

Some Background Information on a Letter Written About 1880 to Mr. and Mrs. Arie Rietveld, Dutch Immigrants Living in South Holland, Illinois, by Their Former Pastor in the Netherlands and His Wife, the Rev. and Mrs. W.J. Oudegeest.

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The letter being described was originally, of course, written in Dutch. In 1941 a very rough English translation was incorporated into a typed and mimeographed genealogy of the Arie Rietveld descendants compiled by the late John C. Penn and the late Jane Rietveld (Mrs. Albert) Tilstra for distribution within the family. The letter also appeared in an updated genealogy of the descendants of Arie's son Cornelis Rietveld, which was compiled in 1972 and distributed by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Rietveld of RFD Bensley Avenue, Chicago Heights, Ill. 60411.

Notes with the above translations of the letter state the letter carried no date, and that the postmark was illegible. However, it can be given the date of 1880 \pm 2 years on the basis of internal evidence, plus the fact that it is known from American ship passenger lists and from Dutch emigration records that the Arie Rietveld family emigrated from Holland during late August and early September of 1868. In the letter, the Rev. and Mrs. Oudegeest (who each wrote a section of it) indicate that ten years earlier the Rietvelds had written them from America concerning their new life there. Further, they state that the ten-year tenure of their son Jacob in the East Indies, begun in 1873, has not yet expired. These facts together date the letter as being written within two years of the year 1880. If one could find mention^{ed} in Dutch or Dutch-American newspapers or other primary sources the date of the catastrophic flood in the village of Niekuik that the letter describes as a very recent event, a much more precise date for the letter could be determined.

The letter's recipients, Arie Rietveld (1818-1899) and his wife Jannigje Gelderblom (1819-1880), emigrated to the United States in 1868 from the village of Schelluinen, which is located in the southeastern corner of the Province of Zuid-Holland. In America the couple settled with their eight younger, unmarried children on a 110-acre farm in the growing Dutch-American settlement in Thornton Township that later came to be known as South Holland. Arie and Jannigje's oldest daughter Johanna, her husband Jacob Vander Kooij and their three small children emigrated with them. Many descendants of Arie and Jannigje Rietveld live in South Holland and the south suburban Chicago area today.

According to membership records of the First Reformed Church of South Holland, Arie's wife Jannigje died 20 February 1880, and therefore she may not have been living when the Oudegeest letter from Holland arrived. The same records give the date of Arie's death as 12 February 1899.

In Schelluinen the Rietvelds had been members of the Reformed Church (Hervormde Kerk), and in America they affiliated with the First Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois. Their pastor in Schelluinen prior to emigration had been the Rev. Willem Jacob Oudegeest, Sr., who like Arie had a large family. The letter

makes it clear that there had been friendly relations between the two couples, and between their children as well. The families exchanged portrait photographs just prior to the Rietveld emigration. Not long after their arrival in America, the Rietvelds wrote the Oudegeests a letter describing their lives in their new setting in some detail. However, when the Rev. and Mrs. Oudegeest write their letter to the Rietvelds around 1880, ten years have passed without correspondence. Rev. Oudegeest is now the pastor emeritus in another small town where one of his sons is the minister. He is now of advanced age. Much has transpired in both families, of which their correspondents are unaware.

According to civil records in the Netherlands, Arie Rietveld was born 14 May 1818 at Hoogblokland, a rural village in the Province of Zuid-Holland not far from Schelluinen. He was the illegitimate son of a 23-year-old servant girl named Cornelia Rietveld who never learned to write. As late as the date of her son's marriage in 1843, she claimed not to know the identity of the father. Arie's maternal grandfather, Teunis Leendertszoon Rietveld was a minor provincial official in the vicinity-- a fish and game warden. About a year-and-a-half after Arie's birth, his mother married Teunis Verschoor, who for many years operated a water-pumping windmill between the villages of Hoornaar and Schelluinen.

Arie was a young farm-hand when on 31 August 1843 he married, at the village of Hoornaar, the daughter of a burgemeester. The bride, Jannigje Gelderblom (born 20 June 1819 at Schelluinen) was the daughter of Izaak Gelderblom (1783-1846) the current burgemeester at little Schelluinen, and his second wife Johanna Sterrenburg (c. 1792-1857). Between 1843 and 1846 the young Rietveld couple lived first at Hardinxveld on the Waal River, and then in Hoornaar, during which period Arie is designated in civil records as a skipper's mate. After Izaak Gelderblom's death, Arie and Jannigje Rietveld and their growing family moved to Schelluinen, where Arie is mentioned in earlier records of him there as a laborer. After living in Schelluinen for 22 years, the Arie Rietveld family, now numbering nine children, a son-in-law and three grandchildren, decided to emigrate to the United States. They were undoubtedly influenced in their choice to locate in the Dutch-American farming community near Thornton, Illinois by the fact that Jannigje's elder half-sister Hendrika and her family had already been living there for 19 years. Many other persons from the villages north and west of the Dutch town of Gorinchem had emigrated to the settlement south of Chicago as well. Undoubtedly more than a few of these were acquaintances of the Arie Rietveld family.

In the official Dutch emigration records for 1868, Arie Rietveld is called a farmer of average or middle means, a piece of information underscored by the fact that he was able to buy a 110-acre farm in a locale that had originally been settled some 20 years earlier. On their emigration journey, Arie and his family traveled first to Liverpool, England. There they boarded a British steamer, the S.S. France, which sailed on 19 August 1868 with 669 passengers and arrived at New York 12 days later, on 1 September. The Rietvelds, like most of those aboard, were steerage passengers.

(This is a xerox copy of the letter as it appears in: The Rietvelds, February 19, 1972, Descendants of Cornelis Rietveld and Marie Van Oostenbrugge. Handwritten clarifications and footnotes are my own.--P.H.V.)
Letter from W.J.Oudegeest, Sr., and his wife M.Oudegeest (nee Snel) to Arie Rietveld.

The front face of the original envelope with address but no stamp is included.

The address is as follows:-

North America

To Mr. A. Rietveld

T orthon
near Chicago
Illinois

In pencil the word T orthon is corrected to Thornton. Cancellation stamp indicates that it was mailed in Hertogenbosch, but the date cannot be deciphered.

An enclosure with this letter says:-

Ons adres is:

Den Wellew. Heere H.B.Oudegeest
President

to
Engelen

by SU Hertogenbosch

(He Engelen)
(B Hertogenbosch)

A free translation of the letter follows:-

Dear Friends:

Sincerely I wish that this letter come to you in good circumstances. After a long silence we wish to send you this and that concerning ourselves and my wife was good enough to do this in my place. Therefore I need not add very much to it. I wish only to mention the great and rare blessing, that coming to an old age, we are still well. Although already in 1873, after 52 years of service, I have become "Emeritus", yet I still take over occasionally the ministerial work of my son Hein, with whom we live, and it does not tire me when I take his place in the pulpit. All my eight children are well placed and according to their wishes. Jacob who in 1873 moved to the East Indies was first preacher in Palembang, later at Fort de Kock, and now since Janaury 1st at Padang. That I and my wife may live to see him return to us after 10 years of service. Now I live in Engelen by the Pasch (?) right in the middle of my children who come to see us often.

(Bosch?)

You wrote us in your letter of 10 years ago, very much about your family, about your work, and your mode of living. I would keenly like to hear from you. The postage is not so expensive to as in times gone by. May we hear much from you and yours, that we may believe, that you were never sorry to leave Schelluinen. Sincerest greetings to you and yours, and greatest possible "heil" we wish you.

Uw toegenegon vriend

(health)

W. J. Oudegeest, Sr.

The part by his wife follows. There are no punctuation marks in this part of the letter. ①

You and your husband Arie and how goes it with your children. Above all how are Antje and her husband and children doing? We talk often of your son Jan, who had a stiff arm. How often our boys had fun with him. Yes, we often do, as you do, turn over the portraits of you all. ② I would so gladly know if your sister Drieka ③ is still living. If so, then send her our regards. I still keep the little sweater (Borstrokje) which she knitted for me for our daughter Jansje. Also it is remarkable that the oldest and youngest are still unmarried to this day. Last summer we spent (a day or three) three days in Gorkum, ④ and saw then many of old acquaintances. But we did not go to Chelluinen. ⑤ The time and occasion were not there. Many of friends came to us and we heard that after we left, many changes have come about. Also that the daughter of you brother Cornelis who had named ⑥ de Groot, had died. Also his oldest son, and now we hear that you brother Cornelis ⑦ has died. That must have been a hard blow to you as it was to us. And so there are many who are no more since we were there. We can hardly thank the good God enough who has spared our lives. ⑧

What satisfaction it will do us to hear from you that everything goes well by you and yours. That there has been a terrible "break through" (a break in a dyke), that the whole village of Niekuijk is under water, you will have read in the daily papers. 70000 people were deprived of all their belongings, also much cattle was drowned. What a catastrophe! Much is being given but so much is needed to help all these people and to maintain them but they cannot give what they have lost. Now I am going to close. Greetings from us and also from the preacher, and my son Hein to you and all your children. I call myself

M Oudegeest

nee Snel

P.S. Now write soon.

Footnotes:

- 1) This part of the letter is directed to Mrs. Rietveld.
- 2) This refers to Arie and Jannigje Rietveld's eldest daughter. Her name was actually Johanna, but she was known by this nickname. She married Jacob Vander Kooy in the Netherlands, and she and her husband and their three small children accompanied her parents to America in 1868. Both she and her husband were living at the time of the letter.
- 3) Ten photograph-portraits of members of the W.J. Oudegeest family given to the Rietveld family of the eve of their emigration still exist. They are among some 40-50 photos of friends and relatives that the Rietvelds brought with them to this country. The photo collection is now in the possession of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Verduin, R.R.1, Box 141, Chicago Heights, Ill. 60411.
- 4) This refers to Mrs. Rietveld's older half-sister Hendrika Gouwens, nee Gelderblom, who also lived in South Holland. She and her husband Tijs Gouwens emigrated from Lekkerkerk in 1849. According to Ross K. Ettema's reference book, Vol. II, she died 7 Feb. 1900, and her husband preceeded her is death 16 Aug. 1881.
- 5) This is the common name for Gorinchem, the principal town in the Schelluinen area.
- 6) An old spelling variation of Schelluinen.
- 7) Meaning unclear. Quite possibly the Dutch word for "married" was mistranslated as "named", or perhaps "de Groot" was a nickname of the brother or niece of Mrs. Rietveld that are mentioned.
- 8) i.e., Cornelis Gelderblom, who did not emigrate.