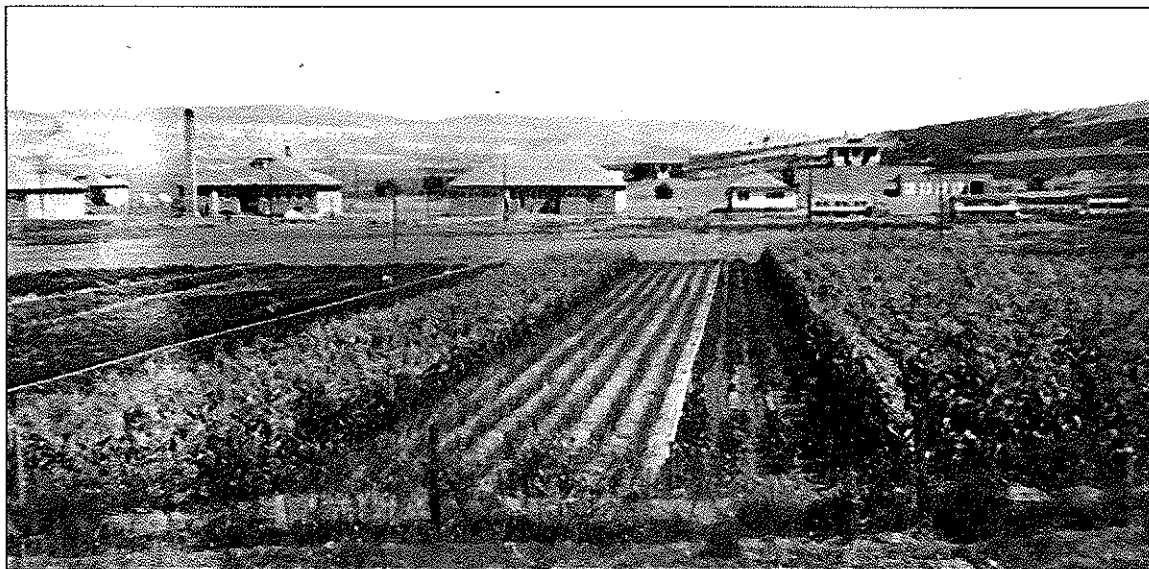
The reports sent to the board never failed to mention the attempts to make the school enterprise self-supporting. In 1915, the superintendent gave an extensive report indicating ten acres had been plowed, 2½ acres of oats sown, but before it was 4" high a sand storm had cut it down; corn and potatoes suffered the same fate. Attempts to provide pork were rather unsuccessful, even though hogs could be fed swill from the kitchen. The chicken and egg situation was somewhat better, although seventy chicks had been drowned in a cloudburst.

To counter the ravages of prairie

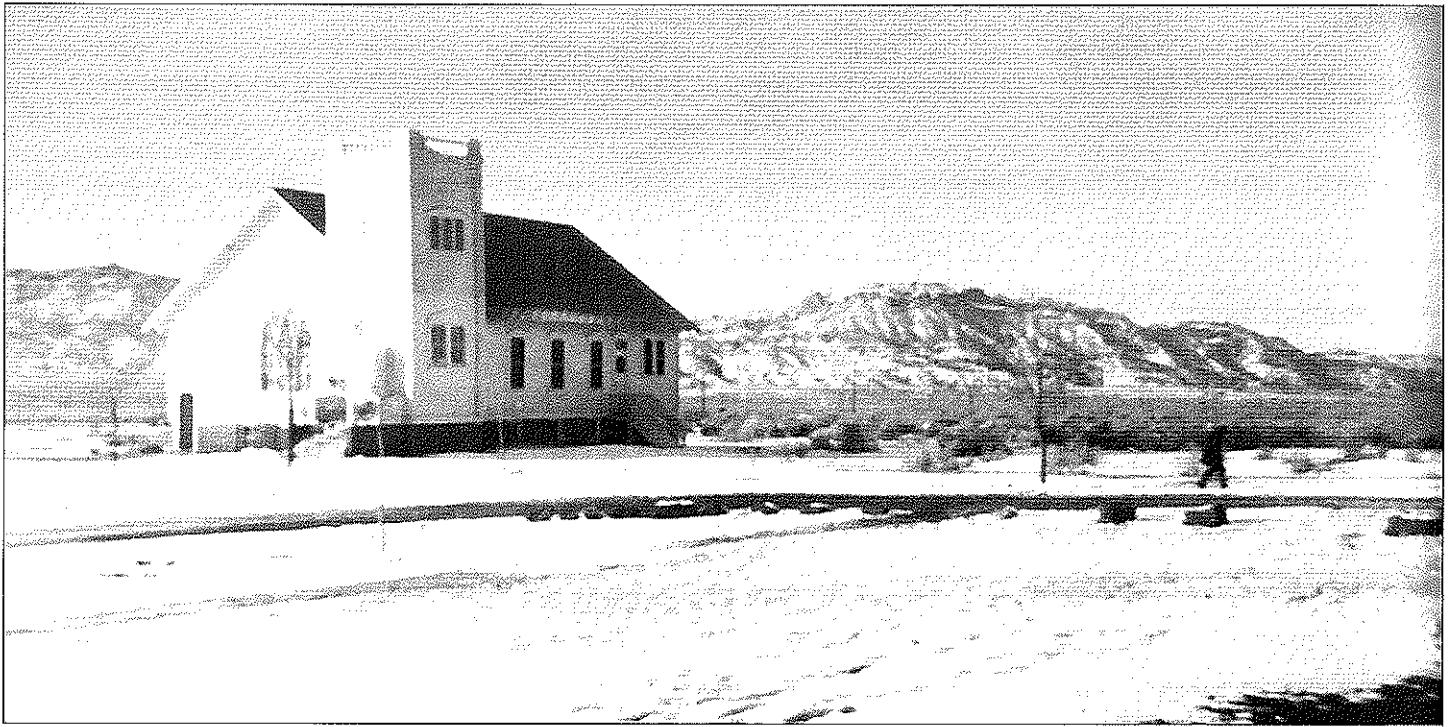
dogs on the newly planted potatoes, oats mixed with poison were used to good effect. Unfortunately, Brink stabled his horse in the barn where the mixture was stored. The horse ate the oats and died. Bosscher balanced that report by reminding the board that "this is the first time in the history of the Mission that no cows or calves died."<sup>14</sup>

Interspersed with reports of crop failures and a thoroughbred Guernsey bull, purchased to breed a good stock of milk cows, killed by a Santa Fe train, there are also references to successes in gardening, or a successful harvest which required the school to be closed so the students could glean the field and assist in the butchering, canning, salting, and preserving—and the overabundance could be sold in Gallup. When the United States Government in 1927 completed a dam to be used for irrigation purposes at Bluewater, some distance to the east of Rehoboth, the superintendent, after personally securing an option, attempted to convince the board to purchase a farm in that valley so that "our Indian boys and girls could receive good pointers about running a farm along modern lines and the

school would harvest lots of fresh vegetables for hungry students." The board did not buy the idea or the farm! With a new well dug in 1929 an overhead sprinkling system was devised to cope with the persistent drought conditions. However, each year the corn seemed to grow one inch shorter and the vegetable crop was slightly less productive because the alkali in the water did not



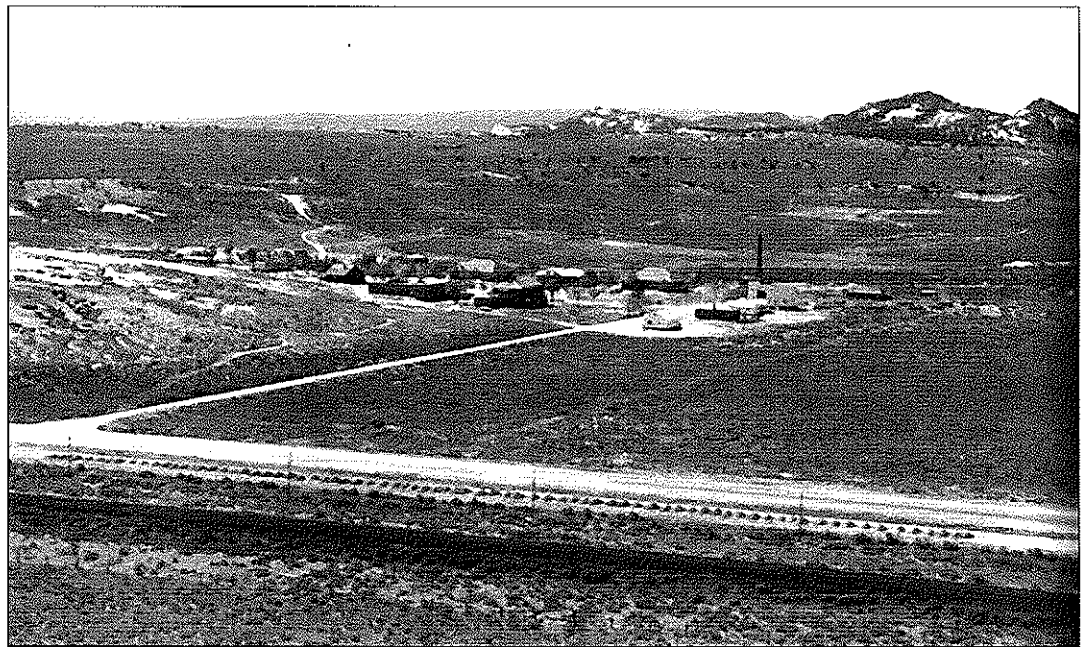
Despite valiant efforts to raise crops at Rehoboth, as in this garden in 1921 or 1922, the alkali in the water was the undoing of these efforts.



The Rehoboth Chapel was designed by the Grand Rapids firm of J. & G. Daverman (see Origins, Fall 2001, p. 2 ff.).

prove to be a very good fertilizer.

In retrospect, it is difficult to determine whether all the expenditure of time, money and energy to make the boarding school economically successful was such a good idea. There is no doubt that from the CRC Mission Board's perspective any reduction in the cost of running the school was attractive. Even during its first two decades of existence, when the CRC mission enterprise was entirely limited to the Southwest Indian field, the expenditure of funds by the small emerging denomination was considerable. The question raised persistently among many members of the church was whether the mission was "worth" the money that was being "poured" into the venture. Moreover, the boarding school "model" always seemed to include the farming feature; nor

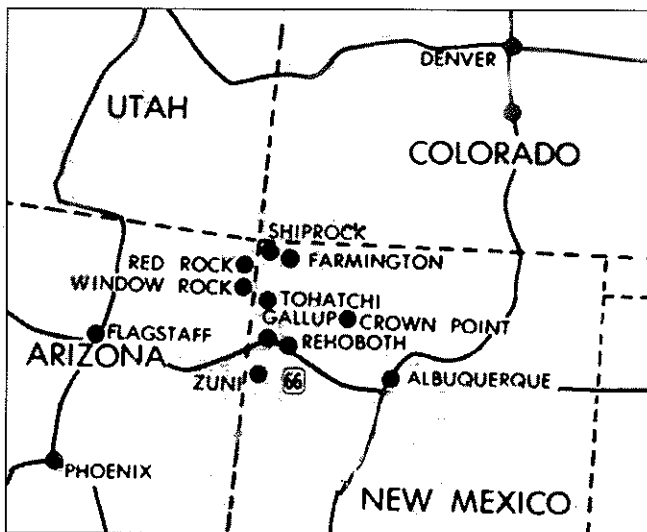


Rehoboth in the late 1940s with Route 66 and the Santa Fe rail line in the foreground.

should we forget that as Beets stated in *Toiling and Trusting*, "At the very beginning of the work of our Church at Rehoboth, it was planned to make it the center of industrial work"<sup>15</sup> and that included the agricultural work as well. Animal husbandry and horticultural

fit into the desire to acquaint and train the students with manual labor while at the same time reducing the cost of feeding them.

Recalling the difficulties encountered in making the Rehoboth Mission economically viable, the question was



often raised, why was the mission placed in such an unpromising location? Brink himself noted that just past the north boundary of the Navajo reservation (Rehoboth was located at the south end) the San Juan River flowed, irrigating thousands of acres of good land. Nearly all of the domestic supplies for a mission institution could have been raised on such a suitable piece of land, where water was in abundance. The answer as to why this area was rejected was simple: Several Methodist and Baptist missions were already in the area; following their experience with the Franciscans, the CRC wanted to be removed from potential competition.

By the mid 1920s Rehoboth had become a fair-sized village with a few homes, school, post office, hospital, laundry, heating plant and church. In the 1930s hogans were built for families visiting students or patients in the hospital, and a new laundry and a "public school for whites" were erected. The major addition in the

1940s was a central heating plant and homes for staff. A high school building and dormitory were added in the 1950s and the next decade saw a new elementary classroom building and more dormitory facilities. When the mission hospital, which had been established in 1910, was moved off the Rehoboth campus and the building

demolished, a business office took its place and several years later, in 1979, the Fellowship Hall was dedicated. Several times in the past the old original buildings had been destroyed by fire. However, as Superintendent Bosscher said, "Van den nood een deugd maken" (the best was made out of a bad situation), and new buildings replaced the old. Thus in 1991 when frozen water pipes in the high school classrooms destroyed 75 percent of the books, the Rolf Veenstra Memorial Library was housed in the renovated old laundry building.

The mission to Native Americans in the Southwest established in 1903 has indeed flourished far beyond the hopes and dreams of the early pioneers. Today, Rehoboth Christian School is no longer a mission boarding school but an independent parentally controlled institution with a reputation for bringing the best Christian education possible to the large multi-ethnic community on and off the reservation.<sup>5</sup>

#### Endnotes

1. Herman Fryling, MSS Collection, Archives, Calvin College. Paper: "Beginning of Our Work Among the Navahos" [1899] p. 8.
2. Beets, *Toiling and Trusting* (1940) p. 49.
3. Quoted in Beets, p. 46.
4. *The Banner of Truth*, January 1902, p. 107.
5. *The Christian Indian*, June & July, 1968, p. 2; Aug. 1968, p. 6; Dec. 1968, p. 2.
6. Beets, *Toiling and Trusting*, p. 49.
7. Nellie Noordhoff VanderWagen, "Reminiscences of Nellie Noordhoff," undated, Home Missions Collection, Archives, Calvin College.
8. *The Banner*, 22 December 1905, p. 544.
9. Andrew VanderWagen, "Herinneringen Uit het Land der Navajoesd en der Zuni Indianen," *Missionary Monthly* March 1940, p. 119.
10. Ibid., Nellie Noordhoff VanderWagen, "Reminiscences."
11. Minutes, Indian General Conference, 1 June 1921, Article 20.
12. Noordhoff report to the CRC Board of Heathen Missions, September 1905.
13. Minutes, Indian General Conference, 21 September 1904, Article 4.
14. Jacob Bosscher, "Annual Report," 1915.
15. Beets, *Toiling and Trusting*, p. 63.

# Twelve Rehoboth Mission Pioneers

Henry Ippel

None of the pioneer mission staff had adequate preparation for their introduction to the American Southwest—its semi-arid conditions, its native peoples, its primitive condi-

tions, its high altitude. Seven of the twelve were immigrants from the Netherlands, still in the process of adjusting to the culture of the “new world.” All were already bilingual,

speaking and writing in Dutch and English, and now challenged to adapt to a native tongue. All of them were tested to use their ingenuity and skills in order to survive.

Rev. Herman Fryling

Rev. Herman Fryling (1869-1947) was born in Munnekezijl, Friesland, the Netherlands. With his parents he emigrated to America in 1880 and took up residence in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His interest in missions was aroused by reading missionary stories and especially listening to an address by Dr. John A. Otte, a medical missionary of the Reformed Church in America. He was designated a “missionary aspirant” and financially supported by the Mission Board as a student at the Theological School (now Calvin Theological Seminary); he graduated in 1896. After giving a “very eloquent and impressive speech in which he gave evidence of his willingness and courage to go to the Indians,” he was called by the Christian Reformed Church to be the first missionary among the Navajo Indians in the Southwest. With his new bride, Katie Hoozeboom, he began work in Fort Defiance, Arizona, in October 1896. Katie died four months later. Two years later he married Jennie Janssen of Zeeland, Michigan, who had come to work on the mission field.

Fryling reported encouragement with his Bible classes which he began in the government Indian school and with the help of an interpreter translated into Navajo the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments and even a little catechism book.



Rev. Herman and Jennie Fryling served on the mission field, 1896-1905, 1907-1929. Also pictured are their children Sophia and John. All photos from: Archives, Calvin College.

However with the emergent competition from the Franciscan fathers, the Fort Defiance mission was closed, but Fryling then became part of the initial team of missionaries instrumental in founding the Rehoboth (New Mexico) Mission. Subsequently Fryling became the missionary in Zuni, New Mexico, from where he retired in 1929, due to his wife’s ill health.

Andrew VanderWagen

Andrew VanderWagen (1868-1953) was born in Hallum, Friesland, the Netherlands; with his mother and brother he emigrated to America at the age of twelve. From

early youth, Andrew (Andries) was interested in horses and he took many ribbons with his fast steeds. He did not complete his theological training because he and his new bride, Effie Hofman, a trained nurse, decided to join the Frylings in the mission venture in the Southwest. On his faithful horse, John the Flyer, VanderWagen explored the vast region and came upon members of the Zuni tribe. (It has been reported that “Van” and his horse traveled from Fort Defiance, Arizona, to Zuni, New Mexico, about forty miles, within 6 ¾ hours.) He convinced the mission board to send him to Zuni in 1897; he called it the “citadel of Satan.” However, a terrible small-pox epidemic during the winter of 1898-99 offered a wonderful opening for Effie, who was able to save the lives of many Zunis. As a token of gratitude, the VanderWagens obtained a grant of land which became the site of the CRC Zuni Mission. Andrew and Effie



Andrew and Nellie VanderWagen later in life.

retained a sincere interest in the Rehoboth project from its very beginning.

Rev. Leonard Peter Brink

Rev. Leonard Peter Brink (1876-1936) was born in East Saugatuck, Michigan, but was brought up in Fremont, Michigan, then a frontier community, which was excellent preparation for his work in New Mexico. In the fall of 1893 he enrolled as a student in the Theological School with assistance from his local classis. To distinguish him from other Brinks among the student body, he was called "L. P.," a designation he retained the rest of his life and which he used as his pen name. He was



Rev. Leonard P. Brink spent more than 30 years on the mission field.

ordained on 1 August 1900, was married a few days later to Elizabeth Van Eeuwen, and a month later became the missionary at the Tohatchi (New Mexico) Mission. He spent the rest of his life on the Indian mission field, with the exception of a one-year absence due to his weakened health and that of his wife. L. P. was a unique person, deeply devoted to his mission work, shrewd in business, handy with tools (on one occasion he described himself as an architect, carpenter, stone and brick mason and plumber!), an avid translator, well-versed in the native language, called the "Cadmus" of the Navajo tribe, a sound preacher with good rapport with his native audience, a teacher, a poet, a good administrator, a long-time editor of *The Christian*

*Indian*—he had all the qualities required for the taxing tasks of pioneer work among the Navajo people. From 1903 to 1912, when Rehoboth received its first ordained minister, L. P. supervised the work and took an active part in the spiritual, educational and material aspects of the fledgling school.

Nellie Noordhoff

Nellie Noordhof (Mrs. Dick VanderWagen, 1872-1950) was also born in the province of Friesland, the Netherlands. She emigrated with her parents around 1880, went to elementary and high school in Zeeland, Michigan, and graduated from a nurses training school in Grand Rapids in 1901. After receiving her appointment, she left Grand Rapids in January 1903 to take up the arduous task of making the Rehoboth "ranch" ready for the opening of a boarding and industrial school. A letter, written to a cousin on 22 December 1903, provides an insight into her first months: "I have five children and will



Nellie Noordhoff (VanderWagen) was responsible for making the Smith Ranch suitable as a boarding school in 1903.

probably have another one. . . . I wish you could come over and sew. I have so much sewing. . . . Just imagine five children coming all at once. . . . There is not a garment which I can keep which is good. These poor children hardly wear any clothes at all. . . . I have no help at all. . . . I was told to hire help but it is hard to do with Indian help. They do not know how to wash dishes or dust. . . . They do not know how to look at the clock. . . . I have not started to teach yet because I must first get things straightened up. I baked eighteen loaves of bread Friday, and

Monday I baked twenty. I have my hands full." She did not shirk her responsibilities but before two years had elapsed the burden apparently was too great and therefore she and her husband left Rehoboth.

Katherine Rosbach

Katherine Rosbach was born in the village of Graafschap, Michigan, and received her education in Ottawa County schools. She arrived in Rehoboth on 3 November 1905 and remained until 1936 serving most of that time as matron and housekeeper. She was intensely involved in the



Katherine Rosbach, who taught for more than 30 years at Rehoboth also homesteaded land that she later donated to the mission.

boarding school and the mission program at Rehoboth. She homesteaded property adjacent to the mission and donated that parcel to the mission upon her retirement. She also donated the windows for

the new church/chapel built in 1923, and during the depression years assisted the business manager by providing personal funds to pay off some of the debts incurred for supplies in Gallup.

Mark Bouma

Mark Bouma (1878-1971), another native of the Netherlands, with his wife arrived at Rehoboth on 30 March 1907, the first person to be called "Directeur" or superintendent, but he considered his work to be that of industrial teacher and manager under the supervision of Rev. L. P. Brink. During his two years at Rehoboth most of his time was devoted



The "director" at Rehoboth for two years beginning in 1907, Bouma later served 23 more years on the Indian mission field.

to manual labor and the supervising of buildings, repairing leaking roofs, remodeling existing structures, as well as looking after cattle, sheep and mules, and hauling supplies from Gallup. A heart condition forced his early resignation, but he returned to the CRC Indian

mission field, serving twenty-three years at Tohatchi, San Antone and Two Wells.

**Cocia Hartog** (Mrs. Paul Wezeman, 1884-1970) was born in Goes, Zeeland, the Netherlands. In 1892 with her parents she came to America, receiving her schooling in Alamosa, Colorado; Orange City, Iowa; and the Medill High School in Chicago, Illinois. Since childhood she showed interest in mission work and taught a mission Sunday school in Chicago before becoming the first teacher at



Cocia Hartog served as the first teacher at Rehoboth.

Rehoboth in 1906, a successor to Nellie Noordhoff. She served as teacher and principal of the school, diligently providing reports to the church papers and heralding its

progress and growth. In 1910 she authored a pamphlet, "Indian Mission Sketches" (the first English publication from the field), which provided descriptions and photos of Navajo life, the Rehoboth Mission School and the

mission stations at Tohatchi and Zuni.

According to a report in *The Banner* (26 October 1911), "The continual strain of a school of forty-three pupils and their intellectual welfare" forced Cocia, like her predecessor Nellie Noordhoff, to relinquish her duties at Rehoboth. She returned to Chicago and after recuperation married Paul Wezeman.



**Jacob H. Bosscher** (1887-1974), a native of Grand Rapids, Michigan, at the age of four moved with his parents to a farm near Lucas, Michigan. His schooling was interspersed with hard work on the farm, but after making profession of faith he felt called to the ministry and therefore entered the Theological School in Grand Rapids at the age of eighteen. Illness forced



Jacob H. Bosscher, left, was appointed manager at Rehoboth in 1909. Manager meant that he painted and preached and did whatever else needed doing.

him to return home after two years of study.

However, in July 1909 his desire for Kingdom work was answered when he received an appointment as "manager" from the CRC Board of Missions, to join the small staff at Rehoboth, taking the

place of Mark Bouma. He soon discovered that his "manager" title was a euphemism for general repairman, painter, carpenter, plumber, barber, butcher, overseer, purchasing agent, bookkeeper, disciplinarian and superintendent of the Sunday school, postmaster, contractor, farmer, "preacher," indeed a man for all

seasons and for all responsibilities. He recalled that his first New Year's Day at Rehoboth was spent in the crawl space under the children's dormitory, lying on his back with a blow torch, attempting to thaw frozen water pipes. This is only one of the innumerable stories Bosscher has related in his memoirs of forty-two years of service at Rehoboth.

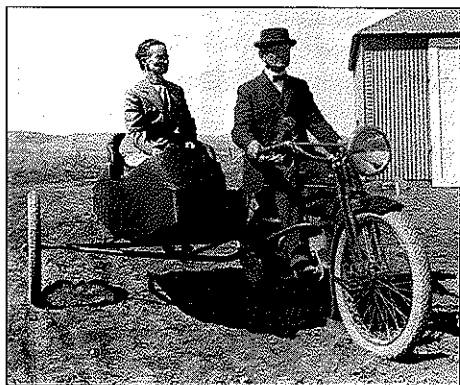
His work has been indelibly imprinted in the history and mission at Rehoboth. An example? From the very beginning, water was a major concern. As the student body grew, the inadequacy of the water supply for the kitchen, laundry, ablutions, building, livestock, etc., was a constant problem for Bosscher. Finally in 1929 a wonderful artesian well was drilled and it was appropriately named "Jacob's Well." He was also prominent in the larger area, serving eight years as state senator in New Mexico, beginning in 1924.



**Rev. John W. Brink** (1865-1948) was born in Leek, Groningen, the Netherlands. (He perpetuated his father's name by signing many of his literary contributions with the pseudonym "Williamson.") In 1869 he emigrated with his parents to Grand Rapids, Michigan, and graduated from the Theological School in 1895, a contemporary of Fryling and Andrew VanderWagen. Brink served briefly as a home missionary and then pastored four churches before accepting the call to be the first ordained missionary at Rehoboth in 1912. His acceptance was said to bring a shockwave through the denomination. "Brink, of all men, to bury himself in such a place! A man of his ability and ambition (he had already served as president of the CRC Synod in 1910), a preacher so well adapted for the best and biggest churches in our denomination—to the Indians! What a pity!"

Nonetheless, he assumed full charge of the boarding school's religious work, relieving Bosscher of some of this responsibility.

An amusing incident occurred soon after he arrived in New Mexico. Driving through the reservation, one of his car's tires went flat. In those days, such an emergency required removal of the wheel, so he went to a nearby hogan and asked in English, "Do you have a lug wrench?" His hearer looked at him in amazement. They were unfamiliar with the item. He tried again this time asking, "Do you have a monkey wrench?" This time they understood and replied: "No, but we have a sheep ranch." In his pastorate at Rehoboth he was the spiritual leader to the children in the boarding school, the patients in the



*Some in the Christian Reformed Church thought Rev. and Mrs. John W. Brink's acceptance of a call to the mission field was an under use of his talents. He served two terms, 1912-25 and 1930-38. This photo was taken in 1916.*

hospital, and the mission staff. Additionally he taught in a training school for native evangelists and followed a strenuous program of camp work in the area. He left Rehoboth in 1925, but returned to Two Wells and Zuni in 1930, and remained there until his retirement eight years later.

**Renzina Stob** Renzina Stob (1895-1977) was born in Chicago, Illinois. A year later her family moved to Raymond, Minnesota,

where she completed her elementary and high school education. After a few years at Calvin College (she finally obtained a degree in 1931), she took a teaching position at the Englewood Christian School in Chicago, but in 1916 accepted an invitation to start a small school at Toadlena, New Mexico, for the children of L. P. Brink, an Indian trader, and a government woodcutter, and also to provide religious teaching to children in the local government school. She left Toadlena in 1919 to enroll in the Moody Bible Institute, but in November began teaching at Rehoboth. The next monthly report of the "Rehoboth



*Renzina Stob served as the principal at Rehoboth for more than four decades.*

Mission Boarding School" was signed by her as principal. From 1919 to 1965 she served as principal and teacher, influencing the lives of hundreds of Native American students.

Comments gleaned from her reports reveal the joys and tensions and aspirations of her work. For instance, at the close of the 1921-1922 term, she wrote, "During the fall and winter school work was hampered greatly by runaway boys; the spirit was very contagious. Government schools reported the same. However that gradually disappeared and the latter part of the term proved encouraging above all expectations. We have given rather straight stiff work all through the year in order that these pupils may be able to make a grade each year. Formerly we thought this impossible but my three years of experience shows that it can be done by the majority, but it means persistent effort and cooperation of the pupils. We can testify that

the latter was not lacking. We are highly pleased at the willingness of the scholars to study hard. Some even remained at recess and asked for help outside of school." Reflecting on the end of the 1928 term, Stob wrote, "Work was considerably interrupted by runaways and epidemics. . . . Though a difficult year, we thoroughly enjoyed the term's work."

In 1938 Principal Stob said, "There are perhaps three principal reasons why many Navajos prefer our school. First, the children are well cared for and loved by each worker; second, many Christian parents desire a Christian training for their children; and third, our course of study is similar to that used in the schools for white children and each graduate receives a state diploma." Certainly the success of the school was due to her leadership and that of the other dedicated teachers and matrons, who did not limit their work to the classroom; all led student organizations like the Girls' Gleaner Club or the Boys' Woodcraft and Leather Work Club, Girls' Needlework Club, Junior Girls' Mission Scouts, Senior Girls' Mission Scouts, or a Victory Club; they also taught Sunday school. Stob's administrative tasks were not easy; she was faced with constant teacher turnover, frequent sickness among staff and students, experiencing what Dr. Henry Beets called "wryving," friction and misunderstandings within the community; she substituted for the matrons and sat in on innumerable committees. Although she planned to retire at age sixty-five she remained active at Rehoboth until age seventy.

**Marie Vander Weide** Marie Vander Weide (1889-1982) was born in Warken, Gelderland, the Netherlands. She was associated with Rehoboth for almost fifty years. When she joined the staff as boys' matron in 1920 her contract read: "She is to be in

charge of the boys placed under her care; to see to it that they are kept neat and clean, including their quarters; watch out for their moral welfare; to assist in daily devotional exercises and make it homelike for the children; to discipline after minor offences in the



Marie Vander Weide was matron, counselor and confidant to students at Rehoboth for almost 50 years.

dormitory and to report those of a more serious nature to the disciplinarian. Moreover, every third Sunday she must be responsible for the boys and the girls and requisition supplies

and clothing and shall attend religious meetings, social gatherings and the Local Conference 'unless excused for cause.' Although not written in the contract, she was the counselor and confidant of as many as sixty-two boys per year (and boys will be boys!), a seamstress, a nurse (at one time she cared for twenty-six boys sick with the flu), a caretaker of the dormitory (even varnishing the floors), and a teacher in Daily Vacation Bible School.

The Mission Pension Plan made age sixty the time of retirement, but she asked to retain her matron position for several years, when at sixty-four she became matron for missionary children living on campus and also campus receptionist, a position she kept until incapacitated by a severe hip injury. But even then in 1964, at age seventy-five, she reported having a group of sixteen boys come to her trailer home for Sunday school lessons. Her legacy certainly was her influence on the boys, whom she loved and nurtured. Her Christian witness and personal

dignity made a lasting impression and many of the boys, becoming young men, acknowledged her abiding friendship by returning to her again and again for advice. Not infrequently her reports indicated her joy that the Spirit of God was working in the hearts of her boys. But she also left the legacy of her artwork, which still can be seen hanging on the walls of various buildings at Rehoboth.



Christine Hood Whipple (1889-1993) was born in the Pinedale, New Mexico, area on June 20, 1889, one of Bah and Robin Largo's nine children. In 1979, Christine recounted her first association with Rehoboth. "On February 8, 1905, my cousin Marcus Whitman and I came to school. Everything was so strange to us, but worst of all, we did not know a word of English. It did not take long before we could talk a little English. There were six children there. They were all named after some missionary because the workers were unable to pronounce our Indian names. There were only a few buildings built of stone, adobe and lumber. There was a laundry where we did all the washing and the machines were turned by hand and we also used washboards, which meant rubbing! One large building was used for the girls' and boys' dormitory and matrons' room; it also served as a classroom. We had our Sunday school and services there . . . We had no utilities and used kerosene lamps, lanterns and candles for light. We had one faucet in the dormitory and a large heating stove where we heated our water in large containers so we could take a bath once a week in a large galvanized tub."

"Miss Nellie Noordhoff was the first white lady we saw. The only transportation we had was a wagon and a team of horses. We would drive to Gallup to get the mail every day.

We also had saddle horses."

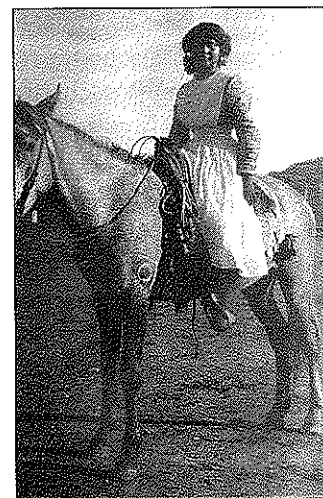
"When I finished the eighth grade in 1913, I decided to go to the Rehoboth Mission Hospital to receive nurses' training under Dr. Lee S.

Huizenga. The first baby I took care of was Arthur Bosscher [son of Jacob and Nellie Bosscher]."

She was the first graduate of the nurses' training program. As a member of the hospital staff, she was perhaps the first Navajo nurse to make house calls in New Mexico and, because she was an accomplished rider, traveled to remote areas on horseback.

Christine became a close friend of the Huizenga family and accompanied them on their trips back east to Grand Rapids, Chicago, New York City, and Englewood, New Jersey. When Dr. Huizenga left Rehoboth to become a medical missionary in China, he invited her to go with him. She declined, fearing that she might never return to her home in Dine Tah.

While working at the Mission Hospital, Christine married a former classmate, Henry Whipple, one of the original six students enrolled at the Mission School in 1903. After living in Crownpoint and Los Angeles, she returned to Crownpoint in 1933 to resume her work as a nurse in the Indian Health Hospital until her retirement in 1964. 6



The first graduate of the nurses' training program at Rehoboth, Christine Hood Whipple made "house calls" on horse back.

# Richard H. Pousma and the Rehoboth Hospital<sup>1</sup>

Peter P. DeBoer

## Editor's introduction

Rehoboth Mission Hospital opened in 1910 with two wards (one for men, the other for women); one doctor, Wilbur P. Sipe, from Flagstaff, Arizona; and several nurses. Most of the medical care was provided in the field, with only the most serious cases hospitalized, often to die. The most common treatable diseases were measles, diphtheria, small pox, typhoid, tuberculosis, and trachoma (which often caused blindness). Sipe contracted cancer and was forced to resign after one year. Nurse Jennie Vander Veen took charge of the

medical care until Dr. J. C. K. Moore came in 1912. During Moore's three-year tenure he was assisted by Dr. Lee S. Huizenga, who was also an ordained minister, did much of the field work, and took charge of the hospital when Moore left in 1915. Dr. Jacob D. Mulder came to head the hospital from 1916-1922, after which he left to take charge of what would later be known as Pine Rest Christian Hospital. Dr. Ernest H. Beernink, from Muskegon, succeeded Mulder in 1922 and served until 1926 when nurses Jennie Vander Veen, Sena Voss, Grace Bode, Alette Rus, or

Gertrude Oranje took charge for one year.

In 1927 Dr. Richard H. Pousma, officially a medical missionary assigned to the China field, accepted a temporary assignment to the hospital at Rehoboth. The arrangement soon became permanent, and eventually Pousma served at Rehoboth for fourteen years. An able, energetic, creative doctor and missionary, Pousma worked tirelessly to build up the medical practice at the Christian Reformed Church's first and major mission field.

Richard Hettema Pousma was born in 1893 in Paterson, New Jersey, to Peter and Mamie Hettema Pousma, the oldest of six children. Mamie Pousma died in 1904 at the age of thirty-three during the birth of their sixth child, who died two months later of respiratory failure. After an eighth-grade elementary education in Christian schools—at Amity Street and North 4<sup>th</sup> Street Christian in Paterson—Richard Pousma took courses in stenography and bookkeeping at McChesney Business College, also in Paterson. This led to three months of work as a stenographer and bookkeeper in a railroad office, followed by two and one-half years of employment in Passaic, New Jersey, with the New York Telephone Company.

Sometime during these teenage years Pousma decided to study for the

ministry. He enrolled in the fall of 1909 in the seminary preparatory course at John Calvin Junior College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. After completing the four-year preparatory course and two years of college-level work, Pousma was admitted to the Theological School (later Calvin Theological Seminary) of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in 1915. After completing two of the three years of theological study, he left Michigan for Texas to serve as business manager and religious and educational secretary for the Army YMCA during WW I.<sup>2</sup> He returned after the war and graduated from Calvin Seminary and married Ollie Heyns in 1919.

He then took two years of pre-medical studies at the University of Chicago and was admitted to Rush Medical College, also in Chicago.

*Peter DeBoer retired from Calvin College as a professor in education, though his career began as a historian. In retirement, one of his research interests has been the life of Rev. Dr. Richard H. Pousma.*

After graduating, Pousma interned in Grand Rapids at Butterworth Hospital, finishing his preparatory medical studies in the spring of 1926. Installed as a medical missionary to China at the First CRC of Grand Haven, Michigan, and with the support of both Grand Haven CRC congregations, he, his wife and their first child, Yvonne, were off to China via Chicago, Denver, Gallup/Rehoboth, the Grand Canyon, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. They sailed on *President Wilson* for the Hawaiian Islands and Japan,

mission field, Kamps as pastor at Rehoboth and Pousma as superintendent of the hospital. Dr. Henry Beets, director of missions and secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions, arranged for the two Grand Haven congregations to continue their financial support of the doctor.

## The Administrative System

Administrative reporting lines on the mission field were complex. The heads of the various mission stations, like Tohatchi or Crownpoint, were to

once a year. The missionaries were required to write reports to the director of missions, at least quarterly, though some wrote more often. Sometimes these were quite personal, attempting to influence a certain decision or action. Occasionally these "end runs" were accepted; sometimes they were rejected and re-directed back to the General Conference for consideration.

There was a further complication to the reporting process. Ordained missionaries, unlike their unordained coworkers, had to be officially called by a church or group of churches. These individuals would sometimes circumvent the General Conference, the director of missions, and the board, and look for resolution of a matter in dispute via their calling church(es), and through the church(es), or as individuals, make appeals to the denomination's highest court, the synod.

At Rehoboth there was yet a further complication. Given the complexity of the operation at that location, before matters could go to the General Conference they would have to be aired in a cabinet. The Rehoboth cabinet, throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, consisted of Jacob Bosscher, officially the manager-superintendent-business manager; Renzina Stob, principal of the school; and Pousma as head of the hospital. In the middle 1930s the cabinet was enlarged to include the pastor of the Rehoboth church. By 1938 the cabinet was dissolved, giving greater independence to those who headed the local church, the hospital, and the elementary school.

Further, Pousma was adept at taking his message directly to the denomination's constituency by writing articles that not only described conditions on the field but often contained explicit or implicit requests for aid. Newsy articles often were solicited from missionaries for publica-



*Dedication of the Rehoboth Hospital in 1910. All photos from: Archives, Calvin College.*

before debarking at Shanghai and, by river boat, moving up the Yangtze to Nanking for a year of study at the Union Language School.<sup>3</sup>

Political, social, and military unrest interrupted the Pousmas' term of service as China became engulfed in a civil war. The situation became so unstable in 1927 that the Board of Missions decided to recall many of the missionaries.<sup>4</sup> The board "loaned" two of the recalled missionaries, Rev. Jacob R. Kamps and Pousma, to the Indian

bring their shared or corporate wishes to the attention of the General Conference, a kind of committee of the whole, with power to recommend action to the Board of Missions. After due deliberation by the General Conference, which met four or five times a year and usually at Rehoboth, issues went, with or without approval, via the minutes to the attention of the executive committee of the Board of Missions, which met every other month, or to the full board, which met

tion in the church papers by the director of missions. Pousma, given his penchant for writing, responded more diligently than many of the others, usually under the heading "Rehoboth Jottings." His informative pieces appeared frequently in the 1930s, often in tandem with Rev. L. P. Brink's "Indian Itemettes." Through these Pousma was able to shape opinion within the church about the mission field and its challenges.

When there was relative harmony, this fairly complicated administrative process tended to work fairly well. When difficulties and conflicts arose, the process often misfired so that those sitting, say, on the Board of Missions, could honestly wonder whether they were in charge.

### Improving the Hospital

At the very first meeting of the General Conference after the arrival of Pousma and Kamps, Pousma presented the immediate needs of the hospital: (1) that the basement of the hospital be finished, creating room for twelve more patients; (2) having a second floor built with six rooms and a bath for "three white girls" (i.e., nurses) and three Indian helpers; (3) asking the Board of Missions for \$2,000 immediately to get the work on the basement done "now." These requests were approved by the General Conference and sent to the board.<sup>5</sup> Pousma also suggested that more hogans be built on the Rehoboth property to house friends and relatives visiting the sick. The General Conference agreed to remodel the old hogan and build two new ones.<sup>6</sup>

This burst of energy stimulated a chain of events. When the executive

committee of the board asked of the General Conference and the Rehoboth cabinet: "Is it the best policy to concentrate on medical work at Rehoboth?" the cabinet countered with an aggressive program covering all the work at Rehoboth. First, the boarding school for grade pupils should continue, enrollment not to exceed 120. Also, a Bible training school (i.e., secondary education) for native workers (interpreters, evangelists, potential elders and deacons) was to be established and as their number increased, the number of elementary pupils was to decrease to stay within the 120 pupil limit. Second, Rehoboth must continue its hospital, large enough to accommodate fifty Indian and four "white" patients. All white patients, with the exception of mission employees, were to pay for medical services rendered. It was suggested that Indians should pay at least a moderate amount for their care. Third, religious work was to be given pre-eminence at Rehoboth. This included Sunday worship services, catechetical instruction of the boarding school pupils, a planned Bible training school, the hospital work, camp work,

and Bible teaching at several area schools, including the huge new boarding school intended for Fort Wingate. Fourth, an additional pastor would be needed for all this. Such plans called for about eight building projects, including two new homes at Rehoboth for pastors, a new well, a new gymnasium, a central heating plant, and an entirely new \$50,000 hospital. And fifth, the Rehoboth staff was to be authorized to write in the church papers to obtain the necessary funds for these projects. The Rehoboth pastor, not the doctor, was charged with providing religious care for the hospital patients.<sup>7</sup>

The optimistic Pousma thought that the hospital could become totally self-supporting in about five years. He had been assured by Gallup doctors that the Rehoboth hospital could easily designate forty beds for paying patients, when the income from just four beds would be almost enough to pay the budget. And, given the reputation that the Rehoboth hospital already enjoyed, Pousma was sure that the Indians, to avoid a government hospital, would be willing to pay fifty cents a day toward the cost of their



*Dr. Jacob D. Mulder visiting patients at their hogan in 1918. Mulder later took charge of Pine Rest Christian Hospital, south of Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

care. Until the hospital was fully self-supporting, Pousma, ever the promoter, suggested that mission friends be invited to underwrite a hospital bed for \$100 per year; only \$500 annually from a wealthy supporter could provide constant care for



*Dr. Richard Pousma pictured in 1940.*

ten sick Indian infants or small children.<sup>8</sup>

All of this was approved by the General Conference and the proposal was sent to the Board of

Missions. Work on the various projects was to begin in the summer of 1928, to be completed by the fall of 1929. Pousma, whose go-getter spirit pervaded nearly every aspect of these initiatives, was chosen to represent the General Conference at the annual board meeting in June 1928.

At a special session of the executive committee in October 1928—more than a year before the crash of the financial markets and the onset of the Great Depression—Secretary Beets looked over the list of expenditures for Rehoboth and questioned how the church could pay for all of this. He noted that above and beyond the \$90,000 needed to operate the Indian field, he had Indian field requests that totaled about \$150,000, which equaled an assessment of about \$7 per CRC family. In contrast the China mission field was costing only \$1 per family.<sup>9</sup>

In the early 1928 General Conference meeting, Rev. Jacob Bolt of Crownpoint, New Mexico, deplored the “dilly-dallying” of the board, since

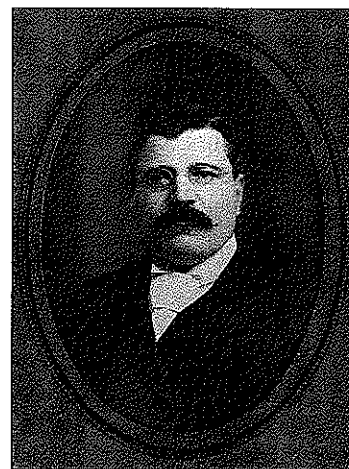
no formal action had been taken to change Pousma’s temporary status to a permanent one. Because he was on loan to the Indian field, technically he could be recalled for China service at any time. To Bolt this uncertain status was an injustice to the doctor and not fair to the Indian field, particularly since the doctor “has a heart for the Indian, and loves the work among the Indians.” The General Conference endorsed the letter, and recommended as a sort of after-thought that Rev. Kamps be given a permanent appointment for similar reasons.<sup>10</sup>

The problem with enacting these personnel proposals was that funding for the domestic and foreign fields designated and loaning staff was the only means to circumvent these limits. It wasn’t until the late spring of 1931 that Classis Hackensack in New Jersey indicated its willingness to underwrite the salary of Pousma. And it wasn’t until May 1936 that Classis Hackensack extended a “call” to Pousma as medical missionary among the Indians in New Mexico. He was duly installed as the missionary at the Madison Avenue CRC, in Paterson, New Jersey, in the late summer of 1937, ten years after the loan arrangement had begun.<sup>11</sup>

His proposed \$50,000 fifty-bed hospital, modeled in size after the Presbyterian hospital at Ganado, Arizona, never came to pass. But the young doctor was resourceful in getting what he could, given the circumstances. In June 1928, he received permission from the board to remodel the hospital basement so that there would be a separate room for contagious cases. By May 1930, he presented a proposal to the General Conference regarding financial support from the U.S. Government for the Rehoboth hospital. Indian agents, he said, have received instructions to pay \$2.50 per day for each patient referred to the hospital, provided the

total does not exceed \$2,000 per quarter.<sup>12</sup>

At the same meeting Pousma presented an elaborate proposal for a permanent building committee for the entire Indian field. The committee was to consist of five members, one a reliable contractor from one of the supporting churches to serve as a construction adviser for the entire Indian mission field. The committee was to meet at each mission station during March or April each year. After the board had authorized major new construction, this committee would approve locations, plans and specifications, and, if the work was to be done under contract, would specify the



*Rev. Henry Beets was the head of missions for the Christian Reformed Church when Pousma agreed to serve at the Rehoboth Hospital.*

contractor(s). By major new construction, Pousma meant buildings, heating and lighting systems, wells, reservoirs, drainage systems, devices for disposal of sewage, irrigation projects, new roads, new sidewalks, etc. The vote was close, but it failed 5-7; however, the General Conference decided to forward the entire proposal on to the board, anyway.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile work at the hospital continued, sometimes at a frenetic pace. For January 1934, Pousma reported a total of eighty-five Indian

patients in a hospital built for only forty Indian patients. Several prospective patients had to be turned away. An executive committee motion to spend \$10,000 to improve the Rehoboth hospital was tabled on account of the dire economic situation.<sup>14</sup> In March 1935 Pousma read to the General Conference a letter addressed to the Board of Missions in which he spelled out some urgent needs at the hospital, including a new laboratory, a special room for very sick Indian patients, an examination room, and more rooms for pay patients. His remedy lay in moving the nurses from their three rooms, and the Indian helpers from the sun porch of the hospital into a new home for the nurses and the others, in size and appearance similar to the proposed hospital. He thought it could be built for about \$8,000. He wanted the Board of Missions to be responsible for half the cost, though he offered to help raise the board's half. The other half he thought he could raise by borrowing the money and repaying it from hospital receipts, since "each additional private room we can get in our Rehoboth hospital is easily worth \$1,000 a year in receipts from pay patients."<sup>15</sup>

The General Conference postponed action for one meeting, but then decided to recommend that the time was at hand to obtain funds for a new hospital, especially since Rehoboth Mission Hospital was twenty-five years old. They suggested a new hospital fund drive as a silver anniversary gift by the denomination. Since the Board of Missions had already instituted salary reductions for workers on the field and was paying them only 75 percent of their reduced salaries, with the 25 percent coming at the end of the year "if possible,"<sup>16</sup> the General Conference's action may have been a polite way to hold off the doctor's aggressive pursuit of improvements



*Dr. Pousma visiting a tubercular patient in the field.*

during the difficult economic times.

In the summer of 1935 the Board of Missions gave its permission to move ahead with some changes, short of a completely new hospital, as long as the money was first raised. Pousma's graphic appeal in regard to the comfort of the nurses may have helped convince the board. In his initial letter he had noted that "it would be a reason for great gratitude on the part of our hospital staff to be able to sleep without having to listen to the weeping of babies, to the groans of the sick, and to the cries of the delivering mother . . ."<sup>17</sup> The enterprising doctor, later that fall, thanked the board for the privilege of using the old parsonage as a home for the nurses, instead of their living in the hospital itself. Funds for renovating the parsonage for the use of the nurses came from revenue received from white patients.

Having achieved one goal, Pousma moved to another. Early in the following year he requested of the Board of Missions that a radio system be in-

stalled in the hospital to aid the religious work. Due to the successful funding of the parsonage improvements, the board decided that up to six rooms at the hospital could be set aside for white patients, including missionaries.<sup>18</sup> But sentiment was already growing among some of the Indian missionaries and within the denomination that the hospital's principal mission was to serve the medical and spiritual needs of Indian patients, and that using the facilities for white paying patients, in spite of the potential for revenue, was contrary to this mission.

In 1938 Pousma proposed that a part of the hospital be remodeled. It needed an enlarged kitchen with storeroom, and a new x-ray room. In early 1939, Pousma's hospital report to the executive committee noted that there were unused funds from the previous year's building fund. He felt that four rooms ought to be added to the hospital. His request was granted, but by then the new director of missions, John De Korne, was already

noting problems on the Indian field causing "headaches and heartaches."<sup>19</sup> In November 1939, the bids for the four rooms came in too high to suit the executive committee and eventually the matter was put on hold until the white-paying-patient controversy was resolved.<sup>20</sup>

In the early fall of 1940, when Synod 1940 had already decided that within a year the white-paying-patient policy of the hospital must cease, and a host of other controversies were swirling about Rehoboth, Pousma calmly reported that a new addition to the hospital had been almost completed, comprising an enlarged kitchen and storeroom, plus sleeping quarters for three Navajo girls (nurse's assistants), and a fine bathroom. It was something, he commented, that was needed for a long time.<sup>21</sup>

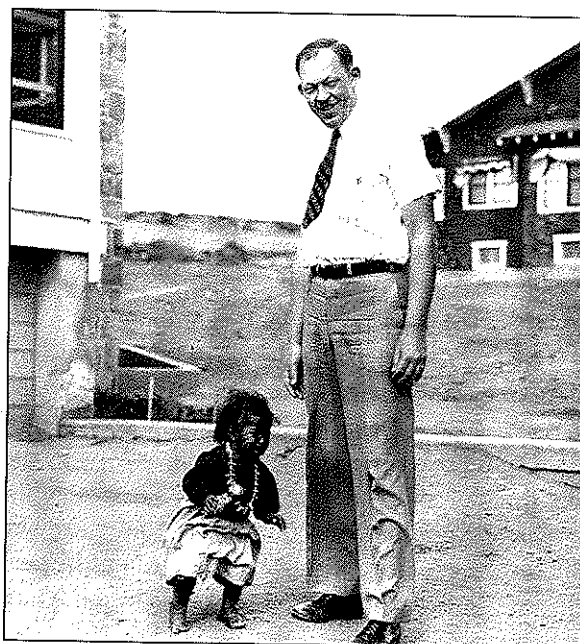
Finally the Board of Missions in the spring of 1941, apparently fairly confident that the decision of Synod 1940 to end the white-paying-patient policy would be reversed, requested authority from synod to build a new home for Rehoboth's nurses at a cost not to exceed \$7,500. But by then Pousma had resigned as superintendent of the hospital and the matter was postponed.

Pousma never got the new hospital that he dearly wanted. But given the dreadful financial conditions of the times, he achieved a great deal in terms of bricks and mortar. But there were needs on the field besides those of the hospital—an improved parsonage, a better chapel, a laundry room, a central heating plant, a new well—that were not met, or not quickly being met. As a place of healing; where mothers delivered babies; where contagious diseases were isolated; where the incidence of trachoma in school children could be measurably reduced; the hospital was a powerful fundraising agent compared to the less concrete, less countable, work of

preaching and teaching, where at best, it often seemed, one could only pray fervently that the Lord would give the increase. The relative ease with which Pousma could raise money may have induced some envy.

## The Many-Sided Practitioner

Pousma did not merely raise money for the hospital and direct much of its physical growth; he also managed the institution, assisted by up to four nurses, a secretary, three or more nurse's assistants, a housekeeper,



*Dr. Pousma and a young patient in front of the Rehoboth Hospital. The doctor's house is on the background.*

laundress, a part-time lab technician, and part-time carpenters and other repairmen. In spite of the help of others, managing must have presented major challenges. Except for vacations or other trips away from the mission field, he was always on call. He must have had remarkable stamina and good health. There is no mention in the records of his ever having been ill, in spite of working with people suffering from contagious diseases. Added to the medical challenges were the patient record-keeping and the general bookkeeping. And he was the

pharmacist, not only responsible for prescribing and dispensing drugs to the patients at the hospital but, under guidelines drawn up by a committee of three which he headed, issuing medications to the missionaries for dispensing in their field work.

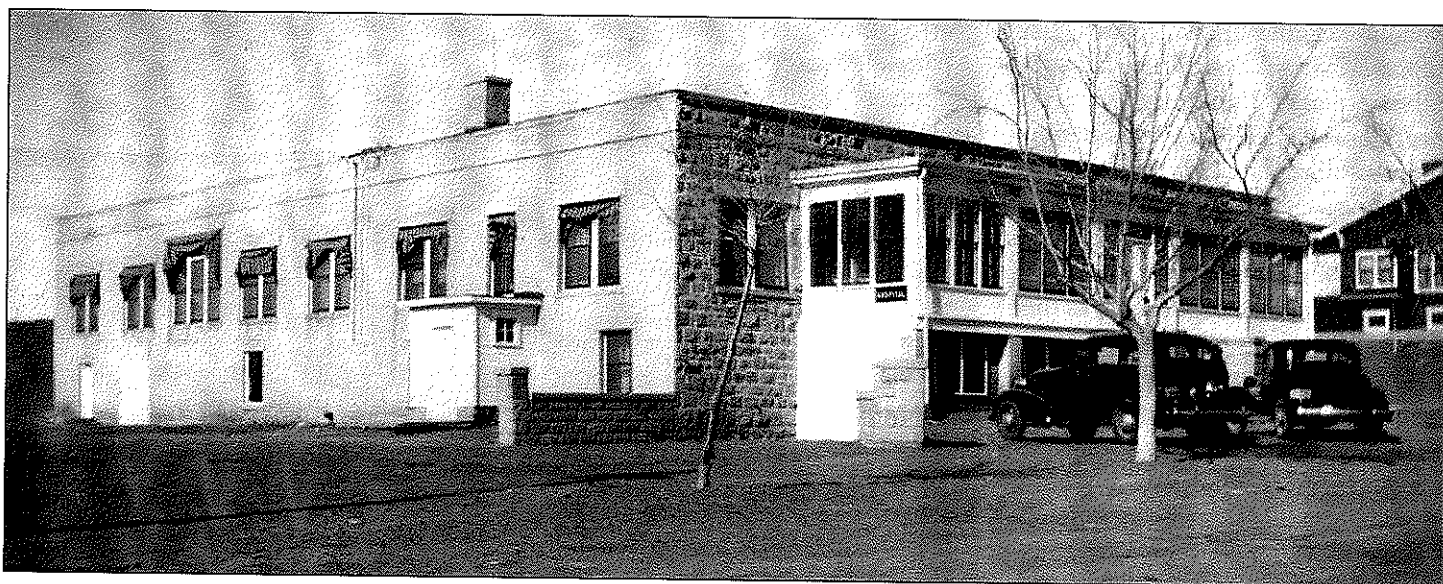
The challenge of managing the hospital should be qualified somewhat. The lines of responsibility between Jacob Bosscher as the business manager of the Rehoboth mission and Pousma as superintendent at the hospital were evolving during the 1930s. The doctor

pushed the evolution hard in the direction of relative independence for the hospital. For example, in 1931 Pousma requested that all hospital records be maintained in the hospital office, including the financial accounts. This control allowed Pousma to later report that hospital earnings would have been sufficient to pay all the bills through September 15, 1931, plus a surplus of \$500, but that Bosscher used the surplus to pay expenses in other departments.<sup>22</sup>

In 1935 the board reminded the doctor that if there were serious changes in building plans for the

hospital, he should be sure to check with the Rehoboth cabinet and the General Conference before proceeding. Pousma apparently needed reminding.

The most explicit difference of approach between Pousma and Bosscher occurred in the spring of 1937 at the General Conference meeting over the hospital's relationship to the school and the industrial department of Rehoboth. The chief item of contention between the two men related to the care and upkeep of the buildings. Bosscher's plan called for an equitable allowance for repairs



*The Rehoboth Hospital that Pousma attempted to improve with proceeds from charging white patients.*

and upkeep, as determined by the auditor of the Board of Missions, a Mr. Dreyer. Individuals like the doctor or Renzina Stob at the school, for example, were to have the say as to how the money was spent, but all money for labor and material should be dispersed through Bosscher's office. Outside help could be hired, but Bosscher was to have charge of all work and decide on the fitness of the material and labor. Further, no remodeling or building changes, such as wiring, could be carried out except under supervision of Bosscher. Bosscher's plan went on to cover specific hospital matters that needed clarification, including the accounting procedures for meals supplied to hospital patients by the mission kitchen, the cost of hospitalizing school children, the cost of the meals of hospital employees, the cost of fuel for heating and hot water, plus laundry and freight expenses.<sup>23</sup>

Pousma's plan was less comprehensive. He proposed that the doctor/hospital superintendent have control over the hospital, the nurses' home, and the doctor's home, since they were used exclusively for the medical work: He would be responsible for all repairs

and additions to these buildings. The manager, Bosscher, would assist the doctor with advice, time, and equipment, while the men, Peter Hoogezand and an Indian assistant—already hired by the hospital and on the job—would be willing to help out elsewhere at Rehoboth if they were able and if their help was needed.<sup>24</sup>

At its next annual meeting, the Board of Missions accepted a proposal by Dreyer that to avoid confusion and conflicting opinion regarding repairs, additions, and replacement of buildings, henceforth requests be sent directly to the executive committee and paid by the board treasurer.<sup>25</sup> This should have pleased Pousma, given his ability to effectively persuade the various administrative groups. But the Board of Missions also adopted an elaborate accounting system introduced by Dreyer that was intended to solve some of the bookkeeping problems for the entire Indian field. Via this system in the fall of 1936 the executive committee suddenly became aware of a large debt of \$5,945 owed by the mission to the Gallup Mercantile. A sub-committee recommended that the board employ an accountant to do a complete audit, and especially

examine the books of both the manager and the hospital superintendent. There was no assigning of blame to either person for this debt, but the audit did result in a more detailed accounting system. This was probably more inline with what Bosscher had proposed than Pousma.

An indication of the inner working of the hospital can be garnered from several accounts. One is by the doctor himself, one by Rev. L. P. Brink on a visit to the hospital, and one by a nurse shortly after she finished a short-term assignment.

In "Come With Me to My Corner of the Navajo Mission Field,"<sup>26</sup> Pousma noted that Rehoboth was a little town of twelve buildings with two hundred inhabitants. The front steps of the hospital led to the porch home to convalescing patients. Beyond the porch was the doctor's office with its sectional book cases. The books, he said, were his "consultants," for not having fellow physicians nearby with whom to consult, as would be true in big cities, these books helped him especially with unusual illnesses.

In the children's ward, he noted, every crib was occupied and each child had a different ailment: one with

pneumonia, another with a tubercular hip, another a tubercular spine; still others suffered from eczema, or a broken leg. One child, only four months old, was an orphan being fed until he could eat the food that his Indian relatives would feed him. Next came the men's ward with seven patients. The women's ward was the largest room, with eleven beds. It contained a piano and song books, as well as a bookcase filled with Christian literature, so that all large-group meetings could be held there. There were three private rooms for missionaries and for other white patients; the white patients paid four dollars a day for service. The operating room was bright and fairly well-equipped, though a bit cramped. The nursery was kept spotless by the nurses. There were three white nurses and four Indian assistants who were kept very busy with forty patients and twenty-four-hour service.

He went on to describe additional duties besides caring for the non-ambulatory patients. There were school children who came in with sore eyes, cuts and bruises, eyeglasses that needed fitting, and a broken arm to be put in splints. In addition, each Tuesday the doctor traveled fifty miles north to Naschitti, where fifteen to twenty more Indian patients would be waiting. More often than not they needed teeth pulled. Then it was off to Sheep Springs, five miles farther north, to the trading store for a few more patients. The doctor rounded off his Tuesdays with some visits to Navajo hogans with patients who were too ill to come to any of the clinics.

In his account, L. P. Brink noted that after driving the 135 miles from Farmington he discovered that the doctor wasn't in, but off on the reservation some three miles away. Having been assured that the doctor would be back early in the afternoon, Brink decided to wait. Once the doctor

arrived, one party after another claimed his attention. Brink decided to wait some more. Meanwhile an old car drove up. Two Indians got out and asked whether the

doctor was in. They had an old Navajo grandmother in the car. While herding some unruly sheep, she had fallen on a sharp rock and seriously cut herself. The doctor asked if Brink would be interested in seeing the operation. This old woman's leg was "a sight to behold," according to Brink. It was cut to the bone, a deep and bloody gash about six inches long. But attending to such wounds seemed like a routine affair to Pousma. The patient was placed on the table. Nurse Alice Vedders sat on a stool at the head end and administered ether. The other nurse, Aileen Dobben, assisted the doctor. The wound was cleansed, every part thoroughly examined, every little foreign particle removed, and then sewn up. The doctor said that if all went well, the patient could leave in about five days. Brink said he was informed that this woman had always opposed the Gospel, and continually found fault with the missionary message. He said he hoped that her stay at this Christian hospital would be a blessing to her, and wondered whether these acts of Christian kindness might change her mind and her attitude.<sup>27</sup>

Johanna A. Kromminga served for two one-year terms as nurse at the Rehoboth hospital, and also gave an insider's look at the hospital opera-



*A patient and relatives arrive at Rehoboth Hospital in 1927.*

tions. She reported that the operations were performed just as they were in city hospitals, except that Pousma had no interns for aides; he had to train the nurses to help him instead. Every kind of operation that would be performed in city hospitals, was done at Rehoboth except for "bone work." She revealed that the Navajos brought in and took away patients when it pleased them, despite protests from the staff. All the nurses, and the doctor, and Frank Peshlakai (a young Indian interpreter) took their turns in telling a Gospel story in the women's ward every night. Simple presentations of the plan of salvation, these stories were based on lessons found in old Sunday school charts. The charts were hung each morning, and in the evening the hospital personnel would explain the picture.<sup>28</sup>

As a strategist for Indian missions, Pousma believed that a significant part of missionary work involved traveling across the mission field visiting homes (hogans), generally called "camp work." For some missionaries, this was the most effective type of work being done on the Indian field. Some went so far as to suggest doing away with Christian boarding schools and Christian hospitals until the natives themselves should be able to organize and maintain them. With this the

doctor disagreed. He did believe that, given the vast territory (approximately thirty square miles) to which a missionary on the field was often assigned, he or she would be fortunate to get to each hogan twice a year.

Nevertheless, the doctor considered camp work of value, but only if it served as a springboard for more intensive missionary work. Camp work, he thought, could intensify mission work if field chapels could be erected wherever Indians were concentrated. These relatively inexpensive structures could be built by the Indians themselves, who as shepherders lived too scattered to attend services regularly at the established mission stations. It would take only minimal financial aid from the mission

were many Indians who cared little about the ancient religions, but who attended these festivals chiefly to meet widely-scattered friends and relatives, and enjoy each other's company. Therefore, if missionaries were opposed to the religious ceremonials, they should propose alternative events to promote Christian sociability.<sup>30</sup>

He also felt field hospitals, or clinics, were important and that camp workers needed basic medical training. Because of a poor diet, inadequate clothing, and uncleanness, the Indian suffered from trachoma, tuberculosis, severe diarrhea, bronchopneumonia, and various social diseases.

But, said the doctor, the best missionary work is done in the

schools. He noted the value to the school children of living in the midst of a Christian community like Rehoboth for nine months of the year. He spoke of the value of

prayer, Bible reading, catechetical instruction, of Sunday school and church attendance. But true to his CRC convictions, Pousma believed that Christian instruction was of foremost importance. Suggestions by some missionaries that the so-called secular instruction of the Indian could be left to the government, as long as the missionaries were permitted to give up to two hours of religious instruction each week at government schools, he dismissed.<sup>31</sup> Pousma's greatest

regret was that there was not yet a Christian high school at Rehoboth. He argued that holding the Indian youth four years longer in a Christian high school would help them become future leaders in an indigenous Navajo church.<sup>32</sup>

Pousma also continued to pursue personal interests and was able to use them for the mission cause. He had grown up in a musical family and continued his music in his leisure hours. His father, Peter, was the organist for some years at the Prospect Park, New Jersey, CRC. Richard Pousma combined his interests in music with public speaking at Calvin College, where he was a member of the Glee Club and known for his rich baritone voice and his great success as a reader. While a student, Pousma likely sang with a Calvin chorus cobbled together from a variety of musical groups, to perform major works like Christmas and Easter cantatas. It was cantatas such as these that Pousma resurrected out in Indian country.

The Indians quickly gave him a name: "Hatale Nez."<sup>33</sup> Early in the thirties Pousma led a chorus of fifty-six singers, "mostly Navajo," in the cantata "David." The group performed at Rehoboth, Tohatchi, Fort Wingate, Zuni, Crownpoint, Gallup, and Fort Defiance. The doctor thought choral music was of great value both for the chorus members and the Indian audiences.<sup>34</sup> By 1937 Pousma had begun a new venture in choral music. He noted that the Rehoboth choir, which in past years had sung cantatas at Rehoboth and at various government schools, was now a smaller group. They were practicing hymns, old and new, each Thursday evening, and broadcast via a Gallup radio station directly from Pousma's living room.<sup>35</sup>



*Patients in the hospital porch.*

for materials, like the Bethlehem (New Mexico) chapel built in 1930-31 for about \$200. Pousma's hope was that indigenous churches would result from these field chapels.<sup>29</sup>

Pousma recommended greater efforts to satisfy the "craving of the Christian Indian for sociability." This need was intensified after missionary camp workers discouraged Indian converts from attending native festivals, which could last from one to eight days. Pousma argued that there

## Endnotes

1. The article is extracted from a larger manuscript "Mission Nearly Impossible: Richard H. Pousma, the Rehoboth Hospital, and Controversy on the Indian Mission Field," a copy of which is available in the Archives of Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, hereafter cited as Archives, Calvin College.
2. Pousma was ordained into the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church on 21 November 1917, prior to his YMCA service as a chaplain in Texas, after having completed two years of theological study. In spite of being already ordained, he returned to complete the third and final year of the curriculum.
3. Details of this year are captured in a diary that Pousma kept, published as *An Eventful Year in the Orient* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1927). Most of the diary had already appeared in *The Banner*, from 8 October 1926 to 24 June 1927. With Pousma in China were Rev. John C. De Korne, Rev. Jacob R. Kamps, and Rev. Nicholas De Vries. All would become important players in the Rehoboth hospital controversy in the 1930s and early 1940s.
4. See Henry Beets, *Toiling and Trusting* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Printing Co., 1940), p. 235 ff.
5. General Conference minutes, 8 September 1927, Art. 12, Archives, Calvin College.
6. Ibid., Art. 13.
7. General Conference minutes, 15 March 1928, Art. 7, Archives, Calvin College.
8. Ibid.
9. Executive Committee minutes, 16 October 1928, Archives, Calvin College.
10. General Conference minutes, 15 March 1928, Art. 14, Archives, Calvin College.
11. Executive Committee minutes, 7 May 1931, Art. 11; General Conference minutes, 26 May 1936, Art. 20; and *The Banner*, 5 August 1937, p. 741, Archives, Calvin College.
12. General Conference minutes, 15 May 1930, Art. 14, Archives, Calvin College.
13. Ibid, Art. 24.
14. Executive Committee minutes, 23 May 1934, Art. 23, Archives, Calvin College.
15. General Conference minutes, 14 March 1935, Art. 11, Archives, Calvin College.
16. Board of Missions minutes 6-7 June 1934, Art. 22, Archives, Calvin College.
17. General Conference minutes, 14 March 1935, Art. 11, Archives, Calvin College.
18. Board of Missions minutes June 1937, Art. 38, Archives, Calvin College.
19. Missionary Correspondence, De Korne to the Executive Committee, 30 March 1939, Archives, Calvin College.
20. Executive Committee minutes, 16 Nov. 1939, Art. 176; Executive Committee minutes, 23 May 1940, Art. 304, Archives, Calvin College.
21. "Rehoboth Jottings," *The Banner*, 27 September 1940: 908-909.
22. Executive Committee minutes, 6 November 1931, Art. 8, Archives, Calvin College.
23. General Conference minutes, 23 April 1937, Archives, Calvin College.
24. Ibid. The fact that Hoogezand and the assistant were already employed by the hospital indicates that this discussion of authority was in response to action by Pousma.
25. Board of Missions minutes 24 June 1934, Art. 40, Archives, Calvin College.
26. Beets, Henry, et al., "Navaholand and Zunitown: Christian Reformed Missions AD 1934" (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Printing Co., 1934), pp. 7-10.
27. *Missionary Monthly*, September 1935: 264-265.
28. *Missionary Monthly*, December 1938: 408-410.
29. *The Banner*, 11 December 1931: 112-13.
30. Ibid, 31 January 1939: 44.
31. Ibid, 26 January 1939: 78-79.
32. "Our Mission Schools," *The Banner*, 26 January 1939: 78-79.
33. As Rev. L.P. Brink explained, "Hatale" is the Navajo name for medicine man, and the name really means singer, for singing is the major part of the medicine man's practice. And "Nez" means tall, since Pousma was 6' 3". But the name singer "fits him well since he delighted in singing and especially in teaching others to sing missions." As reported by Beets in *Toiling and Trusting*, pp. 73-74.
34. *The Banner*, 27 May 1932: 514-515.

# “Richard H. Pousma and the Imbroglia at Rehoboth”<sup>1</sup>

Peter P. DeBoer

During the late 1930s a series of controversies repeatedly swirled through the mission staff and administration without satisfactory resolution and therefore eventually reached the synod of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) for adjudication in 1940 and again in 1941. One of these centered on the status of the Rehoboth Mission Hospital on the Indian mission field and the role of its medical missionary superintendent, Dr. Richard Pousma.

## Fundamental Issues

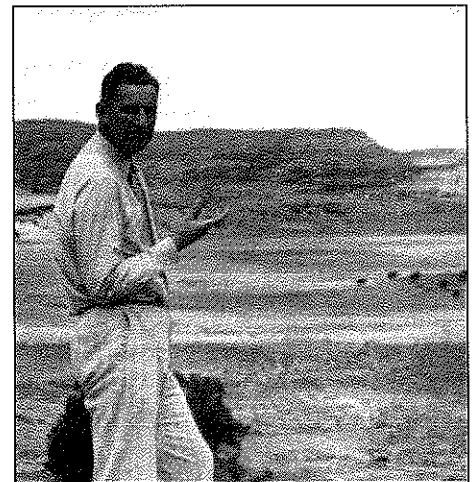
Seemingly at the center of the Pousma matter were the white-paying-patient policy he had developed to underwrite hospital expenses not provided through the established denominational channel and that he was allowed to operate a private practice from his office to supplement his salary. Criticism of the former laid down the principle that all financial support for the mission work ought to come from the voluntary gifts of God's people, and not, in part, from fees paid by non-Indians into the hospital treasury. Criticism of the latter involved a variety of arguments, the most compelling of which was to assert that the doctor was so consumed with his white patients and his private practice that he was distracted from his medical responsibilities to Indians and missionaries. To the critics on the mission field the white-paying-patient policy and the private practice seemed intertwined and inseparable. Both should be eliminated.

Related to the above was the criticism that the doctor did not tend

to think of white patients as mission subjects. They were there, the critics alleged, chiefly because the doctor maintained that their presence helped reduce the financial burden of supporting the hospital for the denomination, but they ought not to be the objects of deliberate efforts at gospel outreach. The critics also claimed that the doctor did not conceive of his work and that of his nurses as primarily evangelistic but medical.

## Criticism by Rev. Kamps

One divisive issue was the claim that the doctor was being reimbursed by the Board of Missions for miles traveled to visit private practice patients—



*Rev. Jacob R. Kamps served on the mission field for 36 years after a brief posting to China in 1926. All photos from: Archives, Calvin College.*

so-called “outcalls.” The complaint was that since these white patients had already paid for their outcalls, Pousma was in effect “double dipping” by billing the board for mileage incurred. A corollary to this was the allegation

that the doctor was not recording his mileage accurately, and therefore not reporting his mileage with the degree of attention to detail required. These criticisms began almost immediately after Pousma's appointment in 1927 and came initially from Rev. Jacob Kamps, who, like Pousma, had originally intended to work in China but was stationed on the Indian mission field, beginning in 1927.

Pousma received a salary of \$2,750 plus a house, arguably the best house at Rehoboth, while Kamps received \$2,000 and housing. Apparently the board's position was that as a medical doctor, Pousma should receive more pay, since he could have earned much more in private practice. Kamps had been in the Indian mission service only a month or so when he deduced that his mileage allowance was not adequate for the job and asked for an increase to 10,000 miles a year.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the board reduced his request to 8,000 miles, marking the beginning of considerable tension between the board and Kamps over the mileage allowance.<sup>3</sup>

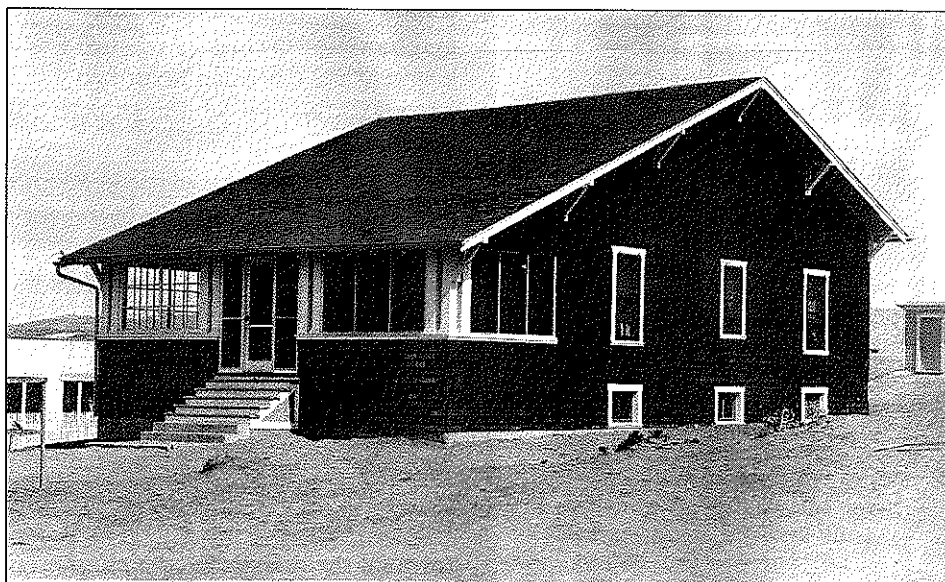
In May 1930 Pousma requested additional mileage, which was already more than that of Kamps. The doctor claimed that his mileage total for the previous seventeen months came to about 34,000 miles because of the white-paying-patient policy and an agreement with the U.S. Government. He calculated that only one-fourth of the total was for non-missionary driving and wrote, "Now that we are receiving government support we shall have to be more generous about getting patients, bringing them home, and notifying relatives in the event of death. All this means considerably more mileage than we have thus far been receiving." Having already been granted an allowance of 12,000 miles for 1930, the doctor asked for 3,000 more, especially since he was maintaining two cars at the hospital.<sup>4</sup> The

General Conference approved the increase. For 1931, the General Conference approved 10,000 miles for Kamps, while Pousma received a total of 18,000—12,000 miles for one car, and 6,000 miles for the other.

For 1932 the doctor received reimbursement for 18,000 miles, but Kamps, who sat on the conference, felt compelled to record his negative vote. He really didn't object to the mileage

even in an emergency, given the presence of other similar cars at Rehoboth.<sup>5</sup>

In 1936 Kamps reminded the Board of Missions that Pousma received \$480 for 12,000 miles of "mission travel." Kamps reported that Pousma had told him that all his out-of-office calls were personal. Since Pousma received pay for the calls to such patients, reasoned Kamps, the mileage must be personal.



*The Pousma's home at Rehoboth.*

as such. Instead, he questioned the multiple vehicles. He noted that Pousma, about two years before, had obtained money for an ambulance from one of the Women's Missionary Unions. At the time Pousma had claimed, according to Kamps, that a touring car (a sedan) was not suitable for carrying patients, but received no mileage allowance increase for the ambulance. Later he asked for more mileage but subsequently withdrew that request. With the advent of the new government policy, he repeated his request, and it was granted. In the fall of 1930 the doctor traded in the ambulance and bought another sedan. Kamps didn't object to the mileage so much as the fact that the doctor had invested in two cars of the same type when one would have been sufficient,

That is, the doctor's private practice mileage was being paid, at least in part, by the board through the mileage allowance. In effect, the doctor was again double dipping. Kamps told Pousma that the acceptance of this money was "dishonest." Pousma replied that Kamps did not understand the process.

The issue continued to simmer for years. In a letter to Henry Beets,<sup>6</sup> then secretary of the board, Kamps insisted that he did not subscribe to the way the doctor accounted for mileage. According to Kamps, the doctor's monthly request was a mere approximation of his actual mileage, of which he kept no record. Pousma claimed this arrangement was agreeable to Rev. John Dolfin, the board treasurer. The doctor had also stated that all 12,000

miles for which he received allowance was "related to mission work." But Kamps added, "[Pousma] did not state how closely related." Kamps concluded that either Pousma was taking advantage of the board, or the board showed favoritism by permitting this arrangement.<sup>7</sup>

Kamps also disapproved of a decision by the executive committee of the board approving a gift about to be given to the Rehoboth hospital by the young people's society at Ripon, California, contrary to official policy.<sup>8</sup> Kamps remained particularly upset about this issue because the board, other than referring Kamps's protests to the budget committee of the board, did little or nothing about the matter. When Kamps brought it up for discussion at a General Conference meeting in 1939 he was amazed and disgusted that Pousma was "hailed as a big man and those who objected to Dr. Pousma's actions were accused of bringing up 'small stuff.'" <sup>9</sup> For Kamps all this was clear evidence of Pousma receiving preferential treatment from the board.

It was all too much for Kamps and he offered his resignation to take effect on 1 August 1939 in regard to the Rehoboth church, and on 1 December 1939 in regard to his camp work assignment. He added, rather bitterly, that he saw no hope for a continuation of his protest because "when anyone in whom I have as much confidence as I had in you Secretary De Korne fails so completely to see my point of view, I consider it hopeless." On the same day Kamps wrote to the supporting church in Drenthe, Michigan, urging them to arrange with De Korne his resignation from the work at Rehoboth.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of the impending resignation by Kamps, the executive committee affirmed that Pousma had not been granted an excessive auto allowance and asked De Korne to confer with Kamps in order to reach a settlement.<sup>11</sup>

De Korne made some progress with Kamps, but dissatisfaction continued in regard to special gifts and the board's decision in regard to Pousma's mileage. The 1 December 1939 deadline for the resignation, however, came and went.<sup>12</sup>

By the spring of 1940, Kamps did succeed in getting the investigation for which he had repeatedly asked. An inspection committee met with him and with Pousma, individually and collectively, to get to the heart of the matter. This committee reported that Kamps had two charges against Pousma. Pousma had been paid for 12,000 miles when he did not drive 12,000 miles for mission purposes, and that Pousma had failed to comply with the board requirement that missionaries file an itemized account of their mission mileage. In response, Pousma admitted that he had failed to comply with the rules of the board. Kamps also had two charges against the board. The inspection committee agreed with Kamps that the board was partial toward Pousma, since it did not require of him what it required of others and suggested that the board should admit its failure. The second charge was that the board or executive committee, when informed of these matters, paid little heed.<sup>13</sup>

The executive committee disagreed with the inspection committee's report, concluding that Pousma's request for 12,000 miles was not excessive; his reports were sufficiently detailed and like the mileage reports of other missionaries; that the charge of partiality toward Pousma was untrue; and that they regretted that the board had been slow to respond to the protests of Kamps.<sup>14</sup> The full board supported the decision of the executive committee and declared that the case was closed.<sup>15</sup> Needless to say, Kamps was not pleased with this decision. With the support of the Drenthe consistory, he determined to appeal to synod in 1940.

### Criticism by Rev. De Vries

During his few years on the mission field, Rev. Nicholas De Vries also came to feel, as did Kamps, that the hospital policy was flawed. He pointed out that the policy, which permitted an ordained man (Pousma) to engage in purely medical and hence secular work with white-paying-patients, was in conflict with the Mission Order; that Pousma's private practice curtailed his usefulness as a medical missionary to the Navajos; that the white-patient policy burdened the nurses and staff and curtailed their usefulness; and that the grounds which the executive committee advanced for continuing the policy were not convincing.<sup>16</sup>

But De Vries added another criticism in his 1940 report to the Board of Missions. According to De Vries, near the end of the school year, a Navajo girl in a catechism class had asked him whether it was wrong to go to the movies. De Vries, in reply, asked her whether she would want to meet her Savior at His return in such a place? The following Sunday De Vries used the incident as an illustration in his evening sermon and emphatically condemned movie attendance, as the CRC Synod of 1928 had officially done. Pousma later spoke with De Vries about how his remarks would likely bring confusion to the minds of the students, since—the doctor



*Also formerly a missionary to China, Rev. Nicholas DeVries became one of several at Rehoboth who were critical of Pousma's practices.*

maintained—everybody there went to movies, including all the non-CRC preachers in Gallup, and even CRC missionaries when movies were shown in the government schools. According to De Vries, the doctor was convinced that there were good movies. De Vries disagreed. Somewhat later, when De Vries observed one of the hospital workers with a visitor attending the Gallup theater, he pleaded with her not to do so again. Subsequently she spoke with Pousma about this and, according to De Vries, received support from the doctor to continue attending.

The following Sunday, just before the regular Sunday afternoon broadcast, and in the presence of De Vries and his wife, Pousma asked this same hospital worker if she was going to see "Gone with the Wind." De Vries later confronted Pousma about the incident and intimated that he was undermining what De Vries was trying to build up. The doctor allegedly flew into a rage and poured abuse on De Vries, accusing him of being a "sneak and a spy," besides having a "damn rotten record" in Farmington, where De Vries had served before coming to Rehoboth.

At the next Rehoboth church consistory meeting, and in the presence of the visiting De Korne and two other inspectors from the Board of Missions, De Vries formally charged Pousma with encouraging movie attendance among the workers, making a mockery of De Vries's spiritual work, and using language unbecoming a minister of the Gospel. The consistory sustained De Vries's charges. When De Korne also told Pousma that he had been wrong, Pousma replied that if he had offended De Vries in talking to the hospital worker the way he did, he was sorry. But, according to De Vries, there was no admission that what he had done was wrong.

According to De Vries, Pousma, in the presence of the inspection committee, freely elaborated on his views of the movies. He criticized the hypocrisy of many CRC ministers who attend "when the coast is clear." He criticized H. J. Kuiper's recent editorials in *The Banner* on the movie question as "vituperative." He maintained that the cleanest place the Indians who visited Gallup could go to was the theater, since their other choices, unfortunately, were the brothel or the saloon.

Finally, De Vries maintained that he was writing all this to the board because charges were successfully brought against Pousma as a member of the Rehoboth congregation, but not as an ordained clergyman. Since Pousma's ministerial status rested with Madison Avenue CRC in Paterson (NJ), the Rehoboth consistory<sup>17</sup> had correctly decided that they had no jurisdiction over his doctrine and life. Before taking the matter further, De Vries wanted the board to consider the matter because Pousma was undermining the work on the mission field.

As with Kamps, De Vries's complaints did not fare well at the meetings of the board. The board advised De Vries not to appeal to Madison Avenue CRC, "since the matter was evidently closed in the Rehoboth consistory."<sup>18</sup> Of course, that consistory had simply pointed the matter to the appropriate body and had not responded to the complaints. In the board's formal report to synod, regarding De Vries, the board deplored the personal attacks, insinuations, and suspicions that De Vries had aroused; called attention to De Vries's charges, and declared them untrue; and then asked synod, in light of the above, whether De Vries ought to continue to serve on the mission field.<sup>19</sup> De Vries responded that since he was not satisfied with the board's answers to his grievances, he, like Kamps, would protest to synod.

### Criticism by Rev. Rikkers

Further criticism of Pousma came from Rev. Henry Rikkers, missionary at Shiprock, New Mexico. Rikkers had accepted a call to the Southwest in 1936, and voiced opposition to the possible appointment of Jacob C. Morgan to succeed Rev. L. P. Brink at Farmington. Morgan, a gifted Navajo, felt slighted that Rev. De Vries got the appointment, left the CRC, and accepted a leadership position with the Navajo Nation. Unfortunately, Rikkers bore the brunt of the

repercussions from this, especially after De Vries moved to Gallup.

Rikkers also charged that Pousma was carrying on a private practice on mission time. He added that this was the opinion of all the members



Rev. Henry Rikkers came to the mission field just as the controversy over Pousma's work was beginning to build.

of the General Conference. When De Korne insisted that the doctor practiced medicine privately during his leisure time, Rikkers said he couldn't fathom such a contention since it was widely known that "the doctor carries on his private practice during his regular office hours." He cited the overtures from three consistories on the Indian field to Classis California to "set aside present practices" at the Rehoboth hospital, as evidence of the attitudes of the missionaries.<sup>20</sup> In response, the executive committee, at its 7 March 1940 meeting, deplored the personal attacks from Rikkers and appointed a committee of three to draw up a letter to the board in regard to meddling in the work of the executive committee and the board by

the missionaries, especially Rikkers and De Vries.<sup>21</sup>

When the Board of Missions met in late May and early June 1940, with Rikkers present as the delegate from Classis California, they sustained none of his charges found in his 15 May 1940 letter. Also, they advised Rikkers that unless he changed, further service under the board was "impossible."<sup>22</sup> The board also protested to synod that Classis California had again chosen Rikkers as its official delegate to the board when the previous synod had agreed with the Board of Missions that it was not advisable for missionaries, or workers on the field, to serve as members of the board.<sup>23</sup> Rikkers, like De Vries and Kamps, thereupon decided to take his protest to synod.

### Troubles with Farmington-Toadlena

By late fall 1938, Pousma also had become the object of pointed criticism by the consistory of Farmington-Toadlena, which included Shiprock. At the time the consistory consisted of two ordained ministers, Rikkers at Shiprock, De Vries at Farmington, and an unordained missionary, Jacob C. Kobes,<sup>24</sup> who headed the station at Toadlena. The consistory objected to certain statements that Pousma had made in several Sunday afternoon radio broadcasts. He had allegedly endorsed a publication titled *The Upper Room*, which the consistory judged on certain issues to contain "extremely modernistic material" and was embarrassed that a CRC missionary would recommend such material. In another address on broadmindedness, Pousma had classified the Mormon Church and the Roman Catholic Church with evangelical churches. Wrote the consistory's clerk Kobes, "Whatever truth we may admit Rome to teach, it still remains true that a great part of its



Ordained in 1945, Rev. Jacob C. Kobes served on the mission field, 1925-1963.

system . . . is false and dangerous for our primitive [i.e., Indian] Christians." So the consistory requested Pousma retract his comments

[on the air] at an early date.<sup>25</sup>

The consistory next sent a committee to confer with Pousma, following which he made an effort on the air to remove the offense occasioned by his address on broadmindedness. The consistory was unable to accept Pousma's statement, chiefly because it couldn't agree with him on precisely what it was that he had said in the original broadcast. Pousma claimed that he was talking about individual Roman Catholic and Mormon believers when he said, "All who worship the true Jehovah God and trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation will go to heaven . . ." whereas consistory members who had heard the broadcast were confident that he was referring to Roman Catholic and Mormon churches, not individuals. If there were no satisfaction, they promised to take the matter to the Rehoboth consistory, and if that failed, to Classis California.<sup>26</sup>

Kobes was particularly upset because of the "two systems, Rome probably presents the greatest danger on the Indian field at this time." Kobes cited his personal "bitter" experience with Catholic missionaries and how his work at Toadlena had been made "doubly hard" because of the efforts of priests to proselytize Protestant children and families. He also referred to an Indian, Joe Patrick, a member of the Rehoboth church, who had

become an interpreter for those Catholics trying to "undercut" the work at Toadlena and Shiprock. Kobes feared that Joe Patrick might justify his decision to work for the Catholics based on the sympathetic words of the broadcast.<sup>27</sup>

Pousma replied to the consistory that he was very sorry that one or more of his radio broadcasts irritated them. He wrote, "I consider these broadcasts the finest and most effective missionary work I have ever done and regret it very much that any part of it hurt you." He promised not to say anything in the future that might hinder their work. But he also said that the broadcasts should not be made "controversial," and if he were forced to permit anyone to speak on the air about controversial topics, he would personally withdraw from these broadcasts. He also deplored the idea of taking the matter to his consistory, to classis, and to synod as a waste of time and money. He added a postscript that "Rev. Kamps made a statement from the Rehoboth pulpit a few Sundays ago that it was not necessary to be Christian Reformed to be saved. He said anyone, anywhere on earth, who believed in Jesus Christ as his Savior, would be saved" [emphasis in original].<sup>28</sup>

Since Pousma worshiped at Rehoboth, the Farmington-Toadlena consistory presented the matter to the Rehoboth consistory. The Rehoboth consistory declared that it objected to Pousma's statement that "... as long as a group believes that Jehovah is the only God, and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, we should neither oppose such nor hesitate to extend to such the hand of fellowship and friendship" and that such groups included Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Baptists, Mormons, Christian Reformed, Methodists, and others. The Rehoboth consistory felt such a position did not provide sufficient grounds to extend the hand of fellowship "to some of the

groups mentioned such as for example the Mormons. . . .” Importantly, the Rehoboth consistory asked that Pousma support its position.<sup>29</sup>

To the Rehoboth consistory Pousma wrote that it had not been his intention to say such, nor did he recall expressing such ideas, but admitted the error of those words, in case he had. He also admitted that in listing churches that claim to believe in the Bible as the Word of God he had included the Mormons, which he should not have done. To this Rev. Calvin Hayenga, the Rehoboth clerk, added his hope that with this admission the Farmington-Toadlena consistory would be able to drop the matter.

The Farmington-Toadlena consistory was not satisfied. They felt that Pousma’s statement lacked sincerity. Besides, his original remarks had included Roman Catholics, and he retracted nothing regarding them.<sup>30</sup> They also wanted an apology for Pousma’s accusing them of “wasting time” in this matter.<sup>31</sup> Retracting his inclusion of Mormons, Pousma would not be moved on Roman Catholics. And therein lay the poison in a sore that festered. After several months, Hayenga reminded the Farmington-Toadlena consistory of Rehoboth’s 18 April 1939 decision that included the declaration that Pousma’s response had been unanimously accepted.<sup>32</sup> More than a year after the controversial broadcasts, the matter was finally put to an uneasy rest when Farmington-Toadlena, although not satisfied with the statement signed by Pousma, nor with the attitude shown by the Rehoboth consistory in refusing to consider their request for a more satisfactory statement, decided to drop the matter in the interest of expediency.<sup>33</sup>

### Life and Character

Perhaps the most divisive issues clustered about Pousma’s life and

character. The same broadmindedness that brought open conflict tended, in a different form, to annoy others on the Indian field. Pousma did not share his compatriots’ prejudice against attendance at the inter-tribal ceremony held annually at Gallup and environs. He loved the color and the pageantry, and appreciated the culture and history of the Navajo Indians, while his fellow missionaries were warning Indian mission converts to stay away. He responded that if missionaries were going to discourage attendance at such ceremonies, they ought, reciprocally, to encourage some other more suitable form of sociability, for it was a chance for these isolated shepherders to get together and see old friends which motivated the Indians to attend, more than reverence for the Indian’s pagan religion. Criticism of his broadmindedness was only intensified by such attitudes and his position on movie and theater attendance.

Central to the life and character issue, though amorphous because they were apparently never very specific, were the rumors that something on the Indian field was—in De Korne’s terse word—“rotten.” The scent of rumor wafted, by 1940, as far west as Classis California, and then, soon, throughout the entire church. There was some terrible thing that the board seemingly could not get clarified and therefore rectified. It was something mysterious that later surfaced in remarks allegedly



*Rev. John C. (J.C.) DeKorne became director of missions in 1939, as the Rehoboth Hospital controversy was growing.*

made by Rev. De Vries, and in brief un-illuminating moments such as the time the doctor resigned before synod and he himself reflected that some persons thought his resignation premature and an attempt to avoid church discipline.

### Prejudice, Not Principle

One of the charges, coming from more than one missionary, was that the board often acted out of prejudice and personal interest rather than principle. Consider this example: Back in the 1930s and early 1940s, when there were apparently no adequate guest rooms on the Rehoboth campus, nor suitable motels or hotels nearby, the inspection committees of the Board of Missions often stayed at Pousma’s fairly spacious house, which included an upstairs apartment. Such accommodations were available, for the Pousmas had but two children, one of whom in the late 1930s was at a boarding school in Utah. Other missionaries had larger families and less room. In addition, Pousma and his wife were known as gracious hosts, and he a garrulous conversationalist. Once, in the early stages of the controversy, De Korne came out to Rehoboth and he and the doctor, old China mission field friends, went hunting for the giant jack rabbits that populated the area. All of this may have created the appearance of coziness on the doctor’s part with some members of the board, which led to rumors of special arrangements that tended to unsettle and create doubts. These were the kinds of circumstances that could tempt a president of the board to unwisely declare at the General Conference that there was “only one man” among the quarreling missionaries.

But behind even those signs of “prejudice,” there was likely a deeper issue. It was an issue that plagued the work on the Indian field and all other mission fields since Christian

Reformed mission efforts were begun in the late nineteenth century. There seemed to be no adequate overarching body of principles or, to use a more recent phrase, no mission statement that would require periodic review or self-examination. The Board of Missions often acted ad hoc and as a result inconsistently, which gave the appearance of preferential treatment, and the General Conference often followed suit.

### Coming to a Head

In May 1939, the General Conference, by a sizeable majority, decided to recommend that the white-paying-patient policy, along with the doctor's private practice, must end within one year, and should the board decide to continue the white-paying-patient policy, that all revenues from white patients and from outcalls and office calls be deposited in the mission treasury. This decision helped lead the executive committee to appoint a committee of Rev. Henry Verduin, John Kos, and De Korne to study the situation and the future of the hospital and submit a report. At the July 1939 meeting of the executive committee, De Korne reviewed the history of the hospital problem, and the executive committee commissioned another committee to report early in 1940.

In January this committee recommended to reaffirm the Board of Missions' decision of 1939 that the hospital remain what it was originally intended to be: "a help for propagating the Gospel among the Indians," and to continue the white-paying-patient policy—with a maximum of six such patients at any one time insofar as this did not interfere with the main purpose of the hospital. The committee argued that this would be fiscally responsible, the white patients would establish credibility for the hospital among Indians, and this mix of patients would be a more attractive

professional opportunity for a doctor than a hospital with only Indian patients. The committee also recommended that the doctor receive the salary paid by the calling churches, plus a home, but that medical and surgical fees from all patients in the hospital be turned over to the hospital treasury, with the doctor being permitted to keep for himself the fees from office calls of the non hospitalized and outcalls on white patients. Lastly, that only one mission auto was to be available to Pousma and the hospital staff; its expenses would be paid out of the hospital budget with no allowance for expenses on Pousma's personal vehicle.<sup>34</sup>

The Board of Missions adopted all of these recommendations but added several provisions reflecting some sensitivity to the criticisms coming from the Indian field. Those in charge were to (1) exercise care in the selection of white-pay patients; (2) refuse admission "to the profane" and require of all who were admitted to refrain from unchristian behavior; (3) strive to maintain the missionary character of the hospital; and (4) see to it that white patients were given "spiritual care." On a one-year trial basis, only 50 percent of fees from outcalls and office calls were to augment the doctor's salary. Two board members dissented, Rev. John Dolfen, who wanted to maintain the private practice fees at 100 percent, and Rikkers, who wanted to eliminate the private practice all together.<sup>35</sup>

At the same meeting, Rev. William Goudberg of Tohatchi reported that the CRC stand on worldly amusements was being called into question on the mission field. No names were mentioned. The board adopted a motion to call the attention of all missionaries to the synodical decision of 1928, and added that the board expected strict adherence.<sup>36</sup> This decision elicited additional criticism

from De Vries who felt that the directive tarred the many, when only the few were guilty.<sup>37</sup>

One startling item at that board meeting must have been a letter from Dinah Van Dyken, a registered nurse at the hospital. In her letter she claimed that Pousma seemed to delight in making "sarcastic and slanderous" remarks about other ministers, while denying that he or any of his professional staff had any responsibility for spiritual work at the hospital. Secondly, she criticized his attitudes toward worldly amusements and heathen ceremonies. She claimed that the doctor encouraged hospital workers to attend movies, and even suggested that she herself attend a show because this was her Christian duty. Thirdly, she spoke to Pousma's professionalism, maintaining that his private practice interfered with his care of the Navajos; that he was more interested in caring for white patients than for Navajos; that caring for any white patient added to the hospital's costs; and that the doctor did not have much feeling for the physical welfare of the missionary patients.<sup>38</sup>

Until then, the reputation of Pousma and his staff had usually been expressed in glowing terms, because white and Indian patients had been attracted to the hospital from far and near. The board, however, was more concerned with the attacks on the "character and conduct of one of our ministers" than with the professional issues. Of course, the board had no jurisdiction over the life and conduct of an ordained missionary nor, the members concluded, could they refer Van Dyken's charges to an ecclesiastical body, like the Rehoboth consistory or Madison Avenue CRC because there was no assurance that the process of admonishment delineated in Matthew 18 had been followed.<sup>39</sup> Not satisfied with this, Van Dyken, like Kamps, De Vries and Rikkers,

appealed to synod.

Synod 1940, after lengthy discussion, formally decided that the board must exercise all possible care that the hospital continue to function first and always as an "agency for the evangelization of the Indians" and eliminate within a year the hospitalization of white patients, except for mission workers, and also eliminate the private practice of the hospital doctor. Synod recommended that De Korne spend more time on the field during the next year until there was greater harmony. Synod upheld the missionaries' complaints against the board and its executive committee that the hospitalization of white patients at Rehoboth was harmful to the best interests of the mission work, and upheld Kamps's complaints that mileage practices had the appearance of partiality. None of the other charges found in the various appeals were sustained, but synod added that the missionaries should leave administrative problems to the board and its executive committee.<sup>40</sup>

Synod did appoint a committee to confer with the protesting missionaries, to urge them to withdraw the charges not sustained by synod, and to continue their labors on the mission field on the basis of the decisions of synod. This committee later reported that Kamps had withdrawn his resignation and, as did Ridders and De Vries, had confidence in and a readiness to cooperate with the board in carrying out the Indian mission program, and was satisfied by synodical actions in regard to these matters. Both Ridders and De Vries read to synod letters acknowledging errors, and asked the board, the executive committee, and De Korne for forgiveness.<sup>41</sup>

The appearance of good feeling that seemed to be generated by the apologies at Synod 1940 did not last very long. Rumors continued to persist. The advisory committee dealing with

the Indian mission field and the hospital recommended to Synod 1941 that it not reopen the matter of white patients. De Korne, advisor to the committee, demurred, agreeing with the committee that the real issues were deeper than the presence or absence of white patients and the best way to get at those deeper issues was to reopen the hospital question.<sup>42</sup> In November 1940, the executive committee instructed Pousma to end the white-patient policy and his private practice by 1 May 1941.<sup>43</sup>

Some time during the spring of 1941, Pousma presented to the executive committee his annual report. After briefly summarizing the history of the hospital since 1927, Pousma presented a justification for the white-pay-patient practice, which he claimed began in 1909. The report elicited at least three written critical responses from the Indian field, one from Kamps, one from De Vries, and one that is unsigned.<sup>44</sup>

More than a week before Synod 1941 opened, Rev. H. J. Kuiper, editor of *The Banner*, helped draw back the curtain on the controversy in an editorial entitled "We Specify." There were no lurid details, but Kuiper did his best to stimulate curiosity. His central claim was that there was a "festering sore" out on the Indian mission field in regard to hospital policy. He defined the festering sore as the "contention and bickering" which existed among "some" of those connected with the Indian mission work.<sup>45</sup>

The board reported to synod's advisory committee that it had carried out the instructions of Synod 1940 and all private practice and all white patients had been discontinued since 1 May 1941.<sup>46</sup> Pousma actually had continued his private practice beyond the May deadline and, on an emergency basis, there continued to be white patients at the hospital.

Although the Board of Missions petitioned synod to reopen the question of white patients, the advisory committee encouraged synod not to reopen the matter.<sup>47</sup> De Korne demurred in a written communication to synod. So did Elder Henry Oost who, in a minority report, substantially agreed with De Korne that reopening the question of hospitalizing white patients would be a more effective approach to the study of the "deeper problem" on the Indian field than would refusing to reopen the question.<sup>48</sup>

Not having been able to grant Pousma a hearing before the advisory committee, De Korne and Rev. Henry Verduin, president of the mission board, spoke in favor of Pousma being given a hearing on the floor of synod. Pousma defended the emergency treatment of white patients, the income from which was turned over to the hospital fund. He noted that the white-patient policy brought in about \$6,000 a year. He admitted that on the issue of movies, he was out of step with the CRC, but warned that the 1928 decision would "alienate our people." He said that on the Indian field we are "trying to win Indians for Christ, not to make them Christian Reformed." Further, with Van Dyken seated in the audience, he pointedly remarked that "it would be entirely beneath my professional dignity to defend myself against a nurse." He also mentioned a whispering campaign of serious personal charges that had been leveled against him. Then he issued fateful words, "I feel I have no course open than to resign as missionary-doctor and as minister of the Christian Reformed Church." He quickly added, "Don't take this as an admission of guilt. I deny the general charge that has been made."<sup>49</sup> A motion, to ask Pousma to submit his resignation in writing, carried.

For the remainder of the afternoon

the synod discussed the issues regarding Rehoboth hospital. During the discussion Rev. George Goris, synod's vice-president, moved that a committee be appointed to confer with Pousma and ask him to reconsider. The following morning the committee reported that it had conferred with Pousma and had received from him a statement that some of his friends had informed him that his resignation as minister as well as medical missionary was improper. So he asked that his resignation apply only to that of medical missionary and asked for advice concerning his ministerial status. The committee advised synod to accept his resignation as a medical missionary and to give him an honorable dismissal. They also advised Pousma to await God's providence "to see if some other field" would open up where a medical missionary could serve. But in case no such opening occurred, that he seek from his calling church an honorable dismissal from the ministry.<sup>50</sup>

### Aftermath

In spite of these decisions, Pousma's private practice at the hospital continued uninterrupted during the summer and into the fall of 1941. De Korne reported a large number of white patients coming to the doctor's office for consultation. If they needed hospitalization, they were assigned to St. Mary's Hospital in Gallup. The secretary did his duty and reminded the doctor of the decisions of synod

and the board. Pousma, in turn, pleaded that since he would soon be entering private practice in Gallup, "that he should be permitted to continue those patients who have been coming to him for years." De Korne reported that he urged the doctor to end the practice as soon as possible, but recognized some complications. For one, no one had determined precisely when it was that the doctor's resignation would take effect. For another, Pousma thought his new offices in Gallup could be built and occupied by late November 1941, so he pleaded for more time.<sup>51</sup>

To the Board of Missions in 1941 the fundamental issues were still separable and the problems surmountable. The number of white patients admitted at any time could have been reduced. The income of the doctor from a private practice, theoretically, could have been reduced by one-half, or eliminated all together, in favor of a preset salary.

In any event, it was Synod 1940 which had made the crucial decision to follow the advice of the General Conference instead of the Board of Missions by voting to eliminate both the white-patient policy as well as the doctor's private practice. It would be nice to think that the case was decided wholly on its merits. Recall, though, that De Korne himself noted an underlying unease at synod, a feeling that something was wrong out on the mission field. The noise, static, or dust that the protesting missionaries

engendered through their protests to Synod 1940, even though in most cases they were denied and in the end the missionaries asked to apologize, must have contributed strongly to the malaise. That negative vote having been cast in 1940, it was well nigh impossible for the next synod to change the decision.<sup>52</sup>

### Editor's postscript

*Medical services at Rehoboth continued after Pousma entered private practice in Gallup. Dr. Louis H. Bos, a former medical officer with the United States Marines, joined the staff in 1946 and served for the next sixteen years. The facility was enlarged and remodeled in 1955. When Bos resigned in 1961, a group of volunteer doctors took over the work. In 1964 the administration of the hospital was transferred to the Luke Society. The original hospital building on the Rehoboth campus was demolished in 1975, marking the end of the medical mission of the CRC to Native Americans in the Southwest; instead an independent hospital continued at an off-campus location as Rehoboth Christian Hospital. This hospital merged with McKinley General Hospital in 1984 to become the Rehoboth-McKinley Christian Hospital.*

## Endnotes

1. The article is extracted from a larger manuscript "Mission Nearly Impossible: Richard H. Pousma, the Rehoboth Hospital, and Controversy on the Indian Mission Field," a copy of which is available in the Archives of Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, hereafter cited as Archives, Calvin College. In this manuscript Dr. DeBoer examines in detail the various controversies, in addition to those involving Pousma, that took place on the Indian mission field during the late 1930s.
2. General Conference minutes, 15 March 1928, Art. 7, Archives, Calvin College. For a discussion of the administrative structure for the mission field see the previous article by DeBoer in this issue.
3. Though in fairness, Kamps was not alone in his complaints. See General Conference minutes, 15 March 1934, Appendix II (Archives, Calvin College) for a complex report to the Board of Missions aimed at finding "an equitable basis for auto allowance to all missionaries."
4. General Conference minutes, 15 May 1930, Art. 25, Archives, Calvin College.
5. General Conference minutes, 19 March 1931, Art. 9, Archives, Calvin College.
6. Beets retired as secretary for the Mission Board in 1939 and was replaced by John C. De Korne.
7. Kamps to Henry Beets, 18 December 1937, Home Missions correspondence, Archives, Calvin College.
8. Executive Committee minutes, 16 December 1937, Art. 11, Archives, Calvin College. Missionaries were permitted to accept personal gifts; they were discouraged from seeking special gifts for the work, like a project outside the limits of the budget. (See *The Banner*, 18 August 1938, p. 755, for a synopsis of recent executive committee and Board of Missions decisions. Funds received by missionaries for the work from outside sources were to be reported and deducted from the budget.
9. See Rev. N. De Vries to De Korne, Home Missions correspondence, 21 August 1939, Archives, Calvin College. Rev. Henry Verduin, the Board of Missions president, is quoted as saying, "All small stuff. There's only one man among you."
10. Kamps to Drenthe CRC, Home Missions correspondence, 22 July 1939, Archives, Calvin College. De Korne had replaced Beets as secretary in 1939.
11. Executive Committee minutes, 7 September 1939, Art. 109, Archives, Calvin College.
12. De Korne to Executive Committee, 16 November 1939, Archives, Calvin College.
13. Executive Committee minutes, 23 May 1940, Art. 11, Archives, Calvin College.
14. *Ibid.*, Art. 287.
15. Board of Missions minutes, 28-31 May and 3-4 June 1940, Art. 403, Archives, Calvin College.
16. De Vries to the Board of Missions, 16 May 1940, Board of Missions correspondence, Archives, Calvin College.
17. This consistory was one of four regional consistories on the Indian field organized under the aegis of Classis California. The others were Tohatchi, Crownpoint, and Farmington-Toadlena.
18. Board of Missions minutes, 28-31 May and 3-4 June 1940, Art. 406, Archives, Calvin College.
19. *Ibid.*, Art. 408.
20. Rikkers to Board of Missions, 15 May 1940; revised as of 3 June 1940, Board of Missions correspondence, Archives, Calvin College.
21. Executive Committee minutes, 7 March 1940, Art. 254, Archives, Calvin College.
22. Board of Missions minutes, 28-31 May and 3-4 June 1940, Art. 410.
23. *The Banner*, 6 July 1939, p. 628.
24. Kobes was ordained as a CRC minister in 1945.
25. Board of Missions correspondence, Kobes to Pousma, 12 November 1938; Kobes to Pousma, 13 January 1939.
26. Board of Missions correspondence, Kobes to Pousma, 23 February 1939, Archives, Calvin College.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Board of Missions correspondence, Pousma to Kobes, 27 February 1939, Archives, Calvin College.
29. Board of Missions correspondence, Rehoboth consistory to Farmington-Toadlena consistory, 18 April 1939.
30. Board of Missions correspondence, Farmington-Toadlena consistory to Rehoboth consistory, 22 May 1939, Archives Calvin College.
31. *Ibid.*, and Board of Missions correspondence, Pousma to Farmington-Toadlena consistory, 27 February 1939, Archives, Calvin College.
32. Board of Missions correspondence, Rehoboth consistory to Farmington-Toadlena consistory, 8 November 1939, Archives Calvin College.
33. Board of Missions correspondence, Farmington-Toadlena consistory to Rehoboth consistory, 15 February 1940, Archives, Calvin College.
34. Executive Committee minutes, 19 January 1940, Art. 217, Archives, Calvin College.
35. Board of Missions minutes, 28-31 May and 3-4 June 1940, Art. 368, Archives, Calvin College.
36. *Ibid.*, Art. 407.
37. Records of the Synod of 1940, Rev. De Vries's protest, IV. D., 3, Remark #3, Archives, Calvin College.
38. Records of the Synod of 1940, Van Dyken to the CRC Board of Missions, 20 May 1940, Archives Calvin College.
39. Board of Missions minutes, 28-31 May and 3-4 June 1940, Art. 411, Archives, Calvin College.
40. Acts of Synod, 1940: 127-128.
41. *Ibid.*, 132-3.
42. Communication of Secretary of Missions to Synod, 1941, Archives, Calvin College.
43. Executive Committee minutes, 20 March 1941, Archives, Calvin College.
44. Board of Missions correspondence, "Some Remarks About the Rehoboth Hospital Report 1940" n.d.; Kamps to Board of Missions, 23 May 1941; and "The Rehoboth Hospital Policy," De Vries to "Esteemed Reader," n.d., Archives, Calvin College.
45. *The Banner*, 13 June 1941: 557.
46. Acts of Synod, 1941: 211-13.
47. *Ibid.*, 74-5.
48. *Ibid.*, 75-6.
49. There is a transcription and summary of his remarks, done by Kuiper in *The Banner*, 18 July 1941: 676-7.
50. Pousma to the Synod of the CRC, 20 June 1941, Archives, Calvin College. See also Acts of Synod 1941, pp. 93-4.
51. Board of Missions correspondence, Inspection Committee Report to the Board of Missions, Spring 1942, Archives, Calvin College. See also Report of the CRC Board of Missions, Acts of Synod 1942: 230.

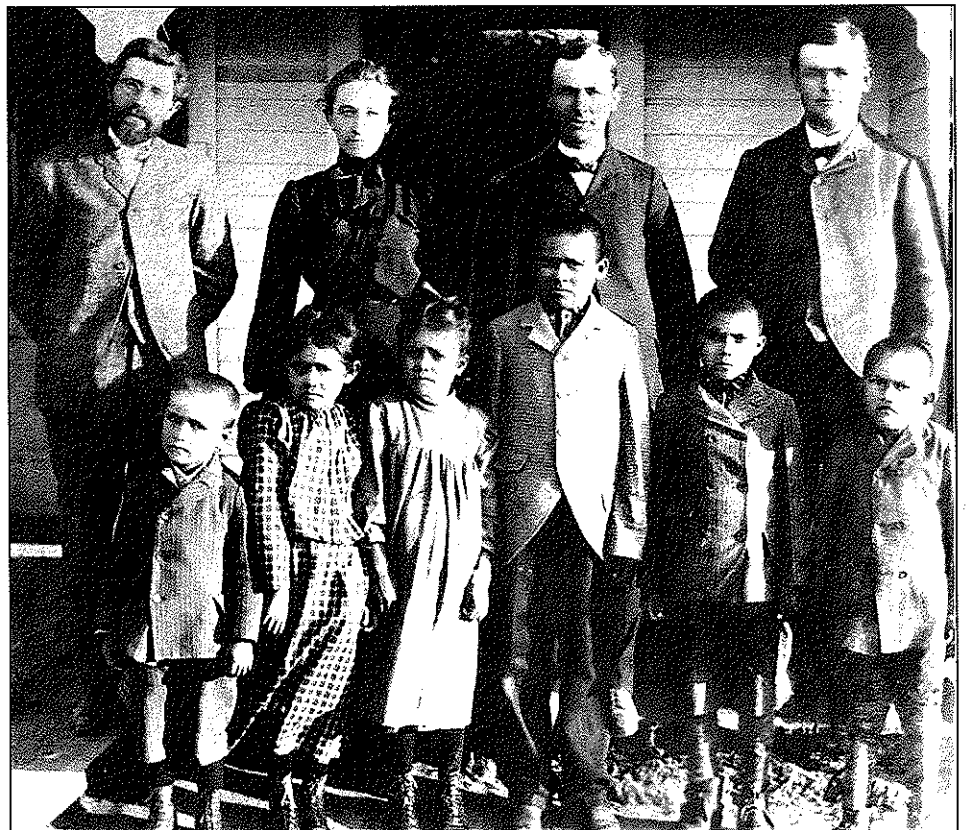
# Student Life at Rehoboth

Henry Ippel

In 1923 Rev. J. W. Brink, the missionary-pastor, wrote a piece for the *Missionary Monthly* (then called *De Heidenwereld*) entitled "A Typical Day at Rehoboth." He described life at the mission while the boarding school was in full operation. What follows are excerpts from that article.

At 5:45 AM (each day except Sunday) the day begins with children, eagerly or protestingly, awakening in their dormitories. At 6:15 AM they gather round their matrons (one for the girls, one for the boys) for a brief period of devotions, Bible reading and

prayer. Some of the children leave for their duties in the kitchen and dining room, because at 7:00 AM the breakfast bell rings and the remaining group marches to the dining hall in the Mission House. At 7:30 AM a steam whistle is heard, which calls other students to their details of work in the laundry, hospital, dining hall, barn or garden. In the dormitory girls may be sewing or mending, and both boys and girls will make beds, sweep the floors, sort and store clothing or run errands for the matron. The dormitories are home for the children for ten



The first class of students at Rehoboth in 1903. The adults are, l-r, Andrew Vander Wagen, Nellie Noordhof, Herman Fryling, L.P. Brink; the students are, l-r: Henry Whipple, Clarissa Pierson, Gertrude Alger, Albert Gardiner, James Evans, John Eliot. All photos from: Archives, Calvin College.

months, sometimes longer. This is indeed their "home," where they live under the supervision of a matron, who is their "mother," disciplinarian, counselor and spiritual director. She helps them with their catechism

lessons and their

school work, encourages baths, directs their play activities, dispenses medicine and provides proper clothing.

At 8:30 AM children leave to attend school. Instruction must take into account the limited English vocabulary of some students and the limited exposure some have had to the non-reservation world. However the curriculum is similar to that of any Christian or public school with perhaps more emphasis on Bible stories and moral lessons. Recitation, singing, board exercises—all are part of the school day. But the devoted teachers spend many an hour before or after school hours assisting and encouraging their boys and girls. In addition to the academic activity, the teachers and matrons organize clubs and groups to develop skills and interests among the children. For instance, in 1927 Janie Kats, the hospital dietician and housekeeper, organized a group of thirty girls, known as the "Shining Stars," which in its weekly meetings produced bead necklaces, belts and watch fobs to obtain funds for charitable purposes (the reporter called it a "live-wire" industrial society).

The time to retire was determined by the age of the child, but usually by 9:00 PM the dormitories had become relatively quiet. It is difficult to



*Early on, regimentation was established for many aspects of the students' day as in this formation at Crownpoint, New Mexico.*

adequately describe or appreciate the work of a matron responsible for fifty to sixty boys or girls whose ages ranged from 5 to 16 or beyond. Even though the children were out of sight while they were in school, they were not out of mind, because all the charms and foibles, the dreams and tensions, the conflicts and attachments experienced by the children were within the domain of the matron. Consequently, whether the children were actually "at home" in the dormitory or on work detail or at school or church, they were the ultimate responsibility of the matron. So a serious cough, a bruised limb, a difficult school lesson, an injured psyche, a happy birthday, a triumph on the playing field—all the experiences of a growing child became the concern of matrons and other staff members. (For another account of "how the work at Rehoboth was carried on" see the article by Jacob Bosscher in *The Banner*; May 16, 1924, page 312.)

Any account of student life at a boarding school shows how regimented that life was. Bosscher in his article refers to the blowing of the steam whistle at 6:55 AM (two short blasts) to announce that breakfast was ready; at 7:30 indicating time for the work details to leave; 11:30 (one blast) telling everyone in school or on work

detail to stop working; followed by the whistle blasting to resume work after the dinner hour; once again at 5:00 PM to end the day's work. This reminds you of the factory whistles in an industrial setting. But there were bells as well to announce the beginning of school sessions and, according to Mr. Bosscher, no whistle was blown on Sunday, "but all the times were indicated either by the church or school bell." Perhaps the whistle was too reminiscent of the industrial setting and Sunday was not a work day!

The regimentation was also vividly portrayed in the photographs of children marching to school, to the Mission House for meals and to chapel for worship services. Children were dressed in uniforms. Students often complained of these marches across the open plaza, exposed as they were to frigid winds, blowing snow or sand, or torrential rain. Custodians too complained of children bringing clay and sand into the buildings. Repeatedly the staff asked for funds to lay sidewalks; in 1930 they insisted that the "most important need at Rehoboth are sidewalks" and finally, in the summer of 1938, "351 square yards of concrete sidewalk were laid."

Undoubtedly this regimentation was necessary. How else to control the

movements of children ranging from 5 to 17? Perhaps it gave the appearance of a military academy! Remember that the model for the boarding school was taken from existing government boarding schools which were similarly regimented in action and in dress.

The life of the students was brightened by special occasions. In preparation for Thanksgiving, the boys would enthusiastically organize a rabbit hunt in the fields adjoining the mission property and in 1912 ninety-two bunnies were killed for the Thanksgiving feast. (The children seemed to like rabbit better than fowl.) In October 1909 the entire student body went to Gallup to see and hear President William Howard Taft, during his brief stop on his way east from a visit to California. In his speech the president encouraged a new constitution for the Territory of New Mexico so that it could enter the Union as a state, which it did in 1912. Imagine the excitement when 22 October 1914, was designated as "Kite Flying Day." Perhaps as exciting (but with some discipline) was the day in 1915 when a neighbor's burro fell into a toilet pit! The outdoor toilets required frequent new holes dug and when the boys (another work detail!) dug new pits, but failed to properly fill the old, it entrapped the vagrant burro! Incidentally the boys enjoyed using their

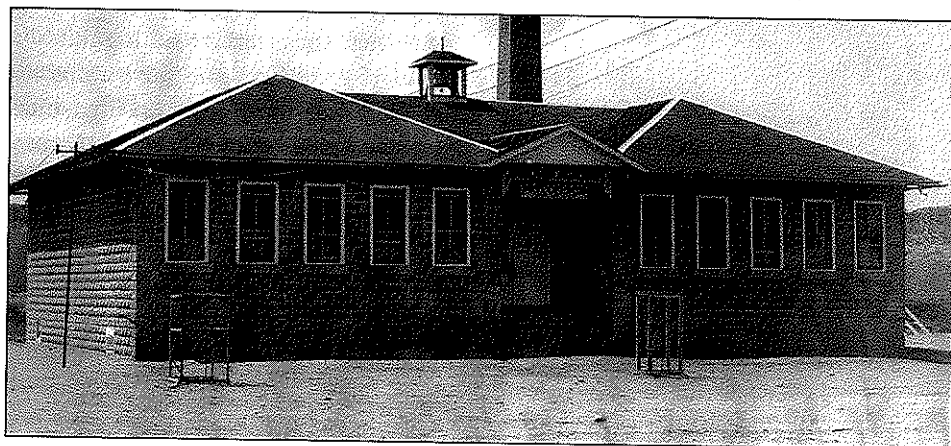
lariat-throwing skills to retrieve the odorous animal.

Holidays were specially festive. Christmas was always a special day. December 1923 brought considerable snow but on Christmas Day the weather was mild and the frost gone. The result was that more Indian parents and friends visited than in many of the previous years. The chapel, recently built and dedicated, was crowded to the limit; all additional space was utilized. A sermonette in the Navajo language by Mr. Edward Becenti (the church's interpreter), a program presented by the children, and, "most important of all," the distribution of a bag of candy and an apple as well as a supper for everyone were the highlights of the day. The report of this event did include the note: "For the workers, Christmas means lots of work!" Christmas 1929 encouraged approximately 500 visitors to come to Rehoboth. The reporter for *The Banner* wrote: "It sure was a picturesque sight to see all the campfires, saddle horses, lumber wagons and automobiles scattered all over and around the place. It was a very happy day for the school children too for many of these visitors were their parents and other close relatives. The Christmas message was given repeatedly in song, recitation, dialogue and sermon and we trust many hearts have

been blessed." (See Dorothy Dykhuizen: *Go Quickly and Tell* (1946), Chapter 13 "Christmas at the Mission" and Chapter 19 "Easter at the Mission.")

Even more dramatic was the incident in 1939 when the children, returning to the dormitory from the dining hall, heard the cry "the church is on fire." Thick clouds of smoke were pouring out of every basement window and the church auditorium. The older boys knew what to do; one ran to the siren and raised sufficient noise to rouse everyone within five miles' distance; others ran to the fire equipment room under the hospital to obtain the hose and chemical carts; others hooked the hose to the hydrant. In a short time chemicals and water were drenching the blazing timbers in the basement and the burning church floor. Students, staff and even the pastor, Rev. Jacob Kamps, came to the rescue of the little country church. The fire was apparently due to an overheated furnace which caused the woodwork above the furnace to burn. The a work detail of boys had built a fire just before supper and then left it without further care. (Fire protection for Rehoboth in its isolated condition was always a very important matter. The mission had a powerful siren, small chemical hand tanks were stored in all the buildings, a large 50-gallon chemical tank cart and hose cart were readily available, and sufficient water was available in the tank on a nearby hill which supplied the hydrants. The Gallup Fire Department, five miles away, also provided assistance.)

Sometimes fun could turn into disaster as when boys, hiding in the hayloft over the mule stall, tickled the posterior of the mule which responded by kicking the outside wall and siding of the barn until the timbers fell off. On the other hand the boys could be very helpful. The erection of a 52-foot steel stack above the boiler room in



The Rehoboth school and post office, 1912. The school was flanked by the girls' dormitory and the boys' dormitory.

1918 required lots of "boy power" which they supplied by holding the guy wires in its erection. In Jacob Bosscher's *Memoirs* he recounts this incident: "To raise a 52-foot smoke stack above the boiler room and onto the boiler was just another thing that had to be done with only school boys to steady the guy lines. Nowadays one would not think of doing this with 'local' help. But money was always short and had to be saved. By doing so I presume we sometimes even risked our lives. It was a problem to get the

boys to cooperate, since they did not take their jobs very seriously. I remember when we had raised the stack to a critical angle, the boys began to laugh, and I was afraid that they would lose their hold on the ropes and all would come down. At such a time I would have to do some severe scolding to come out without an accident." The following year the staff suggested the appointment of a "night watchman" because 17 or 18 small boys "got up at night and stole bread from the bakery." And some of the older boys were

"counted" missing at the Sunday service and were discovered hiding under beds in the dormitory!

Although the sun shines brightly (and almost daily) in New Mexico, nightfall brings the need for artificial illumination. Candles and kerosene lamps were used when the school began in 1903; later a carbide lighting system was installed. But as more facilities were built it was determined that an inordinate amount of carbide was being consumed. Moreover the open flame created a dangerous

condition in the hospital when ether was used. (Operations were often performed with use of a flashlight.) The open flame also tempted a Navajo lady to attempt making a fire in her hospital room since she was accustomed to a hogan fire while she slept. Therefore in 1919 a Delco lighting plant was installed. The Delco system, giving considerable trouble, was declared "outgrown" in 1925 since it required the

use of old lanterns and oil lamps to provide adequate lighting. Consequently the next year electric lines were run between Rehoboth and Gallup. The holes for the poles were blasted out of hard clay with dynamite. With this steady supply of electricity, the motors running the laundry equipment and the pumps had sufficient power and on Christmas Eve a special celebration of lights was enjoyed. In 1929 a beacon light for the transcontinental air route was placed a mile and a half from Rehoboth with power from the Rehoboth line. <sup>6</sup>

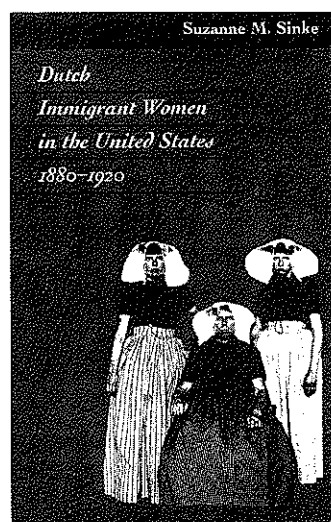


The girls' dormitory in 1921.



The school staff in 1921.

# book notes



## Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States, 1880-1920

Suzanne M. Sinke

Urbana and Chicago: University of  
Illinois Press, 2002  
295 pages, illustrations, notes, index  
\$39.95

When Suzanne Sinke's mother was considering marriage to a man of Dutch American descent, she received these warning words from her mother, "The Dutch expect a lot of their women." How Dutch immigrant women who came to America during

the years 1880-1920 met this daunting challenge is the pervading theme of this volume, which in essence is Sinke's PhD dissertation reworked. The dissertation is titled "Home Is Where You Build It: Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States, 1880-1920," (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1993) and was reviewed in *Origins*, Volume XII, No. 1, 1994.

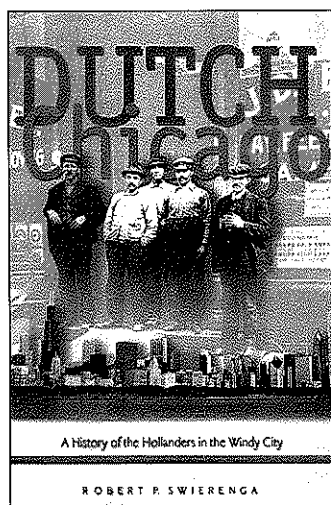
Warmhearted scholarship best describes Sinke's efforts. This book is much more than an edited volume of letters, diaries and recorded interviews by Dutch dialectologists who came to the United States in the 1960s looking for remnants of Dutch speech. Scholarly analysis is always evident, but Sinke allows these immigrant women to speak for themselves about family matters, the necessities of life, domestic frugality, death and sickness, learning a new language, new thought patterns, and replicating old world pervasive religious values in an American environment. The dilemma, either straightforward or subtle, constantly faced by these women was the retention of old world ideas in their adopted land. In other words, in church and in the home, the old world way of life, though tried and true, was not the best in the new world environment.

Dutch immigrant women who toiled unknown and unrecognized are here as are a few who very early entered the professional ranks. The women are viewed in their family settings, contributing to the household economies, providing health care to the sick and dying, acculturating, and

in their religious communities. Most of the women in Sinke's book were members of either the Christian Reformed Church or Reformed Church, since the predominant number of Dutch immigrants during the period of investigation joined one of these two denominations. Now available in book form, Sinke's study of a neglected area in Dutch-American history and American social history deserves a place in the home of many *Origins* readers.✠

Conrad Bult

Conrad Bult is the long-serving book reviewer for *Origins*, a published scholar of the Dutch in America and their periodicals. He is a retired reference librarian and expert on children's books, postcards, and Dutch silver.



## Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City

Robert Swierenga

Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans  
Publishing Co., 2002

905 pages, illustrations, maps, notes,  
index, \$49.00

The dean of scholarship on the Dutch in America, Dr. Robert P. Swierenga, has turned his prodigious research talent and writing ability to the subject of the Dutch in Chicago. A native of Chicago, Swierenga's book has more than 750 pages of text devoted to the Windy City, which has the second largest concentration of residents of Dutch descent in the United States. With remarkable detail, a characteristic of Swierenga's research, *Dutch Chicago* traces the arrival of a conservative Protestant immigrant community beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century and its transition, along two major paths, to becoming part of

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the American experience during the twentieth century. The result is not only a groundbreaking work in Dutch-American historiography but an important contribution to the story of United States immigration.

Coming from all sections and social strata in the Netherlands, ranked tenth among the foreign-born in the Windy City, the Dutch could have been expected to be absorbed rapidly into the larger population. Because of the unique Calvinist (Reformed) makeup of three-quarters of these Dutch, for four generations they maintained a separate and distinct identity within the larger diverse metropolitan population. This unique phenomenon in such a relatively small ethnic group becomes the thesis of the book. Swierenga demonstrates that over the course of succeeding generations the deeply seated Calvinist orthodoxy of the Dutch produced strong loyalty to their Reformed churches and the determination to move from relative poverty to middle class respectability, which in turn became the glue that held their ethnicity intact. The author makes plain that the book is not an academic investigation into the thesis, but rather an insider's look at the major brush strokes that make up the canvas of Dutch Chicago.

The narrative begins with a description of the dominance of immigrants from the northern Netherlands, particularly the province of Groningen, who settle Chicago's West Side and those from Friesland who settle the Roseland area. It brings to life the important role of the Reformed faith within these communities. As with the larger Dutch population in the United States and Canada, the residents of Chicago split into two religious groups within a decade of the beginning of immigration in the late 1840s. Curiously, the split between those who belonged to the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and those who belonged to the

Christian Reformed Church (CRC), Swierenga notes, was part of what held this minority group together. Theologically, the differences between the two, not readily evident to those outside the Dutch Reformed tradition, were real and provided little religious common ground. Yet in Chicago, in every sphere except the ecclesiastical, the narrative notes how the immigrants and their descendants found the common ground needed to maintain a separate ethnic identity for a full century.

Because of this dominant religious character among the immigrants, *Dutch Chicago* begins with a religious history of the community. Using primarily published history booklets, original church records, and periodicals of the time, Swierenga sketched the various RCA and CRC congregations. For those familiar with the Dutch Chicago, the level of detail in these chapters will seem remarkably encompassing, for others the various lists of names may seem overwhelming. Both readers will come away from the book with a notion of the fabric that held this community together. The author notes the important roles of the various ministers in maintaining a stable religious tone within the community. He explains the difference between RCA and CRC, particularly in supporting the Christian School movement, and how these schools aided in maintaining the ethnic separation of the Dutch from the larger Chicago population.

Swierenga examines the westward migrations of the West Side Dutch. Each major move occurred as a new level of economic prosperity was being achieved, indeed the moves themselves added to that economic advancement. The Roseland neighborhoods to the south were a bit more stable, but by the 1970s their residents also became participants in the American "white flight" experience. By then, the author notes, these moves by both groups had a decided racial component. The

last of these moves has tended to disperse the community for the first time.

The situation among the west-side Dutch became very tense when in 1965 Black parents asked that their children be admitted to Timothy Christian School, located in an all-white community. The book carefully examines the major events of the controversy and the dilemma of the school board in weighing the physical safety of the students against the threats made should Black students be admitted. The controversy spread throughout the Christian Reformed denomination, with the school board members, local congregations and the denomination's regional governing body, Classis Chicago North, coming under growing criticism for barring the Black students, until the school had been moved to Elmhurst. In relating this episode, Swierenga seems to conclude that the decisions made were probably the only ones that could be made in that time, at that place, under those circumstances. Those who did not accept the reasoning of the time will certainly dispute this contention.

Swierenga also examines the social and economic components of life within the Dutch neighborhoods. The mutual aid societies, social clubs and agricultural endeavors were typical of other immigrant groups in the American experience, although the Dutch proclivity to acquire land as part of

their agricultural efforts tended to be passed down to several generations, unlike in other immigrant communities. An illuminating section of this discussion reveals the garbage hauling and cartage businesses, which were truly unique with Dutch Chicago. The book reveals that the ethnic cohesion of the community, even across the RCA-CRC religious divide, helped the Dutch gain almost total control of garbage hauling. Routes and customers were apportioned and these allocations were strictly maintained behind closed doors. This arrangement allowed the numerous independent operators ultimately to combine into a few firms that dominated the industry.

Although most of the book is devoted to Dutch Reformed immigrants, Swierenga does not ignore others. Chapter 15 is devoted to Dutch Jews and Dutch Roman Catholics. Because these groups were much smaller, they tended to be more rapidly assimilated into their respective religious communities. It appears the author did not find as many sources for their stories, which therefore are not as richly detailed as those for their Reformed counterparts.

Some legitimate criticism can be made of this book. Some will find the detail of the book rich, others may find it overwhelming. For the uninitiated in the sections on the local churches, the religious forest becomes vague for the

congregational trees. The section on mutual aid societies tells of the "major tragedies" which will have little significance for those not from Chicago. On occasion, the author's over-dependence on a specific source, such as Peter Moerdyke's articles in the *Christian Intelligencer*, may lead to questions of whether these sections are history or chronicle. Certainly the story of Trinity Christian College deserved more than the three pages it has. Lastly, more careful editing would have caught spelling errors and usage inconsistencies such as "flu epidemic of 1919" (p. 245); "national flu and smallpox epidemics of 1918-1919" (p. 331); "1918 flu pandemic" (p. 347); "flu epidemic of 1918-1919" (p. 521). The spelling and usage issues will certainly be resolved in subsequent editions.

However valid, such criticism does not diminish the value of this pioneering study. As the author notes, this is the first treatment of the topic and not all questions could be anticipated and even those that were, could not all be answered. This is both a remarkable view of Dutch immigrant life in Chicago and a guide to research that is still needed on Dutch Chicago. For those interested in Chicago, the Dutch in America, immigrant, ethnic, religious or economic studies, *Dutch Chicago* is an invaluable "must read." §

Richard H. Harms

# for the future

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



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