

Origins

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of The Archives*

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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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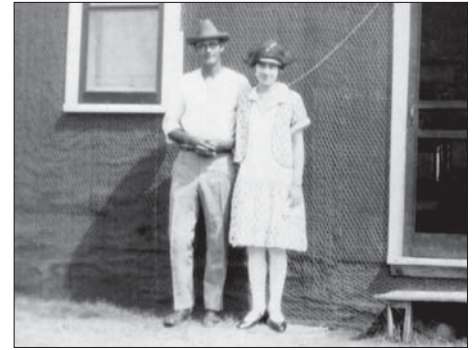
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Nicholas J. Cook
S SGT 483 AAF BOMB GP
1924–1944



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This Issue

We begin with a piece by the original editor of *Origins*, Dr. Herbert J. Brinks, who recalls the impact on his family when word arrived that their son and brother was lost in the air war over Germany during World War II, followed by agonizing months when only bits of information arrived, until word came that he had been declared dead. Next we have three different accounts of Dutch immigrant groups on the South Dakota prairies during the early decades of the twentieth century. Angie Ploegstra and Paula Vander Hoven, who previously uncovered the story of the Perch Lake, Michigan, settlement, now present the decade-long story of Martin. Janet Sheeres, a regular

contributor, describes the nearly four decades of the Dutch community of Friesland. The South Dakota material concludes with an author new to *Origins*, Jason Elenbaas, a student at Dordt College, describing his family and the church in Bemis. Maria Mulder Brown continues the description of settlements by Dutch immigrants and their descendants with a description of muck farming near Imlay City, Michigan. The issue concludes with the third installment of the unique travel account of G. J. Buth, a Dutch dairy farmer and veterinarian, visiting his relatives in Grand Rapids during the summer of 1949. The current installment covers a ten-day period when the Buths traveled extensively through southern Michigan and into Ontario. 🍷

Available On-Line

We continue to add material to our website, the most recent being the index to birth, marriage, anniversary, birthday, and obituary announce-

ments from the *Banner* for 2006. A review of website usage for the period September–December 2006 reveals that the Heritage Hall web pages had 5,067 visitors from 65 countries. 🍷

News from the Archives

Our major processing project completed during the fall was that of the Pete Steen Collection. At 39.5 cubic feet, this is one of our larger processed collections and details the works of Steen, a philosopher and educator who focused on the work of Dooyweerd, and was part of the effort to establish what is now the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. The collection is particularly rich in Steen's extensive research work. Also processed were the files of the Reformed Ecumenical Council, the professional correspondence of West Michigan artist Reynold Weidenaar, and the minutes of Chicago Christian College and Elim Christian School. We are near completing the organization of the approximately 76 cubic

feet of historical material that we have collected from Christian day schools in Canada and the United States. 📖

Book Publication

Our joint book publication effort with the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America was launched with *Son of Secession*. As this is being written, design work is being completed on the biography of Rev. H. J. Kuiper by James De Jong; the book should be available as this issue of *Origins* comes off the press. As with past titles, *Origins* subscribers will be entitled to copies at a reduced price.

Now in our inventory are: *Son of Secession* (for \$20 plus \$5.00 for shipping; retail price is \$25.00), the *Historical Directory of the Christian Reformed Church* (for \$19.95 plus \$5.00 for shipping; retail price is \$34.95); the recent reprint of Jacob van Hinte's *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centu-*

ries in the United States of America (for \$24.95 plus \$5.00 for shipping; retail price is \$39.95). As a special benefit, if you order all three you pay only one shipping fee of \$5.00 for a total of \$69.90; this total is one-third off the retail prices. 📖

Staff

After ten years of organizing college and seminary collections, and translating Dutch into English, departmental assistant Boukje Leegwater retired at the end of January. We thank her for all her good and hard work and wish her well. Joining the staff as our new departmental assistant is Melanie Vander Wal, who comes to us after having worked in education and in the business sector. 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; Robert Bolt, field agent and assistant archivist; and

Renee LaCoss and Dana Verhulst, our student assistants. We are particularly grateful to our dedicated volunteers: Floyd Antonides, Rev. Henry DeMots, Ed Gerritsen, Fred Greidanus, Ralph Haan, Henry Ippel, Helen Meulink, Rev. Gerrit Sheeres, Janet Sheeres, and Rev. Leonard Sweetman. 📖

Endowment Fund

Due to growth in investments and the generosity of our contributors, the *Origins* endowment fund increased 12.9 percent during 2006 to \$356,073. Because of this our annual subscription rate remains at \$10, as established in 1983 when *Origins* began. This is the first real growth of our endowment fund since the sharp stock market decline six years ago. We are most grateful to all our supporters for helping us through the past six years. 📖



Richard H. Harms

Nicholas J. Cook

S SGT 483 AAF BOMB GP

1924–1944

H. J. Brinks



Nicholas J. Cook. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

The telegram arrived on Peter Cook's birthday, 3 August 1944. We were packed and ready to leave for a short vacation on the Cedar Lake Conference Grounds—our first family outing following my mother's marriage to Peter Cook. We stood on our gravel driveway staring at the oddly constructed missive—the kind that almost always brought bad news. This one did too. Dad's only son, Nicholas Cook, was declared “missing in action.” Our vacation plans evaporated.

South Holland's Bethany Christian Reformed Church was a half block away and it was only a matter of minutes before Rev. Peter Eldersveld walked up the drive. He joined the half circle standing around the luggage-filled 1936 Plymouth coupe, examined the telegram, and put his hand on Dad's shoulder. He prayed. I don't remember the words, but they were hopeful.

Our situation was obvious and Pastor Eldersveld advised that nothing could be gained by staying home to wring our hands in anxiety. Anyway, he noted, “missing” is only missing. Many, actually a majority of so-described soldiers, were recovered. So, for now, he counseled, we should expect “Nickie” to be found and returned home. Good advice—especially since the trip was something of a honeymoon for my parents who had been married for less than a year. Peter Eldersveld had married them on

8 October 1943 and the first week in August 1944 was Dad's chance for a vacation from the Buda Diesel factory, the defense plant in which he worked during the war years.

After six years of widowhood my mother, Alice Brinks, married Peter Cook whose wife had died about two years before the 8 October 1943 wedding. Nickie wrote from his Nevada Gunnery School, “I'm thankful the Lord has worked it out for you, Alice, and my dad to get together and make a home to provide company for both of you.”

My parents were pleased by that blessing and expected a joyful post-war reunion enabling all of us to unite as a new family.

Nickie's teenage years had been seriously disrupted. He left school at sixteen and his mother died the following year in 1942. He was inducted into the US Army in 1943 and six months later his father remarried. During his eighteen-month military career Nick traveled across much of the United States, crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and died in a foreign country.

He wrote buoyant letters from each of his training sites. The first, from Camp Grant, Illinois, reported “this army is a lot better than I thought it was. Boy, do I like the food they have here. I eat more now than I ever did. . . . Tell the others it's swell here and not to worry.” From Camp Grant he proceeded to Gulfport, Mississippi;

H. J. Brinks is an emeritus professor of history at Calvin College, former curator of the Archives, and founding editor of Origins. He has written extensively about the Dutch in North America, including Dutch American Voices published in 1995.

Salt Lake City, Utah; Rapid City, South Dakota; Mc Dill Field in Florida; and then to New York City, the port from which he was shipped to Italy where he joined his crewmates to fly bombing missions over southern Germany.

After basic training at Camp Grant, Nick was pulled into the Army Air Corps and transferred to Gulfport where he studied engine repair. His previous employment at the Buda factory in Harvey, Illinois, may have influenced his assignment to the airplane mechanics school. Nick had not been an outstanding day-school student and found the written examinations difficult. He wrote to his "Dear Dad" on 9 July 1943, "I just passed the last phase. I went through by the skin of my teeth and now I'm in the test blocks [stationary engine testing fixtures]. Today we started the 2800 Pratt and Whitney engine and it sure is fun. The test stands are just like the ones in the Buda [factory] only five times bigger and better."

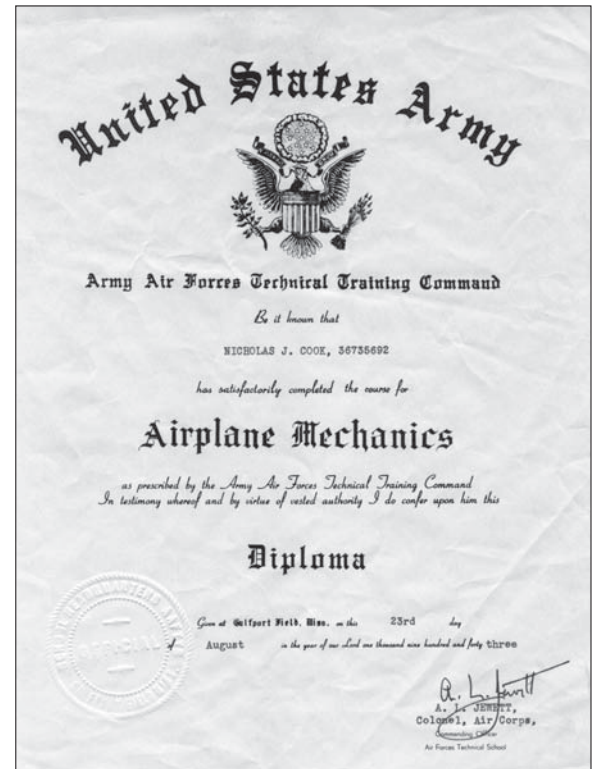
The mechanics training continued through August and concluded with a

general field test—an endurance exercise to simulate bailout conditions and captivity. It required the troops "to sleep on boards and under pup tents. You also have to walk single file wherever you go. And there are guards all around the place so there is no way to get out. "Well, Dad, today I got what I was waiting for ever since I came into the Gulfport field, and that is my diploma. I am going to send it home. Take good care of it because I don't want it torn or soiled."

A few days later Nick wrote, "I got out of the woods [field training] last Saturday and I haven't done a thing since then. I just lie around and sleep and watch the airplanes take off and land."

Nick's next base, the Army Air Corps Gunnery School in Las Vegas, narrowed the focus of his assignment. His size—5'2" and 130 pounds—shaped him for the ball turret "belly" gun position.

Under his new nickname "Pee Wee" he wrote, "I have two more weeks on the ground and then we go up to 38,000 feet and fire the upper and ball turrets in a B-17 bomber. Then, if I graduate, we are supposed to be shipped to Salt Lake City . . . I am still doing all right in school. I have to go for an hour of turret drill after going to

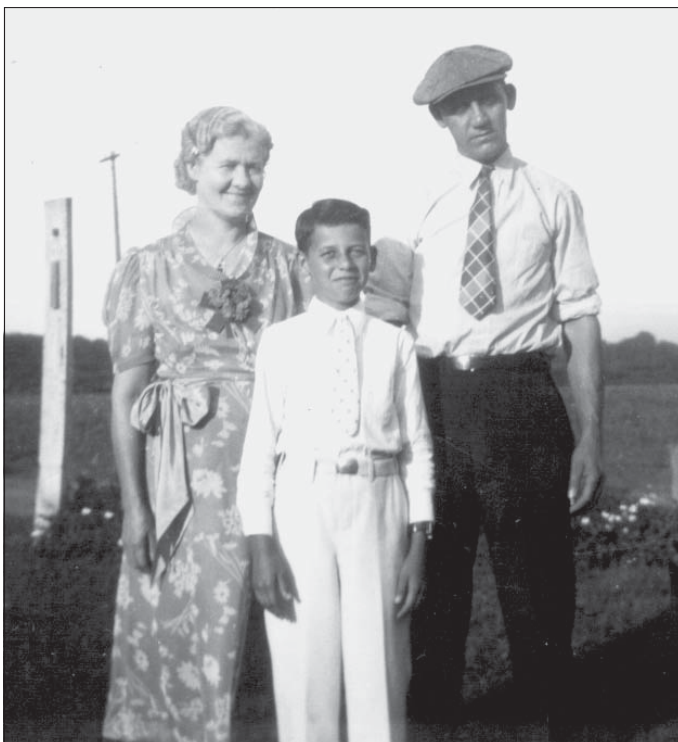


Nicholas Cook's diploma in Airplane Mechanics. Image courtesy of the author.

school for eight hours today. Dad, pray to the Lord that He may help me keep on through this school. I went to church Sunday with Hank Diekema from Grand Rapids. We had a wonderful sermon from a swell preacher."

Pee Wee graduated and moved on to the air base in Salt Lake City where he continued to train as a ball turret gunner, but by 2 December 1943 he found himself in South Dakota, even though he'd heard rumors that his next assignment was to be England. "Well, here I am in the South Dakota Army Air Base. From rumors which are going around I'm supposed to take the whole three-month training here. The last four numbers of my airplane, a B-17, are 1307 and the crew of the ship is all together. The boys seem to be okay. I think I'll like them."

Flying soon became routine and he wrote, "We haven't had much excitement around here except for a crash landing once in a while and an engine catching on fire." He added, "We



Peter and Nell Cook and their son Nick. Photo courtesy of the author.

do nothing but go to school and fly. Yesterday was rough. Five guys on our ship got sick. The wind was so bad most of the ships landed in Denver. But, too many guys on our ship were sick so we had to turn back and land. We came in for a landing and the ship started to tip to one side so he gunned the engines and took off again. The second landing was okay. "I now have my permanent position and it's the lower ball turret. I'm quite sure of going to England, and I'm sure glad about that. When and if we go there we will be in the 8th Army Air Force. The bombardier on our ship said that we would most likely get another leave before we go across, and if we do it will be in April."

The rumors, once again, were false. In less than a month Nick was transferred to Mc Dill Field near Tampa, Florida. His military identity there was more precisely defined.

Sgt. Nicholas J. Cook
ASN36735672
483rd Bomb Group
816 Bomb Squadron
Mc Dill Field, Tampa, Florida

Relatives (Uncle Frank and Aunt Alice) lived nearby and he was able to visit them on a 24-hour pass, but he also drew KP soon after arriving and he reported, "I sure do not like this place. It's what we call 'chicken.' Just the other night (you'll get a kick out of this), we had to scrub the mess hall floors. And then me and Milks [one of his crewmates] had to peel twenty gallons of potatoes."

"Do you know," he continued, "the tracks that run through Hammond, Indiana, by the roller skating rink? Well, I went right through there on the train when I was on my way down here and I sure felt like jumping out."

The time for crossing the "pond" was getting closer and on 12 February Nick reported, "I thought I would write you a few lines and let you

know that I'm getting shipped out tonight. Where, I do not know, but I will write and let you know as soon as possible. I'm not going to fly with my own crew until I get settled again. I sure did hate to part with Lew. And you should have seen him. His eyes were red. He sure is a swell kid."

Details, not usually permitted, arrived in Nick's last stateside letters.

"We have eighteen crews and eighteen new ships. The number of our ship is 2107016. It is a B-17. The model is G which has a chin turret on it and several different changes which I cannot mention. They are starting to censor our letters so I cannot write too much of what goes on."

"We had a lecture yesterday and the guy said we have to forget about home when we are on a mission and he said we should laugh at death. He also said if a German bails out over his own country we should shoot him down in his parachute. Oh, we also have to sleep on our own planes—that is each of us—one at a time. Well, that's all about that. I expect to make staff sergeant by next month which will give me 144 bucks."

Nick's plane, named *Miss Chievous*, left without him and he was sent to New York where he joined another crew which needed a ball turret gunner. He was forbidden to inform his family about this change but the fiancé of his crewmate, Wally Ulitch, sent the news on to Nick's father in a lengthy letter from New York City.

Dorothy Carey explained, "Perhaps you have heard Pee Wee talk about 'Wally' Walter Ulitch, the waist gunner and second engineer in his crew. Well, I am Walter's fiancée."

"In my between-semester's vacation from college I had the extreme good fortune of going to Florida with Walter's mother to see Walter before he shipped out. Of course I met the whole crew, and in the two weeks I spent in Tampa I came to know and

love the crew dearly. They certainly are the finest bunch of fellows I ever hope to meet. When I left I extended to them all a cordial invitation to 'drop in' on me if they ever got to New York.

"I was one of the most surprised girls in the city yesterday when I came home and found a note saying that Pee Wee was in New York and that Mr. and Mrs. Ulitch had gone to meet and have lunch with him."

Dorothy and the Ulitch family took Nick in tow. They fed him steaks, toured the city, and entertained him in their homes. This small-town kid, renowned roller skater at home, was captivated by the ice skaters at Radio City. Dorothy wrote that she "could scarcely drag him away."

Nick's schedule required him to call in for orders every hour but he had a one-day reprieve which gave him an opportunity to enjoy the hospitality of the Ulitch and Carey families.

Dorothy wrote, "I made arrangements to meet him at 7:00 PM and if he did not come I would know he was gone. I came dashing back [from school] at 7:05 PM and no Pee Wee. My heart sank, but I kept waiting. At 7:15 PM, when I had just about given up hope, he came bouncing along. His name had been scratched for shipping today . . . We headed for my home. I had called there in advance and since Mom had to go to choir rehearsal, Dad cooked him a steak. I think he enjoyed it. He talked with my dad for a while and even noticed that my dad had a suit, blue with a stripe, like your Sunday one.

"Pee Wee asked me to forward some documents to you. Since he won't be able to write and he was anxious that you not be worried, I promised to write you and tell you that he is fine, healthy, and as happy as can be expected. (Just like a boy, of course, he's even looking forward to new sights.)

"I don't know if he'll go where he thinks but I guess it's okay if I tell you since he'll be gone tomorrow. He'll probably fly a complicated route to North Africa, thence to Italy. But don't put too much confidence in that.

* * *

"I hope you don't think my intimate tone rude or presumptuous, but Nick talked about you so much that I feel as though I know you very well. And, if your son is like you (as he says everyone claims), I would certainly enjoy knowing you.

"I started out to write a little note, but I knew you'd want to know all the details, so I tried to give them to you. Nick's crew is certainly fine so there's nothing to fear in that direction. As for the rest, we'll put that in the hands of God, and I'm sure He's going to bring our boys home again."

On 21 April 1944 Nick announced, "Hi ya, everybody. Here I am way out in Italy. If you want to know where in Italy—well, I can't tell you."

In a subsequent letter he wrote, "I'm back with my own crew again and I am sure glad of that. The crew I came over here with was missing the last time I heard. . . . Tell Pete Genovese that I want to fly co-pilot with him when I get back. If I can handle a B-17 I guess I can fly another ship too.

"Also, tell Rev. Eldersveld that I've enjoyed mail from him very much."

Nick's last letter, 2 June 1944, complained about the lack of mail and he wondered if his mail was getting through. Then, in one of his most reflective passages he wrote, "I sure wish I was back home. One never knows just how much homeland and freedom of life means. . . . If some of the folks back home just knew what their boys were going through, and if they could take a good look at what war really is, they would get down on their knees and pray for this war to be

over—and not try to see how much money they can get out of it.

"Well, I'll close for now. I love you all. God be with you.

Your son and brother,

(Pee Wee) Nickie"

Following the 3 August missing in action telegram were urgent "Dear Son" and "Dear Nickie" letters, pleading for a response of some kind. On 24 August Nick's parents wrote, "Saturday will be three weeks ago that we heard the news from the government that you were missing. They always say that no news is good

news. So you see that we have not lost hope that you are a prisoner of war. We are all hoping and praying that you are safe and in good hands. Our minister has such wonderful prayers for you every Sunday."

Soon thereafter Major General N. F. Twining's 25 August letter arrived.

Other official letters followed (16 September, 17 November, and 7 December) asserting that the search for Nicholas was continuing. The December letter provided the names of Nick's crewmates with their home addresses—information previously withheld.

A flurry of correspondence between

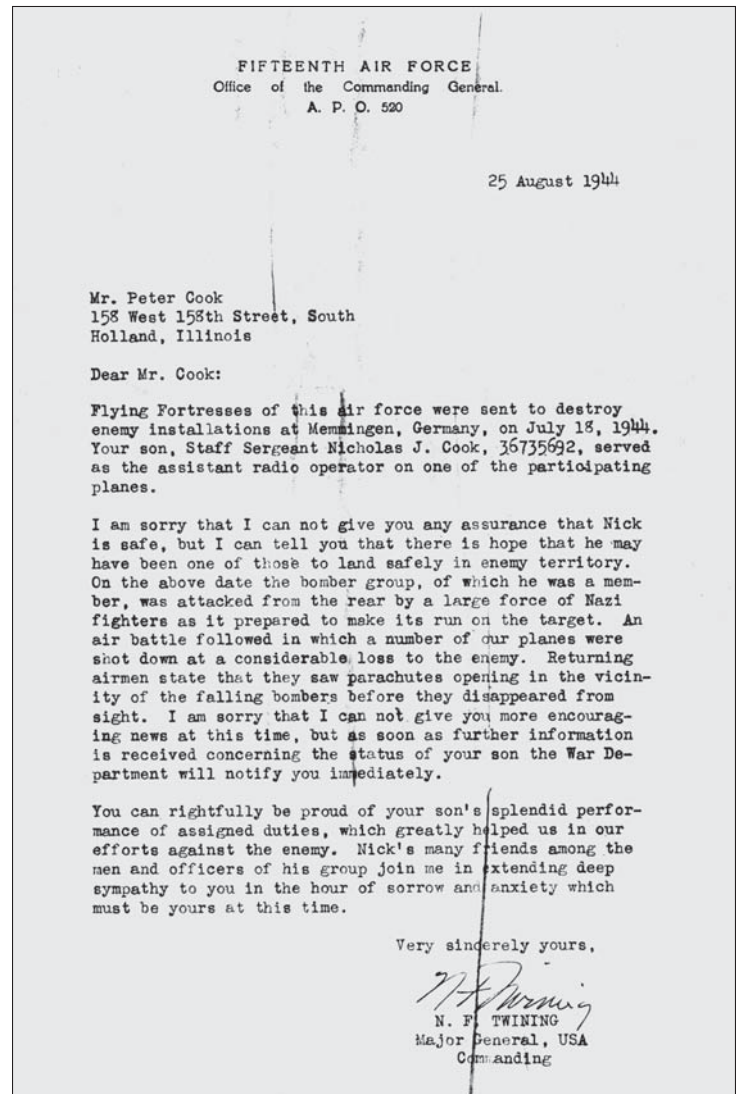
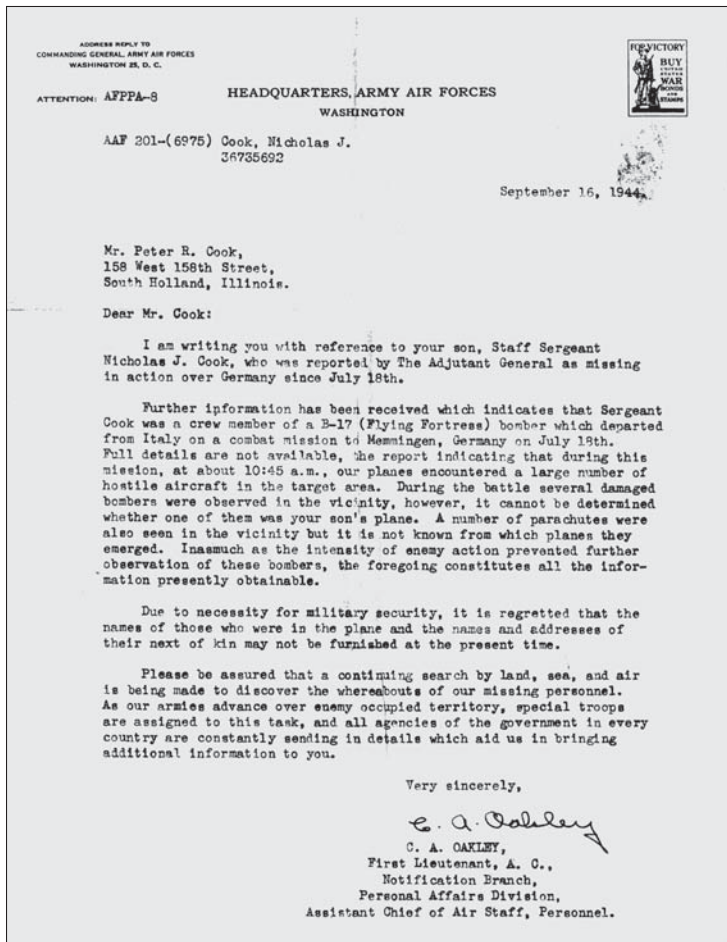


Image courtesy of the author.

the crew's parents and spouses followed and within ten days all the families had contacted each other. The first letter Nick's parents received came from Mary Higgins who wrote that she "received word that my dear husband was killed on 18 July over Germany." She also reported that Lieutenant Rother had been killed. Charles W. Erickson was quickly (9 September) identified as a prisoner of war. The others, Walter Ulitch, Ralph Murphy, Lewis Milks, and Nicholas Cook remained as officially missing in action.

The parents wrote one another for comfort and encouragement. Mary



*Cook's Purple Heart medal sent to his father.
Photo courtesy of the author.*

Image courtesy of the author.

Higgins wrote, "Could you tell me if your son has been taken prisoner? I hope very much that you have fared better than I. All the boys on the crew of *Miss Chievous* were the finest in the world. Both my husband and I thought the world of your son. I hope so much that he has had a chance."

Much later, on 10 April 1945, Walter Ulitch Sr. wrote, "Last week

we received our son Walter's personal things. Outside of that we know nothing further . . . it is almost nine months since the boys are missing and the way things are going on the other side [Germany surrendered on 8 May 1945], I feel we should have good news (we hope) soon."

Nick's personal things were also returned including a dozen unread "Dear Son" letters, a prelude to the

official recognition of his death in August 1945. His body was not discovered until 1949 when it was transferred from a German cemetery to a burial plot in Oak Glen, Illinois, where his father Peter Cook joined him in 1990.

On another of his birthdays Nick's dad received the official notice of Nick's posthumously awarded purple heart.☞

Endnotes

1. The Hammond and Oak Glen roller rinks were Nick's regular, almost nightly, destinations. He modified skates to enhance his skills.
2. When possible, every crewmember was required to pilot the plane so in cases of emergency someone would be able to fly.

Church on the Prairie— Martin, South Dakota 1929–1937

Angie Ploegstra and Paula Vander Hoven

On 26 June 1929, at the behest of Classis Sioux Center, Reverends Jacob Cupido, John Ehlers, and John Geerlings met in Martin, South Dakota,¹ with eleven families and three single men—altogether fifty-eight souls—and organized the Martin Christian Reformed Church. In Dutch they sang the words of Psalm 84:1, “How lovely is thy dwelling place.” Rev. Ehlers read Ephesians 4:1-16 and the sermon of Rev. Geerlings was based on Psalm 122:6: “They shall prosper that love thee.” But they did not prosper materially.

The People

The first Dutch settlers to the area, John and Minnie Vander Sanden, came from Rock Valley, Iowa, when a land agent persuaded John to buy half a section of land for \$25 an acre in the spring of 1926.² In September 1927, in response to a letter from the new settlers, Classis Sioux Center began Home Missions activity in Martin and in the spring of 1928 Classis granted permission to search for a seminary student to minister there during the summer months.³ Subsequently the group petitioned Classis Sioux Center



This is the second work published in Origins by Paula Vander Hoven and Angie Ploegstra on small Dutch settlements. Their previous piece was on Perch Lake, Michigan. Both live in Michigan, Paula in Schoolcraft and Angie in Zeeland.

Vander Sanden log house had four rooms downstairs and plans for four upstairs which were never completed. Local Native Americans referred to it as “the big house.” Photo courtesy of: Dorothy Vander Sanden Driesen.



Main Street of Martin, SD, during the 1920s. Photo courtesy of: Dorothy Vander Sanden Driesen.

to be organized as a mission station, and that request was granted on 14 October 1928.⁴

The hope evident in the organization of the church in 1929 was reflected in that year's harvest. But 1929 was the last good year for several and with the onset of the Great Depression all farm prices fell. In 1930 the congregation enjoyed a Fourth of July picnic and the next day the men were doing some repairs at the church when an ominous sky forced them to quickly head for home. A fierce hailstorm destroyed all of their crops. John Blacquiere had purchased a combine in preparation for a good harvest; instead he bought potatoes in nearby Nebraska and peddled them all over South Dakota. More significantly, the land around Martin was better for ranching, not the farming the Dutch were accustomed to, but nobody told the new settlers that.⁵

Beyond summer heat and winter cold, each of which left skin cracked and sand raw, over the next several

years a series of calamities struck. One year it was so dry that Dick Hoekman "didn't put even a kernel of wheat in the ground."⁶ Grasshoppers were so bad in 1933 that they stripped corn to the stalks and either ate through laundry on the lines or stained them with green splotches. According to Gertie Smits, "In one day the grasshoppers destroyed every crop my father planted. They came in clouds so thick that the sun was even covered."⁷ One night Tjepke Wassenaar left his jacket outside after shocking grain and the next morning just the seams and the buttons were left. "We were haled out six times in nine years. We would run for every pillow we owned and would hold them in front of the windows to try to save them, but we did buy many new windows," recalled Dorothy Vander Sanden Driesen.⁸ When the dust storms came mothers put wet towels into the open windows to allow a little air in without letting in more dust. Fires were common and frightening and could be seen for

miles on the flat prairie, as when the Case Hoekman barn was totally destroyed when fire began in overheated cane stored in the haymow.

Families did what they could to stay alive.⁹ Older children in larger families found jobs in town and boys like Nick Zwaan picked up custom plowing and combining work. Cora and Jean Blacquiere left Martin when they were teenagers and went to Denver to work and, at the age of sixteen, Tena Smits found employment in Iowa. Grace Zwaan worked for the town's doctor. Harry Zandt hired out on nearby ranches whenever he could, sometimes rounding up wild horses to sell. He lived at home and gave his wages to his father until he was twenty-one years old. The Zwaan and William Smits families had dairy operations and sold bottled milk in town. When John Bouma was offered the opportunity to shock grain for the huge sum of \$5 a day he quickly accepted and claimed he knew how, though he'd never done it before. He

fed the cattle of the town's doctor and shocked grain for as little as fifty cents a day.

The women were partners in providing for their families. Minnie Vander Sanden sold eggs, chickens, and butter for extra income and, when her husband John was ill one summer, she worked beside the men on the farm. Tillie Holtrop made and sold angel food cakes to the townspeople and exchanged vegetables for sugar and flour at the grocery store. DeNella Disselkoen was in charge of preparing butter for sale by her family.

The settlers grew wheat, oats, barley, corn, millet, Sudan grass, rye, and some flax early on. Most families had large vegetable gardens which they watered faithfully during dry conditions, sometimes with intricate homemade irrigation systems. They grew sugar peas, lettuce, radishes, onions, rhubarb, green and wax beans, carrots, beets, tomatoes, sweet corn, melons, and summer squash. The Nydam family also grew watermelons and Johanna Hoekman planted kohlrabi and Swiss chard as well. Some had good wells, but many did not and, despite their care, some wells dried up. But hail and drought could not destroy the potatoes, which were therefore plentiful and reliable. There was little fruit, although some of the families picked choke cherries in the canyons nearby. Almost everybody had chickens for eggs, and cows for milk, some raised pigs, and in many families the children herded cattle. The John Smits, Tony Disselkoen, and Vander Sanden families also had sheep, and the Holtrops raised turkeys, which were butchered and packed in dry ice for shipping.

The mothers especially became resourceful in feeding their families. Pigweed and lamb's quarter tasted like and were eaten as spinach. Several mothers made a delicious breakfast cereal from winter wheat boiled



John and Florence Vander Sanden in front of their house. Photo courtesy of: DeNella Disselkoen Vanden Bosch.

in soda water. When the families couldn't afford coffee they used toasted ground wheat instead. They substituted lard mixed with brown sugar for butter, and they learned to make eggless, milkless, butterless cakes, using sour cream which was always plentiful. Harry Zandt remembered eating mostly oatmeal and field corn and often being cold for lack of suitable clothing. After hailstorms the children gathered up the hailstones and made ice cream!

Some of the men, including William Smits, Louis Holtrop, and John Hoekman, eventually found work in the Depression-era WPA programs. They repaired bridges and roads and were grateful for the income. Henry Vaandering farmed and was also a part-time rural mail carrier whose route extended almost to Nebraska (the consistory admonished him for purchasing gas on Sunday). John Vaandering worked for a rancher named "Omaha Smitty." In the very worst years free food was available from the government.

The families coped with these farm disasters by relying on their faith and supporting each other. Whenever anyone butchered the meat was shared. The women made all their children's clothing and passed them around as hand-me-downs. When Jake and Flora Terpstra's little girl died, John Vander Sanden bought lumber and made a tiny casket, and Minnie Vander Sanden lined it with fine cloth she had been saving. Anna Disselkoen went there for several days to make Flora a black dress. John Hiemstra had a snazzy car—apparently a fast one—and when young Nick Smits had appendicitis he took him to the hospital in Hot Springs, about a hundred miles west. (Hiemstra also had an airplane in the 1930s, and even tried to learn to fly it.) The one year they had a little corn John Hoekman was sick, so the other members of the church picked it for him. When Anna Disselkoen's babies were born Tena Smits, Bertha Nydam, and Winnie Smits came to be with the family and did the household work, since new

mothers in those days stayed in bed for ten days. Once, when the Tony Disselkoen family went on a trip, John Blacquiere and his daughter Jean took care of their farm. In their absence Martin was completely “hailed out,” but thankfully the Blacquieres were able to protect the home furnishings. Grace Zwaan had a heart condition and needed help in the house. One of her helpers was young Bertha Nydam who lived with her family twenty miles west of Martin. Nick Zwaan knows exactly how far it was because he began to make that trip frequently! He and Bertha were happily married for sixty years before her death.

Friendships among the families were strong. The Tony Disselkoen family lived about three miles from the Vander Sanden family—close neighbors under the circumstances—and the women were dear, supportive friends. “When we would suffer some disaster we would go to each other’s houses . . . and, after some tears, we would all go to the piano and sing hymns and we would go home feeling better.”¹⁰ “The church was the center of our lives and we stuck together—like family.”¹¹ Even after the congregation disbanded and after the families had scattered, they kept in touch, and there are still strong ties between those who were children in Martin.

There were good times. Several remember the all-day church picnics and fishing parties in the sand hills about twenty miles south of Martin in Nebraska. The old cars couldn’t make it up the sand hills so the older boys would push most of them in turn. There were many small, shallow lakes in that area and fish were plentiful so there’d be



Harry Zandt, 1933. Photo courtesy of: Marge Zandt Yoss.

fish (bullheads) for supper. They’d take along a barrel to put the fish in as they were caught. One year a guest preacher went along. Somehow, before the afternoon was over, his suitcase ended up in the bottom of the barrel, covered with water and fish, and his hostess for the weekend, Mary Bouma, had to wash all his clothing before he could go home. One year they caught two hundred fish. In order not to waste any of them families kept them alive in a stock tank until they were all eaten.

Some of the families were able to purchase land, but most rented, usually from Sioux on the Pine Ridge Reservation. The Tony Disselkoens rented their land for ten cents an acre from John Six Feathers, but only once were they able to pay cash. Other times they traded chickens for rent. Many of the families lived several miles from town, and there were long distances between the church families, which meant that they often only saw each other on Sundays.

The Vander Sanden family had what was almost certainly the finest home in that part of the state. It must have seemed like a mansion on the prairie—a two-story log home with the logs placed vertically, and a separate dining room, kitchen, living room, and bedrooms. Sioux who saw it referred to John Vander Sanden as “Man-with-the-Big House.”

The other families lived more simply. The Bert Bouma family, John and Grace Bouma, and the Terpstras lived in log homes; the Terpstras chinked cow chips between the logs to keep out the wind. The Blacquiere family lived first with George Zandt and his two sons and then in a converted chicken coop on the Zandt’s land. The Roozenbooms first lived in a



Basement house occupied by the Hiemstras during the 1940s, photo taken in 1957. Photo courtesy of: Ann Smits Braaksma.

one-room house and later, as the family grew, they moved to a somewhat larger house with a basement, where all nine of them slept.

When the Reitsma family arrived in Martin there was only a granary on the farm they purchased. They moved into that; subsequently neighbors helped them build a small one-story home with two bedrooms. When they left, the William Smits family moved into that home, an improvement over their previous basement house with bedbugs that crawled between the cracks in the cement walls, despite Rena's best efforts to keep them out.

Basement homes were fairly common. The Henry Vaandering family with nine children had one, and so did Simon and Mary Hoekman. It was supposed to be warmer, "But the butter still froze in the oven," according to Marcia Hoffman.¹² John Hiemstra first shared a basement home with the Wassenaar family, and later with the William Smits family. The Holtrops lived in a basement home with a skylight in the roof to let in light. Later the family of six lived in a two-room log house.

The John Disselkoens had a two-room home. The Nydam and Tony Disselkoen families both had homes that were partly wood and partly sod. Sod houses were common and were made of plowed and cut squares of sod coursed as bricks, about a foot and a half thick. Dick and Lena Hoekman lived in a stucco home – their "honeymoon home"—and when they left it in 1936 his brother Case Hoekman and his new bride Johanna moved in and farmed there.

There was a great deal of interaction between the Dutch and the Sioux who lived near Martin. In contrast to the way most white people treated Native Americans, these relationships were usually positive and, on that inhospitable prairie, kindnesses were reciprocated. Some of those who

were children in Martin recall these contacts and credit them with influencing how they now view diversity.¹³ When Jake and Flora Terpstra's two-month-old son Floyd required surgery, John Six Feathers drove them in the doctor's car to the hospital in Hot Springs. Another time it was John Blacquiére who put the body of a Sioux neighbor in the back of his truck and drove to the government offices in Kyle—thirty five miles away. The man's family and friends went along—walking behind the truck. John was gone a full week. When John Wassenaar was born in 1930 he was delivered by a Native American midwife. The Holtrop family befriended their Sioux neighbors and tried to do all they could for a family whose situation was even more desperate than their own. They shared garden produce and milk whenever possible and when the Sioux baby died they provided wood for the coffin. In gratitude for the continued kindnesses, the grieving family gave an Indian belt to Tillie Holtrop, which is still a treasured family memento. And, for her repeated thoughtfulness, Flora Terpstra was given a pair of beaded moccasins.

About once a week a Native American family knocked at the Reitsma's door for chickens or eggs or garden vegetables. Minnie always gave them something and in return she received packs of Wrigley's gum for the children. William Roozenboom traded for horses and the Vander Sandens and several others bought wood from the Native Americans and traded or sold eggs and chickens. Jake Terpstra traded his Model T Ford. The Dick Hoekman family lived on the highway and Native Americans would often stop when they had car trouble. While the men fixed the car, Lena Hoekman would invite the women into her home.

John Vaandering became well-in-

tegrated into his Sioux wife's family. He was respected by the Sioux. Vaandering's stepson, Harry Drury, notes, "He would speak Dutch and they would speak Sioux and somehow they understood each other. I never knew anybody to speak badly of him."¹⁴ One of the abuses inflicted on the Native Americans in those days was that some whites would marry Sioux women, gain title to their land, and then sell it. This was not the case with John Vaandering. Harry Drury also recalls that the Dutch were fair in their dealings with his people.

The Church

On the day the church was organized Bert Bouma and Jake Terpstra were elected elders and John Disselkoen and George Zandt were elected deacons. Almost immediately the consistory set about making plans for a church building. They had been meeting in the Presbyterian church, but that arrangement didn't last long. The Dutch men were in the habit of leaving their cigar butts on the window sills of the sanctuary, even though they had been asked not to, and when the Presbyterians remodeled their building the Dutch families were told they couldn't use the facility any more. For a time the congregation worshiped briefly in each other's homes. The eventual building, dedicated on 19 May 1930, was a "basement church," a thirty-by-sixty-foot cement block structure. Tony Disselkoen and his horses dug the basement out of the side of a hill and the other men of the church assisted a carpenter, whom they paid \$5 a day. In addition to the sanctuary there was a consistory room and a library, with books donated by the congregation. With a cement floor, a roof, and a pot-belly stove the building was complete. If the upper level was planned or desired, it was never completed.

Arie Disselkoen donated a pulpit

Bible, to be read “as long as the Dutch language is used,”¹⁵ though later the purchase of an “American Bible” was approved. The pulpit came from Bigelow, Minnesota, at a cost of \$7.50 and, with the help of William Smits, an organ with foot-powered bellows was donated by the Corsica, South Dakota, church and the baptism font and communion table were sent by a church in Classis Zee-land.¹⁶ The pews were simple benches.

Almost immediately the search began for a pastor. At first it seemed likely that the Martin congregation would share a pastor with the Purewater church, some sixty miles away. But, after several attempts and high hopes, negotiations between the two congregations broke down. Again and again the consistory minutes indicate discussion of the possibility of having a pastor or a student for the summer, but finances were always the problem. The group was creative in asking Classis for assistance. But at a congregational meeting on 24 November 1932 it was decided that “if the Budget Collections are \$25 or more this month, to go ahead and ask the Emergency Committee to search for a pastor; if not that high, then to cancel the request for a candidate.”

Part of the dilemma may have been that the settlers simply did not have cash. Almost all of their transactions were bartering—eggs, cream and butter for flour and sugar at the grocery store. Cash only came when they sold grain or pigs or cattle. Most of the families rented their land on shares with one-third of the crop going to



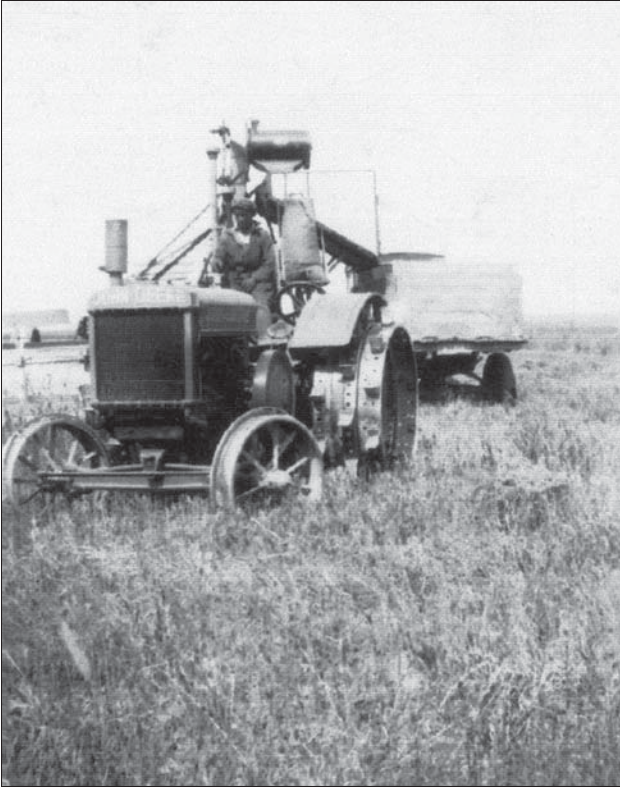
The Jake Terpstra family. Photo courtesy of: Dorothy Vander Sanden Driesen.

the land owner. Some years the crops were so poor that the landlord got almost nothing in rent, but even a small amount was better than nothing.

In the meantime the folks in Martin were served by pastors supplied by Classis Sioux Center who periodically came from great distances to preach, administer the sacraments, and officiate for at least one marriage. Hilda Zwaan and William Roozenboom were married in Martin on 14 January 1930 by Rev. John Ehlers. Their three oldest children were baptized one Sunday when Rev. Leonard Verduin came from Corsica. Rev. Ring Star from Purewater (sometimes called the “Star from the East”¹⁷) was a favorite, partly because he also brought his wife who had a lovely singing voice, about the only time the church was blessed with “special music.”¹⁸ The families of the congregation, especially those with somewhat larger homes, took turns hosting these guest pastors. Rev. Joseph Betten came one winter weekend from Doon, Iowa, and stayed with the Bouma family.

He shared a bed with young John Bouma and woke up in the morning in time for church with frozen ears.¹⁹ The families who hosted guest pastors were given one dollar a day for board.²⁰

When there were no pastors or students, which was most of the time, the men of the church took turns reading sermons in both Dutch and English. By 1933 a compromise had been reached about whether the services were to be held in Dutch or English. “Every other Sunday the service is to be held in the Dutch language in the morning, the other service will be held in the language of the land, with the exception of services on holidays, which shall by turn be in Dutch and the English languages.”²¹ Church services were held in the morning and afternoon. Since most of the families lived some distance from the church and since travel, however they managed it, was difficult, they would bring their lunches and eat them between services. The men took turns leading



Combining flax, August 1928. Photo courtesy of: Marge Zandt Yoss.

devotions. The young people remember entertaining themselves between services by going for walks, and there were also catechism classes for children, beginning with those in the first grade. At the sound of a whistle the afternoon service would begin. "The preacher would sometimes give a fire and brimstone message, often pounding on the pulpit."²² The songs were Psalms, "English Psalters were in the pews, but everybody carried their Dutch Psalters to church with them, though most everyone knew them by heart. There were no choirs, ushers, bulletins, or nursery. Babies were brought to church at a few weeks of age and always taken to church after that."²³ The young men tended to sit in the back of the church and sometimes caused disturbances.

According to the statistics in the Christian Reformed Church year-books, the congregation actually flourished during the years when

they had no regular pastor, reaching peak membership in 1933 with fifteen families and twenty-nine communicant members. There were five in the consistory. The Ladies' Aid Society membership stood at six, down from their all-time high of fourteen in 1931, and there was also a Men's Society. Almost without exception the members of the congregation were active in rotating leadership positions—the men served as elders, deacons, clerks, treasurers, and treasurers of the Poor Fund, and the women taught Sunday school, and held offices in the Sunday school and the Ladies' Aid.

John Blacquiere, his daughter Jean, and Jeannette Bouma were organists and, when they were unable to serve, John Smits filled in.

Though they struggled to raise the money for a pastor, and though they frequently were forced to re-negotiate the terms of their account at the lumberyard in Martin, the little group was remarkably consistent in supporting a wide variety of mission causes, including the Jewish and China Missions; Home Missions; Pine Rest Hospital (psychiatric) in Cutlerville, Michigan; and Bethesda Hospital (tubercular) outside Denver, Colorado; and the Theological School. They almost always had sufficient resources to send a representative to the meetings of Classis, held at times as far away as Doon, Iowa.

But financially their situation remained difficult, as Rev. Leonard Verduin wrote in the 3 March 1933 issue of the *Banner*,

The elders at Martin have a hard row to hoe. They are doing their best to guide the ship so it may weather the present storm One of the unhappy consequences of the Depression, for the Martin people, is that it has been made impossible apparently to have their classical appointments filled. The ministers of our classis are hardly in a position to travel the immense distances involved, at their own expense; the local church cannot pay; and Classis likewise is unable to promise reimbursements.

Finally, in late October 1933, the congregation welcomed Candidate Martin Huizenga and his wife, the former Grace DeHoog from Grand Rapids.²⁴ Part of the salary was in cash, the rest was in donations of food, including sides of beef and pork to can, flour, potatoes, produce, butter, milk, cream, and anything else.²⁵ As other families did, the Vander Sandens took them to a canyon a few miles from Martin to gather stove wood. While the short-term student pastors had boarded with families, the Huizengas lived in Martin in a small house that had no indoor plumbing or electricity and with furniture donated by the congregation. They apparently adapted rather cheerfully to this lifestyle. In April 1935 the Huizengas left, called to Holland Center, South Dakota. By that time others also were already beginning to leave, and membership had decreased to eight families and fifteen communicant members.

The Leaving

Rev. Verduin wrote in the 24 July 1934 *Banner* that "Martin has also been visited with reverses. Much of the land is no longer farmed and land is going back to prairie. A few farmers harvested at least a semblance of a crop." In that same issue Verduin reports of grasshoppers and crops badly blighted by drought throughout Dakota. He wrote that "in this imme-

diate vicinity there will be no grain, no corn, no potatoes, no vegetables, and no hay. About the only income there will be during the winter will be from various relief measures. The government is buying up large numbers of our cattle," some of which were slaughtered on the spot and fed to the poor.

In addition to the years of drought, grasshoppers, hail, heat and crop failures there was another reason why they sought out lives in other places. As the children of the families grew older there weren't suitable Christian mates for them in Martin. It was very important for them to have the companionship of other Dutch Reformed young people, and their parents made the decision to move to places where that would be possible. In the end, they went wherever they had relatives or friends, or some slim hope of a job. But, as Effie Reitsma Easton notes, "We became a close-knit community because of sharing and helping each other and making ends meet, which made it harder for us to part."²⁶

The Bert Bouma family had been the first to leave in late 1932 for Hull, Iowa, and the Wassenaars left for Chandler, Minnesota, in June, 1933.²⁷

John and Florence Disselkoe left in September 1933 for New Holland, South Dakota, and in December the Reitsma family moved to be near relatives in Lafayette, Indiana. The family sent a big truck to transport the Reitsma's livestock and some belongings. They had a Model T truck into which they packed their Home Comfort range and their other household belongings. Three of the children rode outside the truck bed for the seven-day trip to Indiana. As the family was leaving amid tears, one of the neighbors asked Minnie Reitsma to make one last batch of bread, which she did.

The depression and discouragement from drought and grasshoppers continued, so four men of the church took action. On Monday morning, 18 September 1933, Jake Terpstra, John Hoekman, Ralph Reitsma, and John Vander Sanden set out on a trip to the northwest. In January 1968 Jake Terpstra reminisced about it in a speech to honor the fiftieth wedding anniversary of John and Minnie Vander Sanden.

While nothing of the spirit of rebellion manifested in our large cities nowadays was present with us, we realized this could not go on this way. Something must be done. Some settlers were moving out. What must we do? One of our farmer friends, John Hoekman, had been around a lot. He had been in Montana, Idaho, and Oregon, where they raised good crops and did have a lot of fruit and plenty of rain. Ralph

Reitsma had an uncle in Oregon. John Vander Sanden and Jake Terpstra had relatives in Lynden, Washington. The gypsy spirit got the best of us. And plans were made to spy out the land by the four of us.

It turned out to be a 4,100 mile trip in John Hoekman's well-cared-for Whippet.²⁸ They returned happily to Martin, having had only one flat tire, where it was still dry, so they each began to finalize their plans.

The Terpstras headed for Lynden, Washington, in January 1934 and eventually moved to Rock Valley, Iowa. George Zandt left that same time for Worthington, Minnesota. William Smits and his family returned to the area near Bigelow, Minnesota, in October 1934. His brother John had a truck and the oldest of his sons trucked the cattle back for William in several trips. The John Smits family followed to Worthington in February 1935. By March 1935 the Vander Sanden family also had moved to Rock Valley where they had relatives and an opportunity to rent land. It had taken most of the winter to move their sheep. The John Hoekman family eventually transferred their membership to Chandler, Minnesota, in April 1935. That same year the Henry Vaandering family moved to Oregon in search of a better climate for a sickly son. The Tony Disselkoe family left in mid-November and went back to New Holland, South Dakota.

Other families left in 1936—the Nydams, the Holtrops, and the Dick and Lena Hoekman family. The Hoekmans bought land in Minnesota. His brother Case and new bride Johanna came to Martin about the same time. They farmed the land that Dick had vacated, and planted what turned out to be a bumper crop. In early 1937 the Simon Hoekman family moved to Grand Rapids with their 1935 Plymouth, their cream separator, and their Singer sewing



The Martin Presbyterian Church. Photo courtesy of: Dorothy Vander Sanden Driesen.

machine. The Roozenboom family left in about 1937 and went back to Iowa. For a year after their marriage Nick and Bertha Zwaan lived with his parents, Henry and Grace, and both families moved back to Doon, Iowa, in early 1938. The Case Hoekman family stayed until 1943, when they moved to Colton, South Dakota, near relatives. John Vaandering and John Hiemstra stayed permanently.

As late as September 1936 the group requested help from Classis in securing a candidate for ten weeks with the church promising to provide \$50 toward this end. However, in view of the small numbers and uncertainty of continuance, the request was denied. In March 1937, Classis voted to disband the church. Elder John Bouma was present for that

decision. John Blacquiere and John Bouma negotiated the sober details of the dissolution of the church and the sale of the property. The final consistory meeting was held on 22 February 1938. John Hiemstra was thanked for having read sermons “for a long time.” John Bouma stayed in Martin just long enough to record the final consistory minutes and then he and his family left in March 1938 for Ireton, Iowa. The Blacquiere family left for Zeeland, Michigan, soon after John had completed final paperwork for the sale of the church.

It had initially been hoped that another church would purchase the building and for a short time there was some slim possibility of that. The Southwest Interdenominational Holiness Association of South Dakota

had apparently been using the church for services and expressed an interest in purchasing it. John Blacquiere wrote to Rev. B. H. Spalink on 16 April 1938, “. . . [we] hope that the building will be sold and be used for Christian purposes. I know our church failed, let’s give another church a chance, if possible, and let us hope they will do better, for this reservation certainly needs the Gospel.”²⁹ In the end though, it was sold to the Pioneer Masonic Lodge in Martin for \$551. After payment of debts, including those to the Church Help Fund and the Theological School, \$240.32 was left. Yet years later Tillie Zwaan Holtrop told her daughter Grace, “Those were the best years of my life because then I came to know the Lord.”³⁰ ❧

Endnotes

1. Martin is roughly 125 miles southeast of Rapid City, South Dakota, on US Highway 18, 10 miles north of the Nebraska border—between the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Indian reservations.

2. F. H. Johnson Land and Cattle Co. of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Jo Ver Mulm, “Man-with-the-Big-House,” a Vander Sanden family history based on personal audio taped interviews with John Vander Sanden, summer 1987, and Dorothy Vander Sanden Driesen, 29 February 1992.

3. *De Wachter*, 24 July 1929, translated by Gerrit W. Sheeres.

4. From a 1928 Banner article written by Clerk John Disselkoe and quoted by DeNella Disselkoe Vanden Bosch in “Scenes from My Childhood in Martin, South Dakota: 1926-1935,” unpublished, dated 1982. Hereafter cited as DeNella Disselkoe Vanden Bosch.

5. Conversation with Sadie Wassenaar Grootwassink, c. 17 February 2006.

6. Conversation with Martin Hoekman, 13 March 2006.

7. Conversation with Gertie Smits Smidt, 18 February 2006.

8. Dorothy Vander Sanden Driesen, “My Memoirs,” unpublished memoirs, undated.

9. Conversation with Grace Holtrop Heunink, 7 February 2006.

10. Letter from Dorothy Vander Sanden Driesen, 28 December 2005.

11. Conversation with Ann Smits Braaksma, 3 February 2006.

12. Conversation with Marcia Hoffman, 25 February 2006.

13. Conversation with Nick Zwaan, 16 February 2006.

14. Conversation with Harry Drury, 28 May 2006.

15. Minutes of the consistory, 19 July 1929, Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.

16. Minutes of the consistory, 6 November 1929.

17. Conversation with Winfred Nydam, 23 January 2006.

18. DeNella Disselkoe Vanden Bosch.

19. Reverends Cornelius Scholten, Dirk Flietstra, and Jacob DeBruyn also came; John Geels, Arie Disselkoe and John Guichelaar were summer student pastors.

20. Minutes of the Consistory, 6 November 1929.

21. Article in *De Wachter*, 20 December 1933 by Jake Terpstra, clerk. Translated by Mrs. Lloyd Vugteveen, and quoted by DeNella Disselkoe Vanden Bosch.

22. Letter to the authors from Effie Reitsma Easton, 13 March 2006.

23. DeNella Disselkoe Vanden Bosch.

24. Letter from Martin Huizenga to Rev. Dr. H. Beets, 25 June 1937. Henry Beets Collection, Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.

25. DeNella Disselkoe Vanden Bosch.

26. Letter from Effie Reitsma Easton, 13 March 2006.

27. Dates of departure are based on family memories and on consistory records of membership transfers and may be approximate in some cases.

28. According to Nick Zwaan, there were actually four Whippets in the little enclave.

29. This letter is in the Martin Christian Reformed Church file, Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.

30. Conversation with Grace Holtrop Heunink, 7 February 2006.

The Zylstras and the Settlement of Friesland, South Dakota

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres



Bible with the silver covered edges and clasps crafted in 1837 by Rein Sipkes Zylstra.

From 17 February to 2 July 2006 the Bible Museum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, featured *Sunday Silver*, an exhibition of over two hundred devotional books and personal Bibles ornately decorated with silver clasps, corner pieces, and covers. Among the collection, which spanned three centuries, was a Bible (Exhibit #92) of which the cover edges and clasps were crafted in 1837 by Rein Sipkes Zylstra, at the time a gold and silversmith in Drachten, Friesland.¹ From 1835 until 1861 Rein operated a prosperous gold and silversmith business in Drachten and the family was considered very well-to-do. Little could he have envisioned that of his ten children, three—Sipke, Jelle, and Rienk—and their families would become pioneers in Signal Township, Charles Mix County, Dakota Territory, in the early 1880s. Further, of these three sons and their children, nine would apply for land grants—the largest number of applicants in the county of any one family group.²

The oldest, Sipke, also a silversmith, arrived in 1883 at the age of sixty-two. What possessed this man, who had never farmed a day in his life, to make this move at his age to a place where the need for a silversmith was minimal to say the least?

This is the story of these Zylstras and their role in founding a now vanished town and church both called Friesland in South Dakota.

In the popular *push and pull* theory

of emigration, two facts conspire to motivate the emigrant. The *push* may be religious persecution or food or job scarcities and the *pull* to emigrate would then be religious freedom or the abundance of food and jobs. In the case of the Dutch trek to the Dakotas in the decades of the 1880s and 1890s, the push and pull were lack of land and abundance of land. A tenacious settler able to stay on and improve his land claim for the required five years could acquire the land free under the federal 1862 Homestead Act.³

After several decades of prosperity between the 1850s and late 1870s, farmers in the Netherlands experienced what would become known as the agricultural crisis as low-cost wheat from America's prairies and Russia's steppe drove down the worldwide price of the grain. In the old country the labor-intensive Frisian and Groninger farmers could not compete. These former well-to-do farmers considered themselves a social notch above their hired men, so when they lost their land they could not bear to become common laborers. The alternative was to pack up and move to where there was still land available at prices they could afford. This same agricultural crisis also thrust hundreds of farm laborers out of work, and through newspaper ads and letters they were encouraged by way of the Homestead Act to begin farming for themselves in America. Land agents, in this case Rykele Zylstra, a nephew of Sipke, the erstwhile

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silversmith, facilitated this process.

Rykele Zylstra, the eldest son of Jelle Zylstra and Aukje Van Kalsbeek, had neither wealth nor rank nor age, for that matter, to recommend him as a leader. In fact, his nephew Rein (son of Rienk) Zylstra, in his account of the *Early Dutch Settlements in South Dakota*, wrote about his Uncle Rykele, "It seems that whatever he undertook to do worked against him."⁴ When he reached adulthood, Rykele received a respectable inheritance from his maternal grandmother, Tjitske Van Kalsbeek, including a piece of land at a time when real estate prices were high. Perhaps he used the proceeds of the land sale to purchase a boat because, again according to his nephew, Rykele first became a skipper and when that did not satisfy he opened a butcher shop.⁵ In 1876 at age twenty-three he married twenty-five-year-old Liske Pool. On the marriage certificate and subsequent registrations of his children he calls himself Rykele Van Kalsbeek Zylstra in honor of his generous grandmother.⁶

On 17 May 1880, Rykele, Liske, three-year-old Jelle, baby Roelof, and Rykele's bachelor brother, Rein, traveled steerage class to America and headed for Springfield in Bon Homme County in the Dakota Territory, where friends of the family had settled.⁷ It is not clear what Rykele did for a living that year, but it is clear he had not bought or claimed land for himself as yet because when, in 1881, young Hendrik Kuipers from the Netherlands, along with Hermanus Frederik Mos from La Mars, Iowa, stopped in Bon Homme on their way west to scout out land, Rykele teamed up with them. For seventeen days the three men journeyed with wagon and mules through Charles Mix County.

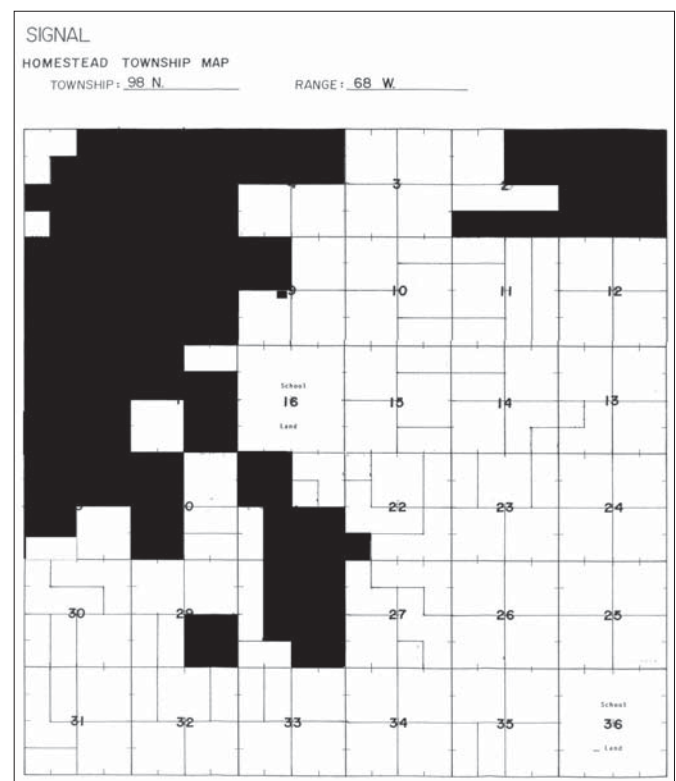
While Rykele returned to Bon Homme, Kuipers and Mos went to Iowa to address an interested group, after which they returned to the

Netherlands to report that there was still land available in America.⁸ In April 1882, acting on his son's report, Albert Kuipers arrived with a group of settlers from the Netherlands and founded what is now Platte, South Dakota (see sidebar).

In June of the same year Rykele arrived with a group of mainly Frisian families. They were Geert Bles, Jelte Bijl, Willem Buren, Jurjen Dyk, Pieter Dykstra, Fedde Ferwerda, Sipke Joutes Koster, Simon Stoffels, Meinte Weidenaar, and Gerben Wynia. Some of them were single men, but most of them came with their families. This group, settling in on Section 22-98-69 of Signal and Hamilton townships, seven miles south and one mile west of today's Platte, became the nucleus of the Friesland settlement. From March 1883 until February 1886 Friesland had a United States Post Office and for three years could properly be called Friesland, Dakota Territory, United States of America.

These two Dutch settlements—Friesland and Platte—in Charles Mix County generated plenty of interest in other Dutch communities and news items about them appeared immediately in *De Volksvriend*.⁹ In an editorial in the 11 June 1882 issue, R. J. F. wrote “Among the sparsely settled immigrants are several recently arrived from the Netherlands. Their condition is not at all enviable and what misfortune will they yet face in the future?”¹⁰ A minister visiting

the Dutch in Charles Mix County in the summer of 1882 also reported that because of their [Dutch settlers'] poverty they faced uncertain times.¹¹ There were other concerns. In August the prairie that was supposed to feed and house them turned against them. Schaapman, in Platte Township north of Signal Township, wrote, "Yesterday morning about 2 A.M. fire broke out in the grass fields. Presently everything is very dry. It has hardly rained here since the 12th of July. The fire came



Land parcels (blackened) owned by Dutch immigrants in Homestead Township.

within reach of our house; 14,000 acres has already burned and still you see a sea of fire everywhere. To see the fire flaming continuously is depressing. In every direction we look, we see flames of fire.”¹²

But not all the news was dire. In September Simon Stoffels wrote to the editor of *De Volksvriend*, “Charles Mix now has more than thirty Dutch families. Since August we have had much dry weather with now and

then a thunderstorm which refreshed the earth. Plums, grapes, and berries are plentiful along the creeks and river. You can pick all you want. The garden harvest was equally plentiful it seemed; the settlers brought wagonloads of watermelons, pumpkins, and squash to Kimball and Chamberlain for cash.”¹³

Nevertheless, the initial slow growth in the number of Dutch settlers may have been partially due to bad press in the homeland. T. G. Vander Meulen, a Frisian who had made a trip to America to ascertain farming conditions for himself, wrote a scathing article in the *Nieuw Advertentieblad* of March 1882 about conditions in America, especially for those trying to farm in newly opened up areas.¹⁴

While Rykele immediately set about building a sod house for his family, his bachelor brother Rein returned to the Netherlands in 1882, intending to bring back his fiancée. However she had second thoughts about living in primitive conditions in America and refused to go with him. Although Rein returned a bachelor, he was able to encourage another brother to emigrate. In 1883 their brother Douwe Zylstra arrived in the company of Klaas Dyksterhouse, whose father, mother, and two sisters, Elizabeth and Dieuwerke, arrived shortly afterward from the province of Groningen. Soon Rein and Douwe began courting the Dyksterhouse sisters and the four were married in a double wedding ceremony on 10 December 1883. Elizabeth, seventeen, married Rein, twenty-eight, and Dieuwerke, fifteen, married Douwe, twenty-four. Unlike the three-week waiting period in the Netherlands and the bride and groom having to produce numerous identity documents, marriage in America was easy. “You go to the Justice of the Peace and five minutes later you are married,” Kuipers wrote in a letter

recommending America.¹⁵

Because the weather cooperated the first years, word spread among the Hollanders in other areas of the United States that the Charles Mix County venture seemed to be succeeding and consequently others joined. Within three years two hundred families had settled in the county.

Among those arriving in 1883 was the family of Rykele’s uncle, Sipke Zylstra, the silversmith. He and his second wife, Reinigje, came with their two sons, Rein and Pieter (also a jeweler), and his wife, Jeltje Brandenburgh; Sipke’s three daughters remained in the Netherlands. He was then already sixty-two, his wife was forty-five. After his silversmith business failed in the Netherlands, Sipke peddled gold and silverware. However, according to his nephew Rein, in the Netherlands Sipke enjoyed the good life too much, like staying in expensive hotels, and was forced to declare bankruptcy. But in 1883 his father, the successful gold and silversmith of Drachten, passed away, leaving Sipke a sizeable inheritance, which he used to come to America. Once in Friesland, South Dakota, he had a house built and rented out his land. He kept a cow, a few sheep, and some pigs, giving him and his wife enough to live on. However, according to Rein, “Aunt Reinigje did all the work; the old gentleman never did a lick of work.”¹⁶

In 1884 Rykele welcomed his father, Jelle Zylstra; his stepmother, Ruurdte Plantinga; and his sister Aukje to America. By that time, however, Rykele had moved out of Friesland to Kimball, the nearest railroad town, where he lived with his wife and four children in a very small house and engaged in carpentry work.¹⁷ It may have been too much for Liske to bring up four little children in a sod shanty on the prairie without any conveniences or family and friends to

help. Often the settlers straight from Holland underestimated the cost of starting a farm, so that what little money they had was quickly spent on farming costs, with little left for the needs of their families. And, like Rykele, many had no prior experience in farming. Thus Rykele may have had to move into Kimball and turn to carpentry in order to feed his family. In his place his brother Douwe became the leader of the community in church and civil matters.¹⁸

In July 1885 Rykele’s other uncle, Rienk Zylstra, aged fifty at the time, and his wife Geertje, forty-eight, arrived with their seven children.¹⁹ Originally from Drachten, Friesland, this family had lived for years in Nijmegen, a sizeable city in the Netherlands, where Rienk had made a living as a carpenter. However their baggage contained no farming equipment, and they had no farming experience.

Their son Rein, eighteen at the time and writer of a short family history, recalls how they arrived in Kimball at the end of the railroad terminal. His cousin Rykele met them at the train, housed them in the town’s hotel, and a day or two later his other two cousins, Douwe and Rein, came to pick up the family in their large lumber wagon to drive them the last forty miles through the endless prairie to Friesland where they moved into Rykele’s abandoned sod house. The family bought a cow but no one knew how to milk it, that is, until Ruurdte recalled that during her girlhood years when visiting her grandfather on his farm in Friesland she had done some milking and she was willing to give it a try. She successfully coaxed milk from the cow and showed the family how. “Imagine,” Rein wrote later, “in Nijmegen we lived in a fine brick house, with water piped in, all very neat, and there [in Friesland] we lived in a sod house!”²⁰ With limited funds to start farming on a large scale, Rein



The Zylstra farm house with a dog house under the porch and barrel on the porch for collecting rainwater. Photo courtesy of the author.

and his two brothers were forced to work for neighbors for a dollar a day while his sisters worked out for twenty-five cents per day. They acquired some land by homesteading but eventually lost all claim to the land due to very poor growing years. Their mother, Ruurdije, passed away in 1901, and toward the end of his life Rienk moved in with his children. He passed away in 1913 in Platte, never having realized the “American dream.”²¹

Working for others was a humbling experience for some immigrants. Farmers back home were used to ordering their hired men and maids to do the work. Families like the Zylstras, accustomed to hired help, soon found out that in America farming was a family affair with everyone pitching in. Those who had been well-established farmers in the Netherlands and who thought of themselves as being in a higher social class often chose not to associate with those they felt were socially inferior to them. Too proud to associate with their

perceived inferiors, too proud to ask for help, and unable to hire help, they were left to muddle along on their own. In his book, *On the Reservation Border*, Vander Pol describes them as “being short of purse and long of pedigree.”²²

One such case was that of Count Bennebroek van Gravenhorst, who arrived in Friesland in 1884 with wife, daughters, and their governess after losing his fortune by investing in the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Like everyone else, they had to live in a sod house until their home could be built. The four daughters, all in their teens, wearing

their fancy dresses, assisted with the farm work. Their nearest neighbors, the Franssens, had a centuries-long pedigree as well, with one ancestor being the *Burgemeester* (mayor) of Feerwerd in Groningen. In an interview given to Vander Pol, another settler, Reinders, boasted that his mother-in-law descended from French nobility. But fancy titles did not help turn the sod in South Dakota.

The Friesland CRC Church

In mid-October 1882 K. Tietema, editor of *De Volksvriend*, along with Jan Timmer, Harm Eerkes, and his son Eerke Eerkes trekked from Orange City, Iowa, to Charles Mix County to look around. The trip resulted in three editorials published in the 19 and 26 October and 9 November issues. (It also resulted in the Timmer and Eerke families moving to Friesland.) Besides the description of land, crops, and prices, the article mentions the settlers’ spiritual needs. Because one of their travel days was a Sunday the four men spent it at the home of Rykele Zylstra, where they were joined by Mr. and Mrs. Dyk, Mr. Dyksterhuis, and the Evert Beltmans. They honored the day by holding a short service consisting of singing psalms, Scripture reading, and a spiritual discussion. They also discussed



Douwe and Dieuwerke Zylstra; they married when he was twenty-eight and she fifteen. Photo courtesy of the author.



The Friesland Christian Reformed Church. Photo courtesy of the author.

the difficulties of meeting regularly on Sunday.²³

Nevertheless, as more families arrived they gradually managed to meet more regularly on Sundays for worship services. At first they met in each others' homes or in the only school in the area. One Sunday morning when they were going to meet in the school they found a group of Lutherans ahead of them with the same idea.²⁴ Unperturbed, they positioned their wagons in a circle and, seated on the grass and the wagons, held a worship service in the open air.

Less than a year after arriving in the area they requested Classis Iowa to organize them formally as a congregation. On Sunday, 11 February 1883, the first service with a sermon was held in a school four miles south of present-day Platte.²⁵ On Wednesday, 14 February 1883, Rev. Henry Bode and Elder Dirk Zwaagman from Steamboat Rock, Iowa, met with eleven men and nine women at the home of Hermanus Mos to officially organize them into a Christian Reformed congregation and to install elders and deacons. This Christian Reformed church, centrally located, served both the Kuipers settlement in Platte and the Friesland settlement. Two of the Platte settlers, Mos and his business partner Westerhuis, donated land for

a church building, which was erected in the same year.²⁶ The first elders were Evert Beltman and Jurien Dyk; deacons were Jan Wynia and Rein Zylstra, but listed

prominently as the first member in the membership records is Rykele Zylstra. The next day another meeting was held in Rykele Zylstra's home, where a sermon was preached and the sacrament of baptism administered to Rykele's four children (two born in Holland and two born in America); two children of Jurjen Dyk; and 15-year-old Anna, daughter of Geert Bles.²⁷ Eight members had brought their membership papers from the Netherlands, several others made profession of faith, and a few joined as baptized members. Attending church services, however, became a test of faith in itself. For many traveling in their horse and buggies over rough prairie terrain once a week proved too difficult and on 21 July 1884 the congregation decided to split into two groups. The east group called itself the Overisel CRC, since many of the people hailed from the province of Overijssel in the Netherlands, and the other group, mostly made up of Frisians, called their church Friesland CRC.²⁸ The Friesland CRC chose Jelle Zylstra and Wiebe Dyk as their elders and Harm Eerkes and Douwe Zylstra as their deacons. Douwe donated twenty acres on which to erect a building for the Friesland congregation; the land around the building was to be rented out for one-third

of the crop and the proceeds used for church expenses. On 31 August 1884, one month after convening as the Friesland CRC, Rev. Thomas (Tamme) Vanden Bosch of New Holland, South Dakota, dedicated their church building.

Five years after it was built, on 23 December 1889, the building burned to the ground—uninsured and with an outstanding debt. A call went out in *De Wachter* for funds and soon \$422 arrived from the churches in the East to rebuild.²⁹ In the meantime the congregation worshipped in the Overisel CRC building. Relations between these two congregations remained cordial; they shared the services of traveling missionaries and seminary students during the summer. Ministers from the nearby New Holland and Harrison churches, whose own congregations had afternoon services, also often took turns preaching on Sunday evenings.

In all of this the Friesland people were not discouraged. Their report to Classis Iowa in April 1902 read, "Friesland is thankful for material and spiritual blessings; a steady progress is observed; therefore, they look ahead confidently with childlike trust in their God."³⁰

Their staying resolve was rewarded, for in 1903 they finally received their first pastor, Sjouke Bouma, born in Menaldum, Friesland, who stayed until 1905. Shortly after Bouma left, American-born Henry Dekker came and stayed until 1909.

On 24 June 1902 tragedy struck again when a tornado demolished the church and part of the barn. At a congregational meeting later that year the main topic for discussion was, "Shall we rebuild or join with the Overisel church?" By that time the Overisel church had moved their building into the new town of Platte.³¹ The little group decided not to give up, but instead built a new church

half a mile east of the old location on land donated by Mrs. Berend Hoeksema. They also built a new parsonage and horse barn. This church stood for twelve years, until 8 June 1914, when another tornado pushed the building off its foundation and destroyed the pastor's barn. Once more they put the building back on its foundation and carried on for seven more years. In 1921, when the membership had dropped to just a few and those few had cars to drive to Platte, the church disbanded.

Hardships and Exodus

The settlers experienced a number of good years beginning in 1883 when crops flourished or at least were average; but even the good years proved precarious. The Minutes of Classis Holland, Michigan, reported in September 1887 that on 2 August a powerful tornado and hailstorm had greatly damaged the crops in Charles Mix and Douglas counties, Dakota Territory, and that many Dutch compatriots had lost their entire crops. Classis asked all church councils to hold a collection for these needs, which many churches did do.³² A drought during the years from 1893 to 1895 resulted in total crop failure. In 1893 a national financial depression added to the dire economic situation for many in Friesland. Extreme heat, drought, prairie fires, and grasshoppers marked the summers. Winters, too, were harsh. The blizzard of January 1888, which took the lives of some 235 settlers in Dakota Territory, Iowa, and Nebraska, also raged in Charles Mix County. The Friesland-Platte area lost two people and one hundred head of cattle in the storm.³³ One year later, in January, young Rein (son of Rienk) was driving a team of oxen with a load of wheat to Armour, the shipping center. Toward evening as it began to snow Rein remembered the blizzard of the



Rev. Sjouke Bouma (1868-1944) who began his ministry in the Presbyterian Church in 1900 served in Friesland CRC 1903-05. He was born in Menaldum, Friesland. Photo courtesy of the author.

year before and, being on a stretch of prairie without any homes for shelter, he anxiously prodded the oxen on to make it to Armour. Fortunately, no blizzard materialized.

When in 1895 news began drifting in of the lush climate and growing conditions, mild winters and moderate summers in Oak Harbor, in the Pacific Northwest, many in Charles Mix County took note.³⁴

As if tacitly subscribing to the adage *first in, first out*, Rykele's brothers Douwe and Rein Zylstra and their families were the first to leave. They left in November 1895 to resettle in Oak Harbor, Washington. In March of the following year Rykele and his family joined his brothers to settle in Oak Harbor. His aged father, Jelle, and step-mother, Ruurdte, and sister Aukje went with them.

The drought also reduced Sipke (the silversmith) and Reinigje to poverty and in 1897 they moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, having barely enough funds to buy their way into the Holland Home, where Sipke died on 8 April 1902.³⁵ In all likelihood their son Peter and his wife

had moved to Grand Rapids sometime between 1886 and 1889. He is listed in the 1889 Grand Rapids City Directory as living on 106 West Leonard and being a jeweler. Peter's move to Grand Rapids explains why his parents moved to this city.

Memento Mori Cemetery³⁶

A few who did not leave the area are buried in the *Memento Mori* Cemetery, now popularly known as Friesland Cemetery. In fact only the gravestones bear silent witness that there once was a community named Friesland and a Friesland Christian Reformed Church. The two-acre site is slightly elevated providing a panoramic view of the boundless prairie. It was prairie so vast that they could not have imagined it in their wildest dreams back in the Netherlands, and yet with grit and courage they tried to shape it to their ideas of how land should be used.

By and large the settlement was spared the high death rate that occurred in the Michigan colonies in 1847. But, when in 1889 twenty-one-year-old Antje Hoeksma passed away, as did an infant son of the Franssens, the community began to recognize the necessity of a burial place. On 30 March 1889 the *Memento Mori* Burial Board was formed and two acres of land were purchased for twenty-five dollars from Jan Wynia. Jelle Zylstra served as the first president of the board. Rienk Zylstra and his wife Geertje are buried in *Memento Mori*. Of the other original settlers only Sybe Buren, Geert Bles, Jurjen Dyk, and Dyk's wife and daughter are buried there.³⁷

Gjalt (son of Rienk) Zylstra stayed and farmed in Carroll Township; he died at age fifty-two. He and his wife are buried in New Holland, South Dakota. Rein (son of Rienk) stayed in Platte Township and was active in the CRC; he died in 1941. Sipke (son of Reink) also stayed and became a grain dealer in Platte.

Conclusion

Rein (son of Rienk), one of the few Zylstras who stayed in the area, served as an enumerator for the 1900 Census of Signal County. That census lists only eleven of the original twenty-six families left in Signal Township. However other Dutch families replaced them and the CRC survived for another two decades. Rein needed eleven census sheets to enumerate the people of Signal Township. By 1910 there were only three original families left and only nine census sheets were used; the number decreased to only eight sheets by 1920, showing a progressive move out of the area.

Rykele Zylstra engaged in carpentry work for several years in Oak Harbor and then branched out into real estate. He died at the age of sixty-four on 29 November 1917 in Oak Harbor and is buried in the Maple Leaf Cemetery on Whidbey Island. His tombstone reads, "Gone to a bright home, where grief cannot come." His search for the ideal home finally ended far, far away from Drachten, Friesland. 🌹

Albert Kuipers (1820-1904) had pulled himself up out of a poverty-ridden childhood to become a prosperous farmer in Steggerda, Friesland. Experimenting with new and different farming methods, he had won several awards and honors for his innovations. However, when the farmers in his area hesitated to adapt these new methods, Kuipers hoped to make an impact overseas. In 1881 he sent his son, Hendrik, to scout out land in the United States, with the prospect of founding a colony—Kuipers City. After all, many others had gone ahead before him and had succeeded. Hendrik's travels in America took in the Dutch communities in New Jersey, Michigan, Iowa, and South Dakota.

Upon returning to the Netherlands in December of 1881, Hendrik and his partner, Mos, described their findings at mass meetings in Amsterdam, Zwolle, Utrecht, Hoozevee and Groningen. Hendrik spoke of the fertile soil and the availability of cheap land in South Dakota, enough land for 10,000 farmers and 500 farm hands, resulting in approximately a hundred families signing on with Albert Kuipers as their leader.* But the majority never made it to Dakota. Upon arriving in America, many of the group left for other areas after being told of the hazards involved in settling in Dakota Territory by arrangement with land agents promoting their own areas.

On 18 April 1882 the Kuipers family along with four other families and three bachelors arrived at the government depot at Plankton, South Dakota, where Kuipers investigated what land was still available for purchase. He chose land lying along a small river called Platte Creek in Charles Mix County, just west of the Yankton Indian Reservation. On 12 May the group took the train to the farthest terminal, Running Water, and purchased supplies, tools, wagons, and tents. With the horses, oxen, and cows pulling the wagons they traveled four days into the Territory. For two days they traveled without seeing another human being; on the third day they passed an Indian village, somehow communicated to the Indians that they were thirsty, and were given water to drink. On the fourth day they settled near the Platte Creek and called their settlement Platte, after the creek. The place is usually referred to as Old Platte. On the 22nd of May they put a plow into the ground and nine weeks later harvested potatoes. They helped each other build sod houses for shelter.

**This number differs in various sources, sometimes 200 families, sometimes 250; however, Albert Kuipers himself quotes the number as being 100 families in the Nieuw Advertentieblad of 17 March 1897. The 200 to 250 may have referred to people in the group rather than actual families. Annemieke Galema in Frisians to America (p. 206) states that young Hendrik finally left with only forty families.*

Endnotes

1. Bernard Van Noordwijk, *Zondags Zilver, Drie eeuwen versierde kerkboekjes* (Heerenveen: NBG Jongbloed, 2006) 233.
2. Charles Mix County Land Records at www.rootsweb.com/us/genweb/sd/sdfiles.htm; eight in 98 N. and 68 W. (Signal Township) and one in 98 N. and 69 W. (Hamilton Township).
3. Individuals over twenty-one years of age, citizen or foreign-born, qualified for the 160-acre land grant provided they lived on the claim for five years and improved the land. The filing fee to claim title was \$10 as proof of temporary ownership, with a \$2 commission paid to the land agent. It was therefore to the land agent's benefit to secure as many settlers as he could.
4. Rein Zylstra, *Early Dutch Settlements in South Dakota*, Dutch Immigrant Papers Collection, box 90, folder 28, Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, 2.
5. Ibid.
6. In America he left the "Van Kalsbeek" part off his name, noting that Americans did not like long names.
7. Annemieke Galema, *Frisians to America 1880-1914* (Groningen: REGIO-PRojekt, 1996), 206. The first Dutch settlers in Bon Homme were the Hornstra, Hendrik Dijkstra, and Rein Talsma families from Oosterlittens, and the Kornelis Bouma and H. Wynia families from Wommels.
8. In his book, *A History of Dutch Settlement in South Dakota to 1900* (Vermillion: University of South Dakota, 1948), 24, Nelson Nieuwenhuis states that Rykele also returned to the Netherlands with Kuipers and Mos but there is no substantiating evidence of this. Zylstra may have traveled with them to Iowa since at least two of his followers, Fedde Ferwerda and Simon Stoffels came from Iowa. The meeting of Kuipers and Mos in Iowa resulted in a committee that would form the basis of Dutch settlements in Douglas County.
9. *De Volksvriend* was a Dutch-language weekly published in Orange City, Iowa, 1874-1951.
10. "Onder de nog uiterst dun gezaaide settlers bevinden zich verscheidene die onlangs uit Nederland zijn gearriveerd. Hun toestand is nu al geen zins benijdens-

waardig en wat zal de toekomst hen nog baren?"

11. *De Volksvriend*, 6 July, 1882.
12. G. Schaapman to friends, Dutch Immigrant Papers Collection, box 59, folder 6, Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.
13. *De Volksvriend*, Sept. 28, 1882, 6.
14. *Nieuw Advertentieblad*, 15 March 1882. The *Nieuw Advertentieblad* was a Frisian newsweekly which published many letters from American immigrants.
15. A. Kuipers in a lecture at Alsmeer about America on Tuesday, 14 September 1897. A transcript of this lecture is housed in the Albert Kuipers family archive, Platte, SD.
16. Rein Zylstra, *Early Dutch*, 6.
17. Ibid.
18. Dorothy Koert, *Portrait of Lynden* (Lynden: Lynden Tribune, 1976), 64. Douwe became the County Commissioner of Charles Mix County in 1889. In 1895 he moved to Whidbey Island, but his wife objected to living there and they moved to Lynden, Washington. Their house became the first stopping place for the new Dutch families in the area. In 1900 the First CRC was organized.
19. Gjalte (28), Aukje (23), Aaltje (20), Rein (18) writer of journal, Zwaantje (15), Sipke (9), Fieke (6).
20. Rein Zylstra, *Early Dutch*, 3.
21. Adeline S. Gnirk, *Epic of the Great Exodus* (Gregory, SD: Gregory Times-Advocate, 1985) 503.
22. Vander Pol, *On the Reservation Border: Hollanders in Douglas and Charles Mix Counties* (Stickney, SD: Argus Printers, 1969) 306.
23. *De Volksvriend*, 9 November 1882.
24. Vander Pol, *On the Reservation*, 310. It is interesting to note the ethnic makeup of Charles Mix County in 1890: of the total population of 4,178, 1,024 were foreign-born. The 1,024 broke down as follows: 310 Hollanders, 176 Norwegians, 171 Swedes, 80 Germans, 77 Canadians, 61 British, 59 Bohemians, 36 Irish, 27 Danes, and 9 Scotch.
25. There is no record of who conducted the service or preached the sermon; this may have been a "reading service," but without ordained elders and deacons, it is difficult to ascertain

how formal a service it was.

26. Mos also donated land for the nearby Edgerton cemetery, where his young wife was buried in 1888. Their four children died in infancy.
27. Membership records, Friesland CRC, H. Bode, *De Wachter*, 22 March 1883. Rykele's children were not baptized as infants perhaps because he himself had not been brought up in the church. His father Jelle Reins joined the church in 1872 when his youngest son Douwe Jelles, born in 1859, and his two daughters, born in 1861 and 1863, were baptized (Family Records).
28. This church eventually became the Platte CRC.
29. Gnirk, *Epic*, 79; *De Wachter*, Vol. 22, #45, 22 January 1890. *De Wachter* was the biweekly news organ of the Christian Reformed Church.
30. Classis News, *De Volksvriend*, 24 April 1902.
31. In March 1900 all the buildings of Old Platte were moved into what is now Platte because the railroad had built a terminus there.
32. Minutes of Classis Holland, 7 September 1887, Article 14. "Daar den 2den Aug. j.l. in Charles Mix en Douglas Co. Dakota een vreeselijke orkaan en hagelslag had gewoed en verschrikkelijke verwoesting hadden aangericht, waardoor ook velen onzer landgenooten hun oogst hadden verloren, wordt allen kerkeraden de nood der nieuwe nederzettingen op het hart gebonden, met verzoek om voor hen te collecteren, gelijk door velen reeds was gedaan." Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.
33. Albert Kuipers letter in *Nieuw Advertentieblad* of 18 April 1888.
34. Albert Kuipers from Platte also made a trip to the Pacific Northwest, but he counseled his people to stay in Platte. Around the turn of the century he made a trip to Texas to found a colony there, but that did not materialize.
35. Rein Zylstra, *Early Dutch*, 7.
36. *Memento Mori* is a Latin phrase that translates "remember your death" or "remember your mortality."
37. For a complete list of those buried in *Memento Mori* go to: <http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/us/genweb/sd/chas-mix/cemeteries/memento.txt>

A Family Farm and a Church

Jason Elenbaas

In 1880, likely disgusted with one tree root too many in Wisconsin farm land, my grandpa's great grandfather, Gerrit Jan Te Krony, his three grown sons and at least two daughters moved to South Dakota. There they homesteaded a crest of prairie just west of Minnesota, west of Clear Lake, and south of the now nearly vanished town of Palmer, which would later be known as Bemis.

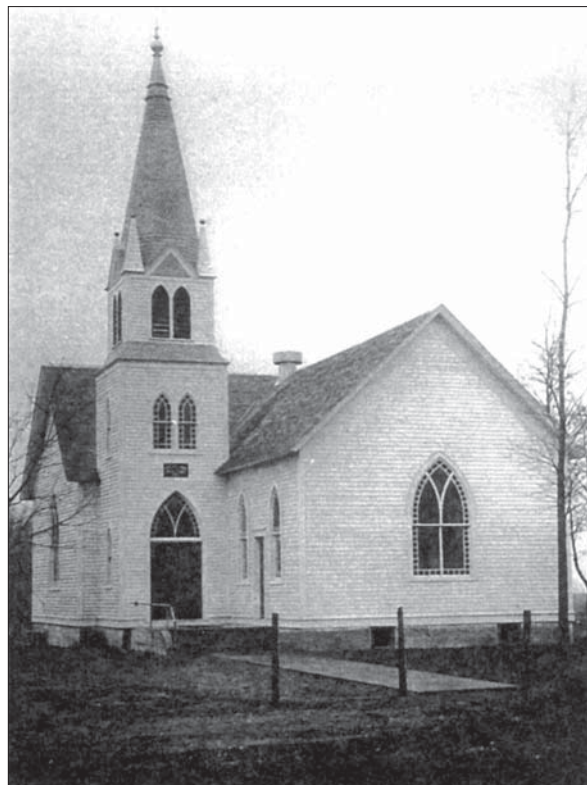
They were part of a group of Hollanders, most of whom came from Alto, Wisconsin, which needed a church. Eighteen adults organized the First Holland Presbyterian Church, part of the Presbyterian Church of

North America. Several other members were willing to give land, but the group decided to accept Te Krony's offer of five acres of already broken land on the northeast corner of his quarter section. According to church histories he gave the land on the condition that the church then break ten acres of land for him before the next spring, by 15 June 1882. Some of the original structure of the church these settlers built still stands, and services are still held in "Bemis Holland Presbyterian." They celebrated their 125th anniversary in the summer of 2006.

As a child on weeklong summer visits from my home in Montana, I

picked asparagus with my grandfather in the morning dew along the church's waist-high fading black wire cemetery fence. My great-grandparents are buried in the cemetery. They wanted to be buried on the home section, my grandfather said; he has hinted that he would like the same.

There's mystery here, however. If my grandpa and I would have turned from our asparagus and walked south, we would have walked over ground that once held a shack. Even my parents have only heard whispers about the family that lived there. They were Te Kronys, but poor, likely outcasts guilty of some disrespectful action. My father slipped up there from the churchyard once



The first building for the Bemis Christian Reformed Church, which burned in 1914. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

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with a metal detector, but all he found were some broken pieces of pottery. Who they were and what they did will likely be forgotten with the passing of my grandparents' generation.

At any rate, shortly before the turn of the century, tension developed because, as the *Banner* would later report, some "did not consider dancing and drinking a very serious breach of the divine law and greatly enjoyed the singing of hymns of a questionable soundness." A more conservative group, including Gerrit Jan and his three sons, separated and became the first members of what became known as the Christian Reformed Church of Palmer. The fourteen families, twenty-one communicant members, formally organized and elected church leaders on 4 November 1897.

Gerrit Jan's son, John Henry Te Krony, donated land, this time three acres on the northwest corner of the family land, just a half mile up the

road from the Presbyterians. Across the village road, a tree-lined buggy track, an acre was donated by G. J. Bloemendaal for a cemetery. Until 1898 the new congregation, known as the Bemis Christian Reformed Church, met in the new frame house of John Henry Te Krony. The pulpit was the family sewing machine. My great grandfather was often angry with two of the men who would smoke cigarettes in the house.

According to a 1977 church history, the church raised \$340 along with \$46 from the town of Clear Lake and \$30 from the town of Palmer to build the first church building. A parsonage and then a horse barn across the road were built before the congregation called a minister. The first minister was Reverend A. J. Brink who accepted the May 1901 call. Brink and his family came by train from Lynden, Washington, at a cost of \$60; their furniture was transported for \$65.

The original church was a simple twenty-by-thirty-foot structure, but an extension was built in 1908 on the southwest side, providing space for a more elaborate entrance, curved pews, and a fairly elaborate gray conical steeple. However on 21 February 1914 the church burned to its foundation.

The congregation rebuilt on the same foundation but added two courses of blocks, raising the church a few feet above the ground. At first, space was only dug underneath for a new coal furnace. But in 1944 the congregation used a Farmall Model H tractor and a two-horse "scraper" to dig out a full basement. With a portion of the north wall removed, the men dragged the empty scraper, which worked on the same balance principle as a wheelbarrow, to one end of the church, where the Model H pulled the filling scraper out again in the opposite direction. With the

extra space the congregation put in classrooms, a small kitchen, and a meeting area. Most of the work was done with purchased dressed lumber, but wood from the old horse barn was used to cover the walls of the furnace room.

Plains winters, especially during the Great Depression, were brutal. The winter of 1945 was especially cold. On Sunday, 23 December 1945, a blizzard from the south resulted in one of many church cancellations. However, the congregation decided to meet that afternoon, so



The Bemis Young Calvinist Federation in 1944. The service banner to the right has fourteen stars. Photo courtesy of the author.



One-room schoolhouse northeast of Bemis Holland Presbyterian Church, half mile east of Bemis CRC. 1936. Photo courtesy of the author.

my great-grandfather, who had often voiced his concern of the fire danger in the tight space around the furnace and its chimney pipe, went out to start a fire in the furnace.

A few hours later his twenty-one-year-old son James made the familiar walk from the farmhouse down to the road and then over to the church driveway to make sure the church was warming up. He opened the door on the south to a blast of heat and smoke; flames leapt up from a hole the size of a dinner plate in the middle of the church. Remembering the event, James says, "I've thought about it my whole life; I could have run up to the pulpit and grabbed that big Bible. But I ran out to the parsonage and called for help."

Because of the blizzard only the Castlewood Fire Department, from nearly ten miles away, was able to respond, but the church was gone by the time they arrived. My grandpa remembers his family convincing

Mrs. Star, the pastor's excitable wife, to take her valuables, a few of them anyway, and go to their nearby farmhouse. Meanwhile the men emptied the well, dumping buckets of what must have been frigid water onto the roof of the parsonage and its siding, preventing damage to all but a small corner.

After the fire the parsonage was moved a half mile west down the village road, two miles south to Highway 22, and a half mile more west to a large open yard, surrounded by carefully spaced rows of elms, planted so that cars could be shaded. The spot was just south of the soon-to-come Interstate 29, and what is now Exit 164. Reverend Ring Star, a skilled carpenter, took advantage of the minor fire damage and added to the parsonage numerous appendages and amenities which still remain to this day.

Reverend Star also designed the new church, the one that I came to know. The WWII lumber shortage

meant that the church had to be built with twelve- not fourteen-foot support beams, making for a relatively low structure. But, other than that, in appearance it was a fairly typical Midwestern Protestant church—white, of course, rectangular, a split-level walk up to the sanctuary and down to the fellowship hall. From the outside a side entrance led down to the consistory and Sunday school rooms. Inside the sanctuary there were tall blond-colored pews that were kept meticulously polished, along with everything else in the church. Near the front of the white-squared ceiling

was a small mouse hole from which, it was rumored, mice did sometimes appear, even on the Sabbath. A crimson carpet with black accents covered the sloping sanctuary floor; three steps led up to the pulpit area, which extended into a rear alcove.

This recessed design was a carry-over from the second church. A grainy photo of the exterior of the second church building shows a protruding section behind the pulpit area. In the church I knew this rectangular space behind the pulpit was taken up largely by two red felt-lined wooden chairs. Evenly spaced on each side, their massive throne shapes dwarfed every minister I ever saw seated in either of them. The congregation must have had a penchant for such chairs, originally intended for visiting ministers from Classis Minnesota who would take turns holding forth during special services. The second church held three red felt-lined chairs which are reputed to have been even more ornate.

Wednesday, June 2, 2004

Final hymns sung at Bemis Christian Church

by LeeAnne Archer

Final Sunday worship services at Bemis Christian Church were held Sunday, May 9, as the congregation closed its hymnals for the final time.

The church, located on Highway 22 in between Castlewood and Clear Lake, got its start in 1898, known as the Christian Reformed Church of Palmer, and saw its membership reach as high as 70 families in the 1930s.

During the war years of World War II the number of families dropped as people left for jobs elsewhere. In October of 1969 the church and the Esteline Church merged, expanding the congregation.

However, the numbers have dwindled in recent years.

Iowa, were helpful to the beginning of the Bemis Christian Reformed Church.

These men not only preached but also attended consistory and congregational meetings here.

Names of early members were: John Wiekamp, Hendrick J. TeKrony, J.H. TeKrony, and M. Lantinga. It was recorded that the first elders were J. Wiekamp and G. Ohmann and the first deacon was J. TeKrony. This consistory was decided upon on Nov. 4, 1897.

G.J. TeKrony donated land for the Christian Reformed Church and the Holland Presbyterian Church. Both churches were located on the same mile road.



Church closes

Today the church building is gone. The Bemis CRC congregation began shrinking even before the second building burned in 1945. Many families, hoping to avoid the draft by working in essential industries, left for California during WWII to take jobs making bullets, ships, and airplanes. Such shrinking rural populations occurred all over South Dakota and the upper Midwest.

The last three directories of the church include photos from the exact same spot in the rear of the church.



The author's grandfather, Henry TeKrony, with a hay rack and horses, September 1952. Photo courtesy of the author.

Each photo—1973, 1986, and 1991—shows a clearly shrinking congregation. During my freshman year at college, 2004, I attended the Easter service at Bemis CRC. Two weeks later the church held its last service. When I drove by the next fall a semi-trailer loaded with beams sat next to a pile of shingles and scrap wood.

Two years later, in the fall of 2006, I drove up to the area to see the farm and the church area again. As I pulled into the farmyard I saw Jeff Te Krony, a close relative, tending the cemetery

with a weed whacker. Jeff is about eight years older than I and still farms with his father. Jeff grew up in the Bemis church, whose remaining assets were divided between cemetery upkeep and support for a daughter of the church, Marcia Bleeker, and her work in Nigeria with Wycliffe Bible Translators.

I didn't have the heart to go nosing around to look for signs of

the old church foundation. I've looked before without any success and my aunt and uncle are moving off the farm in January. Putting too much visible interest into the old farmyard seems too much like rubbing salt into a fresh wound.

I do know the old church foundation was covered when they put

in the county road a few decades ago. When my mother was a child they used the location as a dump. What was left of the metal coal box made a great furnace for paper and plastic. For my part, I'm going to have to be content knowing that the church was within fifty yards of an old rusted Ford whose chrome side mirrors and bumpers still somehow shine and an even more rusted out, horse-drawn, one-row potato picker.

As I've worked to make sense of the farm or the succession of church buildings I associate with this land and my family, it helps to remember that the story of Bemis and my family's farm is not unlike that of many others. On my way to the farm the morning of my last trip I picked my way through country roads. About ten miles southwest of the farm I spied a cemetery on a ridge. I drove up to take a look and found a memorial of Bethlehem Lutheran Church. Across from a cemetery as equally well-maintained as that of Bemis, next to a massive bell forged in 1902, and where the church had once stood, I read a marble memorial.

This Memorial is in grateful remembrance of the pastors and the pioneers who sacrificed so much to build this church on the only sure foundation and through eager energy and perseverance, by the grace of God, have carried on from a humble beginning,



Henry TeKrony at the end of a tiring day of threshing for which the horses are still rigged. The children are Loella and Margene TeKrony. August 1944. Photo courtesy of the author.

that future generations might have the word of God ever before them in all its truth and purity. May we consecrate ourselves to carry on that work of building which they have so faithfully begun.

I thought about that plaque later in the day as I pulled into the churchyard out on Highway 22. I circled the old gravel drive around the place where the church had stood and stepped out to take a picture. When

a gray SUV pulled out of the parsonage driveway I blushed. But, when it stopped next to me on the highway, I was surprised to see Jeff's younger sister, Angela, who had also grown up in the church. After the customary blustery greetings, we turned and looked back at the churchyard.

She said, "Things change, don't they?"

I smiled suddenly and heard myself saying, "That's all right though—that's all right." ❧

The Dutch at Imlay City, Michigan

Maria Mulder Brown

It was only ten acres of celery but that promising first harvest cut from the rich muck soil surrounding the town of Imlay City, Michigan, in 1922 would revolutionize the region's economy and attract dozens of West Michigan Dutchmen and their families, eager to farm the fertile ground. Within a matter of years, about 3,000 acres of the former swampland had been cleared and planted and the young railroad town was dubbed the vegetable capital of Michigan.

Before the Dutch

The shallow lakes and swamps which created the muck bogs in the Thumb region of Michigan were the result of melting glaciers, geologists believe. All of the muck deposits lie to the east of a ridge which eventually became M-53, a major north-south thoroughfare that stretches from Detroit to the northernmost tip of the Thumb. Some early accounts claim that shallow lakes were formed from the glacier melt and filled with vegetation. Others believe the Belle River,

now much smaller, wound through the land and subsequently shrubbery and trees filled the waterway. The decomposition and carbonization of the plant life is what ultimately made the muck what it is today. Also referred to as peat, the soil has high carbon content and is actually the precursor to the formation of coal from vegetation.

For centuries the land was untouched. By the late nineteenth century Native Americans had sold the land to the federal government but still took the opportunity to harvest cranberries from the swamplands about fifty miles north of Detroit. Once in private holdings such picking from the land was prohibited. This angered the Native Americans who set the muck on fire and eventually cranberries—the swamp's first crop—disappeared.

When farmers first moved to the southern Thumb region the highlands were noted for their ability to produce fine stands of hay, corn, wheat, and beans. Dairy farming was

Maria Mulder Brown is a 2003 graduate of Calvin College and currently works as assistant editor at The Tri-City Times, a weekly newspaper in Imlay City. She and her husband, Tim, also own and operate a beef and cash crop farm.



Arthur Groeneveld breaking forty acres of muck land, about 1935-1936. Photo courtesy of the author.



The first structure built for the Imlay City CRC congregation and dedicated in August 1914. Photo courtesy of: Conrad Bolt.

one of Imlay City and Lapeer County's major agricultural industries in the early 1900s. The Michigan Milk Producers Association established a receiving station in the city. According to newspaper reports, hundreds of milk shipments were processed at the plant and turned into thousands of pounds of powdered milk every day.

As dairying flourished, attempts to tame the swamps for agricultural use weren't as successful. Beginning in 1915, various drainage methods were attempted and pursued for ten more years. From 1921 to 1922 Michigan State University (then College) had experimental fertilizer plots on the muck and grew potatoes, corn, and sugar beets.

The Migration

In the early 1920s S. H. Large, a dentist, and Fred Butler and Harry Palmer, two businessmen, asked John DeHaan of Hudsonville to test a celery crop on ten acres of Harry Palmer's farm near M-53 and M-21, another state highway. Following that successful venture the three men established the Belle River Celery

Company in 1923 and hired Peter Laarman, also of Hudsonville, to manage the celery and onion production.

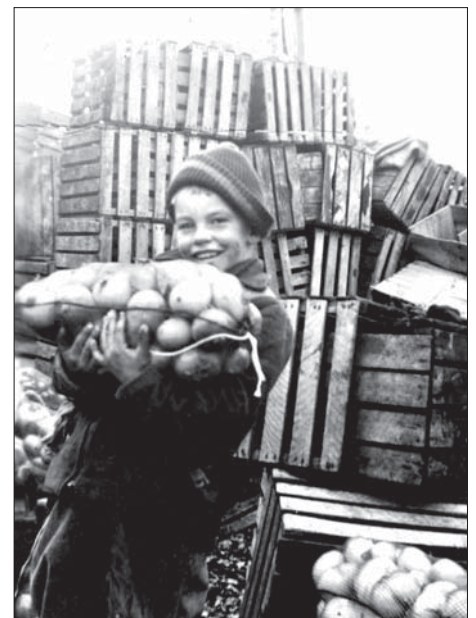
Laarman, a native of Amsterdam, arrived in February along with his new wife Cora. Laarman and others had tired of vegetable farming in West Michigan and were hampered by the lack of trucking routes to the major markets in Detroit and Chicago. Instead they could only sell produce in Grand Rapids, which was not a large market, or on consignment for sale in Chicago or Detroit. Selling on consignment left pricing totally in the hands of the agents, whose concerns were not the same as those of the growers and therefore not necessarily advantageous to the growers. Imlay City's proximity to Detroit was ideal for daily deliveries to the eastern market and customers in the city. News that there was a considerable difference in land prices couldn't be ignored either. Imlay City's \$10 to \$50 per acre cost was much more agreeable than West Michigan's \$800 to \$1,000.¹

Within a few days of their arrival, Laarman's brother Andrew and Arthur

Vander Ploeg and his family made the trek east to Imlay City. Fifty-five acres of muck land was planted by hand that spring. During the next five years, families from Kalamazoo, Zeeland, and Byron Center, all muck-growing areas in West Michigan, arrived in Imlay City ready to farm. They included Frank Yonkman, Heine Ettema, John Stryker, Marinus VanDenBerg, John Vlieg, and Almon Brandt. Farmers of German, Hungarian, and Bulgarian descent eventually followed the Dutch into the area.

Employing the land management methods that generations before them had used in the lowlands of the Netherlands, the Dutch-American farmers dug ditches to drain runoff water pooling on the high ground and to drain the swampy soil.

In addition to celery and onions, potatoes, carrots, spinach, beets, parsnips, and peppermint were the major crops that flourished on the muck. A 1935 newspaper report said it was a good growing year, especially for celery which brought growers \$1,000 per acre.



Among the crops well-suited for muck farming were celery, carrots and onions. Onion growing was the reason the Dutch farmers came to Imlay City. Photo courtesy of the author.



The current building for the Imlay City congregation, occupied in 1966. Photo courtesy of the author.

It didn't take long for the farmers to become part of the community. By 1937 John and Henry Vlieg, John Timmer, William Elling, Fred Hoeksema, and Heine Ettema were officers of the Imlay City Onion and Produce Growers, a cooperative association which owned a storage shed capable of holding 40,000 bushels of onions. At the same time local and state officials made accommodations for the transplanted Hollanders as well. Agricultural officials at then Michigan State College reprinted their bulletin, "Celery Production in Michigan," in Dutch. Already in 1930 the Imlay City Chamber of Commerce began hosting Muck Farmer Days. The meetings, held each winter, allowed for discussions of growing methods, soil testing, fertilizer use, and hearing of special speakers.

Establishing a Church

Eventually West Michigan farmers weren't the only ones with an interest in Imlay City and its business opportunities. Rev. J. R. Brink, a home missionary with the Christian Reformed Church, visited the area in 1925 at the request of the Belle River Celery Company. Brink saw the town as an ideal spot to establish a congregation even though the community was more than 170 miles east of Grand Rapids. Typically such small churches were first served during the summer months by seminary students, who required no salary but simply room and board.

Even though the Imlay City group was small, Brink saw no problem using such students, since the Belle River Celery Company volunteered to pay the travel expenses. Brink established the Imlay City Mission in 1925, writing in the *Banner* why he thought such efforts were good for the denomination:

... Too much congestion of our people has a detrimental effect upon their life, both from a cultural as well as from a religious aspect. That is why I believe we should try to keep true to our church, but spread out influence in various places where churches can be planted. It is better for these communities, and I believe it is better for us and our futures.²

The group of thirteen families attended the Congregational Church in Imlay City before Brink, of Classis Grand Rapids East, came in 1925. Brink and fellow home missionary Rev. H. J. Mulder were some of the early Reformed preachers who ministered in Imlay City. In 1928 Classis allowed the mission to officially become a church. At the 11 June service Rev. Emo Van Halsema

installed two deacons and two elders.

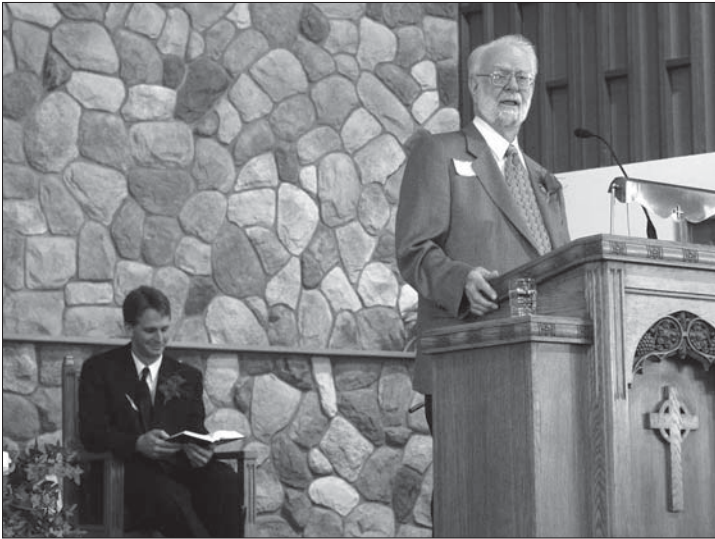
"The future looks promising. Our members there are intelligent black soil farmers and diligent celery growers. They know how to raise celery that has made Kalamazoo and Hudsonville and Byron Center famous," Van Halsema wrote in a 1928 issue of the *Banner*. "May, with the blessing of God, such fame through them go forth from Imlay City. There is abundant room for growth. If there are among the *Banner* readers that contemplate buying a farm for a very reasonable price, we advise them to correspond with the clerk."³

It wasn't until January 1934 that the church secured its first pastor, David Grasman, a recent graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary who had served the church during the summer of 1933. The congregation was meeting in Imlay City's Methodist Church, but housing for the pastor quickly became an issue. Few vacant houses were available for purchase or rent so the church purchased property on Main Street and built a parsonage.

The church family, numbering thirty-seven families by 1938, bought an old facility northeast of town from the Lutheran Evangelical Association, while trying to save money to build a new structure. In 1940, with a denominational grant of \$2,500 from its Church Help Fund, coupled



Opened in 1952, the Imlay Christian School offers K-8 education. Photo courtesy of the author.



Rev. Clarence Boomsma speaking at the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Imlay Christian Reformed Church. Photo courtesy of the author.

with \$3,200 in congregational donations and a bank loan, the Imlay City Christian Reformed Church built its first church building and dedicated it in August 1941. Like so many Christian Reformed church buildings, it was designed by the Grand Rapids architectural firm of J. & G. Daverman.⁴

More than sixty families belonged to the growing group, but with the onset of World War II almost thirty young men left to serve in the United States armed forces. A committee from the Young People's Society, with help from their pastor, Rev. Clarence Boomsma, created the Servicemen's Newsletter. The monthly publication served as a means for the servicemen to communicate with the congregation and vice versa. In addition to articles on church happenings, birth and marriage announcements, and lines reprinted from the men's letters home, Boomsma included a sermonette in each newsletter, encouraging the men to stay strong to their faith.

Church members joined in a community Victory Day celebration in May 1945 and officially recognized those who served in a special Welcome Home Service on 1 January 1946. Robert F. Powers, a twenty-two-

the Netherlands.⁵

Following the war, church membership continued to grow and sanctuary and classroom expansions were a must. In 1965 a groundbreaking ceremony for a new building was held and the congregation moved into their new home the next spring. In the early 1990s more classroom space was created.

Along with establishing a church, a pressing goal of the Imlay City farmers was the establishment of a Christian day school for their children. A separate Christian School Society was formed, which opened the school in 1952.

Imlay City and the Church Today

A devastating storm in 1996 virtually wiped out an entire season's harvest and forced several farms to sell their operations. But some of the muck farms continued to prosper and are still in

year-old husband and father of two sons, and sergeant in the United States Air Force, was the only church member to perish in the conflict. He died 14 March 1945 over Germany and was buried in the Netherlands American Military Cemetery and Memorial in Margraten,

operation under the third and fourth generations of the original families. Van Dyk Farms is now a leading producer in Michigan of head and leaf lettuce. In 2004 they were given the Master Farmer Award by the Michigan Vegetable Council. Unfortunately, Imlay City's finest crop, celery, is no longer grown in the area due to stiff competition from California and Florida vegetable growers who can offer wholesalers produce year round.

As the opportunities in agriculture started to dwindle, the children and grandchildren of the church's first families migrated to other areas of the state and country. Today the congregation is aging but continues to draw families both young and old from the community.

While "English" surnames are close to overtaking the Dutch in the church directory, it's not unusual for older Imlay City residents to still refer to the church as "Dutch Reformed."



A carrot bagging line in Imlay City. Photo courtesy of the author.

For many years both the church and Christian school interacted almost exclusively with other Christian Reformed congregations and grade schools associated with Christian Reformed churches. For years students from the Christian school would travel to Sarnia, Chatham, and Wyoming, Ontario, for annual sports tournaments and then join in fine arts competitions with Grosse Pointe, Dearborn, and Ann Arbor Christian school students. Imlay City CRC alternately hosted a women's missionary day with the CRC churches in Sarnia until interest waned and travel over the border became more difficult. As

a result, the congregation has looked closer to home and begun to interact with local churches of various denominations. Since joining the ministerial association in Imlay City the Christian Reformed Church now participates in community worship services on Easter and Thanksgiving, hosts a homeless shelter, and has co-sponsored various fundraising events that benefit faith-based organizations.

Throughout the 1970s, 80s, and early 90s, the Christian school had healthy enrollment numbers topping one hundred students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Unfortunately, as newer Christian and private

schools emerged and the public education system improved, families had many more choices when it came to educating their children. While enrollment and the school's budget continue to be a challenge today, the institution is known for the sound education it provides. Graduates of the Christian school consistently top the list of academic achievers at Imlay City's public high school.

Throughout their eighty-year history, the family farms, church, and school have undergone much change, yet all three, which those founding families worked so hard to establish, still remain today. ☺

Endnotes

1. J. R. Brink, *Banner* clipping in Imlay City Christian Reformed Church file, Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.
2. J. R. Brink, "Imlay City, Mich.," *Banner*, 1 May 1925: 274.
3. E. Van Halsema, "Good News from Imlay City, Mich.," *Banner*, 22 June 1928, clipping in Imlay City Christian Reformed Church file, Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.
4. See Richard H. Harms, "For the Humblest Worshipper," *Origins*, vol. 20 no. 2 (2002) 4-12.
5. *Young Calvinist*, August 1945, 14.

In addition to the notes, the following sources were used:

"Celery in Dutch," *Lapeer County Press*, 26 October 1938.

B. Cunningham, "Port Huron paper prints feature article on muck farms here," *The Imlay City Times*, 4 August 1949, A1.

"Farmers down to earth," *Tri-City Times*, 13 March 1986, 3A, 6A.

E. M. Foster, "Imlay City celery brings growers \$1,000 on an acre," *Lapeer County Press*, 18 September 1935,

Great is Your Faithfulness: Celebrating 75 years (Imlay City Christian Reformed Church, 2003).

"Imlay celery growers happy," *Lapeer County Press*, 31 July 1935.

"Imlay City growers can store 40,000 bushels here," *Lapeer County Press*, 13 October 1937.

Our Trip to North America, Part III

Summer 1949

G. J. Buth, Nieuwe Tonge

[Gerrit Johannes Buth – b. 16 May 1905]¹

Translated from the Dutch by
Gerrit W. Sheeres

Annotated by
Richard H. Harms
Calvin College Heritage Hall
Summer 2005

Friday, 15 July. At 3:30 we left for Pauline's, who is married to Bill Haight.² He works at General Motors in Grand Rapids;³ he supervises a large division and has a good position there. In that division the doors of the various automobiles and the bodies are made, and also a few smaller parts for Chevrolet, Pontiac, Cadillac, and Buick. He is a strapping fellow. I had to look up to him. We had tea and another beer and went home.

Aunt Maatje prepared dinner and in the meantime we immersed ourselves

in about five letters that had arrived from the Netherlands. Gert Markensteijn had gone to Aunt Allie to pick them up. One was from Mom Buth, the others from Lina, Kees Markensteijn, L. van der Werf and C. Stols.

Each one of us grabbed for the letters, eager to be the first to read them. Fortunately all the news was good, except for Mother who had been in bed for a time. We hoped that she might recover soon, for this made us a bit uneasy. Aunt Marie and Uncle John were supposed to visit tonight.



A native of the Netherlands, Gerrit W. Sheeres is a retired pastor and volunteers in the Archives translating records from Dutch into English.

An aerial view of Grand Rapids at the time of the Buth visit, just to the right of center is the police headquarters building. Most of the buildings in the lower three-fourths of the image were razed as part of the city's urban renewal. Photo courtesy of: Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives Grand Rapids Public Library.

Saturday, 16 July. We were downstairs by 10:30; it had gotten late last night, or better this morning, for we did not get to bed until two o'clock. The ladies had turned in earlier, but Uncle Dan who had stopped by had all the time in the world and kept talking. The topics were varied. Sometimes they were about happy things, and then again we talked about political or economic issues. Also here people are becoming more conscious of the fact that social provisions have to be created. The practice of getting what you can get is becoming more prevalent here. The national debt increases gradually, work performance is decreasing, and wages increase steadily. Everything is therefore kept high artificially, which is not a healthy situation for a nation.

This is the way it is nearly around the world and we face the future with a certain amount of apprehension. We live in this era in which the will of the great mass of people prevails and if things get stuck, another war will be inevitable. According to Uncle Dan more than 550,000 people are born every twenty-four hours, which is more than the daily number of deaths. We had animated discussions and it was going to be the last evening at Uncle Dan's because we would be staying next with Abe and Ann. It is not likely we will forget these last two weeks.

Another beautiful day. All the ladies are scheduled to go for tea at Ann Campau's this afternoon (twenty-four aunts and nieces in all). This tea party was even mentioned in the newspaper. Miny cut it out to save it. Such things are fun to read later.

Brother-in-law Pete is celebrating his birthday today and our thoughts are with him. It is one o'clock here so the people there are getting ready to visit there, since the time difference is six hours, in other words it is seven o'clock on Flakkee.

In the meantime the ladies have



Butterworth Hospital where Dr. Francis Campau had privileges and which the Butths toured. Photo courtesy of: Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives Grand Rapids Public Library.

returned from their tea party. An and Miny sported fresh corsages as an indication that the party had been given in honor of the Dutch guests. They had a wonderfully pleasant afternoon and Ann Campau had taken care of all the details. We stayed home and hosted Jan van Soest, who wanted to get acquainted. He is seventy-eight years old and very well informed. We talked about all kinds of things. He said that he had not made much money, but that he was satisfied with what he had. His wife had died at the age of forty and he also had lost a few adult children. He lives with his son Aart but does his own cooking. After supper we left and arrived at the Pots at ten in the evening.

Aunt Maatje, Uncle Dan, and Gert took us there. They left at one o'clock. The ladies drank anisette and we stuck to highballs, which always taste good. It was two o'clock before we went to bed.

Sunday, 17 July. The first thing we did today was to take a look at the hospital.⁴ The Pontiac whizzed through the streets of Grand Rapids.

We took the elevator up and arrived at the sun deck of the [Butterworth] hospital which gave us a beautiful view of the city. We went down again via a staircase that gave us the opportunity to see the entire hospital at our leisure. This hospital has about three hundred beds, and Abe does most of his work here. It was especially interesting to see the equipment they use in this institution. We got back in the car and drove around a little and passed another hospital that was somewhat smaller. When we came back home we had a drink before dinner. The first dinner we had here was chicken that tasted very good, after which everybody laid down for a rest. Following that we sat outside. Supper was served on a tray and was delicious. At nine o'clock the telephone rang. Abe was called to come to Ada where a woman needed his help. After considering it for a moment he decided to go. Uncle Pete and I went along. The woman lived a few miles outside of Ada on a small, poor farm. The people themselves were quite poor because the doctor is paid by the city's poor fund. We were back home

at eleven o'clock and went to bed immediately.

Monday, 18 July. We were downstairs at nine, and after breakfast Abe went to the hospital. The ladies were busy with the laundry. I joined Uncle Pete for a ride through the countryside. We passed a number of homes that belonged to Uncle Pete, and put up a sign on a lot that was available to be built on. It was one o'clock before we were home, and just then Eric, the eldest son, came in; he had been stung by a wasp. The itch drove him crazy. Ann put some stuff on the spot which made it feel a lot better. After a while the boy was sitting in a chair asleep. Ann called Abe and asked him to come take a look at it him.

In the afternoon we went with Uncle Pete to admire some estates. Today was Uncle John's birthday and in the evening we went to congratulate him. We wondered if there might be some letters from Holland waiting for us there, for we do look for them in spite of all the distractions we may have.

Tuesday, 19 July. After lunch Abe went back to his practice. Uncle Pete left this morning at eight with a friend from around here to a place north of here for a shuffleboard contest. It was nearly 150 miles from here and they intended to be back tomorrow evening. In the evening we had a pleasant time with the older members of the family.

Gert, Uncle John's son, with his wife and daughter, and the eldest daughter of Marie, who is here from New Jersey for a few weeks, were also present. Her father, Henry Francisco, comes to this area quite regularly and then she rides back with him. Miny did not come along to the birthday party; she stayed with An because it is not customary here for nieces and nephews to come to such birthday gatherings. We stayed out on the

porch and drank beer and had a highball, both very refreshing when the weather is so warm.

Only one letter from Holland had arrived, one from Mom Buth. It was read aloud and people praised her for her nice letters. There was a lively conversation about farming here and in the Netherlands and we corrected some of the wrong impressions some had of the Netherlands. Towards the end of the evening we had a midnight snack. We would have loved it if the people of Flakkee could have seen us here surrounded by such a large family.

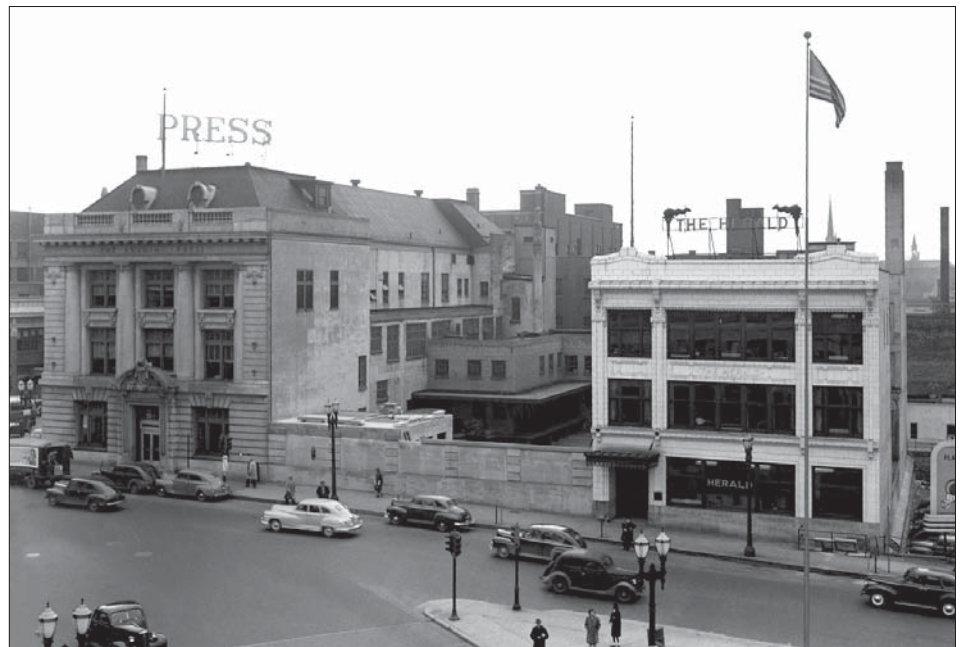
It got to be at least two o'clock again before we rode home where we found the Pots family asleep already.

Yesterday afternoon we went for a look at the onion fields in Uncle Pete's new Dodge, with all three of us in front.

We drove in the direction of Muskegon and passed big apple and peach orchards. The soil was quite different in places, some of it good and some of it poor. I saw this in many places. It is the reason why big areas are not tilled.

Many of the hilly areas are not suitable for cultivation. After about an hour we arrived at the onion fields. These are grown in so-called muck. The fields are rather narrow. For protection they are lined with trees which were planted to prevent wind erosion of the soil.

The plants differed quite a bit. I saw productive fields and also poor ones. Many onions also showed a lack of potassium just as in the Netherlands. Ordinary manual weeding machines were used. The farmers here employ many Mexicans as field hands. In the summertime they come up North to harvest onions and pick apples and pears. We had a brief conversation with an onion grower who had planted forty acres. The rows were at a distance of 16 inches or 40 centimeters. The yield varied greatly from six to eight hundred bushes per acre. The price ran sometimes from one to six dollars per hundred pounds; fewer onions at a sale would raise this price. Here the onions are stored in huge refrigerated buildings. Sometimes it is possible to grow onions in the same



At the time of the Buth visit, Grand Rapids had a morning newspaper, the Herald, and an evening, the Press, both located in the same block of east Fulton Street. Photo courtesy of: Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives Grand Rapids Public Library.



At the commercial center of Grand Rapids, on Monroe at Pearl Street, were a series of department stores, known locally as “Dime Store Row.” Photo courtesy of: Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives Grand Rapids Public Library.

soil for years, but after a few years the soil will be exhausted. One bushel of onions weighs forty-five pounds and three and a half to four pounds of seed are used per acre. There is hardly any importing of onion seed, though celery seed comes mostly from Italy. When I look at the yield I get the idea that it may well be years before Holland will export onions to America. It seems they are well able to supply the market.

We did not have any real plans for today. The ladies went shopping in the city and Uncle John was going to pick me up so we could check out the combines that were working. We first rode to Red Rock Farm and from there to Broer’s Farm; the first has eighty-five and the latter two hundred acres. I took a few nice pictures of them. The combines did a fine job, although it does seem to me that it would be better and neater to first mow the grain and then later to shock it. The younger farmers don’t believe in this anymore and use combines exclusively, but it is and remains more or less hard work. Later on they mow

the stubble to make it even, and then rake the rest because it gets baled, or they leave it loose and bring it indoors. A negative is that when they rake it they also rake in a lot of green weeds which, once in the barn, can easily cause spontaneous combustion. If the farmers have proper storage places and good dry grain the state guarantees the price. Uncle John’s farmer had sold the wheat to a miller for thirty cents less than the guaranteed price. Just like with us the grain is cleaned later on. We were home at five. The ladies came home a bit later.

Abe was home also, but after a while he had to get back to the hospital for a birth.

In the evening the five of us were scheduled to go to the city and the Rowe Hotel. The food tasted delicious. We had a delightful evening.

Wednesday, 20 July. This morning we went to get the mail from the Hill; however, there was nothing but newspapers. We took a few pictures of some special buildings. In the afternoon we went to town to visit a few

museums, big buildings with a lot of old and very modern furniture. It was very interesting. Ann had arranged for a girl to make supper this afternoon, so she could come along as well.

In the course of the afternoon Uncle Pete returned home from his two-day trip to Traverse City, where the shuffleboard games had been held. He said he had had a pleasant trip and his car had run perfectly.

Abe was at his office and would be home around nine o’clock. A doctor cannot set his own hours, for the mill has to grind, and I do believe that his grinds quite well. We wish him all the best for he is an exceptionally pleasant fellow.

And so time flies while we are enjoying ourselves. And no wonder, everybody tries to make life as agreeable as possible for us. We certainly will have plenty of very happy memories. This trip will, if that is even possible, solidify the families even more.

Thursday, 21 July. The sky is dark this morning and it is humid. We are expecting a thunderstorm today. Abe left early. Uncle Pete and I plan to go to town in the Dodge. Close to town we have to fill up first. Uncle Pete had kept track of the mileage of the past two days and figured that his gas consumption has been seven miles per gallon. He thought this was quite acceptable for such a heavy car. Uncle Pete had to go to an insurance agent on some business. It was in a building with many stories. Upstairs we had a beautiful view of the city. Once we were downstairs and outside it was raining. When we got back home Abe was also back; he had the rest of the day off. After lunch the three of us went back to the city. I had to be at the Ford garage and buy a few slip covers for the seats of my red Ford. I also bought a few nice rubber mats. Uncle Pete stayed with little Mimi the rest of the day and we went to Aunt Allie’s

to get the mail. There were two letters for us; one from Mother, and one from Brother Jacob. We quickly read them, after which we were going to go to the granddaughter of Uncle Dan.

Geneveva's⁵ daughter had some kind of eczema and thus was a patient of Abe. First we went to Uncle Dirk for a while. At five o'clock we were at Uncle Dan's where Geneveva and her daughter are temporarily staying.

At six o'clock we were home again. Had a drink first, and after dinner we sat outside for a while until the rain forced us inside.

Friday 22 July. Uncle Pete proposed that today we take a look at the sugar beet district. It is near Midland via St. Louis and Alma. The weather was nice again and we enjoyed the sight of the fields with beets and potatoes. I took a few pictures of the sugar factories. One was in Alma and one in St. Louis. We were inside the one at Alma; it had antiquated machinery compared to our co-op sugar factories. The factories were not as small, but certainly antiquated. The one in St. Louis was made of limestone. The limestone came from a nearby quarry. It looked to me that the daily output was not nearly that of the Puttershoek factory.

On the way back we stopped in Greenville for a glass of beer. I drove the Dodge myself for many miles through the American landscape. At two o'clock we had lunch in Midland and after an enjoyable ride via Belmont we arrived back home at 6:30. After dinner Abe had to go to Comstock Park to visit a patient. When we were home again the phone rang and he had to go to the hospital, where most likely a young American was about to see the light of day.

We agreed that Uncle Pete, Martin Jr., and I would go to Detroit to watch a ballgame. I'll come back to this later.

Sunday, July 24. Abe went to see a few patients this morning. Since we



Briggs Stadium in Detroit, where the Buths saw the Detroit Tigers beat the Yankees 2-1. Image courtesy of: Tom Wilson.

got up late the morning was short. When Abe returned home he made a Manhattan for whoever wanted one and it tasted great. The temperature was not too hot, but it was an overcast day. Before I move on I have to recount a few of yesterday's, Saturday's, events. Like I said a moment ago, we went to Detroit where a New York [Yankees] team was going to play. Martin had been able to get tickets. We were going to leave from Kent Hills at nine. Uncle Dirk had told us that it might have to be a little bit later because they had problems with a young cow. Peter, the vet, who also was going to come along to Detroit, first had to provide medical assistance for the cow and would then come to Francis Campau's with Uncle Dirk. We would pick them up from there.

At a quarter to ten Martin was here and we left immediately, for it was as late as we could leave to still be on time. We changed cars at Francis's farm and the five of us rode to Detroit in Peter's car, a 1948 Dodge. At one o'clock we stopped at Howell for a quick lunch. Compared to the Netherlands distances are enormous here, so we sped towards our final destination. You do have to get used to the long

distances, but we arrived in Detroit nicely on time and were fortunate enough to find a parking spot for the car not too far from the stadium. The game began at exactly three o'clock. We had excellent seats. This stadium can hold 65,000 people. It had beautiful, comfortable chairs with blankets on them that you could put over the back. I was totally unfamiliar with the game of baseball. It is so totally different from soccer. The trick is to hit the ball that is thrown at you with a round, bottle-like piece of wood in such a way that the other team has difficulty catching it.

The outcome was 2 to 1 for Detroit. The game was finished by five. It was quite warm, and when we came back to the car which had been parked in the blazing sun you could hardly touch it. When we drove home we had to stop for at least fifty or sixty stoplights in Detroit before we were out of the city. Enormously long lines of automobiles were trying to find their way to their destinations.

On the way back the temperature became a bit more agreeable. At ten o'clock we arrived at Kent Hills. We had had a good time but were happy, nevertheless, when we could sit down

in an easy chair at Abe's. We enjoyed a good tasting highball.

On Sunday afternoon we stayed home; it was nice and quiet. Toward evening when the temperature usually drops quite a bit we were going to go for a ride to see some of the beautiful lakes around the city. On the way back Abe had to stop in Ada, where we had been a week ago as well. Those people live somewhat out of the way, isolated from the community. After we came home we had a glass of beer and lunch. We got to talking about various card games and wound up playing a game of hearts, after which we went to bed at one o'clock.

Monday, 25 July. It looks like it is going to be a warm day again. Pete took Miny for a driving lesson a few times so that she would be a bit more self-assured behind the wheel. She did pretty well. After that we went to a small village called Dorr, about 15 to 20 miles outside [south] of Grand Rapids. Willem de Korte lives there, who is a brother to Mientje who is married to Teun Koppenaal of Nieuwe Tonge. He went to America about twenty years ago and now runs a restaurant. We did not know him personally, but when we saw him we immediately recognized his mother's face [in his]. First we went to his house, followed by his wife who was in the restaurant. While enjoying a glass of beer we gave him a present from his sister in Holland.

We talked about Flakkee, of course, and left for home around 1:30 pm. He had forgotten quite a bit of his Dutch, which was too bad. He had difficulty speaking it. In the afternoon I went with Uncle Pete to Uncle Dirk's farm where they were busy threshing rye. The weather was great for this and the rye separated from the straw quite readily. The threshing machines are quite different from ours, they are smaller and all have drums that smash the straw. The sheaves are transported

up a Jacob's ladder of sorts and then, at the mouth of the machine, the straw passes four moving knives that cut the string so that the sheaf enters the machine totally tousled. Nothing is left but short smashed straw that is blown into the barn through a long tube. It is only used for bedding for the cows.

I took a picture of the machine and hope it will turn out well so that I will be able to save an image of this sort of machinery.

After we had seen all this we went to Aunt Maatje's and had a glass of beer, after which we went to Aunt Allie's to get the mail and a pair of shoes for Miny. Two letters were waiting for us; one from Jaan and Leni and one from Jan Kieviet of Nieuwe Tonge.

It is Monday evening. After dinner Abe left immediately, he had surgery this afternoon and expects to be quite busy at the office. We stayed home to rest up some and to write a few letters.

Tuesday, 26 July. The ladies left for the city early this morning and intended to stay there for lunch, which really means that they'll be gone for most of

the day. Consequently Uncle Pete, Eric, Miny, and I were home and had lunch at one o'clock. Abe did not come home in the afternoon.

In the evening we went to Eastmanville to Gert and Uncle John. It was Aunt Marie's birthday today and they had the birthday party at the farm.

This morning we met Arie and Dick van Oostenbrugge who left our island when they were five and eight years old.

Arie works in a factory that makes medicines and Dick is a designer of ads for the furniture industry. He designs plates for the professional presses. It was interesting to meet these gentlemen and both of them spoke excellent Dutch yet.

This morning I was already downstairs at seven o'clock. I was going to follow Uncle Pete in Annie's automobile since his car had to go to the garage for a checkup. In the afternoon Uncle Pete went with the neighbors to get his car back. Hardly anyone here walks; the distances are too great.

During the time that Uncle Pete was gone I wrote a few letters to Holland.



In 1932 an annual local talent show, staged on a riverboat, began a long tradition of music, dancing, and the minstrel shows in Lowell, Michigan. The Robert E. Lee, seen here, was built in 1948. Photo courtesy of: Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives Grand Rapids Public Library.

Wednesday, 27 July. The weather was nice and warm again. Yesterday afternoon the ladies did not come home from shopping until 5:30; they said that they had been quite successful. It was the crown on a tiresome day, in spite of all the dollars they had spent. Abe came home late. He taken a roll of film along and that had been developed and we were happy that the pictures turned out okay. We appreciate Abe's gesture very much because a lady in his office developed them. We are sure that the Flakkee family will be very happy to see a few pictures. It is a lot easier to tell people about life in America when you have a few pictures to show, instead of when you only talk about it.

Next we got ready for Aunt Marie's birthday party. We arrived there around eight o'clock and ate supper at the picnic tables outside. Pau-

line had done a great job setting the tables and we enjoyed ourselves. The Eastmanville people are very friendly and don't mind the trouble of making sure people enjoy themselves. Around 12:30 we said goodbye and were home at one o'clock. Abe, Annie, and Miny had left a bit earlier because the babysitter had to go home.

Wednesday morning. An left to go to the beauty parlor, and the other ladies accompanied her. Uncle Pete and I stayed home. They did a good job at the salon and An looked great. In the evening the Lowell Showboat, some twenty-five miles from here, put on a program for ladies only. During lunch the ladies were a bit concerned because the weather looked rather threatening, but the sky cleared and the ladies felt better. I went to the bank with Uncle Pete and had an opportunity to take a look in the

safe. The customers do not need an employee to help them to open their safety box. In the afternoon we went to Aunt Allie's to get our passports. We will need them tomorrow when we go to Canada. Martin Jr. finished threshing his oats. He had harvested a total of 1,900 bushels of thirty-two pounds each. We picked up some pictures of the picnic at the same time. As part of the trip we took a look at a lumberyard in Comstock Park that Uncle Pete wanted to see. Following dinner the ladies left for the showboat at 7:30. When Abe came home we played a game of cards while enjoying highballs. Thus a busy day came to a close, and all of us retired at midnight. The ladies had enjoyed the show very much; it was held on the [Flat] River in Lowell. ☞

book reviews



Vrijheid in het Verschiet: Nederlandse Emigratie naar Amerika 1840–1940

(Freedom in Perspective: Dutch
Emigration to America, 1840–1940)

Hans Krabbendam

Hilversum, the Netherlands: Verloren,
2006. 352 pages, illustrations, maps,
index. paperback.

ISBN 90-06550-947-X

\$29.00

Hans Krabbendam, a historian at the Roosevelt Study Center in Mid-delburg, the Netherlands, has been intensely and productively engaged in the study of Dutch emigration to America. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on Edward Bok in 1995 and since then has edited and written scores of books and articles. Krabbendam uses this book to again acknowledge Robert P. Swierenga as his mentor and dedicates the volume to him.

Vrijheid in het Verschiet is, in many ways, the culmination of his research

in this area. Rather than focusing on one or a few topics, he views the immigration from a wide perspective, as he deals with the motives for immigration, the Dutch background of the immigrants, agriculture, family life, language acquisition, Dutch-American identity, churches, and a host of other issues. His story ends in 1940, although in his *Conclusie* and *Bijlagen* he touches briefly on the post-1945 immigration. Krabbendam devotes brief attention to Roman Catholic immigration and settlements, but the story is largely about those from a Reformed, Calvinistic background.

Of course, in a work of this scope one still cannot deal with every issue. I was disappointed, for example, that Krabbendam completely neglects the stormy history of the CRC in the 1920s. The “Janssen case,” the common grace controversy, Herman Hoeksema, and the secession of the Protestant Reformed Churches are not so much as mentioned. Other readers may find different lacunae. Still, this work is one of the most comprehensive overviews published since Henry Lucas’s *Netherlanders in America* in 1955.

One of Krabbendam’s most notable achievements is his impressive use of both Dutch and American sources. Many authors on immigration rely primarily on sources from one side of the Atlantic or the other, but in *Vrijheid* one finds an uncommonly astute familiarity with conditions and writings in both the Netherlands and North America. One does not necessarily judge a book by its footnotes, but Krabbendam has searched widely and deeply. He

quotes from obscure documents such as a *Survey of 2,300 Female Domestic in Michigan Agriculture, 1895* and *Verzameling van consulaire en andere verslagen en berichten over nijverheid, handel en scheepvaart, 1865*; from (auto)biographies such as the “Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary” by the Roman Catholic Chrysostom Verwyst,” and Lubbertus Oostendorp’s *H. P. Scholte: Leader of the Secession of 1834 and Founder of Pella*, as well as many other biographies of great and near-great immigrants; from countless letters to and from the immigrants, found both in published collections and in various archives (although Krabbendam missed *From Heart to Heart: Letters . . . from Van Raalte to His Wife . . .*). The author’s knowledge of the secondary literature is equally impressive, stretching from an early *Commemorative Biographical Record of the Fox River Valley* (1895) to over thirty major titles from 2000–2006 (with women authors and women subjects finally coming into their own). He discusses the obscure farm worker L. Fraat and a farmer’s wife, Maria Verbrugge from Leota, Minnesota, as well as the familiar Isaac Wyckhoff, Cornelius van der Meulen, George Steketee, Johannes Groen, Gerrit Diekema, and Henry Beets. As is to be expected, Albertus van Raalte is discussed in more detail than anyone else.

Since Krabbendam deals with so many issues, I find the title somewhat puzzling. He occasionally refers to the concept of “freedom,” (as in the freedom to establish Christian schools), but it is not a major motif. His main themes are, rather, the struggles for

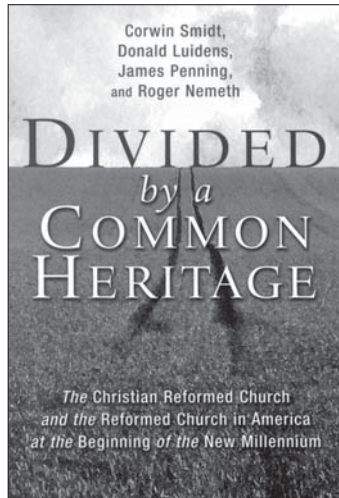
survival, the development of communities, the adaptation to the new environment, and becoming part of the mosaic of American life.

Krabbendam frequently makes use of statistical information, and such

use is helpful. However, as an old-fashioned reader of history I especially treasured the overall story and the individual stories. Krabbendam tells them very well. The book is a fine accomplishment, and those who

do not read Dutch should clamor for an English translation!✂

Harry Boonstra



Divided by a Common Heritage

Corwin Smidt, Donald Luidens,
James Penning, and Roger Nemeth

William B. Eerdmans Publishing
Company, 2006
226 pages, paperback
\$24.00

This sociological survey presents a statistical comparison of the religious behavior and trends of thought exhibited by the laity and clergy of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Calvin College political scientists Corwin Smidt and James Penning, with Hope College sociologists Donald Luidens and Roger Nemeth, here present the reader with a collaborative effort, not a collection of separately authored essays. Though written in a scholarly fashion, the authors hope their volume will be “accessible” to lay members in both denominations.

“Divided by a Common Heritage,” the first chapter, explains the sociological methodology and statistical sources utilized. Also here are elaborate definitions and critiques of the terms “secularization” and “secularization theory.” How these modes of thought prevalent in today’s academic environment can be used to explain present trends in the CRC and RCA fascinate the authors both critically and positively. Additional topics mentioned here but discussed in more detail in later chapters are factors contributing to the strengths, weaknesses, and vigor of each denomination.

Contributing components relative to the health of each denomination are personal individualism and its consequent partner, a lessening of denominational loyalty. For both clergy and laity, the authors’ demographic observations present serious food for thought concerning the survival of each denomination.

Next is a separate, succinct narrative which relates well-known historical material about the two kindred denominations. Essential for an appreciation of the statistical conclusions found throughout the book is a basic awareness of the RCA-CRC story past and present. Generalizations about the formation of the CRC in 1857 and the controversy concerning lodge membership in the 1880s are almost always intellectually vulnerable and remain debatable even today. Other elements worth pondering here are the early Americanization of the RCA and its membership divide on either side of the Alleghenies, and for

the CRC its much later Americanization and large Canadian contingent.

The next five chapters contain somewhat complex statistics and conclusions accompanying various survey numbers. What folks in the RCA and CRC believe, how they put their faith into practice, and what they think about politics, theology, and the social mission of the church are among the modes of behavior examined. Denominational differences and similarities revealed here make for more than mere casual reading. On social issues, which for many in the CRC and RCA are more important than theological niceties, the clergy and laity remain basically conservative. Yet, according to statistical data, the inclinations concerning women in office, homosexuality, and the death penalty are gradually becoming a bit more liberal. On the matter of Christian primary and secondary education, differences between the denominations remain decisive, which does not bode well for merger optimism. An issue threatening the unity within each denomination is the homosexuality question and all its ramifications. What role this issue will have in any merger of the RCA and CRC is unknown, but in the near future it may well become the most significant issue facing both denominations.

It is clear the authors share denominational empathy. Emerging from the statistical evidence, their conclusions are not a prescription for a soon-to-come RCA-CRC merger. They note that membership decline may be solved by outreach strategy.

But this remedy may entail a sacrifice of cherished Reformed confessional ideas which are more than mere ethnic peculiarities.

In a lukewarm way the authors posit their merger solutions, none of which to them appears a happy solution. The first is "Staying the Course," the second "Merging for Survival," and the third "Merger for Purity." Adopting any of the three will result, the authors fear, in loss of members who will search for a church home reflecting their particular needs and desires whether these be doctrinal fidelity, individual edification, or social programs.

Rather, the authors suggest cooperation at the congregational level between RCA and CRC denominations at this time appears the most beneficial path for both to follow. Per-

haps, and this is the fond hope of the authors, cooperative efforts between RCA and CRC congregations will stimulate merger possibilities in the distant future.

More than a compilation of statistical results, the contents encapsulate the spiritual history, religious history, and life blood of the RCA and CRC. What clergy and laity think and do confronts the reader on almost every page. Here presented is a measurement of the spiritual pulse and Reformed outlook shared by laity and clergy in both denominations. All who have this book in their hands will desire to discuss the authors' following observation:

Thus, while there may be a growing sense that the historic split between the CRC and RCA is unfortunate, it is abundantly clear that any

route taken to merge the two communions would be extremely difficult. (p. 193)

Denominational survival if not by merger may well depend upon attracting new members, in itself a difficult task. Tactics utilized for this purpose will reflect more and more the liturgy and belief structure of the present American Protestant environment. Embracing an ecumenical strategy such as this will, some fear, ultimately result in a sacrifice of the historic Reformed character of the two denominations.

This book is must reading for all members of the CRC and RCA. Church discussion groups and council members will find it particularly valuable.

Conrad Bult

for the future

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



“Onze Reis naar N. Americak [Our Trip to North America]” by G. J. Buth concludes

Robert Swierenga describes Church-State conflicts during the super patriotism of the First World War in the “Flag in Church” Controversy

“The Dutch Come to the Hackensack River Valley,” by Richard Harms

The memoir of James Koning who came from the Netherlands as a teenager, translated by Eltine De Young-Peterse, with Nella Kennedy

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