

Origins

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of The Archives

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

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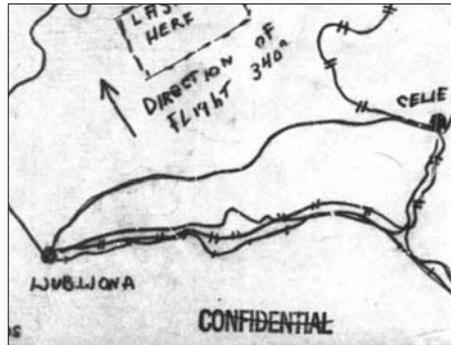
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Cover photo:

Saakje and Jacob Koenes with their helpers
on the Groenstein farm.



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Time to Renew Your Subscription

As in years past we take this opportunity to 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, the same price as when we began in 1982. Gifts above \$10 are acknowledged as charitable gifts to *Origins* and we are grateful for such generosity.

This Issue

In this issue we have two autobiographies, the story of one of the smaller religious groups within the Dutch immigration experience, and an account of a flyer who gave his life during the Second World War. Interest in Martin Douma's service as a bombardier began with an email request from Slovenia and was possible now because military documents are

now available and personal accounts are being distributed via the internet. Janet Sheeres details the history of the Netherlands Reformed congregations, primarily in West Michigan, whose experiences had previously been overshadowed by the stories of the larger Reformed Church in America and Christian Reformed Church groups. Although many stories of Dutch citizens immigrating to North America have been recorded and told, what is unique about Jacob Koenes is emigrating three times, first to Canada and twice the United States, which he recorded years later in retirement. We also present the next installment of Meindert DeJong's account of his youth, written a number of years after retiring from a career of writing books for the *young*, with the aid of Judith Hartzell.

Available On-Line

Since our last report we have added to large collections of data via our website. A team of volunteers completed entering the birth, marriage, anniversary, and death postings in the *Banner*, 1985-1995. Because these

totaled more than 34,000 entries, the data are available in two alphabetically sorted PDF formatted files, A-L and M-Z which are available at <http://www.calvin.edu/hh/Banner/Banner.htm>. With these two files, this site now provides access to all such data for the years 1985-2009. Another major project available at http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/Dutch_Emigrants.htm presents information about Dutch emigrants to North America, 1946-1963, most of whom went to Canada via Pier 21. These are data on 9,703 families assisted by the Immigration Committee of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. It should be noted that most of data for the years 1955-1956 are missing.

News from the Archives

During the summer, we received and processed an additional 22 cubic feet of material for our Christian school records collection. These materials came primarily from the former Millbrook, Creston, and Oakdale schools, as part of the reorganization of the Grand Rapids Christian schools. We processed a collection of

original documents and first-edition books by college alumni and authors—Meindert DeJong, his brother David DeJong, and Peter DeVries. We opened for research the papers of Dr. Ralph Blocksma, noted plastic and reconstructive surgeon and medical missionary during the two decades following WWII. Also processed were the records of First Minneapolis Christian Reformed Church; the papers of WWII prisoner-of-war Jacob Fridsma; and the photographs taken by Dr. Lee Pool, while a student at Calvin. Two of our volunteers have also made significant progress in organizing the H. Evan Runner papers.

In addition, we received the records from the college's Enrollment Management, 1992-1997; college president's office, 2007-2008; various seminary committees from the seminary, 2010; the CRC Board of Trustees, 1992-2002; and the CRC Chaplaincy files, 2000-2009; the latter includes the denomination's work on Just War theory. We accessioned three carousels of slides of San Francisco's Friendship House from Richard Venema of Mira Loma, CA; Hans

VanGinhoven's WWII prison letters from his family in Alberta; and Robert Swierenga's research files on Dutch Chicago, Dutch Jewry, and Dutch immigration.

In addition to several of the processing efforts noted above, one of our volunteers has brought the translations of the Holland, Michigan, Central Avenue CRC minutes to 1907 and is now working on the letters written by Peter Verwolf from the prison in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, at the very end of the nineteenth century. Three of our volunteers continued dutifully keying in data for the project to make vital records information from the *Banner* available online. Lastly, we added 110 genealogies to our extensive collection and its catalog. The entire list of our family histories is viewable at http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/genealogies_page.htm.

Publications

Eerdmans will publish Dr. Kurt Selles's history of CRC mission efforts in China during the first half of the twentieth century this fall. The book

will be produced by the RCA Historical Series, with funding provided by *Origins*. We are now beginning to prepare a newly translated and significantly annotated version of the CRC synodical minutes, 1857-1880.

Staff

Richard Harms is the curator of the Archives and editor of *Origins*; Hendrina Van Spronsen is office coordinator; Wendy Blankespoor is librarian and cataloging archivist; Melanie Vander Wal is departmental assistant; Dr. Robert Bolt is field agent and assistant archivist. Our volunteers include Rev. Dr. Paul Bremer, Mrs. Willene De Groot, Mr. Ed Gerritsen, Mr. Fred Greidanus, Mr. Ralph Haan, Mrs. Helen Meulink, Rev. Gerrit W. Sheeres, Mrs. Janet Sheeres, and Mr. Ralph Veenstra. ▀



Richard H. Harms

An American Flyer Remembered: Martin Douma Jr., 1920–1944

Richard H. Harms

Author's Note:

On 27 February 2010 outside Celje, a town of approximately 46,000 in western central Slovenia, members of that community gathered to remember the crew of a United States B-24 bomber that had been shot down sixty-six years earlier. In preparation for that event, one of the event's organizers, Marko Zdovc, had discovered from a Heritage Hall website of obituary data of military (Gold Star) deaths in the Young Calvinist that one of the crew members was from Grand Rapids.¹ Zdovc asked if more information were available on Second Lieutenant Martin Douma Jr., married to Helen, and the son of Martin and Lena Douma. A check of obituaries and the Grand Rapids telephone directory revealed that several of Douma's siblings were still living in the area. With information from these family members, data from now available government documents, and accounts of war experiences available via the internet, the story of the sacrifice of Douma and his crewmates emerged.

Since 1998 Richard Harms has been the archivist in Heritage Hall and editor of Origins. He currently serves as the chair of the Michigan State Historical Preservation Review Board. He has written extensively on topics related to Grand Rapids and Michigan history as well as the Dutch in North America.

Martin Douma Jr., the seventh child, the third of four sons, was born in Grand Rapids on 24 November 1920, to Martin and Lena Douma.² The elder Douma had been born in Hommerts, Friesland, the Netherlands, and his family immigrated to Grand Rapids in 1891, when he was four. He was married to Grand Rapids native Lena Kloet in 1907. They lived on the city's northwest side, where he worked as a painter, and where they joined Alpine Avenue Christian Reformed Church. One of their daughters died as an infant, so that Martin grew up in a family of ten siblings. He graduated from Union High School in 1938 and went to work as a sandblaster at the National Brass Company, which manufactured cabinet hardware for the furniture industry.

Capable of more than an entry-level position as a sandblaster, by early 1941 he was working at the Globe Knitting Works on Ionia Street, just south of the city's Union Station railroad yard. Like other knitting mills, Globe hired primarily women to run its knitting machines that produced a variety of items, particularly woolen underwear. As it had during WW I, in 1941 the firm won the first of several United States government contracts to produce underwear for the military. By 1944 its production reached \$6 million with 1,200 employees.³ Douma began as a machine operator, but his talents and ability led to several promotions in the rapidly



Martin Douma in his flight jacket. Image courtesy of William Douma.

growing firm, first to production clerk and, by the summer of 1942, as a foreman. At Globe he met and began dating a production machine operator, Helen Roest, the daughter of a city firefighter.

Twenty-one when war was declared, Douma and his older brothers, George and Leonard, were eligible for military service. On 4 August 1942 Douma enlisted in the Army Air Force⁴ as a private. The attack on Pearl Harbor and the German invasions in Europe demonstrated the importance of an air force, particularly the strategic importance of long-range, heavy bombers able to bypass natural and military barriers to deliver

concentrated firepower. Further, aircraft allowed the industrial economies of both Germany and the United States to reduce the number of front-line personnel needed to deliver such military firepower. Instead, personnel in manufacturing could be utilized to produce the equipment and ammunition delivered by a significantly small number of individuals than would have been the case with conventional ground forces. As the world's leading industrial economy at mid-century, the US was able to use its factory output to quintuple its number of available military aircraft at the attack on Pearl Harbor (12,297 aircraft) compared to V-J Day.⁵

With the declaration of war on 8 December 1941 the Army took steps to increase the number of Air Force personnel, which required a reconsideration of qualifications of applicants. Because of wartime need the 354,000 Air Force personnel in December 1941 grew to 1.6 million in one year, to a peak of 2.4 million in 1944. Because of the engineering and mathematical skills needed, a college education had been required for being considered for pilots (including co-pilots), navigators, and bombardiers before the war. Because of the limits resulting from this educational requirement, in 1942 aptitude and ability rather than education accomplishments became the determining factor for applicants to become flight crew members. With requisite skills and aptitudes the war army trained an estimated 193,000 pilots, 50,000 navigators, and 45,000 bombardiers.⁶

For the US, the B-17 and the newer B-24 were the long-range aircraft



The crew of Peacemaker, probably taken while still in the United States. Douma is in the front row at the far left. Image courtesy of William Douma.

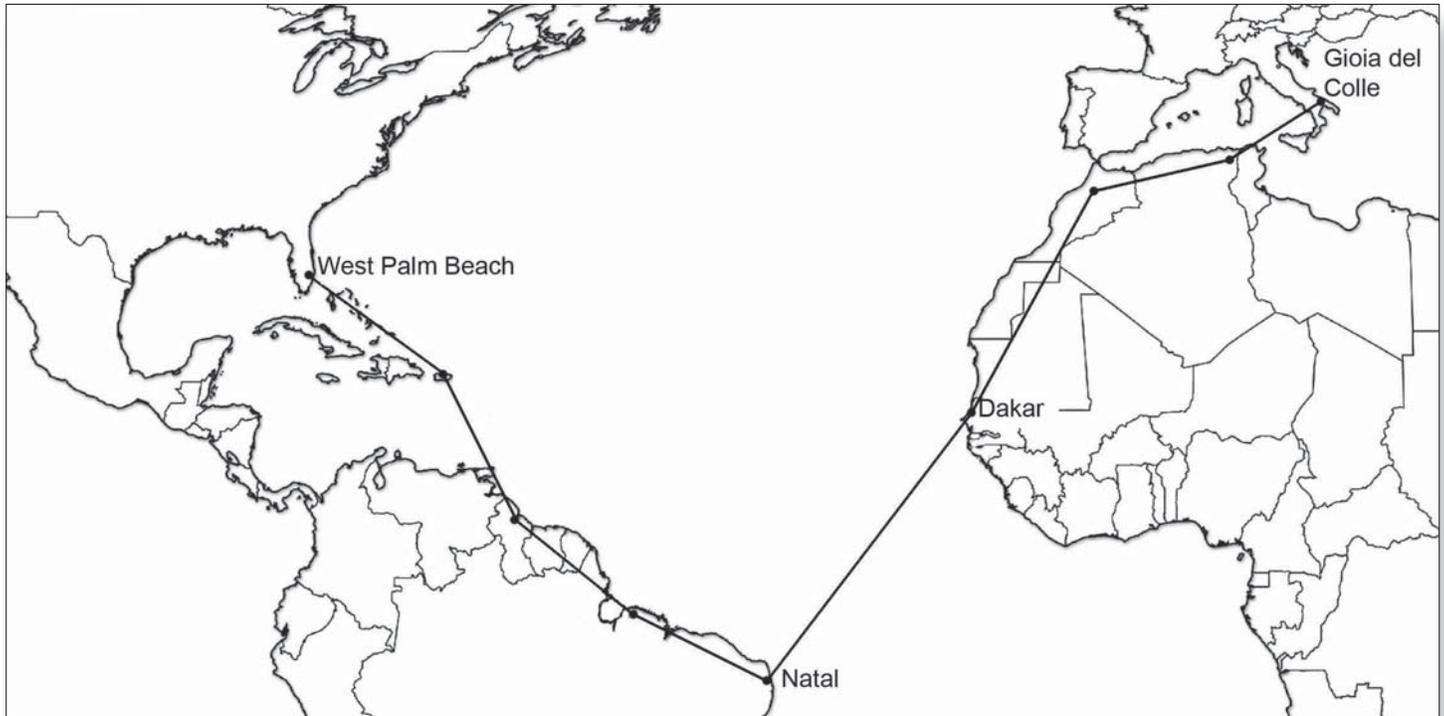
that fought the war in Europe. Prior to the ground invasion these heavy bombers took the Allied war to the German mainland and after D-Day provided support for the invasion. After basic training Douma passed the Stanine (Standard Nine) Test to be trained as a bombardier. Bombardiers for these heavy planes needed skills in both navigation and piloting since once they had sighted targets through the Norden bombsight as they approached the target at the Initial Point, the pilot turned over control of the airplane to the bombardier with the radio message, "You have the plane." For the next minute and forty-five seconds, assisted by the Automatic Flight Control Equipment (auto pilot), in a cramped space under the nose turret the bombardier flew the aircraft on a steady and level course until releasing the five to six tons of bombs. Once the bombardier sounded "bombs away" the pilot resumed control and immediately began flying evasive maneuvers. The crew did not need to hear the bombardier's announcement of this since a slight

bounce of the aircraft upward indicated to all on board that the bombs had been released.

Private Douma spent twelve weeks in specialized training, which included 325 hours in ground school and 61 hours in the air. Ground school included learning the theory of bombing, the physics of dropping bombs, the affects of altitude, air speed, wind direction and velocity, and temperature on dropping bombs. Training was considered secret—so secret that one account from the time reports that

bombardiers used no text books and took no lecture notes.⁷ On bombing runs students learned to use various circular slide rules (called computers) to factor in the variables and calculate the point at which to release the bombs.

Training was also given in the use of the Norden Bombsight, with its gyroscopically leveled platform for the sight head, which consisted of a mechanical analog computer that calculated the impact point of the bombs, a small telescope used to sight the target, and a system of electric motors and gyroscopes that moved the telescope so a single point on the ground remained stationary in the sight. The technology of the bombsight was deemed so secret that bombardiers took an oath to protect it with their lives. If a plane was to make an emergency landing in enemy territory, the bombardier was to fire a thermite gun installed on the sight; the heat of the resulting chemical reaction melted the unit into an unusable mass of metal and glass.⁸ After missions, the bombsights were covered in canvas,



The "southern route," with refueling stops, that aircraft, including Peacemaker, followed to southern Europe or Asia.

removed from a plane by the bombardier, and stored in specially guarded vaults. Prior to the next departure the still-covered bombsights were brought to the plane and installed by the bombardier. The canvas covering was not removed until after take-off. During the flight the bombardier adjusted and calibrated the sight.

Training in the use of the bombsight began from a stationary tower sighting on a moving target on the floor or ground. Flight training came in a Beechcraft AT-11 "Kansan," a twin engine, twin-tail plane. Successful bombardiers were required to be able to drop bombs within 1,500 feet of the target from an altitude of 20,000 feet. Since the Kansan had a maximum altitude of 16,000 feet, 10,000 feet when fully loaded, the radius of accuracy was reduced to within 700 feet of the target at 10,000 feet.⁹

After completing training Douma was commissioned a Second Lieutenant and assigned to Davis-Monthan Field, Tucson, Arizona, where the recently activated 451st Bombard-

ment Group was being organized.¹⁰ In late June, while the group's pilots and some of the ground crew went for ten days of training at the School of Applied Tactics in Orlando, Florida, Douma was able to return to Grand Rapids on furlough. While home, on 26 June, Douma and Helen Roest married.

Once back on duty, Douma was introduced to his new plane, a B-24H-05-FO Liberator heavy bomber, serial no. 42-52101, one of 8,700 bombers manufactured at Ford's massive Willow Run, Michigan, complex. His crewmates were: pilot, 2nd Lieutenant Edward D. Johnson; copilot, 2nd Lieutenant Gene F. McEntee; navigator, 2nd Lieutenant Kenneth L. Hunt; 1st engineer and upper turret gunner, Staff Sergeant Clayton J. Nolecheck; 2nd engineer and right waist gunner, Staff Sergeant Howard E. Grove; tail turret gunner, Staff Sergeant Walter G. Batory; 3rd engineer and nose turret gunner, Sergeant Clifford D. Williams Jr.; radio operator and left waist gunner, Sergeant Richard D. Heaney, and

lower turret gunner, Sergeant Edwin M. Berney.

The bomber, named *Peacemaker* by the crew, was a somewhat modified model of earlier versions of the B-24, with a more maneuverable electrically operated nose turret, better windows in the other three turrets, and an improved bombsight and auto pilot. It was powered by four turbo supercharged Pratt & Whitney Radial engines, capable of generating 1,000 hp each. Its cruising speed was 215 mph (maximum was 290 mph) and could fly as high as 28,000 feet. Without a payload it had a range of 3,700 miles, with a heavy load (8,000 pounds) it traveled 800 miles; in order to be able to return that meant a maximum distance of 400 miles from base to target. Typical payloads were 5,000 pounds of bombs, with a range of 800 miles from base to target.

The 451st Bomb Group was comprised of four squadrons (724th–727th) each of which was comprised of four bombers. *Peacemaker* and her crew were in the 724th Squadron.

The Group trained further at Wendover Army Air Base, 100 miles west of Salt Lake City. By early September the Group transferred to Fairmont Army Air Field, southwest of Lincoln, Nebraska. The B-24's fuel tanks were located in the upper fuselage and its lightweight construction increased its range and optimized assembly line production, but made it vulnerable to battle damage. Because of its size and weight, flying the bomber was physically demanding for the pilots and it was particularly awkward to fly in formation. This became clear during the training of the 724th, when two of the squadron's B-24s crashed in mid-air, killing all onboard both planes.

In November 1943 the Group received orders to begin moving to an unspecified destination. Ground personnel went via train to Virginia and then via transport ship across the Atlantic, some landing in North Africa by Christmas, while others were onboard ship in the harbor of Naples, Italy, that day. The flight crews began the two-month process of flying the sixty-two planes in stages by way of the "southern ferry route" to either southern Europe or the Far East. Each plane flew the same route but about an hour apart, landing in West Palm Beach, Florida, for refueling; then an overnight stay in Puerto Rico; refueling in Atkinson, British Guiana, and in Belém, Brazil; followed by several days in Natal, Brazil, close to the eastern-most point of Brazil. In Natal the planes were fitted with temporary rubber auxiliary fuel tanks in the bomb bay for the 2,000-mile flight across the Atlantic to Dakar, Senegal. After an overnight stay in Dakar the next flight was to Marrakech, Morocco, and then to Telergma, Algeria, where all the Group's sixty-two bombers arrived without incident. In Telergma the flight crews learned that they had been assigned to the 15th Army Air Force's 49th Bomb Wing operating out of Italy.¹¹

As the Group waited for an airfield to be prepared in Italy, several weeks were spent flying practice missions over North Africa. On 2 January, having been sent via two different harbors, the ground crews of the Group's four squadrons were reunited in Italy and sent to a former German airfield near Gioia del Colle, Italy.

The airfield was then home to a British fighter squadron, so the Americans began erecting their tents and other structures in preparation for the arrival of its air echelon in an adjacent olive grove. The airfield with its dirt runway was sufficient for fighters, but it was the rainy season in the Mediterranean, which turned the dirt to mud, making the runway unsuitable for the heavy bombers that weighed over 60,000 pounds at take-off when loaded with twelve 500-pound bombs and 27,000 gallons of high-octane aviation fuel. Army engineers laid metal mesh mats to reinforce the runway for the bombers which arrived in formation on Thursday, 20 January 1944. The

451st has the distinction of the only bomb group in the 125th Air Force to bring its planes into an assigned combat area without a single loss.¹²

According to procedures, the first mission for the 451st, three days after arriving from Algeria, was practice flying with the experienced 98th and 376th Bomb Groups. The first combat mission was a week later against a radar station in Albania. There were no enemy fighters or anti-aircraft fire (flak), yet no one managed to hit the target. The next mission, targeting another radar station, was more successful although one flier was wounded by shrapnel and one of the planes in the 724th crashed on landing because one of its tires had been punctured by flak. The Group's first combat deaths occurred on the fourth mission (8 February) when the 726th squadron's *Old Tub* crashed after take-off, killing eight of the ten crew.¹³ Five days later the Group was given Peenemünde, Germany, on the Baltic Sea, a site of rocket manufacturing



Brought into war service in 1943, the B-24 was a rugged heavy bomber, but the placement of its fuel tanks throughout the upper fuselage and its lightweight construction made it vulnerable to battle damage and a tendency to catch fire.

and launching, as its target. The distance from southern Italy was approximately 900 miles, too far away for the bombers to be able to return to base. Instead, pilots were instructed to find “any friendly territory” after their bomb runs. Air crews considered such instructions to be suicide missions, but were relieved when a red flare arched over the field just prior to take-off indicating the mission had been aborted.¹⁴

On Sunday, 20 February 1944, the United States launched Operation Argument, six days of air missions over Germany, six days that came known as the “Big Week.” The plan was to draw Germany’s air force—the Luftwaffe—into a decisive battle, by launching massive bomber attacks on the German aircraft industry. Since the Luftwaffe consisted primarily of fighters, the scale and nature of these bomber attacks would force the German planes into battle. The missions were flown by the US 8th Air Force, the British Air Force, both based in England, and the US 15th based in Italy. American bombers flew during the day, while the British bomber command flew against the same targets at night.¹⁵ The Americans believed that their B-17 and B-24 bombers, typically with ten .50-caliber machine guns or more each, remaining in tight flying formations, would have the overlapping fire needed against the German fighters, primarily Focke-Wulf 190s and Messerschmitt 109s.¹⁶

The 451st Group had flown missions on the 17th, 18th, and 19th prior to Big Week, so was allowed to rest for the first two days of the attacks.¹⁷ On the Tuesday the 451st was briefed on their mission against the Messerschmitt aircraft factory outside of Regensburg, Germany (north and a bit east of Munich). That area of Germany was a major manufacturing area of much war material and therefore was also a major railroad

hub with marshaling yards. Consequently it was well defended by the Luftwaffe and by anti-aircraft guns; Regensburg had three concentric rings of these guns that could fill a cubic mile of airspace with flying shrapnel at one time. That day the planes of the 15th Air Force fought their way to their targets dropped their bombs, at a cost of 13 bombers lost, but 40 Luftwaffe aircraft were destroyed (in terms of personnel this was 130 to 40). On the flight back *Peacemaker* ran low on oxygen and the crew decided that everyone but the pilot and co-pilot would go off oxygen, despite the high altitude. Since they did this at the risk of their lives, each was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.¹⁸

The next day the 451st flew against a large weapons manufacturer in Steyr, Austria, due east of Munich. Bad weather and fewer defenses and defenders made that mission a bit easier.¹⁹ Thursday was an off day for the Group.

The weather forecast indicated that Friday the 25th would be clear over Germany, and another wave of attacks was directed at the German aircraft industry—targets considered so important that planners were willing to accept and expect significant losses. The 8th Air Force from England and the 15th from Italy were again to be sent against the well-defended manufacturing targets.

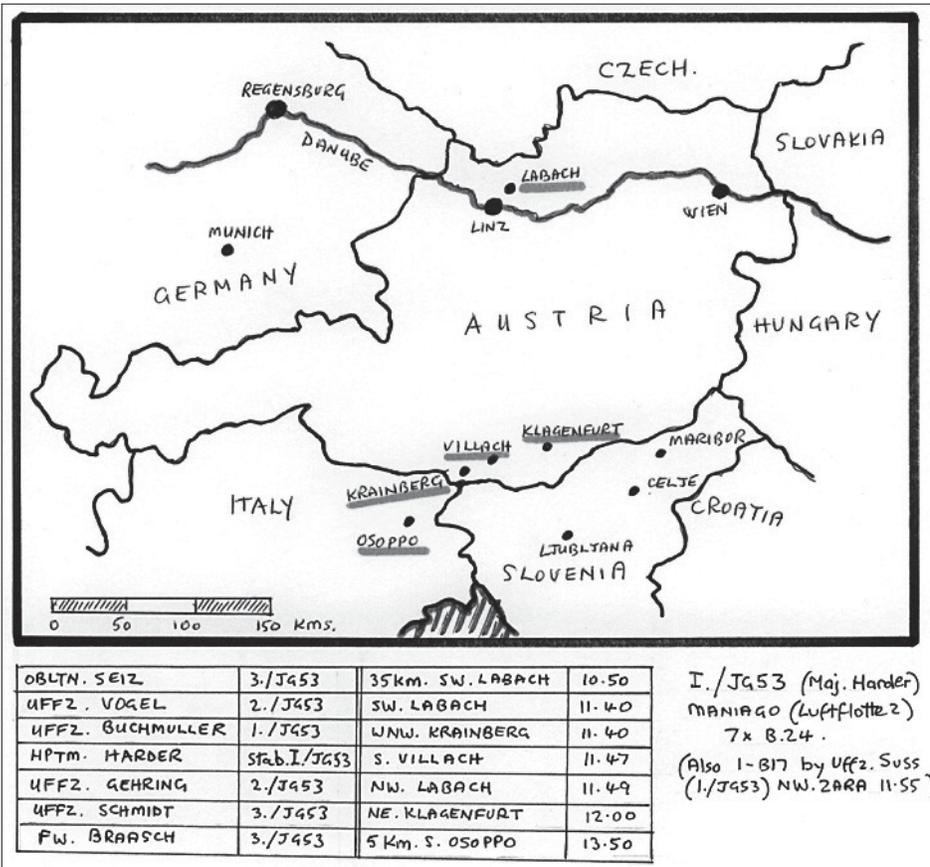
During the night of the 24th and into the morning of the 25th, ground crews, as was typically the case,



The last flight path of Peacemaker and seven of the ten crew members.

prepared the bombers for the mission. The high-octane fuel tanks were carefully filled, the oil tanks for each engine were topped off, and thousands of pounds of .50-caliber ammunition and bombs were loaded into each bomber. At 2:30 a.m., while the ground crew was working, the air crews of the 451st were awakened and told that they would be involved in a “maximum effort day.”²⁰ Breakfast was at 3 a.m. and the crews assembled in the briefing room at 4 a.m.

When the briefing officer pulled aside the curtain on the mission board the crews saw that the 15th Air Force again was flying against Regensburg. From their experiences the previous Tuesday the fliers knew that casualties would probably be high. Three Bomb Groups in succession were targeting the Prufening Aircraft Factory, with the 451st second in order. The first



A German map of air combat action against bombers from Italy on 25 February 1945. The underlined cities were the airbases from which the German fighters left for battle. Image courtesy of Marko Zdovc.

group would have an advantage of surprise, but the second and third groups would encounter more intense and better-targeted anti-aircraft fire. After the Tuesday attacks the briefing officer told the crews that they could expect more than 200 German fighters from various bases in southern Germany and Austria as they approached and left their targets.²¹ At this point the enlisted crew members left the briefing, while the officers remained to receive specific flight instructions.

The enlisted men joined with the ground crew to finish preparing the planes, with the crew chiefs physically inspecting the planes. The crews also manually turned each propeller to bring the oil that had settled to the bottom of the cylinders during the night back up into the engine,

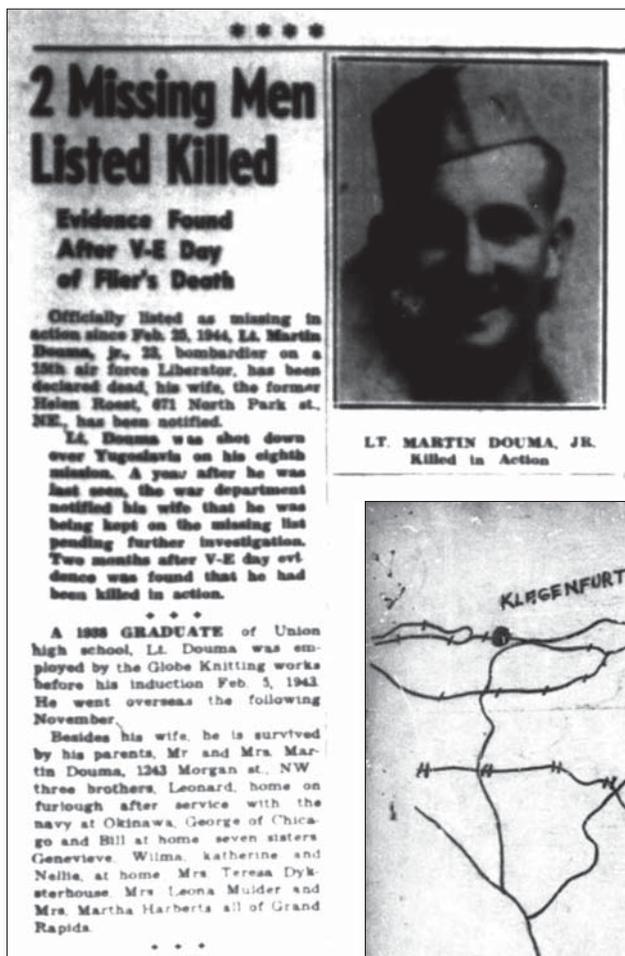
otherwise when the engines were started the resulting pressure at the bottom of the cylinders could cause the engine to rupture. By 4:30 a.m. the officers arrived and the air crews boarded, preparing the plane, with the bombardier mounting the bomb sight. An hour later all was ready and the crew awaited the order to start engines. The *Peacemaker* crew that day consisted of pilot Edward D. Johnson, copilot Gene F. McEntee, navigator Kenneth L. Hunt, and bombardier Martin Douma Jr., all 2nd Lieutenants; Staff Sergeants, upper turret gunner and 1st engineer Clayton J. Nohlecheck, right waist gunner and 2nd engineer Howard E. Grove, tail turret gunner Walter G. Batory; and Sergeants lower turret gunner Edwin M. Berney, left waist gunner and radio operator Richard D. Heaney, and

nose turret gunner and 3rd engineer Clifford D. Williams Jr. Batory and Grove were last-minute replacements for James H. Williamson and Arnold Lampmans, who were on sick call. The ten took their positions for take-off; for takeoff and landing only the two pilots were in their flight seats; only when airborne did the rest of the crew occupy their duty stations.

During the preceding rainy four weeks the Gioia del Colle airfield had become increasingly more muddy. Returning planes threw up rooster tails of spray as they landed, with ground crews wagering on which plane would throw up the highest rooster tail. At 8:30 the planes began to take off, the first planes circling until all had taken off and taken their places in formation. As one after another of the heavy bombers took off, more and more mud oozed up through the metal mesh runway; eventually one bomber slid off the taxiway and sunk to her axles in the mud. *Peacemaker*, with forty other planes, managed to take off before the runway became unusable. These forty were part of the 196 planes that the 15th Air Force was able to launch that morning.

Once the formation of the 451st was underway the crew took their combat positions, with the nose gunner, navigator, and bombardier in the small compartment below and forward of the cockpit. Then the gunners test-fired a few rounds to make sure all was in working order. As the planes gained altitude, masks that provided oxygen from tanks in the upper fuselage behind the bomb bay were attached to the flying helmets. Portable oxygen tanks were available if crew members needed to move about the plane. The waist gunners, stationed at openings where the temperature could plummet to -65 degrees Fahrenheit, were provided some warmth from electrical wiring in special suits.

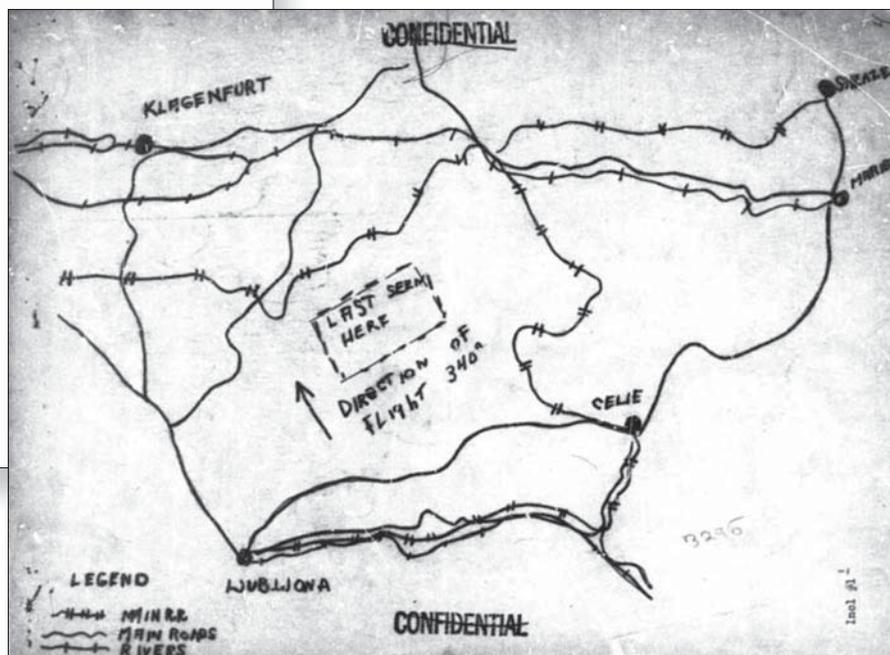
The flight plan for the 451st took



The 15 July 1945 story from the Grand Rapids Herald reporting Douma's death. He was one of more than 30,000 Kent County, Michigan, women and men who served in the military—1,032 of whom died.

Luftwaffe had decided to concentrate its efforts over southern rather than western Germany. Without fighter escorts the gunners on the planes of the 15th battled with the German fighters for an hour and fifteen minutes, until the anti-aircraft fire near Regensburg began. As the formation drew closer to Germany the

the plane. Because inter-plane communication had been cut during an earlier attack, those in the rear of the plane decided to bail out—a command that would otherwise have been given by the pilot. The tail gunner, Batory, and two waist gunners, Grove, and Heaney, helped Berney out of his base turret, but as they attached their parachutes (space was so limited that only the pilot and co-pilot could wear parachutes while in combat position), Berney discovered that his had been burned. There were no extra



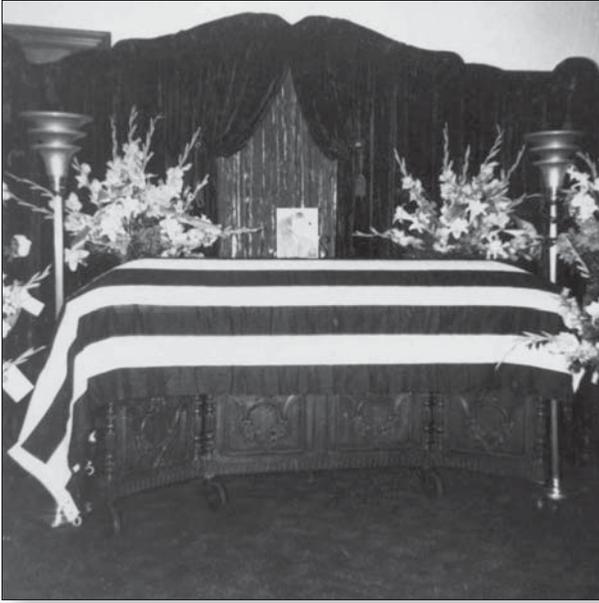
Map drawn by others of the 451st group that had witnessed Peacemaker in flames from enemy fire. Image courtesy of Marko Zdocv.

parachutes on planes flying out of Italy, as was generally the case for planes based in England, so Berney pushed the other three out through the camera hatch, on the underside of the fuselage, and went down with the plane. The plane crashed about 8

the planes north and slightly west across the Adriatic Sea. Over Split (Croatia) they turned northwest and followed the coast to Fiume, Yugoslavia (now Rijeka, Croatia), and turned north again. Fifteen minutes later, about ten minutes before noon, came the alarm, "Fighter, Six O'Clock (sic) Low!"²² as fifteen ME-109s, probably from a base in northern Italy, began to attack. The 466 bombers of the 8th Air Force launched out of England suffered far fewer air losses that day because they had long-range fighter escorts the entire way and because the

number of fighter planes increased. As the Group "fought for every mile," *Peacemaker* was hit in her number-three engine, which began to smoke, and the plane began losing speed and altitude. Losing the covering fire from other bombers made the *Peacemaker* far more vulnerable as several fighters focused on the lone bomber. According to German records, a fighter piloted by Unteroffizier Peter Schots, came from underneath and fire from his plane hit the oxygen tanks sparking a fire that rapidly spread forward through

miles north and west of Celje; none of the seven crew remaining onboard survived; debris was scattered across about a square kilometer. The three who parachuted were captured soon after landing and spent the rest of the war as prisoners of war. A few days after the crash the bodies of the seven killed, most severely burned, were given a military funeral in the Celje Cemetery by the German army. During the mission that day, the remaining planes of the 451st dropped an estimated 67 tons of explosives on the manufacturing complex. Military



Douma's casket during visitation in 1949. Image courtesy of William Douma.

reports indicated that the damage inflicted was extensive. At Regensburg no structure escaped damage; many were totally destroyed. The cost to the 451st was high. Of the 15th Air Force's 196 B-24s that hit aviation industry targets that day, all six that were lost were from the 451st. The Bomb Group was credited with shooting down nineteen fighters that day, but the United States lost sixty-one personnel compared to nineteen for Germany. For this action the 451st received the Presidential Unit Citation and came to be known as the Fighting 451st. It was the last time the 451st flew from Gioia del Colle, as returning planes found their air field too muddy for landing and so flew to other fields, several to Foggia, fifty miles away.

Total Allied losses during Big Week were 6 percent, significantly less than projected, but included 126 bombers, 28 fighters, and 2,600 crew members. German production dropped 35 percent and 70 percent of stored materials were destroyed that week. But German planners had been dispersing their manufacturing facilities so that such local damage did not have a sig-

nificant, long-term impact on production; in fact, total German aircraft production for March 1944 reached new levels. The losses for Germany were not in aircraft (data suggests 533 were shot down during February) but in pilots killed. Germany was well able to replace the planes but not the skilled pilots.²⁴

When the Group was deactivated at the end of April 1945, the 451st had flown 245 missions and won two more Presidential Unit Citations. The group achieved the highest overall bomb score in

the 15th Air Force and its personnel were awarded 1 Distinguished Service Cross, 9 Legions of Merit, 25 Silver Stars, 320 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 280 Purple Hearts, more than 6,300 Air Medals, 523 Soldiers Medals, and more than 100 Bronze Stars.²⁵

Within weeks of the crash, Martin Douma's family in Grand Rapids

received word that he was missing in action. As with so many families of those missing in action, weeks passed without any word. Then in May 1944 his mother received flowers on Mother's Day from him and hope rose briefly that he was still alive as a POW and somehow had been able to send flowers. When his father went to the florist to find out how the flowers had been sent, the family learned that Martin had ordered them the previous June when he was home on furlough.²⁶ Finally, more than a year later, in July 1945, after the three surviving crew members had been freed from the prison camps and their reports of what happened that day over Celje were verified, official word came that the seven crewmates had been killed in action.²⁷ Helen eventually married again.

In March 1949 Douma's parents received a letter that his remains, and those of his crewmates, had been disinterred and identified based on dental records as part of the American military effort to reclaim the remains of its dead from civilian cemeteries. The remains of the seven had been reburied in the US Military Cemetery



The ceremony in February 2010 outside of Celje, Slovenia, dedicating the marker on the site where Peacemaker crashed. Image courtesy of Marko Zdovc.



Martin Douma's younger brother William with the memorabilia his parents and now he has kept since WW II. Image courtesy of Richard Harms.

in Belgrade. Because of the developing Cold War the remains were moved again to the US Military Cemetery near Naples, Italy. At this point the US Government offered the families the option of shipping the remains to the United States for burial in a cemetery of the family's choosing. On Friday, 17 June 1949, about noon, Douma's casket, with a military escort, arrived

in Grand Rapids by rail.²⁸ Visitation with the family was held that afternoon and evening and the next afternoon funeral services were held and the body was interred in Washington Park Cemetery, in a family plot. After almost exactly six years, Martin Douma's body had been returned to Grand Rapids. ❧

Endnotes

1. See: *Young Calvinist Obituaries* on http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/in_house_resources.htm.
2. The children of Marten and Lena Douma are: George Martin (1908-1999), Genevieve (1910-2005), Theresa (1912-2008), Leona (died in infancy, perhaps about 1914), Leona (1916-2000); Leonard (1918- 1998), Martin Jr., Martha (b. 1922), Wilma (b. 1924), Catherine (b. 1926); William M. (b. 1930), and Nellie (b. 1931).
3. Z. Z. Lydens, ed., *The Story of Grand Rapids* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1967) 289.
4. Officially it was known as the US Army Air Forces, but this paper will refer to the branch as the Army Air Force. During WW II the US Army was composed of the Ground Forces, Service Force, and Air Forces. In 1947 the United States Air Force became a separate military branch.
5. Total war production was much higher due to the number of aircraft lost during the war. During 1944, the peak of production, US plants produced more than 100,000 aircraft.
6. Another 297,000 aerial gunners played crucial roles protecting the nation's bomber fleet from attack by enemy fighters but did not need the level of training of pilots, navigators, and bombardiers. As a result, the former tended to be officers while the latter were enlisted personnel.
7. "The Most Dangerous Man in the World," *Popular Mechanics* (October 1942) 26-27.
8. During a visit to Germany in 1938, Herman W. Lang, a German spy employed by the Carl L. Norden Company, reconstructed plans of the bomb sight equipment from memory. German instruments were actually fairly similar to the Norden, even before World War II.
9. Philip A. St. John, *Bombardier: A History* (Turner Publishing Company: Paducah, KY, 1998) 13.
10. For a fine history of this Bomb Group see: Mike Hill, *The 451st Bomb Group in World War II: A Pictorial History* (Schiffer Military History: Atglen, PA, 2001).
11. Philip A. St. John, *The Liberator Legend: The Plane and the People* (Turner

Publishing Company: Paducah, KY, 1990) 62.

12. Hill, *The 451st*, 73.

13. St. John, *The Liberator*, 62. Others in the Group were convinced the plane crashed due to icing on the wings resulting because the crew had forgotten to lay canvas across the wings the night before. When the canvas was removed before take-off, so was the ice. "Interview with Carlo J. Ginobile," in Rutgers Oral History Archive, New Brunswick History Department (Ginobile was a tail gunner in the 726th squadron) at http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/Interviews/ginobile_carlo.html, accessed 12 March 2010 at 6:39 pm.

14. Hill, *The 451st*, 21. One of the longest flights for the 451st was in May 1944 over Lyon, France; the flight there and back took eleven hours and almost all the fuel B-24s carried.

15. The new moon was the 23rd, in the middle of Big Week.

16. In 1943 American daylight raids had experienced loss rates up to 30 percent, which brought an end to daylight bombing of well-defended targets. By the time of Big Week, the number of bombers and fighter escorts available had increased to the point that planners decided to resume daylight attacks.

17. Standard Army practice was that air crews flew combat missions no more than three days in succession. Due to the high level of stress during such missions, after three days of successive missions crew were allowed several days of rest.

18. From the account of the plane's history by Sgt. Richard Heany, related after being released from being a German POW, contained in "Missing Air Crew Report 3295" provided to the author by Marko Zdovc.

19. For details and official evaluations of the raids see: Kit C. Carter and Robert Mueller, compilers, "U.S. Army Air Forces in World War II Combat Chronology 1941-1945, Center for Air Force History at http://www.airforce-history.hq.af.mil/Publications/fulltext/wwii_combat_chronology.pdf, particularly <http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps51153/airforcehistory/usaaf/chron/44/feb44.htm> viewed 24 March 2010, 5:50 p.m.

20. Detail of the events before and

during takeoff are from Roger McColester, another bombardier in the 451st. See "Raid on Regensburg" at <http://www.flightjournal.com/ME2/dirmod.asp?sid=F999E8C39FCE47DEB4CDBABBFBF37179&nm=The+Magazine&type=PubPagi&mod=Publications%3A%3AArticle+Title&mid=13B2F0D0AFA04476A2ACC02ED28A405F&tier=4&id=4C61AB695C8E4723A6D891C5A20647D8>, viewed 16 March 2010 at 5:24 pm and the "Interview With Carlo J. Ginobile."

21. Over the targets, the German fighter disengaged to avoid being hit by friendly fire; defense was then turned over to the anti-aircraft ground forces.

22. Hill, *The 451st*, 23

23. An Unteroffizier was a non-commissioned officer in the Luftwaffe. The German Luftwaffe data was provided by Marko Zdovc. "2 B-24s were shot down over Slovenia on the 25th by Uffz. Peter Schotz (6.ZG.1) during the Regensburg mission. The first at 12.13 near Maribor, the second at 12.25 just south of Celje. Sources Film C. 2025/1. Anerk.49 and 50. confirmed" from <http://forum.armyairforces.com/t.aspx?high=&m=183966&mpage=1#183966>, visited 24 March 2010, 7:10 pm. Account of the attack is by Howard Grove, a transcription of his report was sent to the family of Clifford D. Williams Jr. in 1949. Copy provided to the author by Peter Mahrle. Grove reports that the bomber was on its way back to the base when the attack began, but other Allied and German sources, as well as the flight direction of the bomber of the crash, indicate that it was en route to the target.

24. W. F. Craven and J. L. Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II: vol 3 Europe: Argument to V-E Day, January 1944-May 1945* (online edition at: <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/AAF/III/index.html>, access 26 March 2010, 7:15 pm.), pp 41-43.

25. Hill, *The 451st*, 74.

26. Telephone conversation with Douma's sister, Martha Harberts, on 11 March 2010.

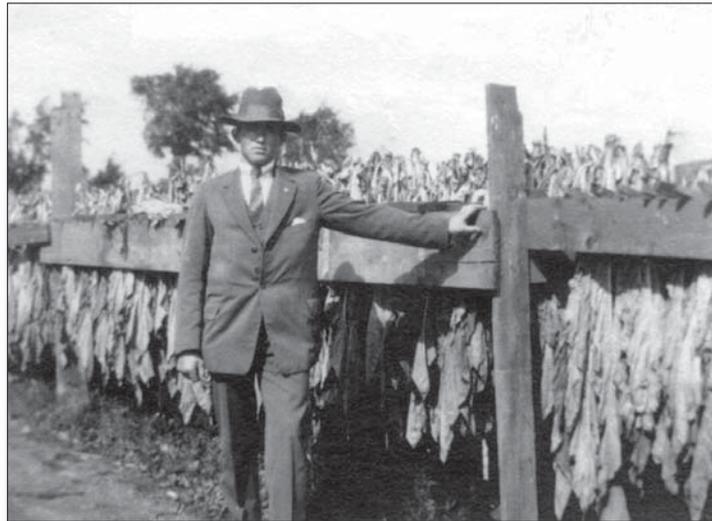
27. Major General Edward F. Witsell to Helen M. Douma, 9 July 1945, letter held by William Douma. *Grand Rapids Herald*, 10 July 1945.

28. *Grand Rapids Herald*, 17 June 1949.

Back-and-Forth Wanderlust: The Autobiography of Jacob Koenes¹

I was born 2 August 1907 in Grootegast, the Netherlands, to Klaas Koenes, a dairy farmer, and Gezina Grimmius.² I had three sisters—Jacoba, Aaltje, and Geertje—and a brother Arend. Our farm was about

Dinner was at noon; we ate mostly boiled potatoes or kale or cabbage, and *soep 'n brij*,³ sometimes pudding. Supper at 6 o'clock was mostly fried potatoes with vegetables; always plenty of food.



Jacob Koenes during his first emigration, standing near tobacco leaves in Canada. Image courtesy of Ina Kramer.

When I was nineteen some young people began emigrating to Canada or the USA. I was very interested in going to the USA. I put my name on the waiting list for the USA; it took about two years for your name to come up. But three young men, whom I knew, were going to Canada and

fifty acres. In those days that was a good-sized farm because there were no tractors—horses had to do the work.

Farmers arose at 4 a.m. to milk the cows. My two older sisters had to go along every other morning. This was a general rule in the Netherlands at that time. Lots of farmers had a girl as a maid in the house and they had to milk twice a day, plus do all the housework and washing. Breakfast was usually at 7 o'clock after the milking was done. At 9:30 we stopped working and had coffee.

I decided to go with them to Canada the next spring. My parents tried to talk me out of it, but to no avail. The four of us left the Netherlands on 28 March 1926.⁴ We left in the evening on a small boat, about 1,000 gross tons, crossed the North Sea and the next morning entered the Thames River, near London, England. Then it was via horse and buggy to a train station in London. From there we crossed England to Liverpool, a train ride of about four hours.

The next day we boarded the large ocean steamer, the *Mountclare*.⁵ We

In addition to his wanderlust Jacob Koenes was a successful dairy farmer in two countries as well as poultry and produce farming in the United States. As this was being prepared for publication, Sally Koenes (née Spriensma) was living in Grand Rapids.

Form 682 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA Permit No. 581937
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR Application No. 583033
IMMIGRATION SERVICE

Permit to Reenter the United States

PURSUANT to provisions of section 10 of the Immigration Act of 1924, this permit is issued to bearer, **JAKOB KOENES**, an alien previously lawfully admitted to the United States, to reenter the United States, if otherwise admissible, as a nonquota immigrant, and its validity shall expire this 2nd day of April, A. D. 1931

The personal description of the bearer is: Age, 22 years; height, 5 feet and 7 inches; weight, 155 pounds; complexion, fair

hair, blonde; eyes, gray; identification marks, none

Approved: Jacob Koenes
Second Assistant Secretary of Labor.

Issued at Washington, D. C., this 2nd day of April, A. D. 1930
Harry E. Jones
Commissioner General of Immigration.

This permit shall have no effect under the immigration laws except to show that said alien is returning from a temporary visit abroad, nor shall it be construed to be the exclusive means of establishing that the alien is so returning.

NOTE.—Any erasure or alteration shall render this permit null and void.

4/3 14-2877

As he was returning to the Netherlands after his second emigration, the first to the United States, Koenes received this re-entry permit from the US government. Image courtesy of Ina Kramer.

traveled second class, also called cabin class. Those were nice rooms, and the ship had a wonderful dining room. Every table of four had a waiter. There was a band playing. It was a different world for us. When dinner time came we were the only ones who prayed, the rest started to eat with no devotions. I saw for the first time how poor the world is without the Lord.

We arrived in Montreal, and then went by train to Toronto. We were then brought to a farmers' office and from there went by train to a little place named Minesing [near Barrie, Ontario]. I went to work for and lived with an English farmer named Richardson. The next morning I started to work with a team of horses and a disc. I also had to milk a couple of cows by hand. The farmers had telephones, so the four of us contacted one another by telephone. We could not speak English, so there was no church for us to attend, as a result we met on Sundays in the field along a creek.

I became homesick and one eve-

ning, lying in the field, I was crying and desperate. All of a sudden the Lord stood there and He said to me, "Jake, what are you crying about? I am with you in all circumstances." From then on I had great peace of mind. There in the field in Canada, I found and met my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

One of the four of us, Henry Visser, became so terribly homesick that he stopped eating. So, we all decided to move and took the train to Chatham, Ontario. In the evening we found an empty house, went in and slept on the floor using our suitcases as pillows. The next morning we saw a lady next door, a Dutch lady, who gave us some good job information. We went to the sugar beet factory where they gave us jobs thinning out rows of sugar beets in the field for farmers. The factory gave us pots and pans free, and we lived in an old shack in the field. We slept on straw. In the morning we baked pancakes. We worked very hard and were paid by the acre. In the evening we went swimming in the Thames River.

That summer I worked helping to build a new tobacco factory. It was mostly cement work, mixing cement with a shovel for 35 cents an hour I remember. Sometimes I worked thirteen hours a day. I boarded with a family named Wierenga at that time and paid seven dollars a week for room and board.

Sunday was our great day. In Chatham there was a Christian Reformed church meeting in the basement of a Presbyterian church. Every Sunday we had a minister from the USA preaching for us. I always had to share my bed with him, which I did not like too well. At noon the church ladies made a meal for us and we ate there. After the second service in the afternoon, we went back to the old shack to work the next day again. Later in the summer I made public profession of faith and became a communicant member of the Christian Reformed Church.

I met several more immigrants that summer. I had a close friend named Cor Wagenaar, from the province of Friesland. I also met Christian Vanden Heuvel, who later became a Christian Reformed minister in Grand Rapids. At that time he was nineteen years old and worked on the farm. Every two weeks I wrote a letter to my parents in the Netherlands, and they also wrote me back every two weeks.

When the winter started I helped another Dutch farmer for a while hauling and loading sugar beets into railroad cars. This work was over in January 1927, so I then worked for a farmer in Blenheim for twenty dollars a month plus room and board. On Sundays I had to take the Greyhound bus to church in Chatham. Sunday was still the great day.

In early spring 1927, on a Sunday morning, the road was ice-covered and the bus did not go—this made me very downhearted. I went to my

bedroom and prayed about my problems and decided to go back to the Netherlands. I had saved plenty of money. So I started packing, bought a ticket, and took the train to St. Johns, New Brunswick. I sailed on SS *Mountcalm*, 18,000 tons,⁶ stopped at France, Ireland, and docked at Liverpool. From Liverpool back to London, and then across the North Sea to Rotterdam.

I arrived in Rotterdam on a Sunday morning and took the train from Rotterdam to Groningen. In the afternoon I stopped to see my brother who was busy writing me a letter. He was surprised to see me. I had not informed my parents that I was coming home, and they sure were happy to see me. When people left for Canada in those days, most of them never returned because of the travel costs. But I learned to save my money, and therefore travel was no great problem for me.

After helping my brother in the dairy business for a time, I received word from the American Consul that, if I still wanted to go to the United States, I now had the opportunity. In early spring [1928] I boarded *Vendam*,⁷ of the Holland-America line, and arrived at South Holland, Illinois, where we had friends, in April 1928.⁸ I worked for Duurt Vander Wall (also from Grootegast), a truck farmer in Munster, Indiana.⁹ The Vander Wall farm had plenty of work, and it hardly ever got done by evening. But I did not mind the hard work and learned more about raising all kinds of vegetables.

I got up at five in the morning, milked two cows, cleaned, fed, and harnessed the horses. Mr. Vander Wall, who was about sixty years old, called me about 6:30 to see if I could get the boys out of bed. I called the oldest one, Sam (Sake), a real nice man, first and he always got right up.¹⁰ But Reinder was a different

story. He had a new little car; I think it was an Erskine. He never came home early and it was hard to get him out of bed. After breakfast we all went to plant onion sets. In the summer Sam (mostly) went to the Randolph Street Market with a truckload of produce, while Reinder peddled to all kinds of stores in Chicago.

In Munster I had a friend named Pieter Vermeulen, who had a new car. We went out together some evenings, especially Sunday evenings. Not too far from the farm was a gravel pit where we went swimming. On a very warm summer evening Eddy Ooms, a nice boy, showed me his new bathing suit, and a moment later Eddy drowned in that gravel pit. I was the last one on earth to whom he talked—this hit me hard. I thought to myself, how come the Lord takes this nice boy away? It could just as well have been me. It was a reminder to me again that we should really be ready at all times to meet our Lord.

In the fall of that year I still did not like it too well in America. I was a restless person. Duurt Vander Wall made me a good offer to stay. He said to me, "I will have a garage for you. You can have a car here, you can work for Sam." He always bought calves and also was a fertilizer dealer, so I always would have some work. Instead I bought a ticket back to the Netherlands. I took the Greyhound



Because of the Depression there is no wedding photo of Jacob Koenes and Saakje (Sally) Spriensma. This photo was taken when they were dating. Image courtesy of Ina Kramer.

line bus from Chicago to New York. I found the Holland Seamen's Home at 3 o'clock in the morning. They let me in, and I slept in a chair. The next day I looked up a friend of mine in Hoboken, New Jersey, who was a baker. He suggested I stay so I cashed in the ticket. First, I worked as a dishwasher in New York City, then as a busboy. Next I started working in the Cooke Bakery, and later in a Danish pastry shop. I learned to roll out dough, learned to fry donuts, and lots of things. I worked six days a week, ten hours a day. I earned \$25 a week—in 1928-1929 that was a good income. I rented a furnished room for three dollars a week, and ate out.

We also had our Christian Reformed church in Hoboken, on Hudson Street. Our church was a good-sized regular house. The second floor had a great big room which we used for an auditorium. Later friend Meindert Beinema and I did the janitor work for the church. We lived upstairs above the church. I did all the cooking and also our shopping. We did that for about a year. Later I became a sponge cake baker in New York City. I worked in a big place

located at 76th Street and 6th Avenue in New York, from four in the morning till one in the afternoon. In the afternoons I went to Coney Island and went swimming and received a very bad sunburn. Sometimes I helped out in the Holland Seamen's Home, when immigrants arrived from the Netherlands I took them to different train stations in New York, since they could not speak English.

I always went to church and we had devotions when we ate. But Friday evenings, my friend and I went to New York, mostly to Broadway, going to the big theaters—nice organs, nice shows, wonderful orchestras. We very well knew what was going on in the great big world. We knew Christians really ought not go to those worldly places. It is really sad to confess that I started backsliding in my spiritual life in 1929.

I planned to make a trip to the Netherlands and the bakery promised me that my job would be waiting for me when I came back. So I left New York in April, when the Great Depression already had started, and I arrived in Rotterdam in the first part of May. It was another surprise for my parents because I had not notified them



The Groenstein farm as it was when the Koenes family moved there. Image courtesy of Rinse Wagenaar.

that I was coming over. My parents did everything to make me happy at home. I looked up an old girlfriend who lived in Friesland. Most of my old girlfriends were married already.

In the month of August I began to think about going back to America, but the Lord had a different plan for me. On 31 August 1930 there was a large picnic festival in Leek. There I saw girls strolling and one of those girls was Sally.¹¹ She made a terrific impact on me. She was nice looking, friendly, and I noticed that she liked me. I was twenty-three years old and

she was not even nineteen years old. I took Sally home that evening. When my parents found out that I was interested in her, they were very happy. They thought that this was a good way to keep me in the Netherlands. My dad said to me, "If you stay here, I will go back in the dairy business, and you can help me." So I settled down and there was no more talk of America.

Sally's family lived in Siegerswoude, Friesland, ten miles away, about an hour by bike. She was the third girl in a family of eleven children. I arrived usually around 8 o'clock in the evening smoking a big cigar and talked with her parents till 10 o'clock when they went to bed. I stayed with Sally till around midnight, so I got home at 1 o'clock. At 4 o'clock in the morning it was time for milking the cows again. Some boys stayed with the girls until 2 o'clock on Sunday nights, but I liked to have a little sleep.

Sally and I were happy together. I was farming for my dad and again joined the community brass band. I became the president of the large choir, 80 voices. In 1932 my future father-in-law rented a different farm and asked us if we wanted to rent his old farm. So Sally and I made plans to



Groenstein as it was during one of the Koenes's several visits back to the Netherlands. Image courtesy of Ina Kramer.



Saakje holding the reins of one of the work horses and Jacob (to the right) with their helpers on Groenstein farm, after WWII. Image courtesy of Rinse Wagenaar, whose father Oeds (far left) was one of the hired men working for Koenes.

exempt from this labor, so we were allowed to stay on our farm. Later the Germans held what they called “razzias,” blocking off certain parts of a town and then searching the homes for people to be shipped to Germany for forced labor.¹⁴ A lot of those people did not want to work for the enemy, and went into hiding (called going underground). Many hid on farms and we always had some

get married the following spring and live in Friesland. We were married in the afternoon of 4 May 1933 and in the evening we had a party for many people. The Grootegast brass band came via bus and gave a concert. The next morning Sally and I were milking cows together in the field, of course milking by hand.

In the summer of 1935, on a Sunday morning while I was in church, the farm burned down. The cause was an electrical short and all the machinery, all the wagons, everything was destroyed. The cows were outdoors in the pasture, however, so we lived in a mobile home until the farm was rebuilt.

We started farming in the middle of the depression with one hired man. It was very hard to make ends meet. Not until 1937 did milk prices begin to improve. But, we worked hard and we were happy. Three of our children were born in the Netherlands. Klaas

(later Clarence) in March 1934 was named for my father; Ynske (Ina) in June 1936, named for Sally’s mother; and in September 1939 Icenius Immo (Mike), named for Sally’s father.

On 10 May 1940¹² I woke up in the night and heard planes, and by daybreak I saw German war planes flying over our house. We turned on our radio and heard that the German soldiers had crossed the Dutch borders—the invasion had begun. That same morning I ran into about fifty German soldiers on the road, all sitting on horses. They did me no harm. The fighting in the Netherlands lasted five days. When they bombed and destroyed the center of Rotterdam, they brought the Dutch to their knees.¹³ Immediately all Dutch warehouses filled with food were emptied and all that food was shipped to Germany.

Many Dutch people were forced to work in Germany. Farmers had to raise food for the army and were

on our farm, at times there were six of these eating at our table. Those “underground people” slept in holes dug in the ground under haystacks, or in potato pits in the fields.¹⁵ Sometimes the Germans came at night to search for people who were hiding. The farmers found hiding these people were also sent to work camps or were shot to death. As a result, many times I had to sleep away from home in the neighbor’s straw stack. We also had a hiding place in our attic and in one of the closets. The Lord saved me from being taken by the Germans, but Sally was alone with the children many nights. We prayed together on those nights that the Lord would save our lives again.

Those were dangerous times. A little ways away from us the Germans took thirteen farmers (including a thirteen-year-old boy and his father) for doing nothing and shot them all to death. People we knew to be very

good citizens were shot to death while sitting around the table eating, or the husband was shot while his family watched.

In 1942 the Germans bombed English cities and those bombers flew overhead at night. But, in 1943 this changed; bombers from England flew overhead toward Germany. Every night bombers, sometimes a thousand, sometimes as many as three thousand, flew over our house. The windows would rattle. It usually took about two hours for the unloaded bombers to return. These bombers sounded like music in our ears because we wanted to be liberated at any price. We also saw a few bombers get hit by German fighters. In no time they were a big ball of fire and slammed to the ground. War is an awful thing—you have to live through it to know how terrible a war is.

The winter of 1944-1945 was a very severe winter. The three northern provinces of the Netherlands had many farms, so the people in these provinces always had food to eat. But in the big cities the people were almost starving. Lots of people who were not too healthy died. Another problem in the winter was keeping houses warm. On the farms people had some wood to burn. We burned peat moss which we had on our land. But people in the cities cut trees down at night just to get a little heat in the houses.¹⁶

My brother-in-law, Reinder Spriensma, also a dairy farmer in Friesland, hid a Jewish doctor and his wife for a long time. These Jewish people asked my brother-in-law if they could take a little walk on a nice evening. They did so and someone reported them to the German headquarters. The Germans came with a truckload of soldiers and a police dog. They found the Jews and took them and Reinder away. The next

day my father-in-law and I received permission to see him in jail in Groningen. This was the last time that we saw Reinder on this earth. The Germans shipped him to Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg, a concentration camp in Germany. We later were notified via the Red Cross that Reinder died in January 1945. In May 1945, a fellow prisoner with Reinder gave us some details of how things went there.¹⁷ Reinder gave his life helping others.

In April 1945, the Canadian army liberated the northern part of the Netherlands. A few days before that, we were notified that we would have eighty German soldiers quartered on our farm for some time. Early the next morning the Germans came, most of them on bikes. Their commander took our front room for himself. They put automatic guns on the table, and machine guns were brought in to shoot from the upstairs windows. The soldiers found places to sleep in the straw, some slept next to the cows to keep warm. When we milked, they took it all for themselves. In the evening they all started to drink vodka and other strong drink.

Eight o'clock was curfew. If you went outside after that you would be shot. Because there was a possibility of fighting, that night about 9 o'clock I asked the commander if Sally and the three children could go to a neighbor's farm for the night. When asked, I told him I wasn't a Nazi and he replied, "Then you better die with us if it comes to action." That same evening the Germans wanted hot water several times. The next morning they were all gone, we found that they had killed, cleaned (with that hot water), and eaten our twenty-five chickens. Hand grenades and ammunition were all over the place. We threw the whole works into a pond nearby. Two days later the Canadians came, all with more modern weap-

onry. It was nice to see that.

The following week all kinds of festivities were held to celebrate our liberation. Since then, 5 May has been a special day of remembrance in the Netherlands. Instead of German soldiers, we had some Canadian soldiers in our house because I still could speak some English.

Dutch war criminals were arrested and put in special camps. Farmers who had work could pick up some of these prisoners to do the work. We had some of those criminals for two days, to weed our potato fields. There were armed guards with them. At noon time they came to the house where we fed them pea soup. One of these criminals had been a commander in Grootegast, and had murdered several people there. When he was in our potato field, he asked me for a little tobacco to chew. I got a little pleasure out of the fact that this former commander was now pulling out weeds in a potato field for a farmer.

After the war our dairy farming improved and we had two men working for us. In 1946 a big new farm became available for rent near the city of Groningen. Because of the shortage of farms for rent at that time, about 260 farmers from all over applied for that farm. We also put in an application. The owners of that farm, who were very rich, visited the farms of five applicants, including us. They agreed to rent us that nice farm. So, in the spring of 1947, after farming fourteen years in Friesland, we moved to Groningen. The cattle were all moved by truck, and I took all kinds of stuff to Groningen in two wagons drawn by two horses, a distance of twenty miles. This farm was about a hundred acres, no crop land; all pasture and hay fields, except it had a nice garden. This was a most beautiful place.

After the war ended I was not happy with political conditions and

caught “American fever” again. We had everything we wanted or wished to have—a nice farm, two hired men, I did not have to work hard, we had a good life—how could I be so stupid to think about America again? On top of that, Sally, my dear wife, was fearful of going to a new country, but we decided to emigrate. An old friend of mine, whom I met when I was in New York before, was a dairy farmer in El Cajon, close to San Diego, California, was our sponsor. We could only carry \$90 per adult and \$45 per child when we emigrated. From this we had to buy our train tickets from New York to San Diego. So I bought some American dollars on the black market which I sent by mail to my sponsor in California. In February 1948 we had an auction sale in the Netherlands. We sold all the cattle and machinery. We bought a lot of new furniture. This was crated, weighing about two tons, and was shipped via freight vessel through the Panama Canal to California. The freight was payable in Dutch money so we had all our furniture paid for in America. We spent about 13,000 guilders for the furniture plus the freight.

We left the Netherlands from Rotterdam on 24 March, on the big ocean liner *New Amsterdam*. On 3 April 1948 we arrived in Hoboken, New Jersey. We stayed that first night in the Holland Seamen’s Home where the people there remembered me right away. The next day we took the train to California.

When we arrived in California everything looked good, with a lot of nice flowers in bloom. My friend picked us up at the depot. I started to work for a carpenter for \$1 an hour. Later, I became a milker on a dairy farm. The man, for whom I worked, was originally from England and was a very nice man. There were three of us milking 185 cows, starting 12:30 in the morning and again at 12:30 in the



The first photo of the Koenes family after their arrival in San Diego in 1948. Image courtesy of Ina Kramer.

afternoon. I slept twice a day, between milkings, and had one day off every two weeks. In the Netherlands we employed two hired men, but now, at age forty, I was a hired man.

We joined the Christian Reformed Church in San Diego, about fifteen miles from where I worked. We bought a 1937 Chevrolet. We spent about five dollars a week for gasoline, had a free house to live in, and also had a nice garden. It took a while before our furniture arrived in Los Angeles.

It was very hot in California in the summer, sometimes up to 110 degrees in the barn. In southern California it never rains in the summertime. We were used to green pastures and rain. We had another friend living in Michigan who knew of a farmer for whom I could work. So, around Halloween time, we repacked the shipping crate and sold the kitchen set because we were not able to fit all of

it in again. The crate went by train to Michigan and we took the Greyhound bus from San Diego to Owosso, Michigan. I started to work for a German farmer. Our children went to a Catholic school. That was something, to see the priest every day. We joined the Lutheran Church in Owosso.

One day I took the bus to Grand Rapids, about eighty miles away and arrived in the downtown area on Oak Street. I looked in the telephone book for a Christian Reformed church, but did not find one. A friendly man helped me and told me that he knew of a place where they could help me out and took me to the Salvation Army. The man from the Salvation Army knew a man who was an elder in the Christian Reformed Church. His name was Abe Stroo, who picked me up and took me home for lunch. Stroo was manager for the Hooker Paint Company in Grand Rapids. He also showed me a little more of the

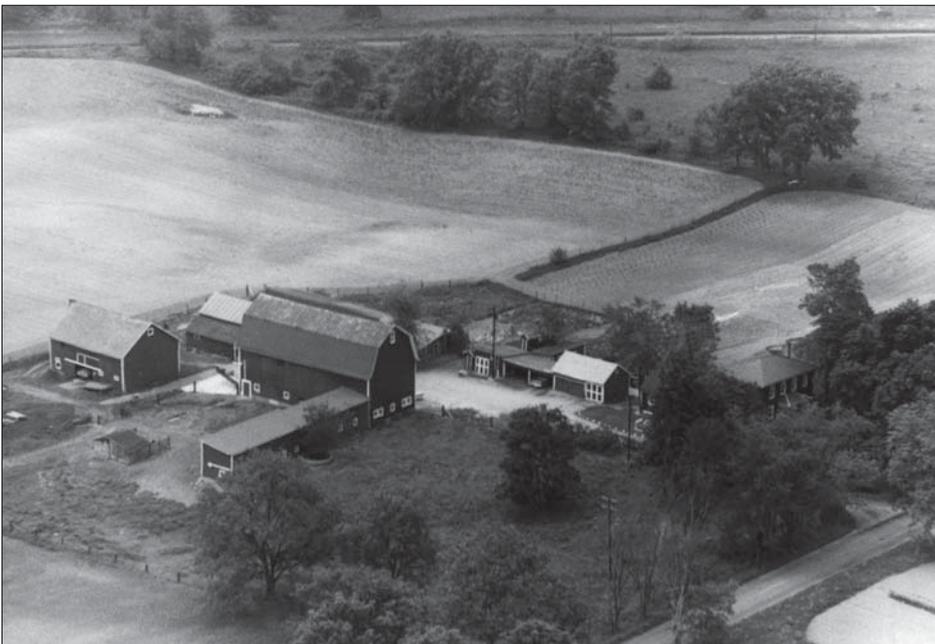


Jacob Koenes, leaning on the hood of the truck, Mike on the truck's cab, with Ina and Clarence on the tractor, on the farm owned by George Welsh. Image courtesy of Ina Kramer.

city of Grand Rapids. His brother-in-law, Theodore Verhulst, was a minister in Graafschap, near Holland, Michigan.

I returned to Owosso that evening happy that we had some contact with church people. Rev. Verhulst put a note in the bulletin of the church

saying that a Dutch family needed a house and work. He wrote us the following week that a house was available in Graafschap, right across from the Christian Reformed Church. It was in January 1949 but it was not cold and we moved everything in one truck to Graafschap.



An aerial view of the Koenes farm on 52nd Street, in southeastern Kent County (about midway between the current Gerald R. Ford International Airport and Alto, Michigan). Image courtesy of Ina Kramer.

When we arrived there was no dairy work for me, so I worked in a furniture factory for 85 cents an hour. But I did not like factory work and got in contact with George Welsh, then the mayor of Grand Rapids. He owned two farms on Michigan Street near Grand Rapids. We went into business with him sharing the profits fifty-fifty—we got a free house, electric, telephone, fuel, and one-third part of the young stock. We started on 6 March, milked about forty cows, and stayed there for about two years. Clarence, who was fourteen, helped me and the mayor said that he didn't have to go to school anymore. Our daughter, Ina, also helped sometimes with milking. Sally's youngest brother, Thomas Spriensma and his wife Jessie (just married), came from the Netherlands in June 1949. He helped us that first year on the farm. Later I got him a job at the Keeler Brass Company.

Ina and Mike went to the Baldwin Christian School and we joined Ada Christian Reformed Church. We also went to Dutch services on Sunday afternoons at the Dennis Avenue [now Mayfair] Christian Reformed Church.

In the fall of 1950 Sally and I picked apples for 15 cents a bushel. That was the price they paid. When we came home in the evening, Clarence and Ina had done all the milking. After about two years we bought a twelve-acre muck farm with a house and a barn (near Byron Center, on Burlingame Avenue near 100th Street) for \$7,800, to raise produce in the summer. We also kept 500 chickens on the Welsh farm, delivering the eggs to customers in Grand Rapids. Eggs in those days sold for about 75 cents a dozen, which was a very good price, so we took those chickens along to Byron Center. Since it was fall, I got a job at the Keeler Brass Company as a steel polisher. It was piece work; I was able to earn \$1.90 an hour, the highest wages they paid in those days.



Jacob and Sally Koenes at their farmer's market stand where they sold the produce from their successive farms. When this photo was taken, grandchildren often went to the market with them. Image courtesy of Ina Kramer.

We had a very nice Christian Reformed neighbor named Ralph Miedema. He raised all kinds of vegetables and told me to do the same thing with my land. So, that spring we put in a crop of sweet corn, lettuce, onions, pickles, all kinds of vegetables. And we started going to the retail market in Grand Rapids, four days a week, to sell the produce. Sally and Clarence went three days, and on Saturdays it was my turn.

In early November 1951 we had our first big snowstorm. On Thanksgiving Day we could not get out because of the snow and there was no work in Grand Rapids. We got approximately 80 inches of snow between Christmas and New Year. So we left for California by way of the southern route, Memphis and El Paso. We visited our former dairyman near San Diego, and we landed in Artesia, close to Bellflower, California. A cousin in Artesia had a dairy farm and Clarence started to milk cows there for \$400 a month. I worked taking milk samples for testing from 150 to 400 cows

every day. I worked six days a week, every day it was a different farm—I liked that very much. We rented a new home in Artesia. That winter California got lots of rain. Sometimes the roads were just like rivers; sometimes I arrived before the milkers, who were stuck in the mud. At times it rained so hard that water would run into the back seat of the car; and lots of times the brakes did not work. In Artesia the water flooded stores, causing a lot of water damage. So, we had all kinds of experiences that winter: first 80 inches of snow in Michigan and then later 30 inches of water in California.

In April we asked our children if they would like to stay in California, but they all wanted to go back to Michigan. So we drove back on Route 66. Clarence did all the driving from California to Michigan. We found everything in order. Our neighbor, Mr. Miedema, had kept an eye on our house while we were in California.

Clarence started to work building schools for TerHorst and Rinzema, for \$1.40 an hour, I remember. I planted

sweet corn and vegetables. For the time being, we bought eggs to keep the egg route going. In the fall of 1952 I began to work for Keeler Brass again and Clarence joined me. Ina and Mike went to Byron Center Christian School. Sally did not like being home alone, so she also took a job at Keeler Brass.

But we were dairy farmers and did not like working in the summer on the farm and in the winter in a factory. We wanted to get ourselves a “high land” farm with dairy cattle again, where we could work year round at home like we did in the Netherlands. When we lived on the Welsh farm, we always bought the feed from John Kleinheksel, who had a feed mill at McCords.¹⁸ In Byron Center we continued to buy chicken feed that came from Kleinheksel's, delivered by Jack Buys. One Sunday Mr. and Mrs. Buys visited and said that there was a dairy farm for sale on 52nd Street near McCords, and a new Christian Reformed church in Cascade needed more members. So, we looked at that farm with two houses, 150 acres of land, and many buildings. They wanted \$24,000 for that farm. In those days banks would not give much credit; if you had \$5,000 they would loan you another \$5,000. We sold our farm in Byron Center for \$10,500 (a \$1,500 profit in two years) and made an offer. Since it was an estate sale (the owner had died at the age of 96), the farm had to be sold. The offer was accepted and in March 1953 we moved to the farm at 8650 52nd Street, and we were the twenty-seventh family to join the Cascade Christian Reformed Church.

George Linton farmed some of our land on a share basis. We kept one field for sweet corn and vegetables. I worked for a builder that summer until July; my last job for him was putting in the basement for Mayfair Church in Grand Rapids. From July



After retiring, Jacob and Sally moved into a house on Cascade Road and in the early 1980s began to spend winters in Panama City Beach, Florida. Image courtesy of Ina Kramer.

onward we took produce to market in Grand Rapids and also raised 1,000 chickens. From then on we were full-time farmers again, initially milking twenty-five cows. On Christmas Day 1953, the Lord gave us the biggest Christmas present we ever had—our youngest son, Arthur Raymond.

In 1959, Clarence thought that it

would be better to work in Grand Rapids so Sally and I sold the cattle. We kept about 2,000 chickens and continued to raise vegetable crops, plus sweet corn. But, in about a year, Clarence decided that he wanted to go back to farming. So we bought dairy cows again, put a new addition on the cow barn, and eventually milked sixty cows. In January 1973 I was sixty-five and retired. Arthur bought my share of the dairy farm but Sally and I still raised a lot of sweet corn. Our son Mike became an auto body man in Cascade.

Arthur met Muriel Dyk, a nice girl, from Manhattan, Montana, who was studying at Calvin College. Art and Muriel were married on 31 August 1974, and lived in the farm house. A year later Art and Muriel moved to Manhattan, where he began grain farming with his father-in-law, Wilbur Dyk, who owned a 7,000 acre farm.¹⁹

To everyone who reads this, I have this advice: stay with the Lord. Sally and I always worked hard, but it became a blessing. ❧

Editor's Notes

1. This is a much-abridged version of the autobiography of Jacob Koenes written in 1978. The entire manuscript is available in the Archives of Calvin College.

2. Jacob Koenes died 10 June 2000 in Grand Rapids.

3. Porridge usually made with barley boiled in milk, buttermilk, or sour milk and served with sugar or syrup.

4. In the original Koenes says it was 1925, but Canadian immigration records report that he arrived on 10 May 1926.

5. Koenes states that the vessel was 18,000 gross tons. *Montclare* was built in Glasgow in 1922 for Canadian Pacific Steamships Ltd. It was a ship of 16,314 gross tons, length of 549.5 feet with a beam of 70.2 feet, two funnels, two masts, twin screw, and a speed of 16 knots.

6. *Montcalm* was also owned by Canadian Pacific Steamships Ltd. and built in Glasgow in 1920. The ship was almost the exact same size and had the same speed as *Montclare*. Koenes also slightly enlarged this vessel's size to 18,000 gross tons.

7. *SS Veendam* was the second ship with that name operated by the Holland-America Line. The ship was built in Baltimore in 1923 and was 15,450 gross tons, slightly smaller than the Canadian Pacific Steamships Ltd. ships on which he had sailed earlier. This *SS Veendam* was scrapped in 1952.

8. Koenes notes it was in 1927, but United States immigration records report he landed in New York on 24 March 1928.

9. In the Netherlands the surname was vander Wal, with one 'l'; the family had immigrated in 1905.

10. Duurt and Tettje (Kuipers) had seven children, Sam and Reinder were the youngest; the other five were married when Koenes arrived.

11. Sally, baptized Saakje, is the daughter of Icenius Immo Spriensma and Ijnske Kroodsmas and was born in Noorddijk, Groningen, the Netherlands.

12. In the original Koenes incorrectly reports the date as 1 May.

13. The Dutch government had capitulated before the bombing, but the Germans were able to get word of this to only a portion of the already airborne bombers.

14. For the Dutch the forced labor program began 28 February 1941. During the war an estimated 500,000 Dutch men and women were forced to work in Germany. The number increased dramatically as the war progressed, during a few days in September 1944 an estimated 120,000 Dutch were taken for forced labor. Of those taken, approximately 30,000 died and many more returned with permanent physical and psychological injuries.

15. After the potatoes were harvested they were stored under rows of mounds of earth in the fields to protect them from frost. During the war frames were built under these mounds for people to hide.

16. Later known as the *Hongerwinter* (Hunger winter), a number of factors

caused starvation in parts of the Netherlands. As had been the case previously, the German government impounded a significant portion of the harvest. To aid the Allied invasion, the Dutch government in exile called for a railroad strike to prevent food from reaching Germany. The Germans responded with an embargo on food shipments, particularly to the western part of the country where the largest cities are located. When this embargo was lifted the resulting dislocation of the food supply was exacerbated by an unusually early and cold winter and destruction by the retreating German army of docks and bridges, making the transport of existing food stocks difficult. In the larger cities daily food rations went as low as 800 calories per person and an esti-

mated 10,000 people died directly from malnutrition, and it was a contributing factor in many more deaths.

17. The camp was notorious for its treatment of inmates: of the estimated 200,000 people who passed through Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg between 1936 and 1945 one-half died from exhaustion, disease, and some were executed or died as the result of medical experiments.

18. A railroad stop south and east of Grand Rapids, a few miles east of Whitneyville.

19. In 1976 Jacob and Sally moved from the farm to a house on Cascade Road. Clarence and his wife operated the farm until 1980, when they sold it, along with the equipment and stock, and then moved to Missouri.

One Heritage—Two Congregations: The Netherlands Reformed in Grand Rapids, 1870–1970

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

After a Dutch immigrant had safely arrived at his destination and settled in, there was still one more important decision to make— which church to join. For the Protestant Dutch coming to Grand Rapids in the 1870s, there were a number of Christian Reformed and Reformed congregations from which to choose. No doubt relatives and friends gave advice as to which offered sound preaching and which practiced pure doctrine. But if the pews in those churches didn't sit well or the message from the pulpit didn't sound well the only thing

to do was to find others who were like-minded and to form a new congregation. In 1870 and 1876 respectively, two such new congregations were established in Grand Rapids: First Netherlands Reformed and the Netherlands Reformed Church of Grand Rapids on Covell Avenue.¹ What follows is the story of emigrants from the province of Zeeland in the Netherlands, and therefore speaking the same Dutch dialect, sharing a similar ethnic heritage, and in many cases with direct family ties, who formed two distinct congregations. Not surprisingly the



The First Netherlands Reformed Church building designed by James K. Haveman, nearing completion in 1951. Image courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Historian, family history researcher, author, and editor, Janet Sheeres is a frequent contributor to *Origins* and also one of its associate editors. She recently completed for publication an extensively annotated version of the Christian Reformed Church Synod's records, 1857-1880.

roots of this separation reached back to the Netherlands, but the initial leadership was from the province of Overijssel, not Zeeland.

The 1870 Secession from the CRC

Klaas Smit, from Overijssel, knew how to make the sparks fly, whether pounding the anvil in his blacksmith shop during the week or the pulpit on Sundays. He had joined the Christian Seceders who in 1834 had left the Dutch Reformed Church, the recognized national church, which the Seceders considered to be too liberal in theology and practice. Well-versed in doctrinal matters, Smit soon became a recognized leader and lay preacher in Seceder circles in the province of Overijssel. Before long, however, he broke his association with the Christian Seceders and joined the Churches under the Cross known in Dutch as the *Kruisgezinden*.² These *Kruisgezinden* had split off from the Christian Seceders in 1836 over the issue of the Church Order of Dort. They insisted on strict adherence to the Dortian church order, while the Christian Seceders were of the opinion that the 200-year-old church order needed updating. In addition, the Christian Seceders had conceded to the King's demand that they not incorporate the term *Gereformeerd* (Reformed) in their name, it being the name of the national Dutch Reformed Church; the *Kruisgezinden* however persisted in using *Gereformeerd* and thus felt the Seceders had sold out to the secular government.³

When Smit arrived in Grand Rapids in 1867, at age fifty-one, he joined the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), considered to be more conservative than the Reformed Church in America (RCA), at the time the only two Dutch denominations in the city. Many members of First CRC had similar *Kruisgezinden* roots in the Netherlands and Smit probably found like-minded

souls there. Rev. Roelof Duiker arrived at First CRC the same year. Born in De Wijk, Drenthe, in 1825, Duiker had served Seceder congregations in the Netherlands, but no *Kruisgezinden*; Grand Rapids First CRC was his first charge in America. Soon Smit began agitating against Duiker declaring that he, Smit, was a better preacher than Duiker.⁴ Peter Boukema, Arie Hoegee, and John Sinke apparently agreed. By September 1868, these

men and their spouses, and others led by Smit, formed a group that launched the Netherlands Reformed congregation. Perhaps this could be viewed as the first secession from the CRC.⁵

While Smit spearheaded the movement, there were forty charter members of the congregation. Not counting the six members of Smit's immediate family plus three other individuals from the province of Overijssel, the remaining thirty-one, a full 77.5 percent, were all from the province of Zeeland, formed by islands in the delta region. Of these thirty-one, twenty-one (over 50 percent) were from the village of Oud-Vossemeer. Even more remarkable is that except for two (John Sinke and Gerrit DeGraaf) all the members emigrated between 1865 and 1870, with the majority arriving in 1867, the time Smit was forming this independent group. Consequently, these members had not developed a connection with the Christian Reformed Church's ten-year history in the United



A map of the Ledeboerian congregations and Churches under the Cross in the Netherlands. Map provided by the author.

States. Neither did they have a connection with earlier immigrants to West Michigan who had gone through the struggles of settlement in their new homeland. These later Zeeland immigrants had also experienced a different church history in the Netherlands from those Zeelanders who had come in 1847 with Rev. Vander Meulen to Zeeland, Michigan, which had joined the Reformed Church of America.

These more recent immigrant Zeelanders met together, and when they met they missed their old way of worship. One of these immigrants wrote, "Each of us remembered how it had been in our native land under the leadership of our old ministers under which we had grown up. We noticed how very different it was here and often sighed, 'Oh, if we had but stayed there,' and 'oh, if only our ministers were here.' Since we were in touch with each other, this was always the subject of our conversation."⁶ Understandably, they formed a community of

faith with those of their own background and who could be called one of their own. Rev. Cornelius Kloppenburg, one who up until then had been associated with the Churches under the Cross, was such a person.

Although not a native of Zeeland, Kloppenburg was born in 1815 just north of the Zeeland border in Maassluis, on another delta island in the province of Zuid Holland.⁷ In 1848 he was admitted to the ministry via Article 8 of Church Order of Dort, (having special gifts for ministry, instead of formal training) into the Churches under the Cross, and in 1858 he became pastor at Oud-Vossemeer, at that time an independent congregation. Kloppenburg and the Oud-Vossemeer congregation remained independent for five years until 1869 when, along with the Christian Seceders and the Churches under the Cross, they were united into a new denomination named the *Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk*, Christian Reformed Church.⁸

The group in Grand Rapids appointed Smit to write to Kloppenburg, urging him to “come over and help us,” using the biblical phrase common to letters of call to a minister. Initially, Kloppenburg had no desire to emigrate, and his consistory was not willing to let him go. But then, rather unplanned, Kloppenburg and his wife traveled to the United States in 1870 due to a family crisis, when their only child, Katherine, 34, eloped with her lover to America. Rev. Willem C. Wust, a minister of a Dutch congregation in Lodi, New Jersey, had spotted her in Rochester, New York, where he had been the pastor, 1856-1864. Wust alerted the Kloppenburgs regarding her whereabouts; the Kloppenburgs crossed the ocean.⁹

When the Grand Rapids group heard that Kloppenburg was in Rochester, it immediately wrote to him asking him to come to Grand Rapids, at least for a visit with his old parishio-



Conelius Vorst, the pastor of First Netherlands Reformed Church, 1877-1891, had been the first editor of the CRC's first periodical, De Wachter, and a member of the first class in the CRC's Theological School, now Calvin Theological Seminary. Image courtesy of Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

ners. Kloppenburg agreed and arrived in late August 1870. The group asked his advice on church matters, and Kloppenburg stated that since he knew so little of church affairs in this country, they should choose the church least objectionable to them and join it. Nevertheless, the group persuaded Kloppenburg to stay as their pastor and organize them into a congregation.

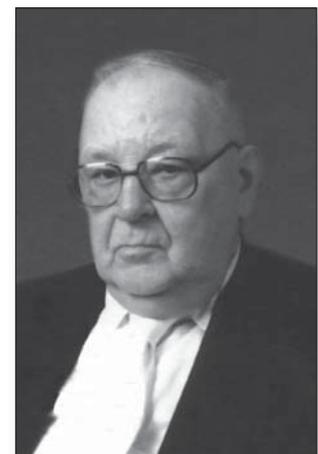
First Netherlands Reformed Church

Kloppenburg organized the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation (NRC) as an independent body on 30 November 1870. It met in the Swedenborgian Church building on the corner of North Division and Lyon Street until 1872, when its own building was ready.¹⁰ The first elders were Klaas Smit and John Sinke; Gerrit De Graaf and Willem Freeze were the first deacons. They named themselves the *Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Gemeente*, or Netherlands Reformed Congregation,

harkening back to word the *Kruisgezinden* had wanted in their names.¹¹

Two months after the congregation was organized, discord within its ranks resulted in the consistory being discharged. At the congregational meeting on 3 May 1871 a new consistory was elected, this time without Smit who with his family left the congregation, which meant all those remaining hailed from the province of Zeeland.¹²

In 1875 Kloppenburg realized that, due to failing health, he could no longer serve the congregation. He advised them to join the mother church, the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands, which had formed in 1869. Significantly, Kloppenburg did not advise them to join the CRC in Grand Rapids, even though many of the members of the First CRC had been members of the Churches under the Cross in the Netherlands. In spite of the difference between the First NRC and CRC there was a cordial local relationship between the two. CRC minister Gerrit E. Boer spoke at Kloppenburg's funeral. Shortly after Kloppenburg's death on 6 September 1876, Rev. Boer and Elder J. Gelok, of First CRC, attended a council meeting of First NRC attempting to persuade the congregation to return to the CRC



Rev. William C. Lamain, born in the Netherlands, served the First Netherlands Reformed congregation, 1947-1984. Image courtesy of John Lamain.

since the two were so closely aligned in doctrine.¹³ Instead, the congregation called Cornelius Vorst, a student about to graduate from the CRC Theological School, to be their next pastor.¹⁴

Cornelius Vorst served the First NRC from 1877 to 1891. He actively sought to establish denominational ties. Two congregations joined with his ministry: Passaic, New Jersey, in 1883 and South Holland, Illinois, in 1886. He also organized a congregation in East Saugatuck in February 1884, but that congregation disbanded. Vorst was not able to forge a union with Covell Avenue (formed in 1876). He returned to the CRC in 1891 when he accepted a call to Lodi, New Jersey.

From 1896 to 1904 Rev. Gerrit Wolbers, from Ooltgensplaat, Zeeland, served First NRC. He preferred independence and avoided denominational ties, so that no churches were added during his ministry. By 1905 the Grand Rapids congregation had dwindled in members and a serious attempt was made to unite with Covell Avenue; however, the congregation voted against it. Instead it decided to join the Churches under the Cross in the Netherlands to which Rev. Cornelius Pieneman belonged, so that he could be called. Just like Wolbers, Pieneman arrived from Ooltgensplaat. His first sermon filled the building to standing room only. His messages were always well-studied and moving so that he drew members from the Covell Avenue congregation, resulting in hard feelings. When Pieneman returned to the Netherlands in 1909, some of the Covell Avenue members who had joined First NRC returned to Covell Avenue.¹⁵

Rev. Hendrik A. Minderman next served the congregation from 1911 to 1921. During his tenure the Covell Avenue congregation, after forty years of independence, joined the NRC family. Minderman's messages were also well-prepared and appreciated. In fact, so

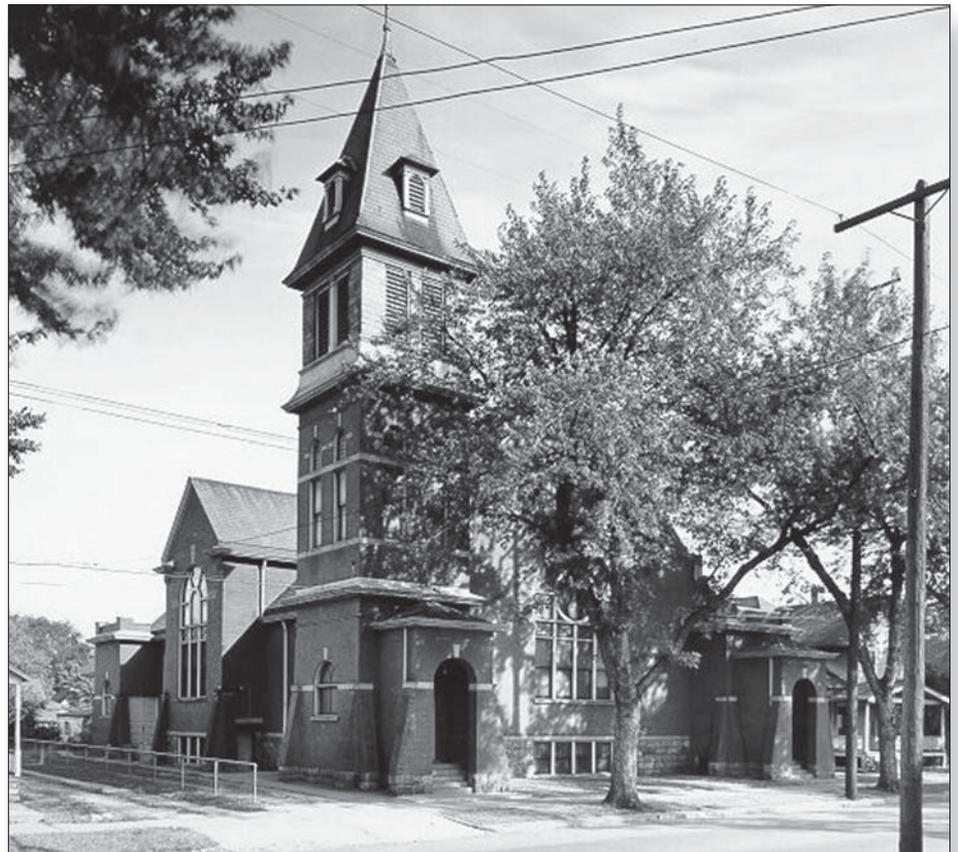
much so that several CRC ministers came to hear him preach, including Dr. Henry Beets and Rev. Lambertus Veltkamp of Coldbrook CRC.¹⁶ Minderman returned to the Netherlands in 1921, and a long vacancy followed at First NRC. Since there was now a denominational tie with Covell Avenue, its pastor Jacob C. Wielhouwer was able to assist with administering the sacraments. In 1920 both congregations acknowledged the need for an English service for their young people. Several members of both congregations joined to form Ottawa Avenue NRC in 1923. Unfortunately, after repeated calls, both First NRC and the Ottawa Avenue NRC remained vacant.

This vacancy was finally filled when Rev. William C. Lamain, also a Zeelander by birth, arrived from the Netherlands in March 1947. Lamain was called by both the Dutch-speaking

First NRC and the English-speaking Ottawa Avenue NRC. An arrangement was made that Lamain would preach services in Dutch at First NRC and in English at the Ottawa Avenue congregation. To accomplish this, he began English-language studies at Calvin College with Professor and Dean Albertus J. Rooks. Within months First NRC approved consolidating with Ottawa Avenue, which was approved by



The first church building and parsonage of the Netherlands Reformed Church on Turner, NW. Image courtesy of Gary Swets.



The Netherlands Reformed Church on Turner (now on Covell Avenue), designed by J. & G. Daverman, shortly after its completion in 1908. The building was razed for the construction of US-131. Image courtesy of Gary Swets.

the latter on May 26, 1947. Two years later the church approved the building of a new and larger sanctuary on Crescent Street which was completed in May 1951. Further growth during Lamain's pastorate resulted, in part, from post World War II immigrants from conservative churches in the Netherlands. By 1970, one century after its founding, the congregation listed 640 professing and 707 baptized members. Lamain served the congregation for thirty-seven years until his death in 1984.

Covell Avenue

In 1876 another small group of Zeeland immigrants, dissatisfied with the existing Reformed churches in Grand Rapids, began meeting in a rented storefront on West Bridge Street on the west side of Grand Rapids. In the spring of 1878, thirteen families left First CRC due to issues with its pastor and joined the Covell Avenue group.¹⁷ By June 1879 the families that left First CRC for Covell Avenue had grown to fifteen (thirteen were from the province of Zeeland). This group eventually became the Covell Avenue NRC, and had an off and on again relationship with First NRC.

In spite of the same ethnic and language heritage as their kin at First NRC, this group chose to remain separate. John Lamain, son of Rev. William C. Lamain, attributes the separation mainly to geography and income.¹⁸ He notes that the Covell Avenue people were primarily from the Holland-Zeeland, Michigan, area, immigrants who came to work in the factories on the west side, while First NRC was becoming more part of the establishment on the east side. Another significant difference between the two groups was their immediate religious experiences. While the members of First NRC had been part of Churches under the Cross, those at the Covell Avenue NRC came from emigrants who had left the Netherlands before the Churches under the Cross had begun. According to Joel Beeke, most of the adults of the Covell Avenue group had been influenced by the teachings of Rev. Lambertus Ledebor.¹⁹

Ledebor, quite independently from the Christian Seceders, had left the Dutch Reformed Church. In a dramatic worship service on Sunday, 8 November 1840, he threw the 1816 Dutch Reformed Church authorized Psalter, which included the Form of

Subscription,²⁰ from the pulpit to the floor. After the service, he led the congregation out to his backyard where he buried the offending instrument.²¹ This action led to his dismissal from the Dutch Reformed Church. Ledebor avowed all of his life that he had not seceded, but the church had let him go. Ledebor moved to Amsterdam, where he, totally unplanned, wandered into the just convened Synod of the Christian Seceders. They welcomed him and, even though he was not an official delegate, gave him a seat and a vote. He was even asked to serve on a committee. From all the strife among the Seceder brothers, Ledebor soon realized that by joining them he would subject himself to another yoke of rules and authority which he had just thrown off and decided to stay independent. While the Christian Seceders understood Ledebor to be one of them, Ledebor maintained that he never joined them.²²

Independently wealthy and single, Ledebor had the freedom to go where and when he wanted. He traveled throughout the Netherlands preaching his own brand of experiential theology. At one point he did away with his contemporary books and turned only to the Inner Reformation theology of the *Oude Schrijvers*, revered "Authors of Old."²³ The literature of these *Oude Schrijvers* was hugely popular among the conservative element of the Seceders.

Imprisoned twice, once for eighteen months for holding unauthorized worship services, he chose imprisonment over paying the monetary fines, which gained him much respect among his followers.²⁴ Earlier he had purchased a home in Benthuizen, Zuid Holland and went back to his previous parishioners there to organize a congregation, which became his home base.²⁵ For the remainder of his life he maintained that he was the pastor of Benthuizen and in exile from the



The building that had housed, 1908-1955, the Christian school of the First Netherlands Reformed Church on Hastings Street, as it was about to be razed for a road improvement project. Image courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Dutch Reformed Church. The small congregations which he established remained independent but collectively they were considered *Ledeboerian* churches. These churches eschewed any association with an overseeing entity. This preference for congregational independence characterized the Covell Avenue group for many years.

In 1883 the Covell Avenue group chose Marinus Donker to lead all the services as well as catechize the children. By 1887 the group had grown enough to justify calling a minister.²⁶ But they had no ecclesiastical fellowship with any other denomination from which to call. Then, just as Kloppenburg had arrived in 1870 in Rochester fortuitously for First NRC, so in 1887 Rev. Teunis Meijster arrived from the Netherlands in Rochester without a pastoral call. Meijster, also a pastor because of his gifts rather than theological training, had had a somewhat irregular ministry in the Netherlands, and had been deposed. Despite some reservations, the Covell Avenue group decided to call him. Two elders, instead of an ordained minister, installed him in December 1887.²⁷ At the same time they were formally incorporated as a congregation, taking the name *Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk*, Netherlands Reformed Church. About this time they purchased a building on Turner Avenue.

Meijster died unexpectedly in the summer of 1890 at the age of fifty-five. Their next pastor, Rev. Kasper Werner, arrived, with both Meijster's ordination and the proper organization of the congregation being questioned. As a result, Meijster's ordination was judged illegal, the consistory dissolved, and new officers elected. Werner, who had arrived in July 1893, installed Marinus Donker and Cornelius Oudersluis as elders; Werner himself was then installed by the two elders. In 1894 Werner, like Meijster, also died relatively young at age fifty-one.



Rev. Jacob C. Wielhouwer served the Covell Avenue Netherlands Reformed Church for 27 years, 1917-1944, and also served First Netherlands Reformed as a moderator during its long vacancy, 1922-1944. Image courtesy of Gary Swets.

In 1896 Rev. Titus Hager, previously at the NRC in Paterson, New Jersey, was installed as the third minister. Under Hager's ministry, which lasted until 1913, the congregation increased to a thousand members. Hager had also preached in and had been called by the First NRC congregation. The fact that he chose the Covell Avenue congregation left such bad feelings that Hager was never again asked to preach at First NRC. It was under Hager's ministry that some members of the Covell Avenue congregation left to join First NRC after Pieneman arrived to serve that church, which compounded ill feelings and open antagonism.

Grand Rapids *Press* reporter, William P. Lovett, attending Hager's farewell service in 1913, observed, "In the *Nederduitsch* Independent Church may be seen a pronounced type of that stern simplicity which characterized the Puritans. . . . Most of the families of the Turner Avenue [Covell Avenue] church come from old Zeeland and are strict to the last degree." He described them as "plain people whose women decline all finery in adornment; not only black coats but black shirts are

worn by the elders. . . . The hour and fifteen minute long sermon was broken up by singing a psalm. Everything was in Dutch and some of it in the Zeeland dialect."²⁸

After Hager's departure, the congregation called Rev. Jacob C. Wielhouwer, from Ooltgensplaat, Zeeland. During his ministry the two congregations sponsored the Ottawa Avenue congregation in order to have an English-speaking church. Up until that time the children were taught their catechism questions and answers by rote in Dutch, many not understanding the meaning of what they memorized, since they spoke only English. This move caused considerable controversy, especially since Wielhouwer, not able to preach in English, opposed the formed a third congregation. He had supporters in both congregations, but those in favor won out, and the English-speaking congregation became a reality.²⁹

While Wielhouwer served the Covell Avenue congregation for nearly thirty years, he also served as counselor of First NRC and the Ottawa Avenue congregation during their vacancies. After his retirement in 1944, the congregation remained vacant for over two decades, and dwindled to a dozen families. Financially, Covell Avenue was unable to provide Wielhouwer with a pension and he had to transfer his membership to First NRC so this congregation could provide for him in his old age.

Shortly after Rev. Lamain's arrival in 1947 to pastor First NRC, he insisted that Covell Avenue do away with its lay leadership, give up its exhorters, and that the few families left join First NRC. The issue went to the 1947 NRC Synod which revoked the preaching licenses of the three licensed practicing exhorters. According to Lamain, "either you are an ordained minister or you are not."³⁰ Of the three exhorters, two acquiesced, but John Noordyke

did not and continued to exhort. For this the congregation was asked to leave the denomination, which it did, returning to its independent status.

In 1960, under the right of eminent domain, the State reclaimed a corridor of land west of the Grand River in order to construct US Route 131. Included in the corridor was Covell Avenue's property. The congregation was paid \$135,500 in compensation. With these funds the congregation built their present church building (which was dedicated on 5 April 1970). In 1966 they called Rev. Benjamin Densel, also born in Zeeland, the Netherlands. Densel had immigrated with his family to America when he was two years

old and although Americanized could still preach in Dutch, which he did on Sunday afternoons until 1974, when these services were discontinued. With Densel's advanced age (he retired in 1986 at age seventy-eight), the congregation re-affiliated with the NRC on 21 April 1987.

Additional Note

As could be expected after a century and a half and several generations later, the congregational differences have been smoothed over. Currently both First and Covell Avenue NRCs, as part of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations in North America, continue to have close relations with their

sister churches in the Netherlands, the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* formed in 1907. As of 2006, the Covell Avenue NRC ministered to some 113 professing members and First NRC to some 345 professing members. The denomination currently consists of twenty-six congregations in North America and one hundred congregations in the Netherlands. In 1993 Heritage NRC split from First NRC, and formed a new denomination: the Heritage Reformed Churches, dropping the word *Netherlands* in 2005. In spite of this division, the three congregations jointly operate Plymouth Christian Elementary and High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.³¹ ↵

APPENDIX: TWO NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATIONS COMPARED

Dutch Roots:

CHURCHES UNDER THE CROSS	LEDEBOER
Had split off from the Christian Seceders in 1836 over the issue of Church Order of Dort	Was deposed by the Dutch Reformed Church in 1840 for refusing to adhere to the Church's Form of Subscription as formulated in 1816
Church Order of Dort on equal status with Three Forms of Unity, i.e., Canons of Dordt; Belgic Confession, and Heidelberg Catechism	Held to the Three Forms of Unity; however, fiercely independent, therefore not bound as strictly to church rules and oversight as stipulated in Dortian church order
Insisted on the word <i>Gereformeerd</i> in their name; it being the name of the established Dutch church that began with the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619	Also insisted on the right to use the word <i>Gereformeerd</i> in its name
Sang Psalms introduced in 1773 to replace the old 1566 Dathenian rhyming of Psalms	Sang 1566 Psalms of Datheen set to Genevan tunes ³²
Old style-garb for clergy preferred	Insisted on old-style garb for clergy; plain clothes for parishioners
Were more concerned with "the Spirit's leading" than with formal education; hence ordained many lay leaders per Art. 8 of Dort	Preached as the Spirit gave him the words; did not ordain exhorters
Congregations regulated by oversight of Classis and annual synods	Because Ledebor did not ordain exhorters to be pastors, he kept tight control over his congregations
Kept strict Sabbath rules for Sunday	Kept strict Sabbath rules for Sunday; often food was prepared on the Saturday; and on Sunday the window curtains facing the street were drawn

FIRST NRC³³

Members mainly from Churches under the Cross in the Netherlands

Organized in October 1870 with Kloppenburg as first pastor

Initially named Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids

201 N. Division 1870-1873

322 N. Division until 1951

1261 Beckwith Avenue NE since 1951

1877-1891: Rev. C. Vorst, trained by CRC, conducted services

Joined with Lodi, NJ, in 1877 and South Holland, IL, in 1886 to form a denomination

1898 approved name change to *Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Gemeente*, Netherlands Reformed Congregation

1892-1893: Rev. M. Vander Spek from Dirksland, Zeeland, the Netherlands³⁵

1896-1904: Rev. Gerrit Wolbers from Ooltgensplaat, Zeeland, the Netherlands³⁷

1906-1909: Rev. Cornelis Pieneman from Ooltgensplaat, Zeeland, the Netherlands³⁹

1911-1921: Rev. H. A. Minderman from Rotterdam, the Netherlands⁴¹

Dutch language only until 1920

some services in Dutch remain

Jointly sponsor English-speaking Ottawa Street congregation in 1923

Vacant 1921-1946: Nov. 1943 a small group of families left (due to the ministerial void) to become Rehoboth Reformed Church⁴³

1947 Rev. W. C. Lamain arrived from the Netherlands. Recommends few families at Covell Avenue join First NRC

Under Lamain's charge, church growth leads to 640 professing and 707 baptized members in 1970

COVELL AVENUE NRC

Members mainly followers of Ledeboer

Organized for worship in 1876; from 1876 to 1883 services were conducted by the elders who read sermons

Rented space on Bridge Street NW until 1887

1044 Turner Ave NW until 1960

met in West Side Christian School until 1970

1255 Covell Avenue NW since 1970

1883 - 1887: Elder Marinus Donker conducted all services³⁴

Organized as an independent *Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Kerk* (Netherlands Reformed Church)

Remained independent: known as Nederduitsch Reformed Church

1887-1890: Rev. Teunis Meijster, from Haarlem, North Holland, the Netherlands³⁶

1893-1894: Rev. Kasper Werner from Rijssen-Wal, Overijssel, the Netherlands³⁸

1896-1913: Rev. Titus Hager⁴⁰ – church increased to 1,000 members (350 families)

1915-1944: Rev. J. C. Wielhouwer from Ooltgensplaat, Zeeland,⁴² in 1918 Covell Avenue joins NRC denomination.

Dutch language only until 1920

some services in Dutch until 1974

Jointly sponsor English-speaking Ottawa Street congregation in 1923

Vacant 1944-1966; congregation dwindled to about a dozen families

Members opposed joining as well as letting their lay leaders go; breaks relationship with First and is independent until 1984

1966-1986: Rev. B. Densel pastor, church growth ensues⁴⁴

1987 re-affiliation with First NRC

Endnotes

1. Both congregations operated under various names (see Appendix). In order to avoid confusion I will refer to them as First Netherlands Congregation and Covell Avenue throughout.

2. Churches under the Cross or *Kerken onder het Kruis*, was a term going back to pre-Reformation days in Europe when the Reformers were persecuted. The English word for *kruis* is *cross* and the term is often translated as Churches under the Cross (of Christ). However, another translation of the word *kruis* is *burden* or *hardship*. This is what the earlier term really meant: a church under the hardship/burden of persecution. By the late 1860s some forty Churches under the Cross congregations had been organized in the Netherlands.

3. Herbert Brinks, "Bastiaan Broere: Pioneer on the Eastern Seaboard 1822-1887," in *Origins* Volume IV, No. 2, 1986, 3-18. "I had always esteemed these men [Seceders] highly. I regarded them as my fathers in Christ, who deserved my respect and confidence as they performed their duties. And now I could not understand how such men could stoop to ask an earthly king for permission to worship God as their consciences dictated. I had read of Ezra that he was ashamed to call on the king for help in order to lead the Israelites to Jerusalem in safety. Reading this made a lasting impression upon me, and I have never been able to surrender my conviction that Christ was dishonored by the church leaders asking permission to worship."

4. Grand Rapids First CRC minutes, 15 Feb. 1869, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

5. *Ibid.*, 17 Mar. 1870. K. Goudzwaard and Jacob Bierens requested their membership papers and wanted to leave because they felt that the congregation in Grand Rapids was not like the Churches under the Cross. They became charter members of First NRC. Boukema and wife are not on that charter member list.

6. History of the Netherlands Reformed Congregation in *100th Anniversary of the First NRC 1870-1970*, Col. 299X, Box 8, Folder 20, S. Kendzel Church Collection, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

7. F. L. Bos, *Kruisdominees: Figuren uit de Gereformeerde Kerk onder 't Kruis* (Kampen: Kok, 1953), 149-157. Kloppenburg moved to Amsterdam in the

early 1840s and became a shopkeeper. In 1843 he married Susanna Binnebosz. The family moved to Meppel where the couple joined the Seceder congregation where Kloppenburg's lay preaching was well-received. Kloppenburg might have become the pastor in Meppel, but the congregation called someone else, and he moved to Zwartsluis to exhort among the small group of Seceders there. This group wanted to affiliate with the Churches under the Cross and Kloppenburg became their pastor.

8. A. Bel, *et al* (eds), *De Vereniging van 1907* (Houten: Den Hartog, 1984), 43-44. In 1867 the majority of the forty Churches under the Cross merged with the Christian Seceders, but three congregations remained (Enkhuizen, Lisse, and Tricht) until 1907 when Rev. G. H. Kersten united the Churches under the Cross (having grown again to thirteen) with the majority of the *Ledeboeriaanse* congregations (totaling twenty-three). However, nine *Ledeboeriaanse* congregations opted out of this new union and formed the Old-Reformed Congregations (*Oud-Gereformeerde Gemeenten*). In 1948 they joined with the Verbond van *Oud-Gereformeerde Gemeenten* and *Oud-Gereformeerde Gemeenten* in Nederland, a federation founded in 1922.

9. Katherine eloped with Hendrik Lindhout, a sailor, also from Oud-Vossemeer. Unfortunately the marriage of Katherine and Hendrik did not survive; Katherine, in the 1880 Census, was living with her mother and four Lindhout sons: Cornelis, 8; Dingenus (Dennis), 7; Hendrik, 5; and Johan, 3. In 1900 she had moved with her son to Missaukee County; Hendrik was remarried to Anna De Graaf, widow of Wybren Doedema. He was manager of the American Sewing Machine shop and lived at 201 LaGrave Avenue. (Kent County Marriages; Grand Rapids 1889-1890 *City Directory*; *United States Federal Census*).

10. Richard H. Harms, "The Swedenborgian: GR's Church Incubator," *Grand Rapids Magazine* (March 1993) 23.

11. *Nederduitsch* is an archaic term for Netherlands, used in the Netherlands from approximately 1600 to 1800 and was part of the name of the Dutch Reformed Church, *Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Kerk*.

12. Klaas Smit was born 19 Apr. 1816 in Hasselt, Overijssel; he married Maria

Foekert in 1838, emigrated in 1867, and was a blacksmith in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Smit was instrumental in the formation of a Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids. After the difficulty with Kloppenburg's leadership he associated with Second Reformed Church (RCA) which was still Dutch-speaking, but left and formed an independent conventicle, which he served until his death. At one time the number of adherents was two hundred. Regular Sunday services and catechism classes were held with Smit acting as preacher and pastor. In 1887 Rev. E. I. Meinders and Elder A. Van Drunen of South Holland, Illinois, organized the congregation with fifty-five members, which adopted the name the True Reformed Church. Klaas Smit and Jacob Gouwe were elected as elders and A. Smilde and I. Kol as deacons. Meinders administered the sacraments twice annually. Around 1887 half of the flock left to join the newly organized Covell Avenue NRC. Smit died on 8 Apr. 1896; Maria, on 15 Jan. 1887.

13. Grand Rapids First CRC minutes, 5 Oct. 1876.

14. J. R. Beeke and J. Den Hoed, "First NRC in Grand Rapids" in *The Banner of Truth*, July 1990, 184; Aug. 1990, 206. In 1892, Rev. Vander Beek, pastor of the LaGrave CRC, attended the installation of NRC pastor Rev. M. Vander Spek, and when Vander Spek died in 1893, Vander Beek conducted his funeral.

15. During Pieneman's ministry a congregation in Paterson, NJ, joined the denomination in 1907, and one in Kalamazoo, MI, in 1909.

16. Beeke, "First NRC" in *Banner of Truth*, December 1990, 325.

17. Grand Rapids First CRC minutes, 28 March 1878.

18. J. W. Lamain, *The Life and Work of Rev. W. C. Lamain* (Stevens Point, WI: Worzalla, 2003).

19. Beeke, "Covell Avenue NRC," in *Banner of Truth*, Oct. 1991, 264. This is supported by G. H. Kersten and J. Van Zweden, *A Brief Historical Survey of the Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands and the United States of America* (Rotterdam; *De Banier*, 1947) 74.

20. By Royal Decree, the *Algemeen Reglement voor het bestuur der Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk in het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden* was approved on 7 Jan. 1816.

21. Kersten, *Brief Historical Survey*, 45.

22. J. H. Landwehr, L. G. C. *Ledeboer in zijn leven en arbeid geschetst* (Leiden: Donner, 1900).

23. Landwehr, *Ledeboer*, 94.

24. J. M. Vermeulen, *In de Lijn van Ledeboer; Ruim honderd jaar predikanten, oefenaars en gemeenten* (Barneveld: Koster, 2007), 49.

25. Benthuisen is located just east of Den Haag.

26. James D. Bratt and Christopher H. Meehan, *Gathered at the River: Grand Rapids, Michigan and Its People of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 51.

27. The Church Order of Dort states that only ordained clergy may ordain other clergy.

28. J. R. Beeke, "The Covell Avenue NRC," *The Banner of Truth*, March 1992, 288.

29. A. VerWys, *A Short History of the Three Churches of Our Persuasion in Grand Rapids* (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author).

30. Beeke, "The Covell Avenue NRC," March 1992, 69. Lamain acted on the tradition of the sister denomination in the Netherlands, that the position of exhorter was no longer valid. Either one was a minister or was not. The following meeting of the NRC Synod concurred, thereby reversing a 23-year tradition in the North American NRC.

31. As of 2008 there are six churches in the United States and five in Canada. The denomination owns and operates the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids. <http://heritagereformed.com/>.

32. Petrus Datheen (1531-1588) was a Reformed minister who played an important part in the Reformation of the southern provinces of the Netherlands. He translated the Heidelberg Catechism into Dutch and put the Psalms to rhyme,

which were put to Genevan tunes. This became the standard Psalter for the Dutch Reformed Church from 1566-1773, when new wording was introduced.

33. Name changed to Nederduitsch Reformed Church of Grand Rapids (1896-1947); in 1947 name changed to First Netherlands Reformed.

34. Marinus Donker, born in 1834 in Oosterland, Zeeland, the Netherlands, married Willemina Broere in 1862, emigrated in 1878, and died 7 Sep. 1911. <http://Genlias.nl>; and <http://seekingmichigan.cdmhost.com/>.

35. M. Vander Spek was born on 1 Oct. 1822, married Jacoba van Berkel in Maassluis in 1852, emigrated in 1892, and died 22 Aug. 1904 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. www.genlias.nl and Fulton Street Cemetery Records, <http://kent.migenweb.net/cemeteries/grandrapids/fulton/dar/index.html>.

36. Teunis Meijster was born on 2 Feb. 1835 in Schiedam, the Netherlands; married Dina Misset, who died in 1883; emigrated in 1887; and died 2 Aug. 1890 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. ([Genlias.nl](http://www.genlias.nl): Beeke, "Covell Avenue NRC" in *Banner of Truth*, Oct. 1991, 264).

37. Gerrit Jan Wolbers was born on 23 Sept. 1866, in Markelo, Overijssel, married Gerritje Bulten on 4 Dec. 1890, emigrated in 1896, and returned to the Netherlands in 1909. He died 11 Jan. 1922 in Enkhuizen, the Netherlands. In the 1900 US Federal Census, Francina Vander Spek, daughter of Rev. Vander Spek, is a servant in the Wolbers home.

38. Kasper Werner was born on 14 Jan. 1843 in Amsterdam. He married Johanna J. Lancee on 26 Oct. 1865, emigrated in 1893 with wife and two sons, and died in Grand Rapids on 28 Oct. 1894, at age fifty-one of pneumonia. www.Familysearch.org and www.ellisland.org.

39. J. de Haas, *Gedenkt Uw Voorgan-*

gers (Haarlem: Vijlbrief, 1984) V 2, 275. Cornelis Pieneman was born in 1863 in Zevenhoven, the Netherlands, married Janigje Hardenbol in 1891, emigrated in 1906, returned to the Netherlands, and died on 2 Aug. 1912 in Dirksland, Zeeland, the Netherlands.

40. Beeke, "Covell Avenue NRC" in *Banner of Truth*, Nov., 1991, 286. Titus Hager was born on 6 May 1862 in Berlicum, Friesland; emigrated with family in 1885; settled in Paterson, NJ, married Winnifred Wagenaar, and was ordained per Dort, Art. 8 (special gifts) in the Peoples Park NRC in NJ. He died in 1947.

41. Haas, *Voorgangers*, v 2, 250. Hendrik A. Minderman was born on 16 May 1856, in The Hague. He married Hendrika J. Scholtens in 1879 in The Hague, emigrated to America in 1911, and died in 1933 in Lisse, the Netherlands.

42. Jacob C. Wielhouwer was born in 1875 in the Netherlands, emigrated in 1906 to New Jersey, married Jennie Cooper on 23 July 1907, moved to Grand Rapids in 1915, and died in Grand Rapids in 1956.

43. Gary Swets, *A Goodly Heritage: The History of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation and Denomination* (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author). On 1 Nov 1944 the Free Reformed Church on Scribner Avenue and Rehoboth Reformed Church merged, becoming Rehoboth Reformed Church. In 1948 it became known as the Old Christian Reformed. In 1974 it became the Free Reformed Church.

44. Beeke, "The Covell Avenue NRC," March 1992, 69. Benjamin Densel was born on 10 June 1907 in Vlaardingen, the Netherlands; immigrated in 1909 to Passaic, NJ, where his father became pastor; married Madeline Padmos in 1930; and died 4 April 1988.

“When I Was a Kid,” part II

This my childhood autobiography must be dedicated to the beloved wife of my old age—Gwendolyn De Jong

Meindert De Jong, with Judith Hartzell¹

The Entire Community: Introducing the Fisherfolk

Life in Wierum

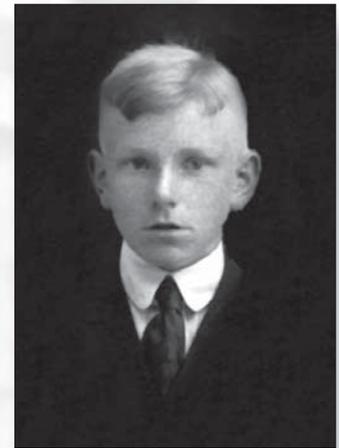
Wierum was a village of about 1,000 people, about half of whom were fisherfolk. The people of our province, Friesland, have had a reputation for being stolid, stubborn, and sober, and this might have been true of inlanders. But our fisherfolk were very emotional, excitable and sentimental; also independent and rowdy. Because of their lifestyle our village was called the “little town that never sleeps.” In winter always as much was happening at midnight as at midday. As we boys tried to sleep in our closet beds² near the heart of the village, we could hear the music and the stomping of peasant dancing in the public inn.

It was a live, vivid village day and night, but only because of the fisherfolk.

For much of the summer and fall, the village was nearly deserted. Only two generations before, Wierum had had a fleet of fifty fishing boats, but we had suffered two disasters since then. Around the turn of the century, a terrible storm wrecked twenty-seven of Wierum’s fishing boats and all the men aboard drowned.³ Then the English had come with their steam-driven boats and fished our waters until the fish were gone. Now Wierum had

only three fishing vessels. For their living most of the fishermen had to hire themselves out on German boats from early May through November.

When they returned home, if possible just in time for the Feast of Saint Nicholas on December sixth, with money in their pockets, they were ready for fun. Deep into the winter



Meindert De Jong as a young teenager. Image courtesy of Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

nights we could hear them carousing in the village inn.

The fisherfolk were colorful in every way: their speech, their houses, and their fierce pride and prejudices—they hated the English first, destroyers of their fishing grounds, and the Germans second, masters of the ships on which they had to work,

Meindert De Jong (1906-1991) was an award-winning author (the first American to win the Hans Christian Andersen Medal) of twenty-seven children’s books. Judith Hartzell is a professional writer now living in Greenville, South Carolina, who became a friend and co-writer with De Jong when they both lived in southwestern Michigan.

and they loved Queen Wilhelmina and all but worshiped the House of Orange.

They also dressed colorfully. The muscular fishermen wore brown suede pants, wooden shoes painted yellow, and loud-colored stocking caps. Their women wore skirts which only fell to slightly below mid-calf, exposing their ankles to view. This was much more daring than other long-skirted women like Mother and Beppe. They also slicked their hair back so tight and stiff with soap; the joke was that they couldn't even entirely close their eyes when sleeping.

Some of the older fishermen still wore a piratical small-button jewel earring in one ear, and they wore gold buttons on their home-knit underwear.

The fisherfolk had opinions about everything. They liked to stand around on street corners or crowd the dike steps in noisy groups. When we children passed them, coming home from school, they would stop us and inquire about our health. Fisherfolk were contemptuous of farmers, whom they considered mere dull clods like the earth they worked. But our father made their coffins and furniture in his carpenter shop, so they claimed us kids as their own.

"Poor Davey, he looks sick," a fishwife would say in pity when Dave fought, for months, a problem of poor digestion. "Come into my kitchen here a minute."

It was impossible to decline, so Dave would obey and be fed bits of smoked fish or cups of strong tea which brought him down shortly after with cramps. An anxious mothering fishwife could not be refused.

America was often the theme of fisherfolk talk—that dreadful land far away where there was no sea. Everyone who migrated there gave up fishing, they said, so it must be an evil place. It wasn't even flat! America was



The De Jong house built in Wierum by Remmeren De Jong, with the carpenter shop behind. Image courtesy of Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

made of hills and valleys, mountains and crooked places. Everyone knew that God had made the flatland where our village sat: it was flat from being a sea bottom once. God especially loved the sea, according to the fisherfolk: He created it, and He had made His Son walk upon it. But some evil force must have shaped America.

To move to America, they said, was to court "a living death."

Other than the fisherfolk, it was the dike and the ever-present sea which gave our village its character. To me as a boy, the dike was enormous. It was a long, man-made earthen hill, covered by grass, and in spring masses of flowers, on the landside. But grass couldn't grow where the salty sea spray would hit the sod, so boulders were built into the grassless bottom half of the seaside dike, to take the beatings of the tides.

Where there was grass, there were

sheep and calves grazing, but mostly sheep. Sheep were considered good for the dike—their peg legs compacted the soil under the grassy sod, and helped keep the dike intact against storm tides.

The dike stood higher than the houses, which were mostly only one story high. Our house, which Father had built, was an exception. We had the highest roof in town. Its glossy blue tiles shone beautifully against the red brick house, trimmed in shiny brown and white, and from its attic windows we boys could see as far as the lighthouse on Schiermonnikoog, one of the Frisian Islands.

Stone steps led up from the village main street to the dike top, and a narrow brick walkway ran the length of the dike. That narrow brick walk was the perfect place for us kids to fly our kites over the houses of our village, provided we tied a clod of heavy sod

to the tails of our North-Sea-wind-buffed kites.

There were almost no trees in Wierum. The wind from the North Sea was too rough, and with it came the salt spray, killing the trees too tall to be sheltered by the dike. But inland about a half hour's walk (about one and a half miles) was the small town of Nes, where my aunt and uncle and my cousins lived. Nes was sheltered and had trees; it was a good place for storks to nest when they migrated back from Africa in spring. One family of storks nested on my aunt and uncle's roof. The story was that storks had once, long ago, nested in Wierum too, but that was much before my time. I'd never seen a stork until I was old enough to visit my Nes relatives.

Rem and the Fisherfolk

Being redheaded, Rem was easy to spot, and once this saved his life. He had been out in the country and had somehow stumbled and fallen into a canal. We heard the story from the fishwife who fished him out, when she presented Mother with her half-drowned but now recovered son.

"Here I was walking back to town, when I accidentally looked into the water of the canal beside me and saw something red in it," she said. "That red doesn't belong in there," I said to myself. So I knelt down and tugged at it and brought up this little red devil of yours. He hadn't been out a minute when he starts hopping along beside me like nothing had happened, and he asks me if I haven't a dried flatfish for him to chew on. Bless the Lord, I'd had such a tug-of-war with death over him, I'd gladly have stuffed him with fish if I'd had any. The little rascal! Such a burden to his long-suffering mother!"

The superstitious fisherfolk believed that red hair came from the devil, so they usually called Rem "the red fox" or "the red devil." In spite

of that, they liked him tremendously; everybody did.

Mother was used to Rem being saved at the last minute from disaster. "He'll drown, or he'll burn up, or explode, or just disappear," she'd worry.

"Tie him to a post," Big Beppe once suggested.

"Would you like to try it?" Mother asked. Both women had long ago given up trying to hold him down.

One wild November night the whole family searched for hours, in the darkness, and no Rem could be found. Then, around midnight, the dike warden was awakened by unexplainable bursts of fire and dull explosive sounds coming from the polder, a mile or more beyond the village. The warden raised an alarm, believing we were being attacked by a mysterious enemy.

"Oh, but that'll be Rem," Mother said, so she and Father set out walking towards the polder.

It was Rem. Somehow he had found gunpowder and fire for a light, and, figuring that darkness would make his experiment more spectacular, he hid out on the polder until the right moment. They found him, having a fine time.

Adventures with Rem

Rem was an expert at two things—adventuring and making money. Sometimes he combined the talents. Even though Father and Mother forbade it, Rem and Dave and I used to hunt for bones on the sea bottom when the tide was out. These bones Rem would sell to the Rags-and-Boneman (provided they were not human bones) for cash, half-pennies usually. The Rags-and-Boneman could use bones to make strong, well-wearing buttons.

We got the bones from dead things which washed up on the seaside of the dike. These were dead sea creatures, usually. Once Rem found a partly-decayed cow carcass and got Dave to help him in harvesting the bones. It

was rough work for Dave, whose delicate digestion meant he couldn't tolerate most foods. The rotting carcass smell made him sick, but not Rem. Still, Dave stuck at the task until, after three days' work, they had dragged six heavy sacks of bones to a fisherman's shanty where Rem said they could hide the treasure.

Then they traded it in for more than a gulden—two hundred half-pennies—an enormous amount.

That night, in the deep closet bed my older brothers shared, Rem begged Dave to do him a favor.

"I'd better ask God to forgive me, Dave. Mom and Dad have forbidden us to hunt bones,⁴ and it was my idea to drag you into this. But Dave, you're so good at making speeches—say it for me, Dave, would you? And use fancy words!"

So Dave solemnly told the Heavenly Father about all of Rem's transgressions that long day—while Rem fell peacefully to sleep beside him.

Centuries before our time, our village extended out into the North Sea. But a terrible flood had destroyed half the town. When the people rebuilt, they made a dike around the old church, but they had to give back to the sea the destroyed half of the village, including most of the ancient graveyard. Now sometimes the pounding waves unhoused the bones of those long ago dead.

Once, when Rem and I were scavenging for bones, I held up a big one for Rem to admire, but he yelled back, "No! Throw that away—it's human."

I threw it far and for a long time after couldn't find the heart for the bone hunt.

How Rem knew which was an animal and which a human bone, I never understood. He was always sure and knowledgeable about—to me—such strange unknowable things.

When the tide was out, we could walk far out on the dry sea bottom

almost half way to one of the Frisian Islands.⁵ We could go as far as the Sailing Water—where the sea was so deep the tide never receded. Here the fishermen of Wierum anchored their boats.

We two boys searched the emptied sea bottom for pools of water which might hold stranded fish, and if we found a flounder, Rem would spear it to take home. That night Mother would cook a delicious dinner.

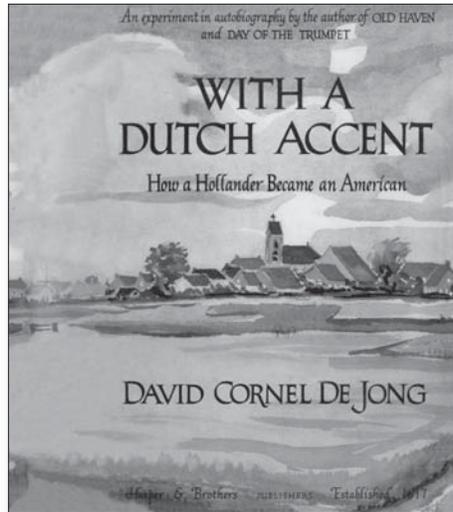
Often as we stood far from shore and played, there'd come a hissing noise in the sea's total stillness, a sigh. The tide was beginning to come in. When we heard that, we'd have to run like mad. Even so we'd often be waist-deep in water by the time we made it back to the dike. It was an exciting life.

Knillis

I don't really remember my little brother's birth on 9 January 1911—the adults must have herded us boys off somewhere during that event. But I remember his baptism. In the cold, unheated church the pastor dribbled cold water on his little head, and he began to cry. Up in the balcony I was so greatly disturbed and offended, I stood up as if to go to him; Pake⁶ David had to pull me down and quiet me.

We were in the balcony because that was the place in church which Pake David rented each year when the pews were auctioned off. Most people sat downstairs, but Pake preferred the balcony seat, near a stove-pipe—the only warm place in winter—and near the organ, which he always tried to shout during psalm singing. I would sit beside him, blasting forth as loud as I could to keep up with my Pake.

Just the Sunday before, Rem had managed to drop a spider over the balcony rail onto the bald head of a worshipper below. This was our ever-



The dust jacket for David De Jong's (Meindert's oldest brother) "experiment in autobiography." This image of Wierum on the dust jacket was reproduced from a watercolor painted by David.

lasting Sunday pastime. The cracked plaster of the church walls was home to lots of bugs, so finding a spider or earwig or sewing bug⁷ was never the problem. The suspense came from having to position oneself directly over a bald head, and then letting go of the bug at just the right moment when Pake wasn't looking.

Rem was a master bug-dropper; Dave was timid about it because Pake for some reason seemed always to catch him at it and punish him. At not quite four, I was still a fascinated onlooker.

But now this day there was no thought of bug-bombing. The fourth De Jong boy was being christened. They named him Kornelis, a Frisian name. I always called him by the pet name, "Knillis."

Like all of us, he was born at home. Mother was attended by a midwife and a doctor, who came over from Ternaard, since Wierum was too small to have a doctor of its own. This man was big and strapping and very good-hearted. He rode a motorcycle, which was advanced for those days, and often when he came to the village he brought his wife along,

pulling her behind in a tandem cart.

One time, in the country just outside Wierum, the cart came loose and he left her behind without knowing it until he reached the next village. Meanwhile, to everybody's enjoyment, she sat there, sputtering mad.

The first time I tasted anything alcoholic was after Knillis's birth. Some days afterward Mother invited all her female friends over to admire the baby, and she served them raisins soaked in brandy. Since I was hanging around, I got some too. They were called *boerenjengens* (farmer boys). Delicious.

My parents weren't teetotalers; that is, they didn't refrain from drinking on principle, but they didn't drink. Or rather, they rarely drank. Pake David, though, was well-known as a principled and outspoken non-drinker.

I became Knillis' regular babysitter. When Mother wasn't looking I would take him to play up on the dike, on the rails left there from dike repairs right after I was born. After the flood, men had used rails on the dike to accommodate a "tipcart," and I imagine it was so called because each dike repairman could easily push his cart along the thin rails laid out along the dike's top, and then tip his cart forward to let the load of dug dirt down into the breach of the storm-broken dike. When the repairs were completed, the rails weren't needed anymore and were left behind to rust away. I thought it a good play place for us two kids: we imagined we were on a "Going to America" train, high up there on the dike beside the sea—and America was across the sea.

But Knillis developed an itchy scalp disorder which looked reddish and rusty. I suffered torments of guilt about it, thinking it was from the rusty rails. Mother treated it with a cure-all ointment which people used for all kinds of skin problems, and

it worked. Knillis's scalp gradually became rust-free.

Playing Games

There were normal games which occupied us every day in good weather, and then there were Rem-created games. One of the joys of living in a Frisian village like Wierum was that as soon as you were old enough, you all played the same games—every kid. (These were the normal games.) There were between thirty and fifty of us. Boys, that is. We had nothing to do with girls, who had their own games. Even with girls in your family, you simply didn't play with them.

It seemed there was a game in style in Wierum at all times, and the styles would mysteriously change. A kid would be told—no one knew who started the change in styles—“Everybody's doing hoops!” or “Bring your marbles—we're playing over at Freerk's!” or whatever. We had stickball season, tag, hide-and-go-seek, stilts, snowball fighting, or, if on rare occasions there was enough snow, snowman building (it usually took the whole kid population to scrape together enough snow for one small snowman).⁸

Flying kites and pole vaulting [across ditches] were very popular among the older boys. Rem taught me how to vault across ditches when I was old enough—about six—but he didn't usually vault with me. He had his own cronies for that game. They would take long poles and vault over drainage ditches.⁹ That

they were drainage ditches and not draft ditches was important. Draft ditches had currents and flowed into the canals, which emptied into the sea. Since none of us knew how to swim, these were dangerous; fooling around draft ditches was for the bravest only—or the most foolish.

But with a drainage ditch, the worst that could happen was a pole stuck in the mud. There a boy would hang until he had no choice but to slide into the ditch. We chanted a nonsense rhyme when anybody fell in. It didn't make much sense, but it was horribly humiliating right out in public.

Older boys also liked to fish for

eels in the canals. They would tie a worm on some woolly yarn, and the eels would get their sharp little eel teeth caught on the yarn. Then we would haul them in and take them home for Grandfather to put in his smoke shed for delicious smoked eel, or for Mother to fry delicately in vegetable oil.

As noted earlier, kites were flown from the top of the dike, since the dike was the highest spot in the village. However, since winds from the North Sea were strong, we had to kick loose some pieces of dike sod with plenty of mud on them for weight, and tie them to our kite tails. This led to problems, since it was against

the law to remove any sod from the dike. Stones and sod were not to be removed, for they could give the high tides an entrance into the dike to break it down. Pake David once took a boulder from the seaside of the dike to use for a knife sharpener. His next door neighbor was then dike inspector and, though they were friends, he made him put his knife-sharpener boulder back in the exact same hole. Luckily, the dike inspector wore a high hat and could be seen from afar. It would give us time to bring in our kites. Then we would stamp the sod back into the dike where it belonged, and run.

One of our strangest games, and about the only one played by boys and girls alike, was called “Sweet Soup.” We would take licorice sticks, cut them up in small pieces, and put the licorice in medicine bottles with



Fierljeppjen, literally “leaping far,” across ditches in the northern Netherlands. It is still done and has become an extreme sport; the current distance record is 21.26 meters (69 feet, 9 inches) set by Bart Helmholt, in Burgum, Friesland on 5 August 2010.

warm tea water. Then it had to stand overnight in a dark place. That “dark place” was supposedly very important. And the whole silly game was to go down all the streets, shaking the bottle and then sucking the foam from the bottle’s neck—but you could suck only the foam so that the soup lasted as long as possible. Everybody doing it made this important.

All of the above were normal games, but Rem had devised others. Mainly I remember the canal boat game. Canals offered great sport for us. When a canal boat neared, we would stand on a bridge, looking down where we expected the boat to pass. As the passengers went under us, we would yell, and then, when they looked up, we tried to spit in their eyes. The captain of the boat would then hastily steer it to the canal side and the irate passengers would jump off and chase us. Then you had to run, and to run faster, you kicked off your wooden shoes and ran light as deer in only your socks, and no adult could catch you.

Christmas and Other Customs

Children weren’t given Christmas presents in Wierum on the anniversary of the Christ Child’s birth. That was considered pagan. On Christmas and also on Christmas Eve we went to church. The day after Christmas was a holiday and everybody went visiting far-away relatives—they had to be within walking distance though; we didn’t have cars or carriages. Often we would walk to Nes to visit Aunt Grietje, Mother’s sister, and her husband, Uncle Jochem, plus their four children. I was closest to their daughter, Pietje, who was about my own age.

But it didn’t matter that our Christmas was so plain and pious, for we had already celebrated St. Nicholas Eve and Saint Nicholas Day on 6 December. This meant a great feast for everyone and gift-giving

for us children. Three weeks ahead of time every housewife and every one of the five bakery shop bakers in Wierum began turning out breads, rolls, buns, cakes and cookies—not in their usual shapes, but as ducks, cows, pigs, trees, and ships, or chewy ginger cakes in the shape of a man or woman. Because Father ran a business which catered to everyone in town, he needed to stay on the good side of them all. So it was our duty to buy sweets from everybody who peddled them, including housewives who went door to door. By 5 December our shelves and cupboards would be bursting with St. Nicholas cakes, breads, and other goodies, which we would eat for weeks to come.

St. Nicholas Eve was especially for children. We left school with our loads of ginger and molasses cakes, some as long as three or four feet. Mother prepared a special dinner for us that night and before we went to bed we left our stockings beside our closet beds. During the night St. Nicholas would come and fill them with gifts, at least until you turned twelve.

Twelve was considered grown up. On that St. Nicks the stockings were left out as usual, but next morning, for the grown-up one, all that was found in them was salt. He was now “salted-off” from childhood and had become a man. For recompense, boys were presented their first cigars, which they were expected to smoke while admiring adults looked on. It wasn’t considered unhealthy to smoke in those days—nobody had uncovered scientific research against it. Instead, it was considered unmanly *not* to smoke.

We left the Netherlands while I was still too young to be salted-off or “Santa Claused,” though Rem and Dave both were. This was a custom of the fisherfolk something like a cross between Christmas and Halloween. Father consented to let them do it to

my older brothers once only. Both he and Mother were apprehensive about what would happen—with good reason as it turned out.

The two boys and I were fed the usual St. Nicholas dinner. This happened the winter before I turned four; I was just recovering from the last pneumonia attack, and Father said that I positively was not to be included. After dinner the lamps were lighted and the table cleared. Dave began to get uneasy when he noticed that all breakable things were being stowed safely away. Then Father and Mother gave last instructions: “Sit here on the bench behind the table, boys. Don’t be afraid! And don’t leave your seats no matter what happens.”

The dining room blinds, closed during dinner, were now opened, and the boys saw a crowd in the street, peering in. Then Mother and Father went away. After that, a procession of fisherfolk entered the room, one by one, dressed in outlandish, scary costumes. Rem sat unmoved beside Dave, who was responding to the excitement of the crowd. Each apparition was more horrible than the one before until along came St. Nick, a headless man, who whinnied like a horse. Dead fish dangled from his wrists and he pushed a wheelbarrow full of peppernuts,¹⁰ which he threw at the boys. It was his demon-like voice which unnerved Dave, who jumped up on top of the bench, screaming.

Rem said only, “Ah, that was just Fat Sape from down the street.” Dave barely recollected himself and sat down again when the last and worst figure arrived: a personage with a half human, half animal face. His eye was a large bloody real cow’s eye, and a blue cow’s tongue flopped horribly from a slit of a mouth, which moaned. Rem whispered to Dave, “it’s only our neighbor Sipke; don’t let him get to you,” but when the figure drew apart his cloak and let slither forth

a heap of cow intestines, Dave gave way to hysterical fear. Mother and Father came rushing into the room and Father carried Dave out then, but all night he was delirious with terror. Never again was anybody “Santa Claused” in our family.

The Carnival Comes to Town

It was late spring—about the time when the whole family went hunting wild duck eggs for a special meal—that the carnival came each year. We called it, in Frisian, the *merke*, and it was strictly forbidden to us. “Worldly temptation” was the verdict all our church people put upon it. “The portals of hell,” Mother said.

Wandering carnival people brought merry-go-rounds and clowns and aerial acts, but only the state church people could go—mostly fisherfolk children and their parents. Excited little fisherfolk lined the canal dock the day the carnival was expected, and more of them ran up onto the dike to catch the first glimpse. “Here they come!” someone would shout, and the children streamed out of town along the canal banks to meet the gaudy *merke* boats. Then began a week of great, noisy merrymaking.

All this we observed only from afar. The only thing Mother and Father allowed us to do was buy *olie bollen*, or “fat balls,” something like warm doughnut holes, from the vendor who sold them at the outer edge of the sinful carnival. That way we did not enter the “portals of hell” and still had a little taste of the wicked, worldly *merke*. It was the only concession we got.

During the carnival evenings the town rocked with loud music from the village inn. The fisherfolk danced their peasant dances. We couldn’t escape the sounds in our beds at night, and being told it was evil didn’t help take our minds off it. We would lie and listen to the music, punctuated



Meindert De Jong as he was gaining a reputation for his children’s books during the 1950s. Image courtesy of Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

every few minutes by a terrific thud, as if all the dancers in their wooden shoes had simultaneously jumped down from the rafters onto the dance floor. What exactly they were doing we never found out; our parents were very mysterious about it. Maybe they didn’t know either. “Just remember that the devil is dancing right with them,” Mother would say.

Occasionally one of us would be kidnapped by a sympathetic fishwife for a forced ride on the merry-go-round. “Oh look at the poor worm—bereft of all that’s good. See how his parents are cutting the very life out of his soul,” she would say, and somehow, though we could dodge her during ordinary times, we would succumb and ride. But of course we had to confess and repent when we got home. Somebody would bring the story home anyway.

Usually the *merke* came when Father had just returned from his two weeks of compulsory military training. By law he had to serve not only his own term but also the term of his deaf and dumb brother. “It isn’t right to make a man give up for two weeks the business which he needs to support his family,” Father would

say. “In America they don’t force men into a compulsory Army. I don’t like the idea of my boys having to do this when they grow up!” We were always glad to have him back home. With his blue uniform and hat, his rifle and sword all stashed away once more in a corner of the attic, life got back to normal, except for the ongoing temptation of the *merke*.

Then, on the final day, Father and Mother took us far away from the music for a hike through the deserted meadows. (The farmers had joined the fisherfolk at the carnival.) It was always a happy time, and it seemed to fall always on the best possible sunny spring day. We would walk away from the devil’s music out into the lush green countryside, past the fertile acres of farmers’ fields, past blue flax, gold linseed, and purple pea-blossoms. Every fifteen minutes we begged Mother for samples from the special food basket she carried. And it seemed that every bridge we passed was an excuse to stop and drink some nonalcoholic “marble-beer.” Each bottle held a glass marble so big you could only get it out by breaking the bottle. Since the bottle could be returned for ten times the value of the marble, we never could break it—except on this special day.

Then later, when we stopped to loll under a bridge or along a canal, Father would tell us about his life as a soldier, funny or adventurous stories. But he’d always ended by saying, “It isn’t right that any man be made to march and drill and shoot against his will!” Too soon the evening bells would call us home, and we would draw near to Wierum again, and to the *merke* music, and the struggle against temptation.

Wierum was a popular stop for the *merke* people, not only because of the wild enthusiasm of the fisherfolk for all carnival events, but also because Wierum was rich in mussels. Wooden

pilings had been driven long ago into the sea silt below the dike; the tops of the pilings had rotted, leaving a line of jagged stumps, like old blackened teeth, to which mussels—smaller than oysters, but even more delicate—attached themselves. For some reason, to the villagers eating mussels was taboo, but the carnival people loved them and would stay an extra day in our village to gorge on mussels.

We kids would feast on them too—it seemed it was all right for kids to do. When Dad and the other carpenters threw out their wood shavings, we gathered enough to build a fire below the dike. Then we would pile a pail full of mussels onto a flat tin on the fire to roast and, when ready, their shells would open, and when cooled a bit we'd eat those delicious mussels right out of their shells.

On Being Frisian and Being Dutch

People in Wierum considered themselves to be Frisian first, Dutch only second. Our ancestors had been free citizens in the ancient sailing nation of Friesland, which was part of the map of Europe a century before Christ. “Hail, free Frisians!” was the cry with which they greeted each other. Also, “Rather dead than slave!” But the Dutch had conquered them and imposed their law and language upon our defeated ancestors. Now the name Friesland applied not to a whole nation but only to our province, one of the eleven provinces of the Netherlands.¹¹

We were forced to speak Dutch in school and church; books and newspapers and legal proceedings were in Dutch. But at home and on the street we remained true to our ancestors and spoke their ancient language, Frisian, which resembles Anglo-Saxon, the ancient language of England, more than it does Dutch.

Compared to Dutch or to English, the Frisian we spoke at home was

more basic and less prudish. Nobody minded mentioning body parts. We had a cookie called “little thumbs” and another called “naked girls.” Some buns were baked joined together. You would eat the two together as one piece; they were called “baby bottoms.”

As a schoolboy I spoke two languages, but knew how to write only one. We were forbidden to learn written Frisian in school. Today it is quite different—Frisian is now a required subject. I remember a song, which I translate, that we sang proudly.

*Frisian blood, rise up!
And rush and roar through our veins!
Fly up! We sing of the best land on earth,
The Frisian land, full of honor and fame.
Sing, then, and shout it far all around.
Your ancient glory, Oh Frisian ground.*

Frisians had then, and still have, a reputation for being stubborn and independent. There was a legend about Wierum's old church. It was built by Cistercian monks, who came to Friesland to convert the people to Christianity. The story is that the heathen Frisians were so proud and stubborn that they refused to bow to anything, so the monks deliberately built the church entrance door too low—the Frisians were (and are) tall—so that they would have to stoop to enter. But the Frisians outwitted the monks. They simply backed in, so they were stooped backwards—not bowing to images or anybody.

One unusual remnant of Frisian customs which still existed in my childhood days was the wearing of golden helmets by women. People say that long ago Frisian women shaved their golden hair and fashioned protective helmets to wear, in memory of a Frisian princess who was scalped by some conqueror. Now, wearing helmets was a status symbol. Big Beppe



In the Frisian provincial capital of Ljouwert (Leeuwarden) this statue commemorates the importance of dairy cattle to the province's farmers. The statue by Gerhardus Jan Adema in 1954 is titled “Us mem” (“Our Mother”) represents the progenitor of the Frisian-Holstein pedigree. Image courtesy of Richard Harms.

owned a beautiful one, with a fancy lace cap to wear over it on Sundays and other dress-up occasions.

Women could get awful headaches from the heavy helmets, but it did look Cadillac-prosperous, so the Frisians had a saying to cover the headache problem: “Those who will be pretty must endure pain.” Occasionally we would hear of another kind of helmet headache—some thief would enter a carriage on the road, bop a woman over her helmeted head, and run off with the precious headpiece. However, barring such a happening, the woman’s helmet was the family’s bank. If times got bad, she would take the helmet to a goldsmith, have a piece clipped off, and sell it to him for cash. But my Big Beppe could say proudly that her helmet had never been clipped.

Even though we considered ourselves Frisians first, we were Dutch second. The whole village of Wierum wholeheartedly celebrated Queen Wilhelmina’s birthday on 31 August each year. The children would all wear white uniforms with orange sashes and, for the boys, white caps with black visors. Then we paraded through the village, and shopkeepers handed us little candies. We would have paraded all day for those rare candies. On this special day everyone hung Dutch flags from their roof eaves for the celebration. The streets were so narrow that flags from opposite houses were like red, white and blue canopies over our heads. It made everything very gay and proud and patriotic.

Ice Skating

We only had two official vacations in our school year, each only one week, but we got an additional God-given holiday when ice formed on the canals. School was always suspended for as long as we had thick-enough-to-skate ice (about two or three

inches was considered plenty safe). The whole village skated, except for a few unfortunate ones like my Aunt Sieuke,¹² who had weak ankles and would have to stay home and miss all the fun. But all the rest of us, from four to eighty, would skate every possible minute of every day.

When the water began to freeze, the smallest boys were constantly checking to see if it was thick enough. First they tested the thin ice one by one; then, if it didn’t bend too alarmingly, they would dare to begin the game of “Over the Paper Ceiling,” when a bunch of boys, arms locked, would run across a ditch as a test. The ditches weren’t deep, and there was no current in them, so this wasn’t dangerous except to our comfort and to our pride, for if we fell through the ice, a jeering song would follow us all the cold, wet way home, and even the girls would laugh at us.

I missed the first winter I was eligible to skate; pneumonia kept me in bed. But the next year, when I’d begun school, my skating time came at last. Father had already taught Dave and Rem to skate five years before, and both were strong skaters now. With the two older boys, he took them to the beginner’s moat and announced that Dave should watch as Rem learned to skate. Father said to four-year-old Rem, “Go on out there, son; strike out with your skates and try to stay upright.” Rem was used to ignoring danger. He jumped out onto the ice, waved his arms like frantic, broken chicken wings, and crashed at once. This he accompanied by wild shrieks. He then attempted to rise, but his feet kept sweeping away out from under him. At last he managed to stand again. For the next ten minutes Rem repeated the crash-sweep-scream-stand action until he got the feel of gliding. In another five minutes he was outskating all the other beginners, and he’d outgrown the begin-

ner’s moat.

Then Father said to Dave, “Well, David, that’s how you do it. Only you can skip some of Rem’s wildness—you must have learned something from watching him. Now, on the ice you go!” And Dave had learned the hard way too, but more gently and steadily than Rem.

This year it was my turn. Father gave me my first polished wooden skates with their long, narrow, sharp steel blades which I fastened to my leather shoes. When I got onto the beginners’ ice, he handed me a little chair to hold onto and told me to stroke behind it. His teaching technique had mellowed over time. An hour later, when Father returned to see how I was doing, he took away my chair and I could skate free. It was my little life’s proudest moment.

On the canals, people skated in long tandem lines, each with one hand cupped behind him, while holding his neighbor’s held-in-back hand with the other. This was too dull for younger skaters; they would “Crack the Whip,” moving so fast and whipping their long lines so hard that the one on the end would be sent flying across the ice.

Vendors set up little booths along the banks of canals, to sell candies and oranges and hot chocolate. If it occasionally snowed a bit, men would sweep the snow from the ice, and everyone was expected to tip the sweepers a half penny. If you didn’t have a half-penny when you passed a sweeper, you’d better skate past him fast, or he’d throw his broom between your feet to mow you down.

Skating season was short; it seldom lasted a full week, and many winters it never froze enough to make skateable ice, so the rare skating season was like a party. People you ordinarily had to treat respectfully, like the schoolmaster, were your equals on ice-skating days. You didn’t even have

to tip your cap to him, not even to the ministers of the two churches or to the notary public, who was quite some dignitary. Except on ice there were no better ones; we were all the same, old and young, male and female, teacher and student. We were all revelers in the fun of the dropped-down-from-heaven ice holiday. 3

Editor's Notes

1. De Jong and Hartzell met after he had retired from writing and became her writing mentor.

2. At the time, due to lack of central heating, beds were built into cabinets, or closets as De Jong calls them. Once people were in bed, the doors were closed to preserve as much warmth as possible.

3. On 1 December 1893, thirteen of Wierum's fifteen fishing vessels were lost in a storm and sunk. Twenty-two men, many from the same families, were drowned.

4. Because of the importance of livestock to the Dutch economy, containing communicable diseases among farm animals was paramount. When such diseases occurred infected animals were destroyed and the carcasses buried. To ensure protection for uninfected livestock it was illegal to dig up animal bones. During periods of economic hardship the poor, especially if young, would ignore this law in order to earn some desperately needed money by selling bones to a boneman, as the De Jong boys did here. Many who dug up bones were caught, arrested, convicted, and

sent to prison, regardless of age, which probably explains the parental prohibition of hunting for bones.

5. The water between the Frisian Coast and Islands is called the Wadden Sea, from which comes the English word *wade*.

6. The Frisian word for grandfather.

7. "Sewing bug" is not defined, perhaps De Jong meant insect common during sowing time.

8. The Gulf Stream moderates winter temperatures in the Netherlands so that most winter precipitation is in the form of rain.

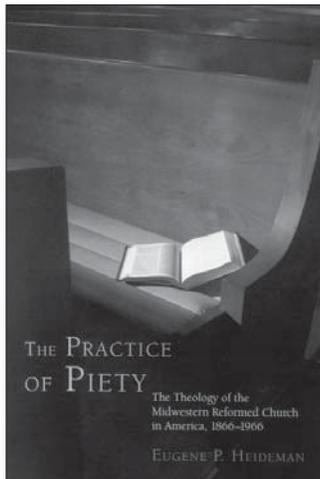
9. The poles had large wooden knobs at the bottom to prevent the poles from sinking into the soft bottoms of the ditches.

10. Small, hard ginger cookies.

11. The Netherlands had been divided into eleven provinces in 1839. Flevoland, a province consisting almost entirely of land reclaimed from the Zuider Zee, became the twelfth Dutch province on 1 January 1986.

12. De Jong's mother's oldest sister, married to Uilke Renzes Stiemsma.

book notes



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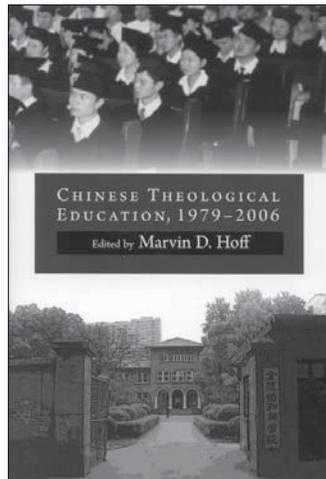
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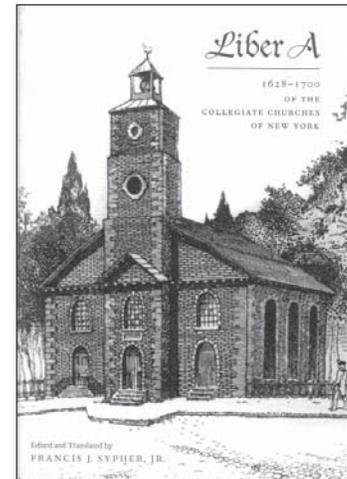
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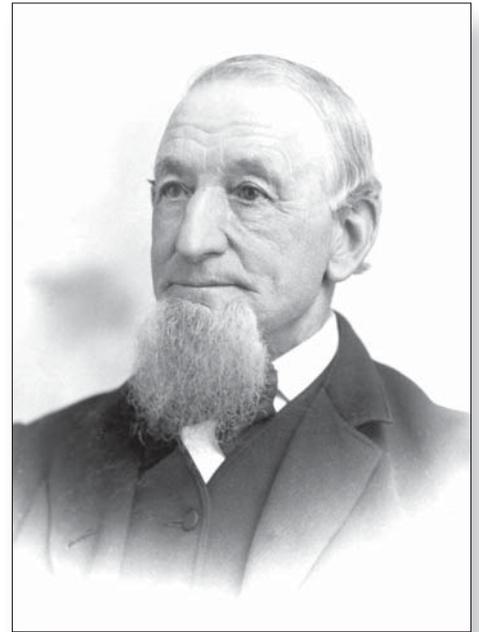
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