

Origins

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of The Archives

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(616) 526-6313

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.

Richard H. Harms
Editor

Hendrina Van Spronsen
Circulation Manager

Tracey L. Gebbia
Designer

Janet Sheeres
Associate Editor

James C. Schaap
Robert P. Swierenga
Contributing Editors

HeuleGordon Inc.
Printer

Cover photo:

David Cok boarding the Christian Reformed Church mission plane for the flight to Hillcrest for first grade.



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Time to Renew Your Subscription

As we do in every fall issue, we remind you that it is time to renew your subscription to *Origins*. A renewal envelope for this is included with this issue. Subscriptions remain \$10 (US) per year. Gifts more than \$10 are acknowledged as charitable gifts to *Origins* and we are grateful for such generosity which has allowed us to keep the subscription rate the same for thirty years.

This Issue

This *Origins* focuses on family history. We begin with two abridged accounts, the first by Coby Cok of her family's experiences while serving as missionaries in Nigeria; another by Sharon Gordon, who tells the story

of her maternal grandparents. Janet Sheeres reports on an unusual case, among Dutch immigrants, that of a relative who moved from the Protestant Church to the Roman Catholic Church. Ralph Hoekstra details how his grandparents' families met while attempting to settle in Texas early in the twentieth century. James De Jong presents the result of his serendipitous discovery of an ancestor's book at the Hekman Library, and Richard Mouw recounts his introduction to the Christian Reformed Church.

News from the Archives

In May we moved into our remodeled space on the main floor of the Hekman Library. Our reading room is three times larger than what we had and can now easily accommodate twelve patrons at a time, with the potential for adding six more seats if necessary. We now have storage capacity for ten years of growth and, even more importantly, we now have state-of-the-art temperature and hu-

midity controls for our storage areas.

Shortly after moving into our renovated space, staff traveled to New Jersey and brought back 77 boxes of records from Classes Hackensack and Hudson of the Christian Reformed Church. These classes have maintained an archive for years and decided that the time was at hand to transfer these materials to Heritage Hall. Included are records from church, school, and outreach efforts in the New Jersey-New York region, including items from the True Reformed Protestant Dutch Church that began in the 1820s and joined the Christian Reformed Church in the 1890s. Extensive mold among these boxes presents a unique challenge for us.

Florence Schoolland DeRuiter donated a collection of very early twentieth-century glass-plate negatives depicting Grand Rapids and Calvin College locations and people. The family of the late David DeHeer (biologist) donated his teaching and

research files to Heritage Hall.

We processed more than 140 boxes of the Vernon Ehlers papers and are awaiting the transfer of the last of his material so that we can make the entire collection available for research. The collection details both his academic and political careers. We processed an additional 20 cubic feet of records from congregations once supported by Christian Reformed Home Missions. We organized the papers of Cora Helen Roelofs Verbrugge that detail the lives of Dutch immigrants in West Michigan and Minnesota.

Also opened for research were the papers of and documentation on inventions by Chicago-area waste hauler William Venema; the papers of William Recker, professor at Calvin Theological Seminary; and those of Rev. John Olthoff.

We added material to the papers of Dirk Nieland (specialist in Yankee-Dutch speech), William Van Regenmorter (Michigan politician), and noted mathematician Jack B. Kuipers.

We added the Dobben family (immigrants from Graafschap Bentheim to West Michigan) papers to the William Harry Jellema collection; the Dobbens were Jellema's maternal grandparents.

During the summer, since we did not have any student assistants, work on producing a digitized copy of the H. Evan Runner papers was on hiatus. To date we have approximately 70 percent of the collection's estimated 36,000 leaves scanned. This project is a test to determine the viability of producing a digital copy of hard copy for reference use.

Volunteers continue their translation of the Holland, Michigan, Central Avenue CRC minutes; keying in data of vital records information from the *Banner* and family data from the *Calvinist Contact* also continues. We electronically published another year of *Origins* (2008) via our webpage.

Staff

Richard Harms is the curator of the Archives and editor of *Origins*;

Hendrina VanSpronsen is the office coordinator and business manager of *Origins*; Wendy Blankepoor is our librarian and cataloging archivist; Laurie Haan is the department assistant; Dr. Robert Bolt is field agent and assistant archivist. Our student assistant is Ben Rietema. Our volunteers include Rev. Dr. Paul Bremer, Mr. Ed Gerritsen, Mr. Fred Greidanus, Mr. Ralph Haan, Mrs. Helen Meulink, Rev. Gerrit W. Sheeres, Mrs. Janet Sheeres, Mrs. Jeannette Smith, and Mr. Ralph Veenstra. 

Richard H. Harms

Twenty-five Years a Missionary Family in Nigeria

From the letters by Ralph and Coby Cok

August 1959

Three Sundays have gone by since we worshiped with you. We spent one on board the ship Atlantic, one in Amsterdam, and one at the Sudan Interior Mission chapel in Jos, Nigeria, before arriving at Zaki Biam. Now we are "settled" and have experienced our first Sunday "in the bush."

The Zaki Biam church is shaped like a cross. The walls and floor are made of mud bricks. The roof is of grass thatch. The sides are low but the peak is nearly twenty-five feet high. Openings in the walls provide light and ventilation. The doorways are also open. It is breezy and cool but quite dark inside. The pews are cement benches without backs and the longer one sits, the harder they seem to become. The order of worship was similar to what we are used to and we tried our best to follow the songs and Scripture reading in our

newly acquired Tiv¹ New Testament and songbooks.

October 1959

Our church at Zaki Biam is a mother church. The daughters of this church are not organized churches but rather preaching and catechism centers.

Once a year people from these centers come to the mother church for a spiritual/Bible conference. This is called a mkohol and recently one took place at Zaki Biam. It lasted from Thursday until Sunday night. Three meetings a day and each meeting lasted about two to three hours. In the evening the church was lighted with two kerosene lanterns. It was impossible to read the hymn book if one was not sitting very near the light. Pastor Yakobo Amaichigh was in charge of the meeting and most of the messages were given by evangelists and elders. Three

Ralph (1926-2008) and Coby (Fridsma) Cok married shortly after graduating from Calvin College in 1951. After teaching in Bellflower, California and then teaching and later serving as principal in Celeryville, Ohio they joined the Christian Reformed Church branch of the Sudan United Mission, where they served for twenty-five years. After their service in Africa Ralph taught and was principal in Goshen, New York.



The school building at Zaki Biam, 1960, Ralph Cok's classroom was to the left side. Image courtesy of the author.

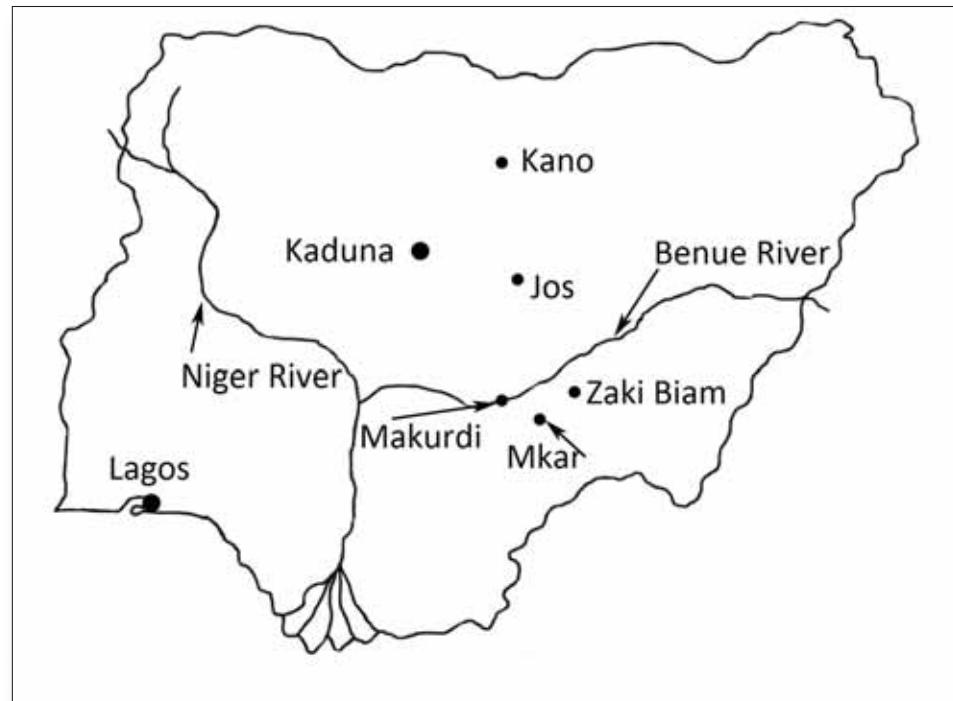
missionaries, the Reverends Ipema, Terpstra, and Persenaike, were to take part on Sunday but the latter two came down with malaria.²

November 1959

Soon it will be Christmas. We can honestly say that this Christmas will be spent in a quite different manner. In the next couple of weeks the families and girls who are on this station will be leaving either for the States or to the place where they will be working. We will be the only family left here, the nearest other missionary family being thirty miles away. We can easily predict a quiet Christmas. Thanksgiving was quite the opposite. We had everyone over for dinner, fourteen of us, and spent the afternoon playing games and breaking in our new croquet set.

We have been kept busy, too busy, with learning to speak Tiv. Wednesday we took our last exam and that ended our classes. Nothing like trying to learn a whole language in three months! We really haven't done that either. We have mastered much of the grammar, but now we must practice it and learn to converse. The women who live here like to come over and talk. They can't speak English at all although many of the men can. I think they get a bang out of hearing us stumble through sentences using wrong tenses and tones. It's nice to be able to talk to them, but a lot of work in learning.

The women have a sense of humor and are a happy lot. Their clothes consist of a blouse of some sort—or no blouse at all—and a wrap-around skirt. Another cloth is worn around their waist which holds their youngest child carried on their back or hip. Many of the older women have designs on their faces, chests, backs, and abdomen that are sometimes very intricate and beautiful. The designs are cut into their skin when they are



*Some of the communities in Nigeria where the Cok family served during their twenty-five years.
Image courtesy of the author.*

babies. After the skin is cut, ashes are rubbed into the wound so a scar will form. Some women have very fancy hairdos, but many have their hair cut very short. This makes it easier for them to keep their hair clean and free from crawling things.

The Tiv people are friendly and like to give gifts. Often the missionaries come home with live chickens, parts of goats or cows, or maybe some squash or yams. We have fresh beef or goat to eat all the time, some fresh vegetables, and a lot of fresh fruit. Our compound has many mango, orange, lemon, and grapefruit trees. We also have a pineapple patch but we buy our bananas.

The house we moved into after language study is a large mud brick house with a tin roof. We have a living and a dining room, a study, three bedrooms, a bath, and a pantry. Our kitchen is a separate building behind the house where the baking, cooking, and heating water are done; thus the house stays cooler. We have a large yard with a type of tough grass which

is gradually turning brown with the coming of the dry season. We dump our bath water on our garden and on our shrubs and flowers. Inside our house we have whitewashed walls and cement floors.

As for modern conveniences, we have electricity at night from 6 until 10 o'clock, running water (the native boys run for it), a large kerosene refrigerator with freezer, and a tape recorder which we enjoy very much. We had taped a lot of music and now can enjoy listening to it. We plan to get a battery-operated radio and phonograph sometime in the future.

We get mail here three times a week, but not as many letters as we would like. We try to answer every letter we receive. We will be thinking of you this Christmas season and wish all of you a blessed Christmas and a happy New Year.

December 1959

We are starting a "farm" here. On the way home from Kunav on Monday we stopped at the Yandev Experiment

Farm and Ralph bought fifteen fertile eggs for hatching. Right now we are taking care of the Terpstras' five chickens while they are in the States. A broody hen is in the lot, so Ralph is going to take advantage of it. Since we can't buy fresh eggs here, chickens are nice to have.

We are trying hard to get into the Christmas spirit. Laura Beelen left her phonograph with us while she is on furlough, so we have been playing Christmas songs. Also, we found a substitute for a pine tree—a cassava plant. We trimmed the leaves and filled the branches with tinsel

(4:30) on Christmas morning with the singing of Tiv hymns and psalms and some familiar Christmas tunes. We looked out of the window and saw a large congregation of people who were singing enthusiastically. As the people came closer and gathered around our veranda, we went outside and greeted them. At the Christmas service that morning Pastor Yakabo spoke with more than the usual enthusiasm, and the people responded more joyfully than usual with songs such as "Tugh gba ve" ("Silent Night") and "Mbarumun Kwagh a Aondo" ("O Come All Ye Faith-

are over, this month gives us time to become more permanently settled in a different house and time to get all the odd jobs done. We will also need to prepare for classes which will start soon.

The year 1960 will be a very important one in the history of Nigeria as the country enters independence. The independence year will also be heralded by an All Nigeria Billy Graham Campaign.

March 1960

On our compound here in Zaki Biam there is a junior primary school with three hundred pupils and a senior primary with one hundred. The school buildings are made with mud bricks covered with whitewash. The old buildings have grass roofs which are cool and quiet, but dirty and dark. Our new buildings have tin roofs which are clean and light but become very hot when the sun shines, and very noisy when it rains. Two children share each desk.

May 1960

One week of our month's vacation we spent at Obudu Plateau Ranch Hotel. Once when we were hiking through the woods I saw a black panther. We backed out fast although the manager later said that those animals don't usually attack for no reason. We didn't want to take a chance though!

The road up to the Ranch Hotel is really steep and curvy. It took us one hour to go nine miles. The road itself is dirt and full of holes. It's hard to imagine that all the supplies to construct that place had to be carried up that same long road. This place is a cattle ranch. We had plenty of meat and fresh milk for a change as well as homemade butter and cheese.

With the arrival of rain it is very pretty around here. On our compound we have quite a few flamboyant trees which are gorgeous right



David Cok boarding the Christian Reformed Church mission plane for the flight to Hillcrest for first grade. Image courtesy of the author.

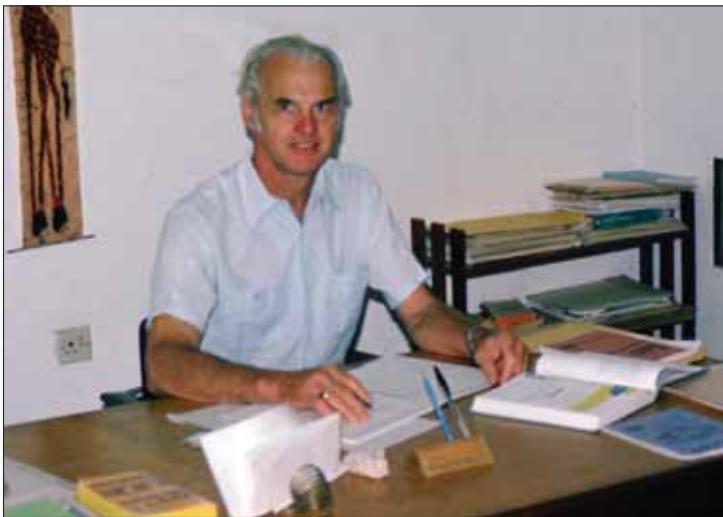
and ornaments, a fun activity for the children. We went to Makurdi and shopped for a radio and phonograph. We bought a radio but were unsuccessful finding a phonograph. Ralph plans to put up the aerial this afternoon so we can hear the local mission news on the radio tomorrow morning. It's nice to be able to keep in contact that way and to also know who is traveling through so we can figure on company for meals if necessary.

Christmas Day (our first one in Nigeria)

After hearing drumming during the night, we were awakened very early

ful"). Our family spent the rest of the day with the Rubings in Sevay, twenty-six miles from Zaki Biam.³ The distance seemed like a hundred miles when traveling on these dusty and bumpy roads. Dr. and Mrs. Larry Den Besten were also there to enjoy a delicious turkey dinner with all the trimmings. On the two previous days the doctor was in the area visiting all the dispensaries.

Christmas time also means a month of vacation for the native students who attend the Christian school here. The school year for them ends the first part of December and a new school year begins in January. Since our formal language classes



Ralph Cok (1926-2008) at his desk. Already in 1961 he assumed some administrative functions. Image courtesy of the author.

now. Our grass is growing and in need of cutting so Ralph put our push lawn mower together. We hadn't used it here as yet. When the mower was being put to use, we had an audience of people who were fascinated by this wonderful machine and wanted a try at it. Generally grass is cut by hand here, with a short piece of metal called a cutlass.

February 1961

The most exciting happening since we last wrote is the arrival of our new son on 3 January. We are thankful to God for another healthy boy—Keith Earl. I [Coby] am still aroused at night by his hungry cries but we hope that soon he will sleep peacefully until morning. In this country getting up at night is more difficult with mosquito nets to contend with, no electric light to easily turn on, and a kerosene flame to heat the bottle. Add to that no running water and cloth diapers, but we manage and adjust. Keith's crib is completely covered with screen to keep out any unwelcome visitors.

During December and January we spent six weeks in the "big" city of Jos up on the plateau. Here we enjoyed a very relaxing vacation

from the work and heat of the valley. We had ideal weather most of the time we were there, so we came back to Mkar very refreshed.⁴ Besides that, preparing to teach in a different school meant extra preparation. Of course, we were not able to get settled in that

short time, and even now we still do not have everything in its proper place. We say "new home" because it is new to us, but actually we are living in a rather old, rambling house with a grass thatched roof.

Ralph is enjoying teaching in the Teacher Training College here at Mkar. He has five different subjects to teach: English, Scripture, organization of schools, methods of teaching arithmetic, and carpentry. Besides the classes, Ralph has additional curricular duties as club advisor, giving counsel and spiritual advice, and helping the student evangelization program. Another job for him in addition to these duties is being an apprentice to the supervisor. The current supervisor will go on furlough in July and Ralph will have the task of visiting and helping forty-three schools located over a large area and regularly paying all of the teachers. He has begun by taking over the finances of the supervisor's work and already the many problems are difficult to handle. What a tremendous need for wisdom, patience, and grace to do this job.

May 1962

Our first term of service in Nigeria as missionaries is almost at an end. In

two weeks we are scheduled to leave for the US. Our family is all excited and Dennis and Ron daily count the days until Pilot [Raymond] Browneye will pick us up in his new airplane and fly us to Jos. At Jos we will meet David.⁵ We hope to arrive on his last day of school. In his letter, which we received today, he too was counting the days.

Our work for this term is finished. A year of teaching at Zaki Biam Senior Primary School, six months of teaching at Mkar Teacher Training College, a year as Supervisor of Primary Schools and six months with our new Bristow Secondary School⁶ have brought many and varied experiences. One chief pleasure was the regular and frequent opportunities to teach and preach the Word. God has blessed us during this term. He gave us opportunity to work and strength to do the work. Sickness has been a minor item in our family.

March 1963

I [Coby] just finished giving Mary her bath. I usually do it at night when I have more time and when the water in the pipes has become warm enough from the sun to save me from having to heat water.

The house of Mae Mast, a midwife, was set up as a maternity center. In addition to Mary's birth in February, two more girls were born there this week—to the [Thomas] Oosthuizens and the [Timothy] Monsmas. The delivery table is just a plain table but higher. Ralph laughed when his sister Audrey, a labor and delivery nurse in Ohio, asked if they had special lights. We used a kerosene lamp from 3:00 until 5:00. When I was completely dilated the generator was turned on and we had light, even though it was just a bulb in the middle of the ceiling.

May 1963

We are spending a couple of weeks

in the guest house at Rock Haven. Rock Haven is on a plateau about 4,500 feet elevation. We are enjoying the cool nights, fresh vegetables, and the handiness of 24-hour electricity. Many missionaries from different missions stay here for short holidays. We hear many interesting stories about the work that each mission is doing and what successes and problems they have. Rock Haven is about four miles from Hillcrest School. David and Dennis are staying with us and take the Rock Haven school bus



The Coks lived in this new-to-them rambling house with a grass-thatched roof in Mkar, 1961. Image courtesy of the author.

each day. It is nice to have the boys with us for a few days while everyone is free from work and can take time to play together.

This afternoon we plan to go to Hillcrest to watch David play in a soccer game. Last Saturday we went swimming in a pool at the Lutheran hostel near Hillcrest. Since we forgot our bathing suits, Steve and Ardene Lambers offered to let us use theirs.

August 1963

David and Dennis have been back at school now for four weeks. We miss them, but they seem to be enjoying themselves there. David's newest interest is keeping a chart on how many hamburgers and sloppy joes he eats during the term. Keith is quite proud

of his increasing vocabulary, and we are relieved that he can finally tell us what he wants. Mary is six months old and in the stage of grabbing everything within reach. She is such a joy to us.

November 1963

While I'm typing this, the Voice of America on the radio has just given us a report from Washington on the funeral cortège from the White House to the Capitol. We could hear the horses and the drums and we marvel

that it could be heard all the way out here while it is actually happening. Friday evening about 10:30, not too long after it occurred, we heard the shocking news of the President's assassination. It seems unbelievable that this has happened in America. We think of it happening in other countries, but not in ours. The funeral will be broadcast as it happens.

We had a pleasant day on Ralph's birthday. After church a bunch of people came to celebrate at the Vannette home. I brought the cake, a huge double recipe chocolate cake. About ten adults and thirteen kids were at the party. On Ron's birthday we celebrated with a wiener roast in the yard, with cake and ice cream for dessert.

The boys are home again. David

didn't change much, but Dennis has grown. His feet have, anyway, because his school shoes are way too small, and they aren't worn out. Dennis came home with a lot of papers for us to see. David's papers blew out of the lorry⁷ and he felt badly about that. They left Hillcrest in the morning at 11:30 on Wednesday and got to Mkar at 10:15 that night. There were twenty-one kids in the back of the lorry and a couple of adults. Their clothes were filled with dust, but we were thankful to have them both home safely. Keith was so excited to have the boys home that he hardly knew how to act.

July 1964

You may be interested in a local legend that was put to a test a few weeks ago. For generations people have believed that in a rocky ravine about forty miles from here lived a great snake with flashing eyes. This snake was said to have power to destroy people if anyone tried to kill it. A few weeks ago one of the Christian school teachers was hunting with a shotgun and saw a snake near the school compound. People shouted warnings to the teacher not to shoot this snake. The teacher, not believing the legend, shot the snake and then dropped dead. The local people tied the dead man's body upright in a chair in the schoolyard and stretched out the snake in front of the body. All day long people came to see the two of them. What was the real reason for this teacher's death? Your guess is as good as ours, but this man had been warned by a doctor not to hunt because of his bad heart. Of course, you could never convince the people that it might have been anything other than a supernatural death.

August 1964

We've added a new Suzuki to our possessions—a black and white mo-

torcycle with whitewall tires. What fun it is! Ralph bought it yesterday on my birthday and I've found lots of reasons to go for a ride. The four of us fit on it just right.

January 1967

After being closed for two months due to the Nigerian Civil War, we were happy the Gboko post office



Smaller motorcycles were convenient and economical means of surface transportation in rural Nigeria. Shown here are Coby and daughter Mary at Bristow School in Gboko, 1964. Image courtesy of the author.

opened again the second week of December.⁸ Although mail still takes a little longer than usual, most of our Christmas mail arrived shortly after the New Year began. We were grateful for your prayers and concern for us during the recent fighting here. God has been good and kept the missionaries safe from danger. The leaders of Nigeria have met in an attempt to establish peace and harmony without further bloodshed. Since none of the

leaders trust any of the others, and no one would give anyone a guarantee of safe conduct, the conference had to be held in a neutral place. After weeks of delay, they agreed to meet in Ghana.

February 1967

I came into the hospital at three in the morning on the fourteenth with strong regular contractions, but by morning they slowed up and nothing happened all day. Then they started again at night, diminishing toward morning. About three or four in the afternoon things began in earnest and our little girl was born at 6:25 pm, 15 February. She is 21 inches long and weighs 7 lb. 11 3/4 oz., has dark hair and long dark lashes. Dr. Jeanette Troup said she never saw a newborn with such long lashes. She doesn't look newborn. She is filled out nicely and doesn't cry

much, maybe because she was three weeks overdue.

October 1967

With a prayer of thanksgiving I [Ralph] am happy to report that our family is reunited. During the four months of June to September, missionary wives and children were evacuated from the civil war zone. Families were sent to Jos, Lupwe, or Takum. Coby lived in our mis-

sion guest house in Jos. She had two rooms, a bath, and a kitchenette which she sometimes shared with another family. The guest house was less than a mile from Hillcrest School, so the children could come and live with her. David is living at Mountain View Hostel which is on the same compound with the guest house. He would run over every night. Also, during this time I managed to fly to Jos for two weeks and four other weekends. I surely was thankful that we had an airplane. The trip from Gboko to Jos is one hour by plane and eight to nine hours by car.

February 1968

Now, with a builder available, we are busy with plans for an addition to our library at Bristow, an addition to our school kitchen, and a new staff house. We actually need six new houses, but at present we do not have the finances for that many.

But life at school includes some recreation. Last Saturday about fifty Bristow boys met boys from other schools. They slept out near Mkar Mountain and then climbed it the next day. This past Sunday, 180 students, which included thirty-five girls, went on a four-hour trek of preaching, singing, praying, and passing out tracts in about a dozen villages in a ten-mile circuit. Next Saturday the Fellowship of Christian Students is planning a spiritual retreat at the top of the mountain.

Our staff also has some time for play. Last week our neighbor, Paul Kortenhoven, went fishing with half a dozen fellow missionaries. He caught a 112-pound Niger trout which was five feet long. Fish adds a nice variety to our diet and the whole compound enjoyed it.

The civil war has slowed down, with the fighting two hundred to three hundred miles away. However, the problems the civil war has caused

still continue and are getting worse. Drugs for the hospital and gasoline for cars and trucks are scarce. Even the students don't get as much soap as usual to wash their clothes; new laws have limited or stopped the importing of food and clothing. Last week our mission lorry went to Lagos to get cases of food and other things and came back practically empty.

February 1969

It is a little over a month ago that we again left the US for Africa. We had a good trip and were only delayed thirty minutes in our takeoff in Cleveland because of the congestion at Kennedy Airport. But, since we had a two-hour layover in New York and were flying the same plane to London, we weren't concerned. It was a good thing that we had eaten supper in the car as we drove to Cleveland because we didn't get served food in the plane until after ten, and the children were asleep by then. Only forty-seven people were on board; each of our children had three seats on which to stretch out.

In London it was a sunny 38 degrees, for which we were glad because we left our winter clothes in Ohio. We had four hotel rooms, dinner, supper, and a good long afternoon nap. We flew on a BOAC VC-10 to Kano, Nigeria. Fortunately, all of our luggage arrived when we did. While I spent a half hour going through immigration, health, police, and agriculture departments, Coby and the boys found our luggage and presented it for customs. We had to open about five of the sixteen pieces and Coby managed to talk us out of paying any customs fees. Then we had to declare all the money we had and report the goods we were sending by sea. Finally, we were free to go, all this being in the early hours of the morning, having had no sleep. An hour later we boarded a Nigerian plane.

With Principal Gerry VandenBerg on furlough, the woes of administration have fallen to Pete Winkle and me. One of the difficult problems to deal with is collecting school fees and then turning away those who don't bring enough money. Also very dif-

One Scripture at the Government Secondary School at Gboko three times a week. The principal of the school is a Christian and allows our missionaries to come in and do this. The government has no objection, so it is a real challenge to present our Christian



After rain, rural roads, normally slow and difficult to travel, became more so. Image courtesy of the author.

ficult to do is deciding who and how much to help out of one's own pocket because one doesn't have the heart to send them away.

September 1969

We have had so much rain in the last three weeks. Since our mission stations are divided by a river, transportation is greatly hampered. Often meetings are called and then not held because half of the members are unable to cross the river due to flooded banks. Coby is planning a trip to Jos to see the children, but reports about the roads are very bad. Bridges are washed out; there are miles of soft mud and holes in which army trucks sink to their axles. Still, this is her one chance of seeing the children in the 4½-month school term, so she is quite determined to make the trip.

February 1970

I [Coby] have begun to do some teaching again. I am teaching Form

teachings to these students. I rather enjoy it but as yet it takes quite a bit of study and preparation on my part. The school is just a couple of miles from our home, and I take the motorcycle.

Many Tiv people are slowly returning to Tiv land. The carpenter, who has done a lot of work for our school and also for us, has returned. He can do especially good work, having had experience making furniture with style for missionaries. We gave him a picture from a catalog and he produced "early American ladder-back chairs" for us at a very low cost. Other carpenters, storekeepers, salesmen, and photographers are also back. Usually they come alone to see if they can get started in work, and then they send for their families.

January 1971

A couple of weeks ago we went on a trip to Yankari Game Reserve. We left on a Tuesday morning and returned on Friday evening. The reserve is

about 150 miles from Jos. We lived in grass-roofed huts which had a gas stove and a kerosene refrigerator in a nearby building for us to use. A half mile from our huts were warm springs which are 88 degrees day and night. The water was so pleasant that we went swimming in the evening as well as during the day. The baboons came down from the forest and sat on the rocks to watch us play in the water. Twice, once at dawn and once at dusk, we went out on the back of an open truck for a two-hour safari to look for wild animals. We saw a couple of hippos, many baboons, herds of roan antelope, water buck, hartebeest, and warthog, and about twenty-five elephants.

April 1971 – HE IS RISEN!

The NKST [Nongu u Kristu u ken Sudan hen Tiv] church in Jos took a significant step this past week. Finally, after many meetings, debates, and synodical and classical delays, they were allowed to organize. The organizational service was held Saturday afternoon. One hundred families, including our own, are charter members. The meeting was about two and a half hours long. The church history was read, synodical and classical members spoke, a sermon was preached, and greetings were received from the CRC mission, TEKAS [Tarayyar Ekklesiyoyin Kristi A Sudan—Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Nigeria], civic organizations, and the government. How wonderful it is to see the work of the Lord advance and to participate in making His Kingdom come in a tribe that first knew the Gospel only a little more than fifty years ago.

Although cholera is rampant in Kano and the coastal areas of Calabar, Ibadan, and Lagos, it doesn't seem to be as prevalent in Jos. Mkar Hospital, also, has only a few cases. The people there have been frightened into boil-

ing their drinking water and as a result the hospital has had many fewer cases of other intestinal troubles. Since this disease is mostly due to poor sanitation, we are not concerned for ourselves.

June 1971

Tuesday night was graduation for the seniors at Hillcrest. David is no longer a high schooler. At the awards assembly on Wednesday he received a scholarship from Calvin College. After the graduation service on Tuesday a reception was held in the lounge for all seniors and their parents. A variety of cakes, cookies, candies, peanuts, and punch was served.

We had one dirty task that took four days to accomplish. Our sewer plugged up and the toilet wouldn't work well. We dug up the whole line and uncovered the septic tank and soak-away pits. Finally, we had to have the local "honey dippers" bail out with pails both the pit and the cesspool. It took them a couple of hours and then it took us another day to get the dirt back into the holes again. We don't always appreciate conveniences out here until they break down.

Friday night we had supper at the home of an Indian family whose daughter was one of my students. About

five teachers and their wives were invited guests. We arrived at 8:00, started eating at 8:30, and finished at 11:30. We had three courses of appetizers plus a variety of things to drink. This was followed by a meal (we walked around a table and served ourselves) with about three kinds of meats, vegetables, pastries, and breads. Dessert included shortcake in sweet syrup, a cookie/cake pastry, peanut brittle, and strawberries with whipped cream. A half hour later coffee was served. Much of the food was Indian, with Indian spices.

December 1975

David and Mary (Van Someren) graduated from Calvin in May, were married in June, and are now living in Cambridge, Massachusetts. David



The Cok family in 1975. From left to right, back: Ronald, Ralph, Keith; middle: David, Dennis; front: Mary, Coby, Janet. Image courtesy of Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.

is attending Harvard and working on a higher degree in physics and math. Mary is attending Harvard Divinity School and majoring in church history. Dennis is now in his second year at Calvin and living in Heyns Hall on campus. Ron has a half year of high school left and then he plans to join Dennis at Calvin.

June 1976

Some months ago we were so optimistic about reconciliation between the churches. We wrote that we hoped it would bring about confession, forgiveness, and unity. In the euphoria that followed the first meeting of confession and forgiveness between the Jukun tribe (EKAS Benue) and the Kuteb tribe (EKAN Takum) the missionaries had great hopes. It is obvious now that the native church leaders had a much more limited vision. That great outpouring of brotherly love last December ran dry before real unity was established. Bitterness and plotting against each other has stopped and there is still an amiable feeling. But when the EKAN Takum leaders were asked to appoint members to a committee which would seek out ways of working toward unity, they refused to appoint anyone.

I'm sure that all of you heard about the coup of last January at which the head of state was killed. Since then there have been a lot of trials and probes. Some of them had to do with people involved in the coup. Others were with people involved in corruption and financial scandals. Many people have had lands, buildings, and money confiscated. Some people were imprisoned and some were executed. We can be thankful that in all these events missionaries were permitted to continue in their tasks.

The coup of six months ago has brought many changes in government. One change is the creation of new states. Two of our big institu-

tions, Takum Hospital and Wukari Secondary School, are now included in a different state. The attitude of this state, which is similar to the attitude of the states in the north, is that all mission schools and hospitals should come under the control of the government. While they are currently in the process of taking over these institutions, they have invited many of our missionaries (which include teachers, doctors, nurses, and business administrators) to continue to work in these.

November 1976

Good is the Lord and full of kind compassion! He has filled our lives with many good things. Thanksgiving certainly is in order. Africa, as you know, is a developing continent, and Nigeria is one of its leaders. Material progress such as new roads and buildings are everywhere evident. There are four new houses being built in the lots adjoining this one. On the Mountain View compound in Jos, we are now living in a new house that is less than a month old. The soil here on the plateau is very poor and hard: it is mainly laterite, which is low-grade iron ore. We have hauled in several loads of black dirt and manure and have started a garden. We began this a month before we moved, and now are enjoying broccoli, rhubarb, lettuce, beans, cucumbers, and tomatoes. We wanted to plant carrots but couldn't get any seed here.

July 1980

Our two daughters are tutoring students from India, Pakistan, and the Middle East and so have direct confrontation with Copts, Muslims, and Hindus. Please continue to support us with your letters, your prayers, and your gifts. In particular, pray that we may have an adequate staff this year and especially for the right person to fill the important position of Hillcrest

chaplain. Pray that we may be bold in our witness as we contact non-Christians in our homes and school.

June 1982

The end of our home service has arrived. All of our speaking engagements are completed. We traveled over 6,000 miles in the past six weeks and experienced all kinds of weather—snow, wind, and ice storms in Iowa and South Dakota, the most colorful spring ever in New Jersey, and summer weather in Ohio and Michigan. Coby and I were able to share in about forty different appearances.

August 1983

The current "water strike" has been the cause of considerable frustration and inconvenience in Jos for the past two weeks. However, we sympathize with the striking employees as they have not been paid for months due to a shortage of government funds. Although no water is being pumped into Jos, we are fortunate in that we can pump from our well. Others are collecting rain water in tubs and drums or else hauling water from nearby lakes or reservoirs.

Some of you may know that we intend to leave Nigeria in January of next year. We are experiencing mixed feelings as we prepare to leave World Missions. We have seen God richly bless the church here during these years. We have also experienced God's guidance and blessings on us as a family. We trust that He will continue to do so in our uncertain future. We ask you to pray for us as we leave our work to others and separate from many dear friends.

May 1984

Although we left Nigeria in February, Janet remained there to finish her junior year of high school. She will join us in Grand Rapids in June. To do this was her own choice and we feel it

was best for her and also for us. During that time we were able to travel to schools for possible employment. Remaining at Hillcrest until June also made it possible for Janet to have only one change of schools.

Twice we've been with our children in Rochester. Keith has been home from Purdue a couple of times. Since Mary lives in Grand Rapids we see her frequently. Another exciting event is the marriage of our daughter Mary to Drew Ericks on 7 July. He is a recent Calvin grad from Holland, Michigan, who is presently looking for a teaching job. Planning and anticipating a wedding is a lot of fun. The third special event happening this summer will be the arrival of our first grandchild. David and Mary are looking forward to a baby in August. This is a good year for us to be here!

Our missionary career in Nigeria is now ending after twenty-five years. This includes many months of speaking and traveling during our home service. We are so grateful to the members of our supporting churches, our family, and our friends for the many years you have faithfully supported us with your love, your letters, and prayers. Through the years you have opened your homes to us and provided us with meals even when we came with all our children. ☩

Endotes

1. Tiv are an ethno-linguistic group or ethnic nation in West Africa. They currently constitute approximately 3.5 percent of Nigeria's population. The Tiv language is spoken by about 7 million people in Nigeria, mostly in the Benue State as well as the states of Plateau, Taraba, and Nasarawa. Most Tiv have a highly developed sense of genealogy, with ancestry traced to an ancient person named Tiv, who had two sons Chongo and Ipusu.

2. The Peter Ipema family served in Africa, 1948-1979; the Gerard Terpstra family, 1952-1969; and the Cornelius Persenaire family, 1955-1962.

3. The Rev. Eugene Rubingh family was in West Africa, 1957-1968.

4. In November 1960 the teaching staff at Zaki Biam became all Nigerian and the Coks moved to Mkar where Ralph joined the faculty of the Teacher Training College.

5. The school-age children of missionaries boarded at the Hillcrest Christian School in Jos, about 250 miles from Mkar, about twelve hours by surface vehicles.

6. The W. M. Bristow Secondary School is a mission school in Gboko, Benue State.

7. Since Nigeria had been in the British Commonwealth, trucks are known as lorries.

8. The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Nigerian-Biafran War (6 July 1967-15 January 1970), was an attempted secession of the southeastern provinces of Nigeria as the Republic of Biafra. The war ended with a military defeat of the Biafrans; from 1968 onward the war had been a stalemate, with Nigerian forces surrounding Biafrans, causing widespread famine and thousands of civilian deaths.

Sam and Gertrude Sterk: One Immigrant Family's Story

Sharon Joy Gordon



Sam Sterk's Dutch passport, issued in 1920, used when he first came to the United States. Image courtesy of the author.

Among other things, Sharon Gordon is a private-duty nurse and parish nurse in the Caledonia and Hastings areas south of Grand Rapids. She is the daughter of the Sterks' third child, Milly, and has spent some time and effort compiling the family's history. This article is a much abridged version of that story.

In 1921, seventeen-year-old Sybrand (later Sam) Sterk from Marrum, the Netherlands, decided it was time for adventure in a different country. The son of Jan Pieter Sterk,¹ a well-to-do potato, flax, and produce dealer, and Antje Offringa, boarded SS Noordam in Rotterdam on 3 March with two friends for the ten-day trip to America. Sybrand's paternal uncle, Thijss J. Sterk,² a farmer living near Corsica, South Dakota, was his sponsor. When he arrived at his uncle's farm in early April, Sam had \$70 in his pocket and couldn't speak a word of English.³ After eight months of seven-day work weeks for \$25 per month pay, he moved to Iowa to help out a maternal uncle, Jelle Offringa,⁴ who had arrived from the Netherlands with his family in May 1920 and because of illness was unable to tend his farm. Sam worked for him until March 1922 for room and board—no pay. In the spring he got another farm job paying \$30 per month.

It was a lonesome life for a young man who had grown up only ten miles from the large town of Leeuwarden. Farm life on the American prairies meant working seven days a week and miles of dirt roads to the nearest town. Two of his friends had decided to head up to Michigan, where they heard there were job opportunities in Grand Rapids. Sam was invited to come along. One of the friends offered, "I'll take you up there for \$17 and, if you can't find a job, I'll take you back to Iowa for free." It sounded promising, and Michigan

was closer to New York making it easier to return to the Netherlands if things didn't work out.

The trip took a leisurely two weeks, with stops to sightsee, fish, and swim in lakes along the route. In Grand Rapids, Sybrand got a job in one of the many furniture factories. He only had to work nine hours a day five days a week, and the pay was \$27 a week. His room and board was \$7 a week, so for the first time he was feeling better about life in America. Meanwhile, on the other side of town, a girl by the name of Gertrude Hooge-



Gertrude Hoogeboom about the time that her brother introduced her to Sam Sterk. Image courtesy of the author.

boom was blossoming into a pretty young woman.

She was the daughter of Albert Hoogeboom and Elizabeth Visser, who initially lived on and worked a small canal boat in the Dutch waterways, selling peat used as a fuel for cooking and heating. After Grace, their first child, was born, Hoogeboom sold the boat and bought a small grocery store in Rotterdam; the family lived above the store. There were seven more children born. When Elizabeth became ill with kidney disease, requiring frequent hospitalizations, and the grocery business getting progressively worse, the family decided to emigrate. In September 1910, Albert, Elizabeth, five of their children, and Albert's widowed sister Harmke and her six children boarded *SS Rijndam*, and headed to America.⁵ Due to her illness, Elizabeth and her two youngest children, Gertrude and Charlie, traveled second class, while Albert and the three older boys were in third class.

The family came to Grand Rapids, where Albert managed to get a job at the Leonard Refrigerator Company.⁶ He worked hard from six in the morning until seven in the evening, five days a week, and until nine o'clock on Saturday evenings, when Gertrude and the boys would bring him a warm supper. The family set-



The Sterk farmhouse and attached barn in Marrum. The barn was used to store potatoes and processed flax for resale. Image courtesy of the author.

tled on the city's near southwest side, which was predominantly Dutch, so Albert never learned to speak much English.

Gertrude and Charlie hardly got to know their mother because, one year after they arrived in America, Elizabeth died; Gertrude was seven and Charlie was only four. Albert was devastated; he had five children and himself to care for in a strange country. His sister, Harmke, helped, but she had six children of her own. Albert wrote his daughter, nineteen-year-old Clara, offering to pay her so that she could emigrate and help with the family. She came, and for six

years kept house and raised Gertrude and her four brothers.

In 1917 Clara married Louis Walma. Since Gertrude, only thirteen, wasn't old enough to take over the household, Albert and the four boys moved to his brother's farm in Iowa. Gertrude stayed with Clara and Lou. Albert didn't like farming, so in the fall he moved back to Grand Rapids. Because he couldn't afford the mortgage payments, he continued to rent out the house he owned on Naylor Street. Because of a lack of money, the three oldest boys, who were in their mid to late teens, went out to fend for themselves. Albert and Charlie boarded in different homes while Albert worked and tried to make ends meet. When Gertrude was fourteen, and had graduated from the eighth grade, Clara had a baby. Due to financial difficulties and a lack of space, Gertrude entered the working world as a housekeeper. For cooking, cleaning, and caring for six children she earned fifty cents a week plus room and board. Because she was a minor, and unable to attend school, once a week she had to report to City Hall about where she lived, worked, and how much she earned. It was extremely hard work



Sam Sterk working on his uncle's (Thijs Sterk) farm near Corsica, South Dakota. Image courtesy of the author.

caring for six kids and cleaning a large house. When a better paying job offer came she jumped at the chance. For five months she assisted a woman who was recuperating from a hospital stay and was paid \$1.50 a week. Next she got a job in East Grand Rapids keeping house for \$2.50 a week, with Sunday and Thursday nights off.

One cold Sunday, 24 December 1922, after visiting her family, her brother Sid walked her to Grandville Avenue where they waited for the streetcar to take her to East Grand Rapids. While standing there talking, Sid spotted a new friend, Sybrand Sterk, across the street. Sid called to him by his nickname, "Hey Sam! Come on over and meet my little sister." After a short introduction, Gertrude felt kind of sorry for this "Dutchie" young man since the next day was Christmas and he had no family with whom to spend it. Since she had most of the next day off, Gertrude invited Sam over to Clara and Lou's for Christmas dinner. When she got to Clara's early Monday, Sam was already there and getting along especially well with Lou because they both spoke Frisian. Later that week Sam bought Gertrude a pair of gloves as a belated Christmas present.

Even though Gertrude only had two evenings a week off, and Sam lived on the opposite end of town, they saw each other as much as possible. Often times Sam and his friends took the streetcar to visit their girlfriends and more often than not missed the last car going west and had to walk home. It was a long walk, so they would stop and get something to eat in an all-night coffee shop downtown. It wasn't unusual for them to finally get home at three in the morning only to get up and go to work at seven.

Next Gertrude got a job working in a dime store downtown, and a year later a piece-rate job in a paper box



Sam and Gertrude in raingear during their honeymoon at Niagara Falls. Image courtesy of the author.

factory. Although she had trouble keeping up, she worked very hard because the pay was \$15 a week. Sam tired of working inside a factory and began working for Klaas Hoeksema, a painting contractor. Painting was much more to his liking because there was variety and plenty of outdoor work.

On 9 May 1924 Sam and Gertrude were married by Rev. Y. P. De Jong, of Grandville Avenue Christian

Reformed Church. It was a small wedding held in Sid Hoogeboom's apartment located above a bakery. They honeymooned in Niagara Falls in July, when both were able to get time off. Her father offered to rent the upstairs of his house on Naylor Street to Sam and Gertrude for a low rate provided he could live with them; the main level was rented to others. In the summer of 1924 they moved in and Gertrude quit working in the factory and began keeping house. One of her biggest chores was laundry, particularly keeping Sam in clean work clothes because he painted for wealthy customers. She soaked his paint-covered clothes⁷ in lye from Saturday until Monday, scrubbed them by hand, and boiled them in soapy water for thirty minutes. Then there would be three rinses to remove all the lye, since it could be very irritating to the skin. And finally the clothes would be hung out to dry.

Since winter months were the slowest for painters, Sam went back to the Netherlands for a surprise visit. He stayed from 7 December



Sam returning from his visit to the Netherlands in February 1928. He is holding the life ring from SS President Harding, but he actually sailed on SS President Buchanan of the same fleet. Image courtesy of the author.

PHONE
CH 5-1308

SAM STERK
PAINTING AND DECORATING

613 LIBERTY S.W.
GRAND RAPIDS 9, MICH.

Courtesy of the author.

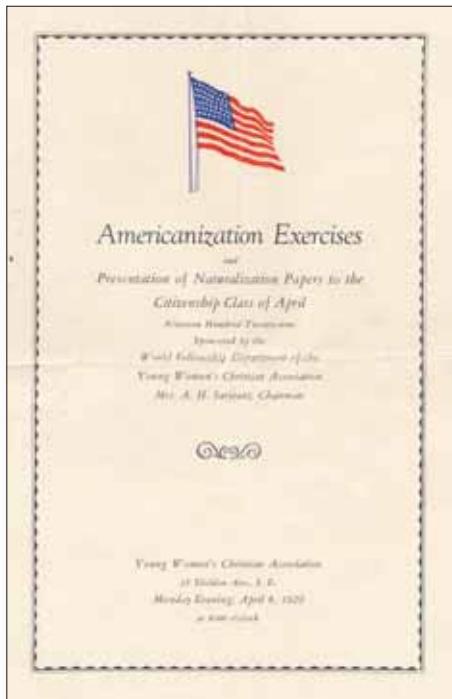
to 7 February of 1928.⁸ The voyage back from Southampton, England, to Boston on *SS President Buchanan*⁹ was very exciting, since there were celebrations on both Lincoln's and Washington's birthdays. Later that year, after attending night classes at South High School, Sam learned English and became a United States citizen.

Back in the Netherlands, business was getting worse for Sam's father, John, and when the full impact of the Great Depression hit, he found himself overextended. The banks foreclosed and the Sterks found themselves virtually penniless. Klaas Hoeksema, Sam's boss, had visited the Sterks on one of his overseas trips and saw the difficulties they were having. When he returned he told Sam he should have the family come to America, and that he would help him accomplish this. Sam had been working a lot of overtime trying to save money, putting in 90 to 100 hours a week. In 1930 he borrowed against all his life insurance policies, used all of his savings, and had Hoeksema cosign a bank loan to raise the \$3,000 needed to send for his parents and brothers.

Hoeksema owned a five-bedroom farmhouse in Grandville and agreed to rent it to the Sterk family. Sam and Gertrude with their two daughters moved there temporarily to get the place ready. The farmhouse needed to be furnished, and they had no money, so Sam and Gertrude had to rely

on donations. Their church collected what they could and furniture was also donated by wealthy painting customers. The boys, Henry and Gerrit, arrived in March; Bill, who was

in the military, came several months later. The rest of the family came at the end of May and moved into the farmhouse, with Sam and his family moving back to Naylor Street.



The cover of the program for the ceremony during which Sam became a United States citizen in 1929. Image courtesy of the author.

The economic trouble that had started in in the late 1920s forced the economy to its lowest point in 1932. Albert Hoogeboom lost his main-floor tenant and without the rent was unable to continue making mortgage payments. To avoid repossession by the bank he signed the lease over to Sam, provided Albert could stay

in the house for the rest of his life and receive a little spending money every week. Sam and Gertrude moved downstairs and started to make the mortgage payments. Hoeksema tried to keep Sam working as much as possible. Money was scarce and luxuries were few, but the Sterks always had enough to eat because they were able to get vegetables, milk, and other things from his father's farm. Gertrude cooked on a combination wood/gas stove with a meter on it. When they needed the gas, a quarter was put in the meter. If the gas ran out before the meal was fully cooked and they didn't have another quarter, Sam would build a wood fire to finish the cooking.

During the Bank Holiday in March 1933, the bank demanded that the mortgage be paid, while all its depositors' assets were frozen. Sam refused to pay, wanting the bank to take the several hundred dollars he had in savings and apply it towards the loan. The bank refused, claiming they weren't allowed to touch the assets nor could they give Sam his savings. It was a stand-off, but Sam didn't give an inch. Finally the bank agreed to apply his savings to the loan, which brought down the amount due to where Sam was able to pay it off.

The next year while painting the Coldbrook Christian Reformed Church the scaffolding collapsed and Sam fell to the ground. He tried to continue working, but after a couple of hours his ankle hurt so badly that he went home. Gertrude fixed him lunch but he couldn't eat much, so he went to bed to rest. The pain continued so he decided to go to the doctor. The first doctor wasn't in; he hobbled up the steep steps to a second doctor only to be told that he should go to the hospital for x-rays. After driving himself to Blodgett Hospital, it was determined that his ankle was shattered. The ankle was set but the

cast made walking impossible so Gertrude's brother took the streetcar to the hospital and drove Sam and the car home. Sam wasn't allowed crutches so for the first three months, so he slept on the living room couch. The full recovery took almost a year. Luckily both Sam and Hoeksema had insurance and between the two policies Sam received an income of \$22 per week during the ordeal. Compared to the \$9 per week he had been earning, he considered this a "lucky break."

During the entire Depression Sam and Gertrude were on relief for only six weeks. This occurred when the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) hired men to paint the area schools. The WPA paid one dollar per hour while Sam was earning forty cents per hour, so he quit working for Hoeksema temporarily and applied to the WPA. The WPA never called him, but instead took inexperienced men off the streets to do the painting. So the Sterks went "on relief," receiving only groceries, since welfare in those days never consisted of cash.

Soon after this, Hoeksema's painting business began to get work. Area banks had repossessed thousands of houses and many of them needed work, especially painting, before they could be sold. Hoeksema got many of these contracts and eventually had eighty to ninety men working for him during the summer and fifty to sixty men during the winter.

It wasn't easy raising a family during the Depression. Visits to the doctor or dentist only happened if there was a serious problem. Sam's teeth had been bothering him for some time; abscesses at times made it painful to chew. The dentist suggested some rather costly work to save the teeth, but after thinking about it for a few minutes, Sam decided to eliminate that and future problems by

having the problem teeth pulled. It cost fifty cents for the first extraction, and twenty-five cents for the remainder. The dentist gave Sam a temporary plate to wear until his mouth healed and told him to return later for his



Albert and Elizabeth Hoogeboom in a photo taken just before they left the Netherlands; Elizabeth died a year after arriving in the United States. Image courtesy of the author.

new dentures. Sam wore the temporary plate for over thirty years before getting dentures.

Once a year all the Sterk families gathered at the Grandville farm for a day of food and fun. The 1933 gathering was on a cold fall Saturday. As Sam and Gertrude were making final preparations, they put their two daughters, Betty and Ann, in the back seat of their model T and Sam backed the car out of the garage. He kept the engine running to warm up the motor because the water in the radiator had frozen. They gathered the last few things in the house and after a few minutes went out to the car where they noticed the girls weren't moving. They soon realized that the girls



John and Anna Sterk in 1940, after he was diagnosed with cancer, about a year before he died. Image courtesy of the author.

MONOXIDE FUMES PERIL CHILDREN

Two Girls Overcome While Seated in Parked Motorcar.

Two children narrowly missed death Saturday morning when they were overcome by monoxide fumes while in the rear seat of a parked motorcar.

Anna Louise Sterk, 4, and her sister, Betty Jane, 8, daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Sam Sterk, 552 Naylor-st., S. W., were taken in a police ambulance to St. Mary's hospital, where it was reported they apparently had recovered from the effects of the fumes.

When found by the parents, Anna was unconscious and her sister violently ill.

The parents explained that when they prepared to drive away from home Saturday morning Mr. Sterk discovered the radiator on the car was frozen. He backed the car partly out of the garage and left the motor running and the children remained in the rear seat while the parents went back into the house. When they returned to the car they discovered the children were ill.

A 1933 newspaper clipping concerning the carbon monoxide poisoning of Betty and Ann. Clipping courtesy of the author.

were overcome by carbon monoxide fumes from the car's exhaust. Neighbors quickly called for the police and an ambulance, while Gertrude held Ann, and Sam walked Betty around

the yard. Both girls were rushed to the hospital and admitted for tests and observation. Both girls were revived and were released on Monday to a couple of very relieved and thankful parents.

The Sterk family grew to include four daughters—Betty, Ann, Milly, and Kay. All were relatively healthy except for Ann. During the summer of 1935, when she was six, she broke her arm jumping off the bleachers in Roosevelt Park. In 1939 she contracted a bad case of scarlet fever. Because the disease was communicable, the Health Department quarantined the Sterk house for six weeks. Betty stayed with a friend, Gert Meyers, who lived up the street so that she could continue going to school. Sam could stay at the house, but he was supposed to live in the basement to avoid contact with the rest of the family. Milly, who was only five at the time, still remembers the county health nurse stopping by frequently to check her for symptoms of the fever. Sam got lonely sleeping by the furnace and eating his meals on the basement steps, so one time he snuck up to eat with the rest of the family. That, of course, was the day the doctor arrived to check up on Ann. The doctor gave him a good chewing out and banished him to the basement. Grandfather Albert also got tired of being quarantined, so he would sneak out nearly every day and walk to his favorite bakery; he had an affinity for *oliebollen* (round fried balls of dough with raisins).

Shortly after Ann recovered from scarlet fever she became ill again, this time with rheumatic fever. As sometimes happens with this disease, her heart was affected, which led to a lengthy convalescence so that she missed a whole year of school. Afterward she was allowed a very gradual return to physical activities, but the doctor wanted her to avoid playing with other children because it might

be too much for her heart. Ann, a fighter, slowly recovered, eventually making up the lost year of schooling.

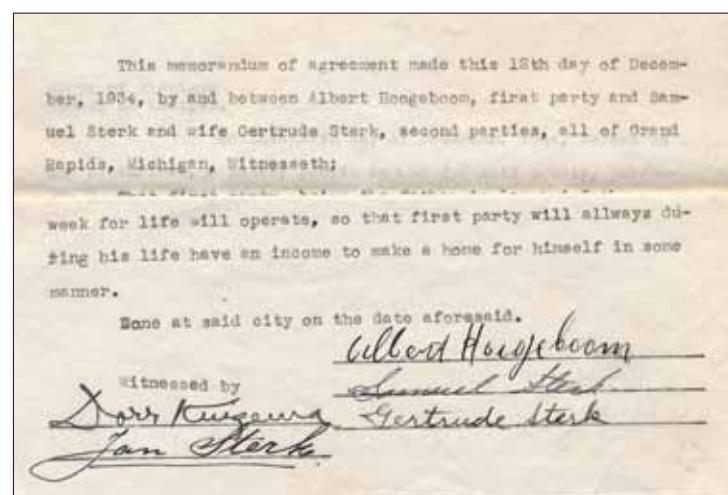
Albert Hoogeboom lived with Sam and Gertrude from 1924 until he died in 1941. His granddaughters cherished him; he was almost like another father for them. He loved to spoil them with big chocolate bars

Dutch. Gertrude would take the older girls to the English service after the men returned home. While they were at that service, Sam would fix the Sunday dinner. Then at two o'clock Albert would attend the second Dutch service by himself, and in the evening he would watch over Milly and Kay while the two older girls would attend



The Sterks recreating in Hess Lake (just south of Newaygo, Michigan). Left to right: Betty, Gertrude, Ann, Mill, and Sam (Kay had not yet been born). Image courtesy of the author.

and other similar delectable things. In fact, the girls can attribute most of the fillings in their teeth to Grandpa Hoogeboom. He never was fluent in English but he understood the girls and they understood him. He was always there to laugh with, or to take them on walks to the store, or to listen to their latest exploits. Sam and Albert would usually attend the first service at Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church, which was in



Part of the 1934 agreement by which Sam and Gertrude bought her father's house and agreed to allow him to remain living in the house. Image courtesy of the author.

the service with their parents. He also helped out by buying vegetables at the farmers' market and cleaning and cooking them for supper.

Albert wasn't a well man, and as

the years went by his health became progressively worse. The fumes from Kelvinator had damaged his lungs, eventually causing cancer. In the last few years of his life he was often wracked by severe coughing attacks. Gertrude always knew when he was on his way home because she could hear him coughing a block away. The sisters became frightened every time he started coughing badly because he'd turn blue from the lack of oxygen.

John, Sam's father, developed cancer. He had a birthmark on his back that started to bother him in the late 1930s. When working on the farm the birthmark would itch, so he'd back up against a cow, or whatever else was nearby, to rub his back. Eventually, because of constant irritation, it became infected and abscessed but he never had a doctor check it out. By the time his sons were aware of it and took him to a doctor, it was too late. A large lump was removed and it was cancerous. His back slowly healed, but one year later he developed a lump in his arm pit. The lump never healed. Fearing the worst, he gave up farming and he and Anna sold many of their belongings. He died on 15 June 1941.

Ten days later, while Sam was at work and Gert was helping out at the annual Pine Rest Christian Hospital sale¹⁰ in Cutlerville, south of Grand Rapids, Albert was home watching the girls and had another coughing spell. He sat down in his chair to rest. Betty and Ann noticed that he hadn't moved for a long while but were scared to go near him. His eyes were closed and his head was tilted back slightly like he was sleeping. They called their younger sister Milly, who was six, and told her to try and wake up Grandpa. When she couldn't rouse him, they ran to get the neighbors.

He died on a Wednesday. A wreath was placed on their front door, and

the Sterks received the visitors in their house; funeral homes weren't used much in those days. His body was kept on ice in a casket in his bedroom until Saturday, when he was buried.

Anna Sterk was a strong-willed woman and survived a long time after her husband John died. She had seven devoted and loving sons to care for her and they each provided an equal amount every month for her living expenses. She lived for a while in the apartment above Sam and Gertrude, who had bought their own house on Liberty Street. This worked out well until she broke her hip in 1959 when she was eighty-three years old. The resulting hospital bill was \$3,500 and each of her boys paid \$500 to help cover the bill. Sam and his brothers were worried about her living by herself after her hospitalization, so they persuaded her to move into a nursing home. They also split that bill seven ways. While in the nursing home each of her sons picked a certain day of the week to visit her, ensuring her a lot of company. Sam's day was Sunday; he'd pick her up in the morning, and she'd have lunch with them, then they'd go to the Dutch church service, and in the evening he'd bring her back to the home. She died on 5 May 1965 at the age of eighty-nine.

The years passed by all too quickly. Betty married Steve Herrema; Ann married Art Van Enk; Milly married Jim Van Dyke, also a painter; and Kay married Doug Behnke. Sam and Gert enjoyed traveling and made several trips west together. They had relatives scattered throughout the United States, and tried to visit most of them. Every Labor Day they went either to Michigan's Upper Peninsula or Mackinac Island. In 1958 they made their first trip to Florida with Milly and Jim. They liked it so much that they began going for longer periods of time each winter. Also in 1958 Sam became a self-employed painter, so he had the

liberty of taking longer vacations during the slow winter months.

In 1962, Sam and his son-in-law Jim, who had been working for Harvey Balkema, joined forces as Sterk and Van Dyke Painting. Around 1969, Sam and Gert bought a home in Lake Worth, Florida, since by then they were spending about six months of the year there. With a lot of fellow snowbirds from Grand Rapids in the Lake Worth area, they saw some of the same faces at the Lake Worth Christian Reformed Church as they saw back home on Grandville Avenue.

Sam's green thumb flourished and he was able to get two plantings a season in his backyard garden. He still enjoyed fishing, and spent a lot of time doing so on the Lake Worth pier. Sam also liked to play shuffleboard, and had a bunch of regular friends with whom he played at the neighborhood court. Lake Worth was a second home for them for over twenty years. Because of their prolonged absences, in 1979 they sold their house on Liberty Street and bought a mobile home.

The winter of 1982-1983 was their last in Florida; after much deliberation and heartache they reluctantly sold their Lake Worth home. It was the end of an era, of sorts, and it was a very difficult move to make because of all the good memories involved. They were both approaching eighty and the preparations and long trip had become more difficult each year. In February of 1984 they made another difficult decision; they sold their mobile home and moved to Sunset Manor, a retirement home in Jenison, just west of Grand Rapids. The transition went smoothly, and in a matter of days they began feeling at home. They knew more than half the people there, the majority being Dutch immigrants from the same area of town where they had lived. They rediscovered old friends they hadn't seen in decades. It was almost like being on vacation,

no more cooking and washing dishes, and new things to do every day. Sam took up shuffle boarding again and Gertrude started taking exercise and craft classes.

Because of health issues Gertrude moved to nursing care in February 1988; Sam followed in May of the next year. He died on 22 November 1993, and she died on 15 June 1995 having transplanted their families from the Netherlands into the United States. ☙

Endnotes

1. Sam was the second of seven sons born to Jan Sterk and Antje Offringa. Jan Sterk bought flax and potatoes from Frisian farmers, processed them, and traveled across Europe selling his inventory. His business venture expanded during World War I because of fresh food shortages in Europe, and he bought factories that made jam, and he began shipping dried vegetables to other parts of Europe. At one time he had over two hundred employees and owned one of the first cars in Marrum; the other was owned by one of the two doctors in town.

2. Thijs Jans Sterk was born 26 February 1857 in Ferwerderadeel, the Netherlands. He had immigrated in 1883 and moved to South Dakota in 1890. According to the 1920 census he was married to Jennie at that time and his seven children (John, Dora, Peter, Gertie, Harry, Martin, and Henry) were still living on the farm.

3. From: [4. Jelle was married to Renske van der Heide in 1916; they had one daughter.](http://www.ellisisland.org/search/shipmanifest.asp?MID=03478360840053358560&FNM=SYBRAND&NM=STERK&PLNM=STERK&first_kind=1&last_kind=0&TOWN=null&SHIP=null&RF=1&pID=100156140076, visited 9:50 am, 24 July 2012.</p>
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5. The three oldest children, Grace, Clara, and Ed, had jobs and remained in the Netherlands. Ed worked as a seaman, and later jumped ship in New York and settled in Grand Rapids.

6. Beginning in 1881, Leonard manufactured the “Cleanable Refrigerator,” initially an ice box with removable liners and flues. Later improvements were metal shelves and better door-locking mechanisms in the 1880s, and porcelain lined interiors in 1907. Electric refrigerators were first manufactured in 1918,

and by 1925 Leonard was building one out of every five refrigerators produced in the United States, or about 1000 refrigerators per day. Leonard merged with Kelvinator, the largest manufacturer of electric refrigerators in the United States in 1926. Kelvinator joined White Consolidated Industries, which also had the rights to Frigidaire, Gibson, Tappan, and White-Westinghouse product lines. White Consolidated Industries was acquired by Electrolux of Sweden in the early 1980s.

7. At the time all paints were oil based which were not soluble in soap and water.

8. From: <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com/Browse/view.aspx?dbid=8745&path=1927.02. Republic.51&sid=&gskw=Sybrand+Sterk> visited 11:55 am, 24 July 2012.

9. Launched 19 February 1903 by Harland and Wolff, of Ireland, for the United States Lines, the ship was christened SS *Servian*. The maiden voyage was 14 September 1907, Hamburg to New York, for which the ship was renamed SS *President Grant*. Subsequent names were USS *President Grant* (1917-1919), USAT *Republic* (1919-1921), USS *President Buchanan* (1921-1941), USS *Republic* (1941-1945), USAHS/USAT *Republic* (1945-1952), and was sold for scrap on 11 March 1952.

10. Pine Rest Christian Hospital formally opened 11 June 1912 (the first patient had been admitted the previous September) to provide Christian psychiatric care on the farm purchased from F. D. Cutler, 8½ miles south of downtown Grand Rapids, near the interurban line between Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo. It was the first institution in the United States to provide such Christian care. The annual sale was run by women's church groups who donated the day's proceeds to the hospital.

“You Know What You Got Now”

The Texas Experiences of My Huyser and Hoekstra Grandparents

Ralph A. Hoekstra¹

“You know what you got, your next one could be worse,” was an expression I heard many times growing up in Cicero, Illinois. This expression comes to mind when I think of my two grandfathers, Pieter (Peter) Huyser and Sipke (Samuel) Hoekstra. How different their lives could have been if Huyser had heeded this advice when he lived in Barendrecht, the Netherlands, and Hoekstra when he lived in Chicago. Huyser had a thriving retail and wholesale grocery business, while Hoekstra had a prosperous cinders hauling and paving business.

Huyser sold his business on contract for 40,000 guilders² and set out to fulfill a dream of coming to America.³ Pieter, his wife Henderika, with their six surviving children,⁴ arrived at Ellis Island on 14 November 1910, heading for Iowa and later Texas. According to the family, Hoekstra sold his Chicago business and home for \$50,000 and used most of the money to fulfill his dream of being a rancher and moved with his wife and seven children to Texas.⁵ The lives of both families changed when they set off on new adventures in Texas; financially the



Ralph Hoekstra retired from Hughes Aircraft Company in 1998 after thirty-five years where he last served as Manager of Division Business Operations and retired from the Coast Guard Reserve after thirty-one years. He and his wife, Jane Milliken, live in Huntington Beach, California, where he is researching and writing about his and his wife's ancestors.

The Huyser family in October 1910, just before leaving the Netherlands for Iowa. Left to right: Maatheus (Matt), Jantien (Janet or Jen), Pieter, Jan (John), Geerdina (Dena), Henderika, Johanna (Anne), and Willem (Bill). Image courtesy of the author.

move was a failure, but two siblings from each married one another.

Pieter Huyser's Story

In 1888, at age eighteen, Huyser was apprenticed to a shoemaker in The Hague, where he met Henderika Raman. She was a chambermaid from Assen, Drenthe, and the two married in Assen on 15 May 1895. Five years later Huyser bought a grocery business with ample living space on the second floor. The property included a barn in which Pieter raised chickens for their eggs and to sell as fryers.

Pieter also dealt in the wholesale food business. The family was able to live very well on the proceeds of the business. They had a maid, Klaartje, who took care of the cleaning and other chores.

In 1905 Henderika's brother, Jan Raman, had immigrated to Orange City, Iowa. Jan, also a shoemaker, started a shoe business there and one year later his wife and children joined him. The two families shared letters, and probably in one of them Jan wrote about a grocery store being for sale in Orange City. Pieter made his decision to sell his business and uproot his family from their comfortable life in Barendrecht. As noted, the business, home, and barn were sold; most of their household items were sold at an auction, and on 8 November 1910 they left for America aboard *SS Rotterdam*. The family arrived on 16 November; on the ship's manifest Pieter had listed his occupation as shoemaker.

The hope of purchasing the grocery store was dashed when Huyser learned that the seller intended to open another store in the same area.⁶ While in Orange City, Pieter's brother sent a letter offering to sell his linseed oil refinery business. Pieter was willing to return to Holland since he had enough to pay for a return trip from the sale of his business and could



The road leaving Barendrecht for Dordrecht; the Huyser house is to the right. Image courtesy of the author.

obtain credit to buy the refinery. But Henderika vetoed this plan, forcefully telling him something like, "You are in your own boat, now row it."⁷

So he looked into buying a farm. He couldn't afford to buy an Iowa farm, since no one would sell him a farm of less than 160 acres and he had only enough to buy 15 acres. An affordable alternative came via a sales agent visiting

Orange City for the Theodore F. Koch Development Company. Huyser read the sales brochures and attended a meeting and heard of the promises that a better life could be had in Winnie, Texas. He attended another meeting and signed up for a Koch-sponsored excursion to Winnie. The excursion only went as far as Beaumont,

Texas, where the

prospective buyers, all Dutch from Iowa, were shown existing orange and fig orchards. Later Huyser took Koch's next excursion, which did go to Winnie, located near the eastern border of Chambers County, about twenty miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico.

On the second trip, nine weeks after arriving at Ellis Island, Huyser bought two 20-acre lots—lot numbers

WINNIE, TEXAS,
Is de naam van een nieuwe Hollandsche Kolonie
in Zuid-oost Texas.

waar reeds een aantal Hollanders land gekocht hebben, en waar het klimaat gezond, en in den zomer nauwlijks zoo warm is, als in Illinois, Iowa of Michigan, en de winters zoo mooi zijn, dat elke maand in 't jaar aldaar veldgewassen, groenten en fruit verbouwd kunnen worden.

Plenty regenval. Goede afwatering; overvloed van gezond drinkwater. Perfecte bezittels. Prachtige grond, open prairie met zwaar gras er op.

Een flinke ondersteuning voor een Hollandsche kerk wordt door ons be-loofd zoodra zich 40 Hollandse families aldaar gevestigd hebben.

Goedkoope spoorkaarten bij ons in Chicago of St. Paul verkrijgbaar op den eersten en derden dinsdag in elke maand. Retour tickets van Chicago naar Winnie kosten \$30.00.

Wegens nadere inlichtingen en kosteloze beschrijvingen adresseer de ei-genaars.

Theo. F. Koch & Company,
1025 Unity building, Chicago, Ill.,
of Globe building, St. Paul: Minn.

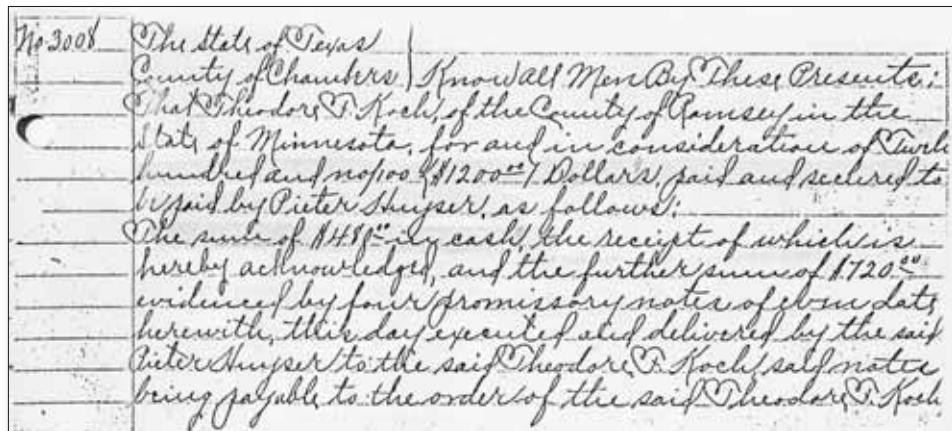
*One of Theodore Koch's many ads printed in *De Wachter* during the summer and fall of 1907; this one, from 1 September, p. 7, extols the "virtues" of the area and that discounted, round-trip rail tickets from Chicago can be purchased for only \$30. This one reads (in part): Winnie, Texas, is the name of a new Dutch colony in southeast Texas where a number of Hollanders have already bought land, and where the climate is healthy, and the summer is hardly warmer than in Illinois, Iowa, or Michigan; and the winters are so nice that the soil can be worked each month of the year and fruits and vegetables can be grown.*

19 and 20 in the Theodore F. Koch Subdivision of the Valmore League.⁸ The price was \$30 per acre for a total price of \$1,200. Pieter paid \$480 down and signed four promissory notes of \$180 each, the first one due 21 January 1914 and the rest due annually on

21 January, with 7 percent interest (standard at the time) on the unpaid balance each year.

The Huyzers said their good-byes to their relatives in Orange City and traveled via the Santa Fe Railway⁹ to Galveston, Texas, where they transferred to the Gulf Coast and Interstate Railway¹⁰ (GC&I) to Winnie. It was via a "doodlebug," a combination passenger and baggage car with a gasoline-powered engine that turned a generator which provided electricity to traction motors.

According to Janet Huyser's recollections, Winnie was uncultivated and the family moved into an old wooden unpainted house. Huyser dug a deep well for clear drinking water, built a chicken coop, a privy, and a lean-to for the horses. A fence was erected around the forty acres with a sturdy gate and reinforced corner posts. The fence was to keep free-roaming and grazing cattle out. He tilled about fifteen acres of sandy soil, which needed much fertilizer, and planted sorghum, sugar cane, and some corn. The roaming longhorn cattle broke through the fence and trampled and ate everything. On one occasion the family's milk cow broke loose and was never to be seen again. Between the torrential rains, the scorching heat, and the cattle break-ins, the land never produced a paying crop—not



Record of the Texas land sold by Theodore F. Koch to Pieter Huyser and the terms of the sale. Image courtesy of the author.

that there was a market for the produce nearby. Huyser lost three horses to a disease caused by flies or mosquitoes, so he had no transportation to the more distant market in Houston or Fort Worth. A little income came from growing pickling cucumbers for a canning company in Hamshire, about three miles away, which paid forty-five cents per wagonload. To partially support the family, Pieter and son Willem took low-paying and strenuous jobs on a rice plantation twenty-five miles away. They came home on Saturdays with their week's pay of five dollars.¹¹

In February 1913, Huyser's financial resources were gone and the only hope of continuing was to refinance the loan with Koch. Koch agreed to the request and the total now owed increased by \$497.99, with \$120 paid "cash-in-hand," and six promissory notes of \$181.33 to replace the original four notes of \$180 each. Koch also required that a minimum of one-half of the forty acres be planted with specific crops. This was a no-win situation for Huyser, but he had no other choice. During the thirty-one months Huyser farmed the forty acres, the amount he owed Koch increased by \$487.98. On 4 August 1913, Huyser sold his interest in the forty acres to P. Kunefke, who took over the amount still owed to Koch.

The Huyser family only had a few days to get ready for their next adventure. They had to sell what they could, decide what they could take, and find new homes for their pets. They had enough money to purchase fares for the family to Chicago,

where they were met by the Sipke Hoekstra family, whom they had gotten to know while in Texas. Pieter Huyser found work earning \$18 for a six-day work week, delivering 50-pound sacks of coal. By Christmas 1913 he had contracted tuberculosis and died penniless on 15 June 1914.

Many of Pieter Huyser's grandchildren have wondered (or wished) that Grandfather could have held the land. The Stowell Oil Field, whose center is about one mile east of the Huyser farm, was discovered in 1941. The family knew that there was oil under the farm. Johanna Huyser said that the first two wells dug for water produced oil and it took a third to get clear water.

Henderika, now known as Henriette, died 28 April 1921. She was buried, as was Pieter, in Forest Home Cemetery in Forest Park, near Berwyn, Illinois. Johanna (Janet) Huyser took on the responsibility of raising her siblings still living at home.¹²

Sipke Hoekstra's Story

Sipke Hoekstra was born 22 May 1864 in Niawier, Friesland; he was the first of eight children of Roelof Hoekstra and Jantje Sipkes Hauptman. Six years later the family moved to Ulrum, Groningen. Bartha (later Bertha) Dijk was born 30 July 1870 in Marum, Groningen. Bartha and her

siblings, as well as Sipke, all worked in the peat fields after finishing elementary school. It is highly likely that the two families knew each other since they attended the same church. Sipke courted Bartha for about a year and they were married 24 March 1892. The next January they made their way to Rotterdam, where they boarded *SS Obdam*. Their destination was Roseland, a community in southern Chicago, where Sipke found work on one of the Dutch-owned truck farms. About 1897 he had saved \$200 and bought a kerosene delivery route on the near west side of Chicago, also called the "Groninger Hoek," because of the large number of Dutch immigrants living there from the province of Groningen.

By 1903 he was operating a business hauling cinders away and using them to pave sidewalks.¹³

Sipke frequently mentioned information about the size of his business in his portion of the letters sent to Bertha's relatives in Marum.¹⁴ For instance, he bought the lot adjoining his house at 1641 West 14th Street for \$1,000, and on these two lots he built a barn to avoid paying livery stable costs for his horses thereby saving the \$175 per month he was paying for this. By 1909 he had twenty employees and twenty-three horses and grossed about \$50,000 in both 1908 and 1909.

In the early part of June 1909 Sipke and Bertha finally took a vacation after more than fifteen years in America. They were part of group of Dutch immigrant men that took advantage of a Theodore F. Koch sponsored excursion to Texas. The Hoekstras must have left this excursion, since he reported that they traveled 5,000 miles by rail.¹⁵ While they were away their children were left in the care of his brother and sister-in-law, Sikke (Samuel) and Minnie Hoekstra.

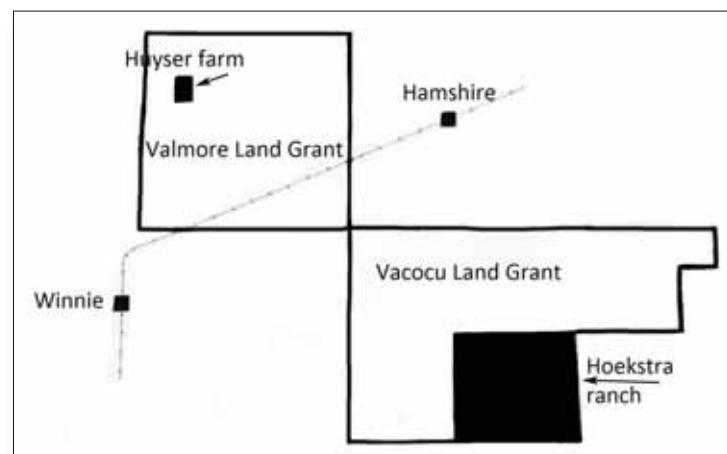


The Hoekstra family in 1908 in a photograph taken to send to family in the Netherlands. Left to right: Rudolph (Ralph), Louis, Bertha, Raymond, Jennie, John, Sipke, Catherine, and Samuel. Image courtesy of the author.

Sipke did not buy his land from Koch, probably concluding that the land Koch was selling near Winnie was useless for farming. He had something else in mind, raising cattle, and contacted land developer James R. Creek. Creek had obtained land previously in default when then owner Hiram C. Wheeler, who had been a wealthy farmer from Odebolt, Iowa, had gone bankrupt trying to establish a dairy farm on the land. The ranch of 1,000 acres was situated south of the Wheeler operation near a planned route of the Houston and Sabine Pass Railroad, which was never built.

Joining Hoekstra in the venture was Peter J. Oosterhoff, from the west side of Chicago. Oosterhoff, originally from Saaksum, Gronin-

gen, worked as a clerk in a Chicago teaming office. The partnership had Hoekstra owning 80 percent of the operation, while Oosterhoff owned the rest. The terms of the sale were \$12,500, with \$4,166 paid down and the balance in three promissory notes of \$2,778 due one, two, and three years after 30 July 1909 at 7 percent interest. Hoekstra's portion of the



Map of the Valmore and Vacocu land grants east of Winnie showing the Huyser farm and Hoekstra ranch.

down payment was \$3,300.¹⁶ Oosterhoff was to be the day-to-day manager of the ranch. After agreeing to



The John and Anna Stob house outside Winnie. Image courtesy of the Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

the purchase the Hoekstras returned to their Chicago home and business.

In 1910 the Hoekstras decided to move to Texas. The Chicago business was sold in 1911 for \$50,000, with Hoekstra keeping some of his horses, his family carriage, and some of his wagons for use in Texas. The last of their property was sold in February 1912 when Thomas and Sientje Mulder bought the 14th Street property. Church membership records suggest the family moved to Texas at different times. The memberships for daughters Jennie and Catherine and son Louis went from the First Christian Reformed Church (CRC) of Chicago to Winnie CRC on 30 October 1911. Those of Bertha and son Samuel were transferred on 29 April 1912. Curiously, no record was found of the transfer of Sipke's or sons Ralph, John, Raymond, and Albert. Daughters Jennie, then eighteen, and Catherine, then fourteen, were in the first group to arrive and probably were charged to get the house in order, since it could have been vacant for at least ten years.

Hoekstra bought Hereford cattle at auction at the Union Stock Yards

in Chicago. The horses would have been brought to the stockyard to await their shipment to Texas with the cattle. His son, Louis, was at the stockyards to see to the loading of the animals into two stock cars, and rode with the animals to provide for their water and feed. In August 1911 the average price per 100-weight for cattle sold at the Union Stock Yards was \$4.50, which suggests that Hoekstra paid about \$2,250 for the cattle.¹⁷ The carrying capacity of a 50-foot stock car was 50,000 pounds, so shipping charges brought the total to about \$5,000. According to practices of the day, each animal had its own space in a car. Between each animal the loading crew tied strong dividers to the sides of the cattle car. The floor would have a layer of sand covered by hay for the animals to eat.

From the Union Stock Yards the train crossed the Mississippi River at Fort Madison, Iowa, and with temporary stops along the route came to Emporia, Kansas, where the cars carrying animals shunted to a siding with ramps and pens. The animals were taken out of the cars for rest, feeding, and watering. Santa Fe employees

cleaned out the cars and resupplied them with feed. After about a five- or six-hour rest, the animals were re-loaded into the cars to continue south to Texas. At night, while underway, Louis would have slept in the caboose, or a drover car, depending on the number of other attendants.¹⁸ The next stop for Louis and the animals was Beaumont, Texas, where the Santa Fe had another feeding station. At Beaumont the cleaned cattle cars and the animals proceeded toward their final destination on the GC&I, whose only stop with a permanent cattle ramp and pen was at Whites Ranch.

Although everything seemed to be going as expected, there was one problem for which Hoekstra had not planned—ticks. No cattle had been grazed on the fields of Hoekstra's ranch since about 1900, and ticks could only survive four years without the presence of a host.¹⁹ So, in all



Bertha Hoekstra washing the dog in the horse trough on the Texas ranch. Image courtesy of the author.

likelihood, his animals were infected at the railroad feeding station of Whites Ranch which was also used to ship Texas cattle to market. The ticks carried a disease called "Texas Fever," more accurately the parasitic bovine babesiosis. Young cattle exposed to the disease can build up immunity to it, but for mature animals, both cattle and horses, the mortality rate was very

high. Cattle fever ticks were likely first introduced to North America by Spanish colonists in the 1700s. At the time, many northern states refused to allow Texas cattle to come to their states. In 1868, ticks from Texas cattle killed thousands of domestic cattle in Illinois and Indiana.²⁰ The high mortality rate led to the creation of a National Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program in 1906, which targeted all or part of fourteen southern states, including Texas. It wasn't until 1943 that this disease was declared eradicated.²¹ These ticks were to end Hoekstra's ranching dream.

Hoekstra cannot be criticized for choosing Herefords for his cattle ranch. Although Texas Longhorns, immune to the tick-born parasite, did well in the area, their meat was too tough for northern markets. Herefords produced well-marbled and therefore more tender and flavorful meat and flourished on a diet of tall grasses, ideal characteristics for Hoekstra's cattle ranching.

As noted, the family joined the Winnie Christian Reformed Church and became friends with their new neighbors, including the Huysers. Just as the family was beginning its new life in rural Texas, disaster hit. Their cattle and horses began to die. Texas Fever killed off the first shipment; the second shipment of cattle met the same fate. The losses prompted Hoekstra to leave Texas before the third and last promissory note came due on 23 September 1912. He had paid J. R. Cheek almost \$11,000 for the land, mostly from savings he had before

he sold his Chicago business. Family lore reports he spent \$10,000 for the cattle that died on the ranch. Moving and living expenses could have cost him at least \$1,000, plus an unknown amount to repair the ranch home and other structures. He still would have most of the proceeds of the sale of his Chicago business and property, probably from \$30,000 to \$40,000, remaining. The Hoekstras returned to Chicago but stayed in touch with the Huysers with post-cards and letters.

The Hoekstras rented a house at 1857 West 13th Street. Soon after, twelve-year-old son "Ralph" died when he joined other children in throwing pieces of tar into the boiling tar kettle of a roofing crew. The kettle exploded covering Ralph with boiling tar. He was buried 2 September 1912 in Forest Home Cemetery in their newly purchased six-space plot where his formal name "Rudolph" is on the marker. In December 1912 Hoekstra bought a house at 1819 West Yeaton (now Grenshaw) and bought his first automobile, a 1912 Marmon.

Hoekstra resumed collecting cinders and using them for paving but instead of horses he purchased two Mack dump trucks. Son Samuel reports that his father was the first of the Dutch haulers to switch from horse and wagons to trucks. Because his son Raymond later died (in 1917) when he fell from the running board

of one of the trucks, Hoekstra must have purchased seven-ton trucks, which were the only Mack truck models at that time with running boards. Business seemed to flourish as Commonwealth Edison Company became a new customer and some of the cinders were sold to a company making cinder blocks.²² Sipke also would have had to purchase other equipment to start his paving business.

Hoekstra finally found someone

**These premises serviced by
S. Hoekstra Teaming.
This emblem is not to be removed
under penalty of law.
City of Chicago Ordnance**

Facsimile of the tin emblem the city required to be attached to his customers' cinder bins. Image courtesy of the author.

interested in the ranch. On 23 January 1915 he traded his interest in the ranch to Charles M. Gates, for Gate's equity in an 18-unit

apartment building located at Calumet Avenue and 43rd Street. Sipke later traded his equity in this apartment building for a farm in Canada,²³ probably in southern Alberta where others from Chicago moved and organized a Christian Reformed congregation.

Hoekstra was killed on 31 October 1915; starting again in Chicago had taken most of his financial reserves. His oldest daughter, Jennie, died after Raymond. Bertha died at eighty-three on 26 January 1953, having lost three children, two to accidents, and her husband to murder. Louis Hoekstra married Janet Huyser, Catherine married Peter Tornja, Samuel married Johanna Huyser, John married Emma Krueger, and Albert married Lena Slinkman. 

Endnotes

1. The author is the son of Samuel Hoekstra and Johanna (Anne) Huyser.
2. The conversion rate for a Dutch guilder, per a 1907 letter from Sipke Hoekstra to Holland, was 2.7 guilders to one US dollar; 40,000 guilders would convert to about \$15,000.
3. The new owner paid the down payment, but never another payment. The author acknowledges Robert Schoone-Jongen for information on the business practices of Theodore F. Koch; Harvey Huiner for information regarding 1461 West 14th Street; Thys DeJong for translations; John Bouws for photographs of the Huyser store; Ruth Hoekstra for sending files on Winnie; and Henry, Eugene, and Burton Hoekstra and Barb Huyser Rinella for sharing their memories.
4. Four of their children died in the Netherlands—Mattheus (the first son with this name) and Johannes in 1898, Henderika in 1902, and Bastiaan in 1904. Janet (13), Wilhelmus (11), Mattheus (9), Johannes (6), Johanna (3), and Geerdena (1) emigrated with their parents.
5. Both men have had portions of their life stories told in *Origins*, see: Robert P. Swierenga and Ralph A. Hoekstra, “Murdered by the Mob,” vol. 28 no. 1 (2010) 17-27; and “Janet Huyser’s Recollections,” vol. 16 no. 2 (1998) 2-10.
6. Recollections of Johanna Huyser Hoekstra, the author’s mother.
7. “Janet Huyser’s Recollections,” *Origins* (1998) 2-3.
8. Valmore League was the name given to a Mexican land grant given in

1835 to Francisco Valmore. When Theodore Koch bought the land the development’s name was titled Koch Valmore Subdivision.

9. The line was formally the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, but commonly called Santa Fe.

10. Santa Fe Land Improvement Company had purchased the Gulf Coast and Interstate in 1908, but the line continued independent operations until 15 August 1915, when the rails were washed away by a hurricane.

11. “Janet Huyser’s Recollections,” *Origins* (1998) 6-10.

12. Those still at home were Johanna (Anne), 14; Geerdena (Dena), 12; and Cornella (Cora), 10. Their brother Jan (Johnnie), who suffered from long-term epilepsy and other mental disorders, went to live at Pine Rest Christian Hospital in Grand Rapids and died in 1928. Janet had married Louis Hoekstra; Bill had married Martha Renkema; Matt had married Jennie Speelman; Anne married Samuel Hoekstra; Dena married Chester Baar; and Cora married Louis Tazelaar.

13. He had an edge on his competitors in that he avoided dump fees by using the cinders in paving sidewalks.

14. Sipke Hoekstra letters in possession of the author.

15. In letters held by the author.

16. The one parcel Sipke Hoekstra purchased was part of a Mexican land grant given on 18 June 1835 to Baptiste Andre Vacocu. The size of the grant was 5,535 acres. Peter married Jacoba (Cora) Bossenga, who died in 1916. On 9 March 1911 the Oosterhoffs sold to

the Hoekstra’s their share of the operation for \$1,646.83.

The amount Sipke paid Peter would have been to reimburse him for his down payment, his portion of the first promissory note and for the interest he paid on the balance of his share of the purchase.

17. “Cattle Prices 1909 to 1999,” United States Department of Agriculture publication, 1999.

18. “Santa Fe Railroad Instructions to Shippers.” Main lines would also have feeding stations provided at regular intervals. A 1906 federal regulation required that stock animals could be in railcars no longer than twenty-eight hours at a stretch. Before that time was reached they were to be removed for at least five hours of rest and feeding. But a shipper could provide written authorization to the railroad to keep the cattle on the train up to thirty-six hours. This became the norm for most movements after that time. See <http://www.atsfrr.com/>. Lesley McMahan (lmc-mahen@gt.rr.com) provided photographs and other background information on the logistics of bringing cattle to Texas.

19. David L. Morris, DVM, PhD., “Texas Cattle Fever,” (Fort Collins, Colorado).

20. Angela M. Pelzel, DVM, “Cattle Fever Tick Surveillance in Texas.”

21. *Ibid.*

22. Personal communication with Louis’s son Eugene Hoekstra, June 2012.

23. Sipke’s realtor, George Ottenhof, in an interview printed in the *Chicago Tribune* on 31 October 1915.

From a Calvinist Cradle to a Catholic Grave

The Unusual Odyssey of One Dutch Immigrant Woman

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

Introduction

The story of Dutch immigration to the United States is usually told in the context of the communities they formed—that is, where they collectively settled, or which churches they joined (or founded) as they moved to other areas. In this context some stand out as being influential in business, education, religion, or other professions. But there were also those who did not join the Dutch enclave, or eventually left such enclaves. These people were absorbed into the

American mainstream and therefore are difficult to find so that few of their life stories have been told. Jantje Sjaarda's story is one of these.

When Jan and Trijntje Sjaarda presented their first child, Jantje, for baptism on Sunday, 13 May 1877, in the *Gereformeerde Kerk* of Burum, Friesland, the Netherlands, their prayers for her were probably that she would grow up to be a God-fearing daughter, wife, and mother. However, her life took so many twists

and turns that in her parents' wildest imagination they could not have foreseen the result. And the thoroughly Calvinistic Dominie Roelof Mulder administering the rite of sprinkling the water of baptism on the little forehead would have been taken aback had he known that at her death her casket would be sprinkled with holy water—as part of the Roman Catholic Church's Rite of Christian Burial, and that she died under an assumed name.

The Netherlands

Photographs of Jantje taken as an adult suggest an attractive and intelligent woman; she was, no doubt, a dutiful child. She would not have been spoiled, for she was soon followed by two brothers, Geert in 1879, and Wiebe in 1882. The family, trapped on one of the lower rungs of the economic ladder,¹ was doing its best to provide for their growing children.

During the 1880s the Netherlands experienced a severe economic

slump. North American prairies and the Russian steppes, using extensive mechanization, produced abundant wheat which flooded the world markets and drove down wheat prices. The European farmers who used labor-intensive methods could not compete with these prices. The result was an employment crisis in Dutch agriculture. Ironically, many of the unemployed farm laborers, including Jan Sjaarda, looked to America, the cause of their economic problems, for work—the solution to their problems. In the spring of 1883, when Jantje was almost six, the family boarded *SS Schiedam*. Accompanying them on their journey was Jantje's namesake and grandmother, Jantje Landstra Renkema, and her mother's sister, Hiltje Renkema. The latter was on her way to Grand Rapids to marry her

An associate editor of *Origins*, Janet Sheeres is a native of the Netherlands who has lived in Canada and now the United States. She is a dedicated student of history and has published numerous articles both in North America and the Netherlands; her most recent book is *Son of Secession: Douwe J. Van der Werp*.



Jeanette (Jantje) Sjaarda as a young woman.
Image courtesy of the author.

fiancé, Conrad Stouwie, also from Burum. After a few days of seasickness Jantje began to enjoy the journey and the sights. The family was processed through Castle Garden and traveled by train to Michigan.²

Grand Rapids

In Grand Rapids the Sjaardas were re-united with Trijntje's brother, Willem Renkema, and his wife, Johanna, who had immigrated in 1881 and who ran a small grocery store on Tenth Street. Jan, soon named John, found work as a stoker in the Grand Rapids Gas Company, and the family established a home at 324 Eleventh Street. Hiltje married Conrad Stouwie and the two lived next door at 326 Eleventh Street.³ John and Trijntje joined the Alpine Avenue Christian Reformed Church (CRC) where the Renkemas were already members. The church was located on Alpine Avenue and Eleventh Street and was within walking distance for the family. The pastor at the time, Rev. William H. Frielings, had been John's former pastor (1865-1866) in Burum. Initially there were so many immigrants from Friesland attending Alpine Avenue CRC that the church was often called the Friesian church, and the Sjaardas soon felt at home in their new surroundings. Sometime during those same years, Trijntje's older sister Ruurdje and her husband, Jan Wiersma, and their four children also immigrated and moved to the near northwest side of Grand Rapids. With their arrival the entire Renkema family had moved from Burum to Grand Rapids and all lived in this tightly bound religious community on the West Side.⁴

In their first autumn in America Jantje, now called Jeanette, started school. In 1884 the Alpine Avenue CRC added a Christian grade school and the Sjaarda children fit right in the new school with the other children from the same ethnic back-

ground. Church, school, and her extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins formed close bonds between Jeanette, her Dutch compatriots, and the CRC.

During those early years in America it looked as if the Sjaarda family would do well in America. In October 1884 a little sister, Sadie, was born. Then, after just four years in their new country, the first in a string of tragedies occurred that would dramatically change the course of Jeanette's life. Her mother never regained her strength after Sadie's birth and died in March 1887. Jeanette was almost ten at the time; her siblings Geert eight, Wiebe six, and Sadie three. While the children grieved for their mother, they were fortunate that their grandmother was able to comfort and take care of them. With their grandmother's help the children continued to attend school. But when in 1890 their grandmother also died, Jeanette, then thirteen, had to grow up fast. She was the oldest, and the task of keeping house for her father and taking care of her younger siblings now rested on her young shoulders. Jeanette's education ended at the eighth grade, which was not considered unusual at the time. Hard work, not educa-

tion, was the means by which most first-generation Dutch immigrants pulled themselves up out of poverty. By 1892, when Jeanette's brother Geert was thirteen, he was working as a laborer for Widdicomb Brothers & Richmond Company, later Widdicomb Mantel Company.⁵ Advanced education was not deemed important for most of these immigrants and children worked outside of the home to help support the family; girls were expected to marry, not have careers.

Marriage and Widowhood

In July 1891 Jeanette's father married Florence Postema, a divorced woman who brought her five children into the home. Jeanette's new step-siblings were approximately the same ages as she and her siblings. The blended family of John and Florence began with nine children, all under the age of fourteen, and they added three more.⁶

With her father's new marriage, Jeanette's position in the family was understandably usurped by her step-mother. There is no information as to whether she and her step-mother and step-siblings got along; but, shortly after John and Florence's child Anna was born in 1892, Jeanette left the



The Widdicomb Furniture Company factory in Grand Rapids. The firm was incorporated in 1873, but began as George Widdicomb & Sons in 1858; it closed in 1971. Image courtesy of the Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Henry Hemmes and Jeanette, who were married only three years before he died of tuberculosis. Image courtesy of the author.

home.⁷ On the 23rd of October 1893, at age sixteen, she married twenty-one-year-old Henry Hemmes, a member of the Reformed Church in America.⁸ Rev. Peter Ekster, then pastor of the Alpine Avenue CRC, performed the ceremony.

By the age of sixteen, Jeanette had been thoroughly indoctrinated into the Calvinist faith. In the close-knit Dutch community of the Alpine Avenue area of the 1880s and 1890s there were no other worldviews to distract its young people away from the faith. Movies, radio, and television had yet to be invented, and everyone knew that dances were sinful. By marrying outside her strict CRC denominational fold, Jeanette showed—what some might consider spunk—a small streak of rebelliousness. The Hemmes family had arrived in Grand Rapids

with the Hemmes family at 20 Langdon Avenue, on Grand Rapids' northeast side.¹⁰

Toledo, Ohio

The Sjaarda (also spelled Shaarda) family left Grand Rapids in 1897 for Vogel Center in Missaukee County, Michigan, along with Conrad and Hiltje Stouwie and their children. John Shaarda's two sons by his first wife, and all of Florence's children, and their children moved to a farm in Missaukee County.¹¹ In 1898 the Hemmes family also moved—not north, but south to Toledo, Ohio. Toledo was a major railroad hub and as a result had become a desirable location for furniture factories, carriage makers, breweries, glass manufacturers, etc., which drew many immigrants to employment there.

in 1887 from the city of Groningen, the Netherlands. John Hemmes, Henry's father, worked for the Valley City Rattan Company. Jeanette and Henry's child, Ida Catharine, was born on 10 February 1895.

The newlyweds lived at 193 Tenth Street for a while before moving to 110 Fremont Avenue. Both places were close to the Sjaardas, Renkemas, and Stouwies. Sadly, their happiness was short-lived. On 8 July 1896 Henry died of tuberculosis, leaving nineteen-year-old Jeanette to support herself and her daughter.⁹ She moved in with her in-laws and for the next few years she is listed in the Grand Rapids city directories as Henry's widow, who boarded

Jeanette moved to Toledo with her in-laws rather than to northern Michigan with the Shaarda clan. Toledo city directories show that by 1900 the Hemmes family, including little Ida, but not Jeanette, lived on Austin Street in Toledo¹²—a city that had only thirty Dutch immigrants compared to thirty-five thousand Dutch-born, second- and third-generation Dutch in Grand Rapids in 1900. Among the few Dutch in Toledo, there were no young men of marriageable age, and so Jeanette, young, pretty, and eligible, attracted American suitors.¹³ Although Toledo had its share of churches of various denominations, none were Christian Reformed or Reformed. Neither Ida's grandparents nor Jeanette made any attempt to have little Ida baptized during these years. Indeed, she was not brought with any religious training, suggesting that Jeanette's own church life may have stopped.¹⁴ Once unmoored from her CRC roots, it seems that slowly but inexorably she drifted away from her childhood church. In Toledo she was exposed to diverse ethnic groups and to diverse ways of thinking that were quite foreign to her conservative Dutch upbringing. She may have worked in a private home as a domestic but, because the 1906 and 1907 Toledo city directories list her as a waitress and because for the remainder of her life, whenever she had to support herself, she did so by waitressing, it is most likely that she worked as a waitress in Toledo as well.

Chicago, Illinois

On 14 February 1910 Jeanette was in Elgin, Illinois, to marry twenty-eight-year-old William Clarence Cave, an electrician from Paulding County, Ohio.¹⁵ A copy of the Illinois marriage registration gives all the details, including her maiden name, her parents' names, and her place

of birth, so there is no question that on Valentine's Day 1910 she married Cave. By June of the same year (when the federal census was taken) Jeanette and her husband, then known as W. C. Brown, were living in Chicago's 21st Ward. The reason for the name change remains a mystery. Whatever the reason may have been, from that time on Jeanette would always be known as Jeanette Brown.¹⁶

The marriage certificate for Cave/Brown states that this was her *third* marriage. So, between 1907, when she is listed in the Toledo City Directory as Hemmes, and 1910, she had been married a second time.¹⁷ A Shaarda genealogy, composed by one of Jeanette's step-sisters-in-law, notes that she was married to a Frank McDonald, but no record for this marriage has been found.¹⁸ The second marriage may have been abusive and ended in divorce or it may have been a common-law relationship. So unanswered questions remain—did she and Cave elope and take an assumed name so that McDonald could not find her? Did they travel to Illinois to marry and disappear in a much larger city? Whatever the reason, the two settled in Chicago, far away from their respective relatives.¹⁹

Meanwhile the Shaarda clan in Missaukee County, Michigan, moved to Willard, Ohio, another Dutch enclave made up largely of immigrants who had lived in Kalamazoo, Michigan, area. Only Jeanette's brother Wiebe stayed in Michigan. In April 1909 her father, John Shaarda, died in Willard, just short of his sixtieth birthday. Jeanette traveled to Ohio for the funeral, and there again met her sister Sadie. She successfully persuaded Sadie to come to live with her in Chicago, for the 1910 federal census lists Sadie Sjaarda living with W. C. and Jeanette Brown on Superior Street.

Even though Jeanette was still a baptized member of the CRC, there

is no record of her joining a CRC in Chicago. Sadie, on the other hand, brought up in the strict Dutch CRC communities of Alpine Avenue and Vogel Center, did attend First CRC in Chicago and was baptized on 19 December 1910 by Rev. Sjoerd S. Vander Heide.²⁰ First Chicago CRC was located near Ashland Avenue and easily accessible by streetcar. If she had wanted to, Jeanette could have gone with Sadie to First Chicago CRC and once again join this part of her Dutch heritage. She chose not to.²¹ Sadie returned to her family in Ohio in late 1910.

Ida Catharine

Meanwhile, Jeanette's daughter Ida continued to live with her Hemmes grandparents in Toledo. She graduated from Spring Street School around 1908. She too had a difficult life. As a little toddler just learning to walk, she fell down the cellar stairs, seriously injuring her right knee and hip. She had surgery to correct the damage and, even though there were various attempts to treat the pain, Ida



Ida Catharine, the only child born (in 1895) to Henry and Jeanette Hemmes. In 1920 she married Lawrence Dewig. Image courtesy of the author.

ended up walking with crutches. The constant pain finally resulted in the leg being amputated above the knee in 1918; she was twenty-two years old at the time. She supported herself by working as a restaurant checker in Chicago. In 1915 she lived at 1138 Addison, probably with her mother and step-father.²² In 1916 and 1917 she was living at 842 Barry Avenue at the same address as that of W. C. Brown.²³ Barry Avenue was not that far from Superior Avenue, so apparently the family had moved from Superior Avenue to Addison and then to Barry Avenue. The frequent moves suggest the Browns were renting rather than owning a home.

In January 1920, Ida, then twenty-four, was living on her own as a boarder in Chicago's 23rd Ward. The fact that she no longer lived with the Browns, and that the Browns were not found in the 1920 Census, indicates that he had probably died and Jeanette was boarding elsewhere.²⁴ In the years 1918-1919 more than 8,500 people died of the Spanish flu in Chicago alone. It attacked mainly those between twenty and forty years old. There were several W. C. Browns who died in Chicago at that time and, with the limited information recorded, it cannot be determined with certainty that one was Jeanette's husband.²⁵

A Working Woman in Chicago

With Ida's marriage and move to Evansville, Jeanette, once more a widow, was on her own and responsible only for herself. Her siblings were living in Ohio and Michigan. At forty-three she was at a crossroad in her life. If she had any thoughts of returning to her Dutch roots and the CRC, this would have been the time to do so. By moving to Chicago she had unwittingly moved to a city that, like Grand Rapids, also had a large Dutch population. By the 1920s there were over twenty-two thousand Dutch-

born plus those born of Dutch parents living in the city.²⁷ There were several Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches she could have attended;²⁸ she could also have moved to Willard, Ohio, to be near her Shaarda family. She apparently preferred Chicago.

Those were the “roaring twenties,” during which time the country experienced an economic boom and new inventions such as the radio became available to all. Women had gained the vote; women’s clothing became less restricted. To support herself Jeanette turned to waitressing, just as she had done in Toledo. She began wearing make-up and moved her waitressing career up a notch by becoming a *maître d'* in the Blackhawk Restaurant where she supervised a large number of people.²⁹ A step-niece in Ohio wrote, “Jeanette was an elegant person and my dad thought a lot of her.” The Blackhawk Restaurant had opened in December 1920. It featured dance bands and orchestras until 1952.³⁰ By the end of the 1920s any connection to the Dutch community in Chicago, especially her former church community, had long been severed. In 1928 the denomination had taken an official stance against dancing (as well as card playing and theater attendance) and would have had difficulty embrac-



Jeanette (now Brown) a bit later in life as she must have looked when living in Chicago. Image courtesy of the author.

ing as a member a mature working woman employed by the Blackhawk Restaurant—a worldly place with music and dancing.

The Great Depression hit Chicago especially hard due to its large manufacturing base. The city saw some of the most volatile strikes and protest movements in its history. Jeanette left the Blackhawk Restaurant sometime before the 1930 Census was taken. She avoided the bread lines by holding down two jobs—during the day

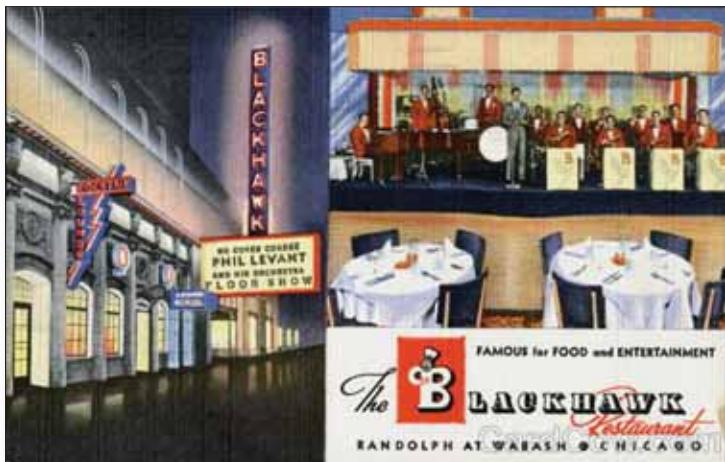
she worked in the cafeteria at Carson’s (Carson Pirie Scott & Company department store) on State Street and in the evening she waitressed at the very exclusive Saddle & Cycle Club, where she could augment her income with

generous tips. She rented rooms on 290 North Clark Street. She never owned a car, but the bus line was right on her street. Although still an attractive woman as an adult, Jeanette did not remarry.

A decade after 1929, new storm clouds were gathering over Chicago, when a vigorous debate raged whether the United States should become involved in the European War. By December 1941, the discussion was halted and the reality of war impinged on the lives of all Americans and instantly reshaped the workplace. Chicago’s industrial base produced \$24 billion of war goods, everything from electronics and field rations to parachutes and torpedoes. The city’s Great Lakes Naval Training Station, Fort Sheridan, and the Glenview Naval Air Station all brought thousands of military personnel through the city. Working women became the norm, even if their pay was still lower than that for men doing the same work.

In August 1935 President Roosevelt had signed the Social Security Act and, in 1942 when Jeanette turned sixty-five, she should have been eligible to receive some kind of pension benefits. However, most women (and minorities) were excluded from receiving benefits—especially women in the service sector such as domestics, teachers, nurses, hospital workers, etc., and those who worked intermittently. Jeanette therefore did not qualify, and kept working.

After the war in the late 1940s and early 50s, she and her landlady, Minnie Roe, were living on Broadway Avenue. The two devised a resourceful working arrangement. In the summer they worked in Chicago and in the winter months they worked in Florida as waitresses during the influx of wealthy tourists. On her way to and from Florida she stopped in Evansville to visit Ida and her grandchildren.



Postcard advertisement for the Blackhawk Restaurant in Chicago’s Loop where Jeanette became *maître d'*. Image courtesy of the author.



The Dewig family when Eugene (back row, fourth from left) was ordained to the priesthood. His mother, Ida, is on his right; grandmother, Jeanette, is in the middle of the front row. Image courtesy of the author.



The Shaarda siblings. Standing left to right: Wiebe; Sadie (Workman); Geert; seated, Jeanette (Brown). Image courtesy of the author.

Becoming Roman Catholic

Ida's life in Evansville centered on St. Boniface Roman Catholic Church. Her seven children received thorough instruction in the faith, much as their grandmother had received growing up in the CRC. Two became nuns, one a priest, and one a monk.³¹ Ida's Roman Catholic faith had sustained her during her many physical trials, and her daughter's strong faith may have turned Jeanette's heart to accept the Roman Catholic faith as well. After years of seemingly spiritual neglect, just before her seventieth birthday, she converted to Roman Catholicism. She had always kept in touch with her Shaarda family, but when she shared the news with them, her younger brothers Geert and Wiebe, both staunch members of the CRC, were not happy with her conversion to Catholicism. In spite of their displeasure

she spent some of her later years in Willard, Ohio, with various Shaarda family members. In 1954 and again in 1955 she traveled to Willard to attend the funerals of Sadie and Geert respectively.³² Her Shaarda nieces remember her with fondness and several of the Shaarda clan traveled to Evansville to attend the ordination of one of her grandsons, Eugene Dewig, into the priesthood.

She retired in 1953 at the age of seventy-six, the long days on her feet having taken their toll. She had supported herself since the age of sixteen—sixty long years, interrupted only a few times when she lived with a husband. She moved in with Ida in Evansville.³³ A grandson recalled, "Her life now was evidently more settled, serene, and meaningful. Mother and daughter spent a lot of time reminiscing, as in years past,

in the delightful (and exasperating!) mixture of Dutch and English, which no outsider could imitate or understand. Both would smile a triumphant smile when asked, 'What did you say?' There was a closeness never before experienced in their lives."³⁴

Because she was a newcomer to Evansville she had no friends or acquaintances and seldom went out. Occasionally she would play bingo at church-sponsored events. On the evening of 21 March 1959, while preparing to attend a Lenten service, she stepped into the bathroom, sighed, and was gone. She was just two months short of her eighty-second birthday. Her funeral took place at St. Boniface; she was buried in St. Joseph cemetery in Evansville—a Dutch-born woman resting in American soil, all traces of her Dutch heritage and Reformed roots buried with her.¤

Endnotes

1. Social mobility and therefore economic improvement was fixed in Dutch society; a phenomenon that is called pillarization.

2. Ellis Island did not begin to process arriving immigrants until 1892.

3. The population of Grand Rapids in 1884 was 42,733, with the area around 10th and 11th streets just beginning to develop. By 1900 the population was 90,000, of which nearly 40 percent was Dutch born or of Dutch ancestry.

4. Jan Sjaarda had been orphaned at the age of eight; two older siblings had died young, so on the Sjaarda side there were no aunts, uncles, or cousins.

5. Her young Wiersma cousins Wybe, 17, and Durk, 13, were also working for the Widdicombe Mantel Co. by 1890.

6. Anna, born in 1892; Thomas, born in 1894; and John Jr., born in 1898.

7. In the Grand Rapids city directories of those years there is no evidence that Jeanette worked outside the home as a domestic, even though many Dutch girls as young as fourteen years old did so.

8. Although theological kin, the CRC had left the Reformed Church in America in 1857 and at the time members from the other denomination were viewed as from beyond the religious pale.

9. Welfare from the city was limited to groceries and fuel for the very poorest people. The most she could expect was some help from her family and in-laws to look after her child while she worked, or to ask for help from a private agency like a church.

10. The Grand Rapids city directories from 1881 to 1900 give an accurate description of where people worked and lived.

11. Roelfje/Rulie married Clarence Burkett in 1899 in Missaukee County, so was no longer living with the family. Jeanette's younger sister, Sadie, fifteen in 1900, was working as a maid for the Peter DeVos family in Missaukee County.

12. 1900 United States Federal Census.

13. Her two Hemmes sisters-in-law did indeed marry non-Dutch men.

14. Eugene Dewig, *Till we meet again; a brief biography of Ida Hemmes Dewig*. Personal papers of grandchildren.

15. William Cave's family lived in Paulding County, Ohio, where his father, Henry N. Cave worked as a blacksmith. William C. was born in 1879, and by age 21 had moved to Toledo, presumably to look for work. In 1900 he was working as a bartender in a hotel on Perry Street. Ten years later he had worked as an electrician.

16. Apparently Jeanette went to her grave without divulging the reason for the name change; her one remaining granddaughter and one remaining granddaughter-in-law were surprised upon hearing the information.

17. In a letter dated 15 November 1997, Kathleen Shaarda Cok wrote that Jeanette was married three times, which agrees with the marriage license of 14 February 1910.

18. A search through the Lucas County, Ohio, marriage records for those years failed to produce a marriage for a Frank McDonald or a Jeanette Hemmes. I also checked surrounding counties without success.

19. This name change may also explain why there are no wedding photos of the Browns or, for that matter, any extant photos of W.C. Brown, while Jeanette certainly was not averse to having her photo taken.

20. Membership Records of Ebenezer CRC of Berwyn Illinois (formerly Chicago First CRC) from 1867-1950; Sadie joined the CRC in March 1910; by December of the same year she had her membership transferred to Chicago Junction (Willard), Ohio, where she made profession of faith on 31 July 1911; she married Albert Workman the following year.

21. Ibid. There is no record of Jeanette joining First Chicago CRC.

22. Chicago City Directory 1915.

23. Chicago City Directory 1916 and 1917.

24. W. C. Brown had probably died by this time, because he is not listed under Brown or under Cave on the WWI Draft Registration, which registered all males born between 1872 and 1900. W. C. Brown/Cave would have been required to register under the Third Registration (12 September 1918) that included all unregistered/un-enlisted men born between 11 September 1872 and 12 September 1900 on a card calling for name, address, age, date of birth,

race, citizenship status, occupation, employer's name and address, name and address of nearest relative, and physical appearance.

25. The epidemic first appeared in the Chicago area at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station about thirty miles north of the city. The first cases were reported on 11 September 1918, and within a week the hospital was crowded with over 2,600 men. By 14 October the city had suffered more than 1,400 deaths, and on "Black Thursday," 17 October, 381 people died in a 24-hour period.

26. On his 1917 WWI registration card, Dewig lists his occupation as apprentice horse-shoer, so having a small garage was probably misleading. Horses were being phased out and cars becoming more popular by 1920. Once in Evansville, Ida learned that Lawrence was poorer than he had let on. He had a little garage on the edge of town where he sold gas and repaired cars. After being poisoned by carbon monoxide three times, his health deteriorated and he turned the garage into a feed store. In 1923, when she had two small children already, Ida took in her grandfather, John Hemmes, then seventy-three, blind, and senile. (Ida Hovingh Hemmes had died in Toledo on 2 October 1912, at age 64.) He returned to Toledo in 1925 where he died on 3 June 1925. At the age of forty, Lawrence developed rheumatoid arthritis and was bed-ridden until he died at age sixty. St. Boniface Roman Catholic Church helped the family financially and also subsidized the education of the children in Catholic schools. As a result, two of the children became nuns, and two became priests. Raising seven children and tending a sick husband cannot have been easy for Ida, herself handicapped with a prosthetic leg.

27. Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1985), 812.

28. In fact, the pastor of one of the CRC churches, Evergreen Park, was Rev. Zachary Sherda. Zachary's father, also a Jan Sjaarda from Burum (a distant cousin to Jeanette's father) had immigrated to Grand Rapids in 1881. Their name changed to Sherda and Sherda's only son, Zachary, became Rev. Zachary Sherda, who pastored the Evergreen Park

CRC in the Chicago area from 1916 to 1930—the very years that Jeanette lived in Chicago. Zachary, who had been born in the United States in 1886, was her contemporary, but miles ahead of her in education. The two may not have known of each other's existence.

29. Information from letter from Kathleen Shaarda Cok, 24 November 1997, in possession of the author.

30. Many of the great bands—Benny Goodman's, Glenn Miller's, and Bob Crosby's Orchestra and his "band-within-a-band" the Bob Cats—played at the Blackhawk during the 1930s.

31. Norman, called Frater Hugh, left the monastery at St. Meinrad in 1968 in order to marry.

32. Wiebe died in 1960, one year after Jeanette.

33. The Social Security Act was signed by President Franklin Roosevelt on 14 August, 1935. Taxes were collected for the first time in January 1937 and the first one-time, lump-sum payments were made that same month. Regular ongoing monthly benefits started in January 1940.

34. Dewig, *Till we meet again.*

Sometimes “buried” treasure” lies in plain view!

G. E. Boer’s copy of Aegidius Francken

James A. De Jong

G eert E. Boer’s personal copy of Aegidius Francken’s *Kern der Christelijke Leer* [*The Heart (or Kernel) of Christian Doctrine*] is an example of a treasure buried in plain view. Boer was the first and until 1883 the only professor at what is now Calvin Theological Seminary at its founding in 1876. Francken’s book served as the basic textbook in theology for aspiring ministers for ten or fifteen years thereafter and as a trusted resource for the next ten or fifteen. Boer’s personal copy of this book contains some ninety meticulously made marginalia noting printing errors.¹

This copy of the book stood in plain view on Calvin’s Hekman Library shelves, presumably for over a century. Students, library staff, and faculty walked past it thousands of times, probably in three different library buildings during those years. A few probably even casually perused it. Boer had taught systematic theology until the brilliant young Geerhardus Vos joined the faculty in late 1888, using Francken’s book as the text for the subject. When Vos accepted an appointment to Princeton Theological Seminary in 1894, a group of students submitted a petition to the board of curators, or trustees, asking that Boer not be entrusted once again with teaching that discipline. The petition, submitted without his knowledge, stung a little, but the board and synod concurred.² After filling the post

with part-time help for a year, Henricus Beuker was appointed to cover that field. In 1901 Boer donated his personal copy to the library; it was the library’s 526th book acquisition.



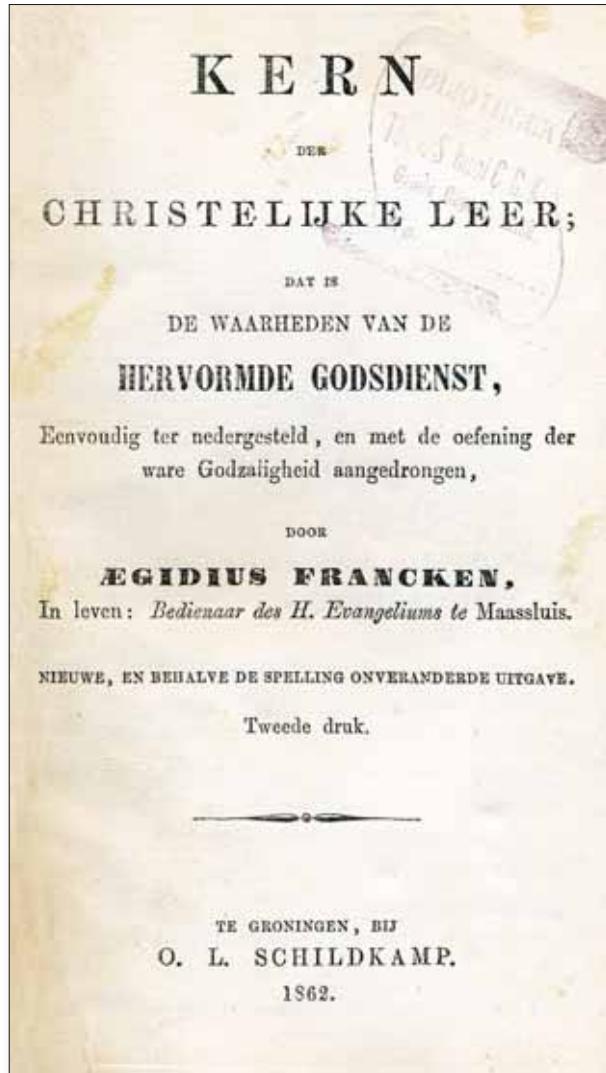
Aegidius Francken, 1676-1743. Image courtesy of the Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Noteworthy is that Boer’s copy has been checked out only six times since the college and seminary moved to the Knollcrest Campus in 1962. As important as this book was during the nineteenth century, it has not been in heavy demand since.

Using it for another project in early 2011, I paid more attention to the marginal notes. Observing that all were then listed sequentially on two pages just inside the back cover, I realized that this careful compilation could not have been the work of a typical student. Knowing that

James De Jong is president emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary, an ordained minister, author, and has taught at Trinity Christian College, Dordt College, and Calvin Theological Seminary, and most recently has been studying the early history between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church.

FAR RIGHT
*Boer's list
of printing
errors in his
1862 copy of
Francken's
Kern (right).
Image courtesy
of the Archives,
Heritage Hall,
Calvin College,
Grand Rapids,
Michigan.*



Francken's book had been one of the first textbooks used at Calvin Seminary, I compared the handwriting with some of Boer's handwritten personal papers in the Heritage Hall collection; Janet Sheeres and I authenticated the writing as that of Geert E. Boer. The theological librarians and Richard Harms readily concurred that this copy of Francken's book should be removed from general circulation and added to Calvin's collection of rare books.

Aegidius Francken

Aegidius Francken (1676-1743) belonged to a loose movement of several dozen Dutch Reformed ministers

who lived and wrote from the late sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries. These ministers shared several things in common. First, they had a deep commitment to the Reformed confessional legacy of Geneva, Heidelberg, France, and the Low Countries. Second, they pressed hard for a closer, more personally intimate walk with the Lord in all aspects of daily life. This entailed, in the third place, distancing themselves and their congregations as much as possible from various forms of worldliness prevalent, in their minds, in the “Golden Age” of the Dutch Republic. Fourth, patterns of daily personal and family devotions marked by prayer, serious

searching of Scripture, and continuous reflection on one's spiritual condition were prominent. Theirs was a brand of piety and spirituality closely inter-related with English Puritanism and German Pietism, the latter drawing on many of these Dutch authors. The movement had very balanced writers and healthy practices, but it also had legalistic, unhealthy introspective and judgmental manifestations that were problematic. Hardly complete and only very general, this profile depicts what is known as the Dutch Further Reformation movement.³ Francken lived toward the end of the Further Reformation movement. By the mid-eighteenth century it had pretty

much run its course as Enlightenment influences on theological thought and in the theological schools became dominant.

Francken was trained in theology at the University of Leiden. His father and two brothers were also Reformed Church ministers. Ordained in 1705, he served only two congregations in his lifetime: Rijsoord (1705-1711), and Maassluis (1711-1743). A hundred years later, Abraham Kuyper's father also served Maassluis and Kuyper himself was born in that village. Francken's preaching was described by a contemporary as being "very learned, edifying, and soul-stirring." He was reportedly respected and loved by his parishioners. He produced several works. The first was a three-volume dogmatic theology that leaned heavily on a manuscript produced by his father, appearing between 1710 and 1712. The second is his *Kern*, a condensation or distillation of the first work. It first appeared in 1713 and eventually was reprinted between two and three dozen times. In addition, Francken produced a book on spiritual marriage, one on the use of the organ in worship, and several devotional works and books of sermons. There were at least ten publications in all by the time he died. But his *Kern* was the best known and most widely disseminated.⁴

The book, over four hundred pages long, is divided into thirty-six doctrinal topics (*loci*) or chapters, and takes a catechetical (question-and-answer) format. The topics are the predictable ones emphasized in classical Reformed theology: the Trinity, divine decrees, the council of peace, angels, creation, fall, the covenant of works, the covenant of grace, calling, regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification, the law, the church, etc. Some of the answers are quite lengthy, obviously not designed for ready memorization. All are fortified by Scriptural



Geert Egberts Boer (1832-1904) was the first instructor of what later became Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin College. Image courtesy of the Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

references. Each chapter concludes with questions and answers zeroing in on practical application (*betrachtung* in Dutch), which rendered the material more preachable and well suited for discussion in the home, where it was often used. *De Kern* was not scientific theology in the sense that it paid attention to the history of doctrinal development, discussed and evaluated various positions taken on a topic, explored the philosophical influences shaping Christian doctrine, or examined and tested the biblical passages supporting the doctrine being explained. Emphasis was strictly on getting it clear, getting it right, and getting it into the heads and hearts of its users. *De Kern* was indoctrination, plain and simple. But it was tested, confessionally reliable indoctrination.

The opening questions and answers of the first chapter (on "The Knowledge of God from Nature") illustrate the experiential flavor of the book's treatment of doctrine:

Question 1: Of what does our greatest good consist?

Answer: In friendship and fellowship

with our blessed God. Ps. 144:15. "Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord."

Question 2: What do you understand by "the greatest good?"

Answer: Such good as perfects us and that can fulfill all the eternal desires of the soul.

Question 3: Do people find that kind of greatest good in God and in the enjoyment of his fellowship now?

Answer: Yes, certainly. Ps. 68:20-21. This God is our blessedness. Sela! "This God is a God of total blessedness for us, and with the Lord of lords is complete deliverance from death." Ps. 73:35. "Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire nothing on earth besides you."

Question 4: Can you provide any evidence of this?

Answer: Yes, it is that all the qualities of the greatest good are found in God and in fellowship with him.

Question 5: Can you simply illustrate that?⁵

In a long, six-part answer, Francken explains that: 1) the greatest good is worth loving for its own sake, because it is to love God, and God is love; 2) it necessarily makes the possessor of it a better, more virtuous person; 3) it is enduring and sufficient for the rational person; 4) it is certain and reliable, as is God himself; 5) it is everlasting, since God is ever-present for those who enjoy his favor; and 6) it fulfills the deepest desires of the soul, and this is what God desires and what he alone can accomplish in his people. The chapter argues that God can be understood or known also through knowing how the deepest needs of human nature are met in knowing who and what God is. It is an eighteenth-century

echo of Calvin's opening passage in the *Institutes*, where he explains that knowledge of God and knowledge of self go hand-in-hand.

De Kern in Dutch Reformed Theological Education

Although Francken belonged to the last couple generations of Further Reformation writers, some ministers and a number of church members continued to read these "old writers" (*oude schrijvers*). Meanwhile, in the theological faculties and seminaries of the last half of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, the rationalism of the Enlightenment undermined confessional Reformed orthodoxy, the divine inspiration of Scripture, belief in miracles as presented in Scripture, and the need for personal conversion and spiritual rebirth. Christian faith was increasingly presented as living a morally upright life and contributing to the quality of life in Dutch society. Those dissatisfied with such biblically anemic developments often continued to feed spiritually on the old writers and met together in unofficial conventicles for prayer, fellowship, and spiritual growth. This, simply stated, was the situation when the *Afscheiding* (literally, "separation") movement of 1834 occurred. When the leaders of this movement, including Hendrik de Cock in the Netherlands and two of his colleagues who immigrated to America with their followers—Albertus Van Raalte to Holland, Michigan, and Hendrik Pieter Scholte to Pella, Iowa—separated from the Dutch Reformed Church, they returned to writings and confessions of the Reformation era, the church order of the Synod of Dort, and edifying catechisms and devotional literature of the Further Reformation.

For twenty years, the *Afscheiding* leaders trained future ministers for the new movement in the parsonages

of several prominent pastors. This training was essentially an apprenticeship model that included assigned readings, discussion, and supervised practical experience. De Cock, regarded as the father of the *Afscheiding*, was one such early educator before his untimely death in 1840. A recent biography of this man, including a review of his approach to ministerial training, notes his dependence on Francken.⁶ A somewhat earlier, partial review of the large number of reprints of Further Reformation books and catechisms by the *Afscheiding* leaders notes Francken's prominent place in that body of material.⁷ When the several strands of the *Afscheiding* eventually assented to amalgamate these parsonage seminaries into a single, bona fide seminary in 1854, a faculty of four of the most prominent parsonage educators was appointed to teach there. Located in Kampen, the school devised a curriculum and designated preferred sources. A measure of dissention existed on these matters. But in 1857, the synod of the *Christelijk Afgescheidene Gereformeerde Kerk* [Christian Seceding Reformed Church] took a significant decision in resolving a fundamental issue. It lifted Francken's *Kern* to a position not just of preference, but of definitive authority in teaching Reformed theology: "Additionally, the assembly recommends that in introducing the study of doctrinal theology, the teachers use particularly the works of Johannes à Mark, D. le Roy and A. Francken."⁸

What is fascinating about this decision in our contemporary setting, when the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) are increasingly collaborating on a number of fronts, is that for a generation immigrant ministers trained in the parsonage schools and at Kampen found their way into both American denominations. They were exposed to the

same sources, sat in the same classrooms and in several instances even served the same congregations in the Netherlands before immigrating. In fact, serving on the Kampen board of curators (trustees) when the decision just noted was taken, were Douwe Van der Werp and Bernardus De Beij. Both immigrated in the 1860s, the former in 1864 and the latter in 1868. Van der Werp became the mentor of CRC theological students before Calvin Seminary was founded in 1876, and he also edited the denomination's first periodical, *De Wachter*, after it was founded in 1867. De Beij became a leading Dutch-speaking RCA pastor in Chicago and a frequent contributor to *De Hope*, the RCA's leading Dutch-language periodical founded in 1865. The two contended strenuously over which denomination in America was to be preferred; but they did so on a substantially common theological foundation.

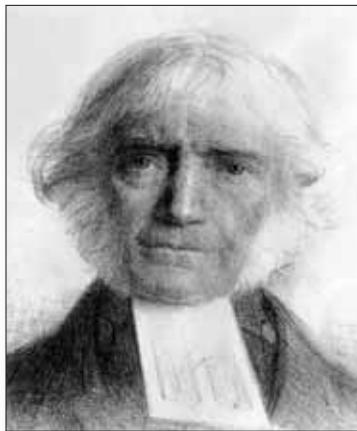
What is especially noteworthy is that Francken's *Kern* played a different role in the seminaries of the two American denominations. While Francken contributed to the formation of RCA pastors trained in the Netherlands, shaping their doctrine and preaching and approach to pastoral care, he would have had at most an indirect influence on RCA pastors trained in North America. His work was never translated into English, and theological education at Hope or what became Western Theological Seminary was entirely in English from the outset. In the CRC, however, theological education was entirely in the Dutch language until Geerhardus Vos commenced some instruction in the English language in the late 1880s. Van der Werp undoubtedly used Francken as a primary text, since he participated in making the 1857 synodical decision in the Netherlands and patterned his training after that in Kampen. Trained at

Kampen, Geert E. Boer certainly did, as the discovery of his personal copy of the book reinforces. By the time he left for Princeton in the 1894, Vos had developed a five-volume systematic theology for use in teaching doctrinal theology at Calvin Seminary. Yet even in that era, Francken was being commended by Abraham Kuyper, and my personal copy is yet another reprint done in 1894 and previously owned and signed by Henry Ahuis, a significant later CRC minister who graduated from Calvin Seminary in 1899. Francken's *Kern* may have no longer been used as the basic textbook in theology at the seminary after Vos's time, but it was still being purchased and consulted by CRC clergy at the turn of the century.

Tamme de Haan and His Edition of the *Kern*

Boer's copy of *Kern* is dated 1862, brought again to press that year by Tamme F. de Haan, one of the four original faculty members at Kampen. He had been vocal, along with his colleague Simon van Velzen, in advocating for the 1857 decision that doctrinal theology was to be taught in harmony with Francken's book. De Haan was gifted in near eastern languages, which he taught as well as doctrinal theology until he retired in 1862. He oversaw yet another reprint of the *Kern* because the most recent one was now "sold out" and no longer available. The opening sentence of his foreword describes the book as "a very orthodox, well-organized, blessed, edifying, and useful catechetical and instructional book in the truth" that had once prevailed in the Netherlands but had then been "put on the shelf" until rediscovered and reused by the leaders of the *Afscheiding*.⁹

After serving two congregations in the Netherlands, Boer immigrated to America and, declining his first call to the Spring Street CRC in Grand Rapids (now known as the First or Bates Street CRC), struggled mightily with an immediately issued second call from the persistent church; Boer accepted and moved in 1873. Sitting in the same Kampen classrooms, study-



Kampen professor Tamme Foppes de Haan, who reprinted *Kern* in 1862. Image courtesy of the Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

ing with him and also graduating in 1865 was Boer's close friend, Gerrit K. Hemkes. Hemkes immigrated in 1877 and joined Boer in 1883 as the second Calvin faculty member. Since Boer graduated from Kampen in 1865, he likely acquired his copy of *Kern* as a required textbook for his courses in systematic theology, and then continued using it when he began teaching that subject at Calvin. A greater "treasure" than Boer's copy of Francken is the faith, reflected in the *Kern*, that these first two faculty members transmitted to an early generation of CRC pastors. The book itself is worth recognizing and preserving as an important instrument in that transmission.♦

Endnotes

1. His obvious intention was to transmit these to the publisher or editor for correction in a subsequent printing of the work.

2. See *Een Man des Volkers: Het leven van Prof. Geert Egberts Boer*. G. K. Hemkes, editor (Grand Rapids: J. B. Hulst, printer, 1904) 156. Hemkes, the second appointee to the seminary and Boer's seminary classmate in the Netherlands, produced this book within a month after Boer's death in 1904. It is largely compilations from Boer's personal diary.

3. The *Nadere Reformatie* refers to a period in Dutch church history, about 1600 until 1750, during which Christians wanted to apply the principles of the Reformation in their personal lives, in their church worship, and in society as a whole. In terms of orthodoxy as well as piety, the *Nadere Reformatie* is similar to English Puritanism, and German Pietism. The term has been translated both as the Further Reformation and the Second Reformation.

4. The best, probably the only substantive, essay on Francken is by G. H. Leurdijk, "Geestelijk Leven in Maassluis: Pastoraal portret van Aegidius Francken (1676-1743)," *Documentatiebald Nadere Reformatie* 27:1 (2003) 117-144.

5. Aegidius Francken, *Kern der Christelijke Leer*, Tamme F. de Haan, ed. (Groningen: O.L. Schildkamp, 1862) 7. (Emphasis Francken's; translation by author.)

6. Harm Veldman, *Hendrik de Cock (1801-1842): Op de breuklijnen in theologie en kerk in Nederland* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2009) 569.

7. J. Van der Haar, "Welke geschriften van de oudvaders lazen de Afgescheidenen?" *Documentatiebald Nadere Reformatie* 8:2 (1984) 61-66.

8. *Handelingen en Verslagen van de Algemene Synoden van de Christelijk Afgescheidene Gereformeerde Kerk (1836-1869)* (Houten/Utrecht: Den Hertog B. V., 1984) 698. Translation by author.

9. Kern, "Aan den Lezer" by de Haan, *Documentatiebald Nadere Reformatie* 27:1 (2003) 117-144. Translation by author.

“Realms beyond the Sea”

Richard J. Mouw

Some of my earliest memories of heated discussions at gatherings of my extended family have to do with “Christian schools.” Both of my maternal grandparents had been raised in families that immigrated to New Jersey. My grandmother’s family was Christian Reformed (CRC), members of the Summer Street Church in Passaic, while my grandfather’s home church was the First Holland Reformed Church (RCA) in the same city. When they married, she transferred to his congregation. The denominational affiliation continued into the next generation; my father was an RCA pastor.

The heated disagreements about Christian education abated, however,

when I actually started attending a Christian school in the fourth grade. That step was not an easy one for my parents. I can still remember my mother saying to her sister that the only reason I was going to attend a Christian school was that “the public school is so bad that we had no alternative.”

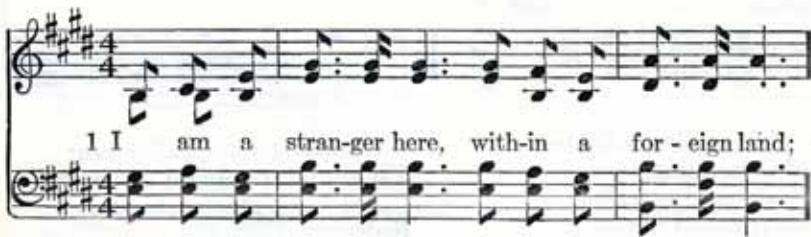
The public school in question was School Number 18 in Paterson. My father had begun a pastorate at the Riverside Reformed Church in that city, and Number 18 was the local school. On my first day at the school I was beaten up on the playground by a group of Italian boys. The neighborhood was very ethnic-conscious: it mattered whether you were Italian,



Richard J. Mouw is president of Fuller Theological Seminary where he also holds the position of Professor of Christian Philosophy. In 2007 he was awarded the Abraham Kuyper Prize for Excellence in Reformed Theology and Public Life, at Princeton Theological Seminary, by the Abraham Kuyper Center for Public Theology.

The Riverside Christian School served students from Fair Lawn, Hawthorne, and the Riverside section of Paterson, New Jersey, for six decades until it was replaced by Wyckoff Christian School in 1959. Image courtesy of the Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

395 I Am a Stranger Here, within a Foreign Land



The opening bars of "I Am a Stranger Here, within a Foreign Land" from the 1934 Christian Reformed Church Psalter Hymnal.

Black, or Polish. For a lone Dutch kid, walking to and from school was a traumatic experience, with frequent peer harassment. The one fellow student who befriended me was an Italian-American, a kid named Luigi; he told me not to blame all Italians for my treatment because "the bad kids are Northern Italians, and I'm Southern."

The classroom itself was no improvement. I disliked—and feared—my teacher intensely. She was very mean-spirited. I often pleaded tearfully in the evenings with my parents not to force me to go to school the next day. They finally decided, with great reluctance and not a little familial embarrassment, that it was time to look at a Christian school for their son.

When the day came for me to make the switch, my father took me to Riverside Christian School, a large gray house-like structure with four classrooms, two grades per room. We arrived shortly after the school day had started and the principal, Mr. [Gerrit] Dykstra, ushered me into the third/fourth grade classroom. When he introduced me to the teacher and students, the kids responded with a welcoming applause.

As I took my seat, morning devotions were beginning. Each desk had a copy of the old "red" Psalter

Hymnal. The teacher, Mrs. [Clara] Pontier, asked for a favorite hymn from the students. My memory is that more than one student shouted out "395"—and that is what we sang:

I am a stranger here, within a foreign land;
My home is far away, upon a golden strand;
Ambassador to be of realms beyond the sea—
I'm here on business for my King.

That hymn was a new one for me. But singing it with the others that day, I had a profound sense that I had somehow found my people. In retrospect, my guess in lifting our voices together, we were mixing some social consciousness with our theology—almost all of us had Dutch surnames. We were not far removed from people for whom the United States was "a foreign land," and the "realms beyond the sea" had a hint for us of a country from which our forebears had migrated. There was certainly much of that social identity thing going on in my own heart, given my recent experiences of being an outsider in an ethnic-conscious schoolyard.

Much of the ethnic overlay of that experience of singing that hymn has become far less important to me over the years. What has stayed with me, though, is the fact of being "here on

business for my King." For that—as well as for that youthful experience of a sense of belonging—I am eternally grateful.

Decades later I visited Calvin College to be interviewed for a faculty appointment. The final step in the process was an interview with President William Spoelhof. I was warned ahead of time that he would quiz me about denominational matters—in those days, not many new faculty came from non-CRC environs.

The warning was correct. Spoelhof quickly got to the subject: "You're RCA," he remarked. "Are you familiar with our stand on Christian schools?" I replied that I was not only very familiar with that stand, but that I had attended a Christian



Richard Mouw has been on the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary since 1985, serving as president since 1993; he served on the Calvin College faculty from 1968 until 1985. Image courtesy of the Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

school in New Jersey for several years. "Oh, which one?" he asked. When I said it was Riverside Christian in Paterson, he beamed. "That's where I went to school! Great!"

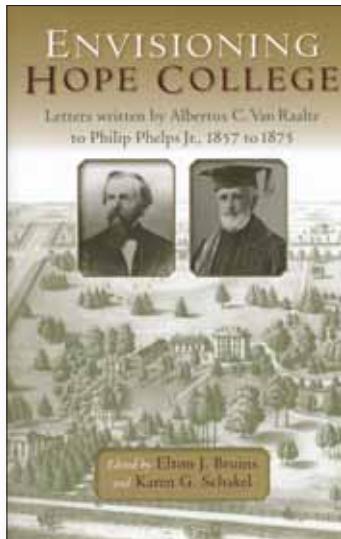
I departed Calvin College in 1985, after seventeen years on the faculty, for a position at Fuller Seminary in California. On one of my return visits

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to Calvin College, shortly before Dr. Spoelhof died, I had a few minutes with him. He was warm in thanking me for my years of teaching at the college. His parting words: "I knew you were OK the first time I met you. After all, you went to Riverside!"

Afterwards, I wished that I had told him about what I had begun to learn there about being an ambassador for "realms beyond the sea." ☙

book notes



**Envisioning Hope College:
Letters written by
Albertus C. Van Raalte to
Philip Phelps Jr., 1857-1875**

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