

# ORIGINS



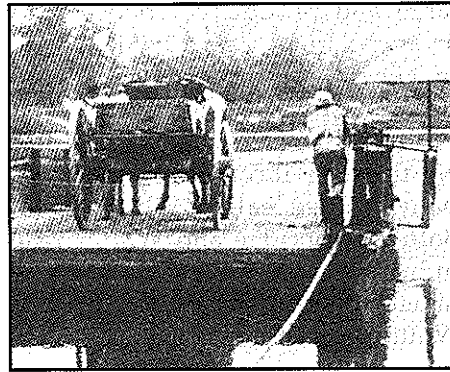
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*Origins* is designed to publicize and advance the objectives of the Archives. These goals include the gathering, organization, and study of historical materials produced by the day-to-day activities of the Christian Reformed Church, its institutions,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

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# Whitinsville, Massachusetts

Annemieke Galema

Worcester, Massachusetts, is a large and productive county with an undulating surface which rises, in general, from two hundred to two thousand feet above sea level. Within its borders, the township of Northbridge incorporates the company village called Whitinsville. Both Northbridge and Whitinsville industrialized rapidly during the nineteenth century, and by 1880 the Whitin family dominated the local economy. To them the company village of Whitinsville owes its origins, its name, and its one-time leading position as a producer of cotton and textile fabrication machinery. Consequently, the township's population more than doubled between 1815 and 1910, with the greatest portion clustering in Whitinsville.

As Rev. A. P. Marvin described the village in 1879, it was marked

by the evidence of thrift in every direction. The buildings were nearly new and kept in "good repair." The architectural design of the shops and factories copied the most advanced models and were supplied with the best machinery available. Some of the homes were elegant and surrounded by capacious grounds and gardens. Rev. Marvin declared,

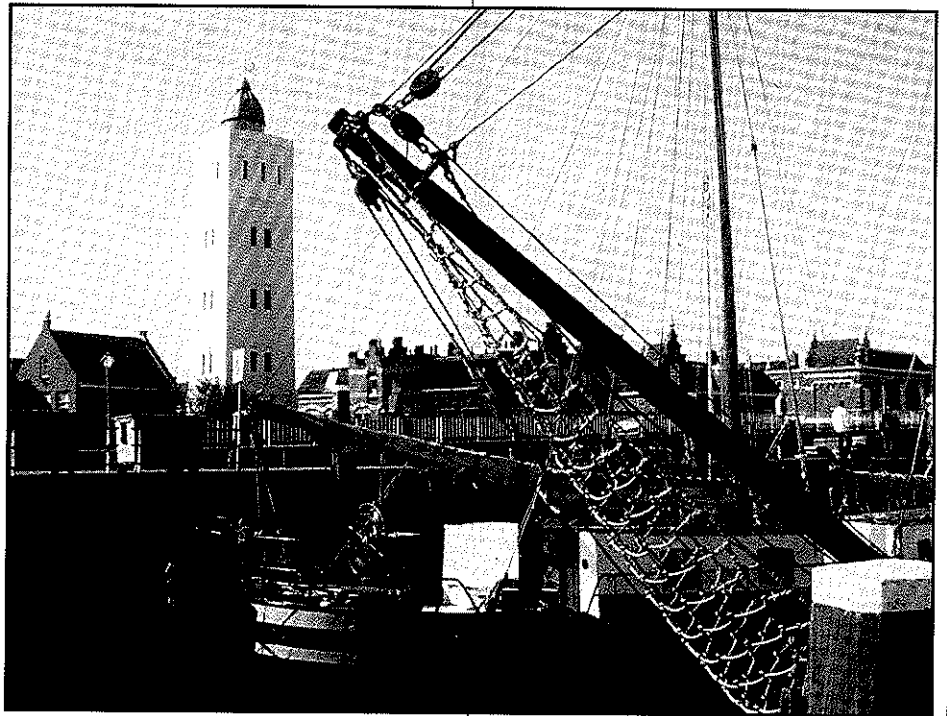
"It would seem that (the area's) growth must be mainly in the villages near the river and the railroad. . . . And as the property in these localities is very much under the control of the members of the

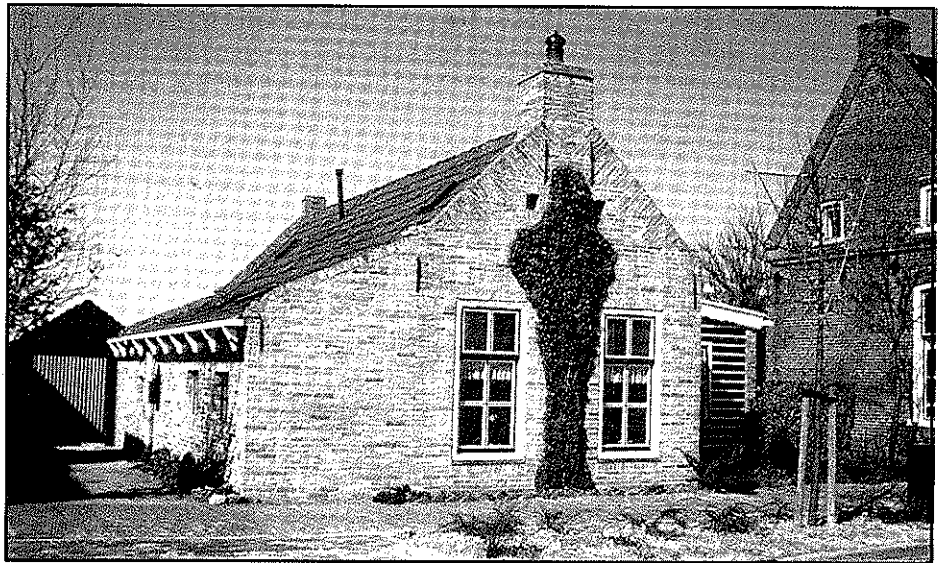
above named (Whitin) family the gradual development of all the capabilities of the valley of the Blackstone, within the limits of the town, may be expected. As the villages increase, the natural effect will be to raise the value of the land in the Centre, by furnishing a market for all the products of the farms and gardens. The quarries are near for the convenience of builders, and thus many circumstances combine to prophesy a prosperous future to this ancient town."

Obviously the clergyman's opti-

*Harlingen Harbor.*

Drs. A. Galema has nearly completed her doctoral thesis which recounts the history of Frisian immigrants in North America. This article edited and condensed for *Origins* is a small fragment of her longer study. *Origins* will review that book when it is published and hope as well that Galema will provide us with popularized versions of the Frisian experience in Paterson and elsewhere. Those who wish to consult Galema's sources will need the footnotes which are available in the Calvin College Library Archives.



*Laborer's house in Oude Leije.*

mistic report could not have predicted that Whitinsville would soon contain a vibrant Frisian community. The first of many Frisians arrived in Whitinsville almost by chance in 1886. No one planned their coming, and one of the two newcomers returned to Friesland almost immediately. A widely credited tradition indicates that these first Frisian migrants arrived with a herd of Holstein-Frisian cattle purchased to populate John C. Whitin's Castle Hill Farm.

Verification for that account comes from a record book which Thomas Navin consulted while compiling the Whitin family history. The Castle Hill Farm, managed by John Whitin's widow after his death in 1882, suffered the loss of its registered Jersey cattle to tuberculosis in 1886. To restock the herd, Mrs. Whitin, like other American farmers in those days, sent agents to the province of Friesland to find and purchase a number of good Holsteins. In 1886, these cattle were shipped under the care of two men—Jan Bosma from the village of Nijland and Hendrik de Boer from Gaastmeer.

Recounting these events in 1950, J. Kooistra wrote that Jan took an immediate liking to the American environment and wanted to stay but Hendrik got homesick because, as the story goes, he had already promised marriage to a young lady in the fatherland.

Jan Bosma stayed to work on the Castle Hill Farm. In May 1887 his sister and her husband, Wytse B. Feddema, arrived from Tzummarum, and they were followed by Feddema's brother Pieter. In September 1888, Piet's wife, Klaske Hoogendijk, joined him with their five children. All came from Tzummarum. In 1892, Rintje Bosma, brother of the first emigrant, Jan, came over with his wife and children. A year later Albert Rienstra (a brother of Rintje Bosma's wife) moved his family to Whitinsville from the village of Abbega in southwestern Friesland. Oepke Plantinga with his wife and children departed from the same place.

These events indicate that the group expanded rapidly, but, more importantly, they illustrate the many connections which linked the families and individuals together *before* they crossed the ocean. Ties both of kinship and regional background are obvious. Thus the forces that bound the Frisian emigrants together before they left the Netherlands continued to influence the social patterns established in Whitinsville after settlement.

In 1880, the Dutch-born populace throughout all of Massachusetts numbered 993; by 1910 the figure was 1,589. A few of these were located in the city of Boston, mainly Jewish cigar makers who had come from Zwolle and Rotterdam. In 1900, Boston had 391 resident Hollanders and 486 in 1910. In other parts of Massachusetts a few Dutch were located in the industrial towns of Fall River, Lowell, and Worcester (3, 9, and 8, respectively, in 1910). It is obvious then that most of the Massachusetts Dutch lived in the area of Northbridge. This town, and primarily the village of Whitinsville, lodged the remarkable number of 987 Dutch immigrants. They were 11 percent of the 8,807 population. J. Jansen, a minister of the Whitinsville Christian Reformed Church, noted that most of the Dutch immigrants were Frisians from the southwestern part of Friesland's northern clay area.

From the whole group of Dutch migrants who settled in the township of Northbridge between 1880 and 1910, I was able to examine extensively 132 people who came from the six municipalities of Wonseradeel, Barradeel,

Ferwerderadeel, Het Bildt, Westdongeradeel, and Oostdongeradeel. Some 83 percent of these came from only two municipalities, Wonseradeel and Barradeel, and there were also areas of concentration within these two municipalities. In Barradeel the largest percentage of emigrants to Whitinsville came from the towns of Minnertsga (22 percent) and Tzummarum (39 percent).

It is a curious reality that the vast majority of Whitinsville's Frisians did not become farmers in Massachusetts, but industrial workers. Available evidence for sixty-four immigrants whose occupations are known both in Massachusetts and Friesland indicates that, although nearly all of them were agricultural workers in the Netherlands, in Whitinsville forty-six of the sixty-four immigrants gained livelihood as machine operators or in other tasks directly related to factory production.

This occupational pattern faithfully represents the entire Frisian

subculture which, in 1900, worked mainly (43 percent) at the Whitin Machine Works or the Whitin Cotton Mill. Only 5 percent became farmers, and all but one of these were truck-garden farmers. Most unmarried women worked at home, though a few worked as maids or in the cotton mill. By 1910, when the Frisian community nearly tripled the occupational ratios remained nearly constant. Several new farms were added, and unmarried women were more frequently employed as maids and store clerks, but the major difference occurred in the categories of industrial occupations. In 1900, the census taker labeled most Frisians as "factory workers" in 1910, they were identified as mechanics engineers, machine operators, and foundry men. Obviously, then, these rural Frisians adjusted to the industrialized workplace with few difficulties. Quite pragmatically, they simply accepted whatever the Whitin Company offered from its list of available tasks.

Even so, some immigrants did

seek careers as independent farmers. Several acquired neglected Yankee farms and restored them for productive agriculture. That pattern was also evident elsewhere—in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, for example, where Finnish immigrants rejuvenated abandoned farmlands. In 1911, several Whitinsville Frisians also explored Edmonton, Alberta, as a site for agricultural livelihoods. Gaele Bakker, with his wife and seven children, filed land claims northwest of Edmonton, where other Dutch immigrants had already established a Christian Reformed congregation. But farm ownership, although always a potent symbol of achievement for immigrants with rural origins, did not lure a significant portion of Whitinsville's Frisians to Canada or elsewhere. Most of them, coming from the ranks of the unemployed or of low-wage laborers, gained sufficiently satisfying social status and economic security in Whitinsville to keep them in that industrial setting.

By most standards the industrial community which the Whitin family established in Northbridge Township was ideal. For example, Massachusetts passed its maximum ten-hour workday law in 1879, but the Whitin family had already adopted the ten-hour day in 1864. By 1907, the Whitin Company also instituted the five-and-a-half-workday week while most employers still demanded a full six-day week. And in Whitinsville, no night work was required. T. Navin, who wrote a history of the Whitin Company, concluded that the Whitin workforce enjoyed a wide range of



*Bangma Farm — last remaining Dutch dairy farm in Whitinsville.*

freedom, which reduced the need for supervisory discipline. These conditions contrast sharply with T. van der Wal's assessment of labor conditions in Friesland—conditions of poverty, labor unrest, and massive unemployment.

The Whitin Company also provided housing for its employees. Navin estimates that two-thirds of the people rented company housing in 1870. By 1901, the family had constructed seven hundred company homes, and many if not most of the Frisian immigrants began their New World lives under a company roof. Census records indicate that 81 percent of the Frisian immigrants rented homes in 1900, and the percentage declined only slightly to 72 percent in 1910.

Along with housing the company offered apprenticeships, which young men often preferred to advanced formal education. Arnold Banning, who became a company apprentice, recalls that he came to Whitinsville as a ten-year-old in 1913. He attended the Whitinsville school until he was fourteen and then began his factory apprenticeship. As the oldest son, Arnold worked to support his parents and younger siblings, a task which became an urgent necessity when his father died. Banning's brother and sister gained advanced degrees in sociology and theology, but he, like other firstborn sons, joined his parents to support a large family. Harold Wassenar confirms the impression that firstborn children were viewed as additional resources to provide large families with greater security and comfort. Apprenticeships were well suited to those objectives.

The Whitin Company knew well enough that recent immigrants made good and reliable employees—especially when they came

from conditions of poverty and underemployment. Thus, along with the Frisians, a variety of other European immigrants gathered for work in Whitinsville. Before 1880, the local populace was predominantly New England Yankee. The Irish, who first joined them, worked in the foundry, but the next generation of Irish would not take on that heavy work, and during the 1880s they were replaced by French-Canadians and Armenians. The Frisians, who arrived during the same period, avoided the foundry, preferring work in the machine company.

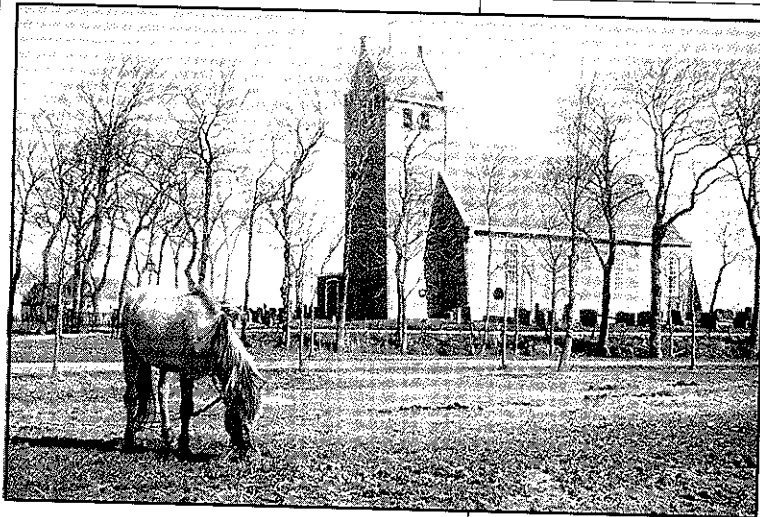
Whitinsville, with a population of Yankees, Frisians, Irish, Armenians, and French-Canadians, provided the ingredients to test the theory of the American melting pot. The various national-origin groups (one writer mentions fourteen in 1905) worked cooperatively together in the mill and machine shops, but after hours each group retreated behind familiar social boundaries. The French-Canadians and Irish clustered together around their Catholic church, and the Armenians were similarly clannish. Yankees who expected Europeans to assimilate the social and cultural patterns of traditional New England were disappointed, because the restoration of a homogeneous Yankee past gained little or no support from Whitinsville's newcomers. Like the other groups, the Frisians did not abandon their national heritage, and they refused the option of melting with other ethnic groups.

According to the 1910 United States census, no person born in the Netherlands married outside of the ethnic group in Whitinsville. Frisian men preferred women from the Netherlands and were known to travel across the ocean to find suit-

able spouses. The story of Meindert Krull, who landed in Whitinsville with five marriageable daughters in 1896, became a local legend. According to Harold Wassenar, the news that five women were immigrating from Holland spread rapidly in Whitinsville. He reported, "When they arrived in front of the Whitin Machine Works, the Dutchmen ran out of the building to greet the wagon full of women. It was a day to remember. Ha! The first Dutch beauty queen parade. And my mother was the queen." The Dutch not only married exclusively within the ethnic boundaries; they also restricted room and board to single persons from the Netherlands. Thus even single newcomers were incorporated into familiar family structures which duplicated Old World village patterns.

In Whitinsville, as in many similar villages, the churches served as social centers. Choir rehearsals, church suppers, prayer meetings, and mission-society gatherings all helped to enrich the daily routines. Whitinsville supported a number of churches—Methodist, Presbyterian, and the two largest, the Congregational and Catholic congregations. Around the turn of the century, when secularism diminished the strength of Whitinsville's traditional churches, they lost a measure of their prominence and social significance. The Dutch Frisians, however, had just begun to consolidate their religious activities during the 1890s, and for them the church remained a vital institution.

In the October 1, 1926, *Banner*, Henry Beets penned a historical account of the Whitinsville CRC which reported that in the 1880s a number of Frisian immigrants were not satisfied with the English-language preaching and Sunday school classes which were available in



*Marrum village green.*

Whitinsville. Consequently, they organized their own worship services in the basement of the Presbyterian Church, where they read Dutch sermons and sang from the Dutch Psalter. In 1895, Rev. F. J. Drost accepted an invitation from the Whitinsville group and became their first pastor, with a \$400.00 annual salary, free housing, and a podium in the town hall. In 1896, Drost officially organized the Whitinsville CRC by joining it to the Hudson classis, and in 1898, the congregation completed its first sanctuary, on Willow Street.

In 1904, Rev. J. Jansen followed Drost as Whitinsville's second pastor, but after two years he returned to the Netherlands. During the Twenties, writing about his American experience, he reported that the Whitinsville CRC, with about four hundred parishioners in 1905, incorporated

the congregation as cheerful, young, and well-established. Worship services were in Dutch, and the church also sponsored a Dutch-language grammar school to avoid public-school instruction which challenged the teaching of the church. But the parochial school also preserved the Dutch language to assure its continued viability as the primary language for worship and catechism instruction. The use

about half of the eight-hundred-member Frisian community. Rev. Jansen described

of Dutch persisted until 1921, the last year of Rev. F. Fortuin's fifteen-year pastorate in Whitinsville.

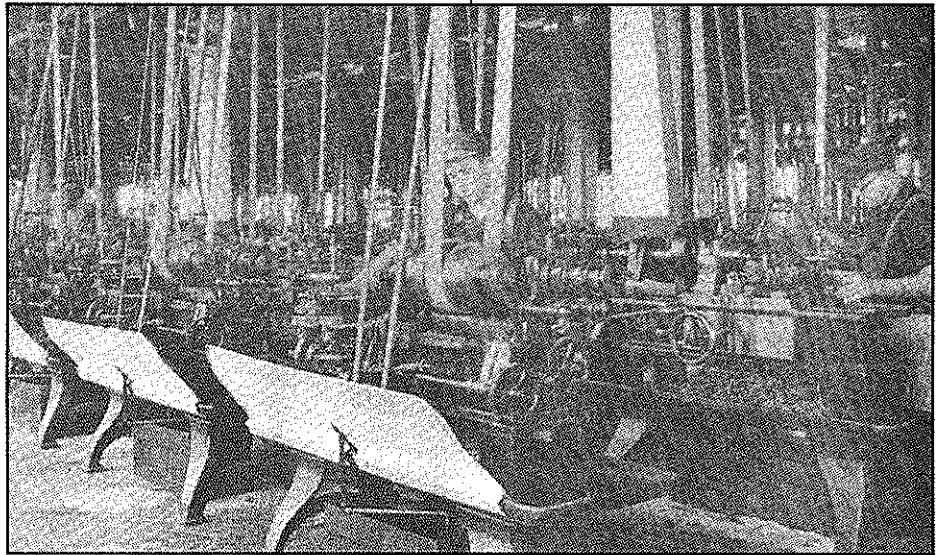
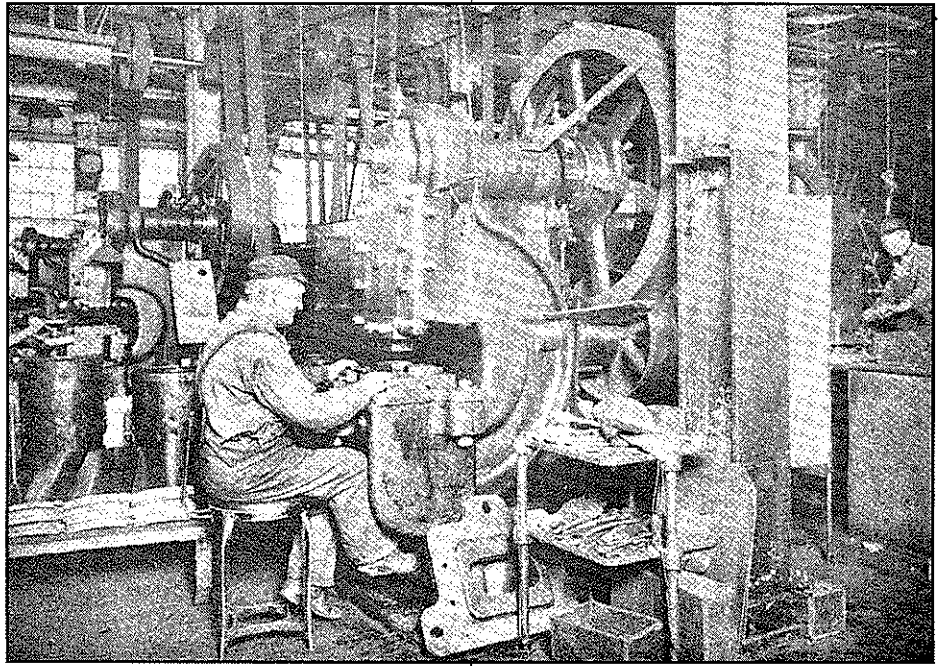
When the need to change from Dutch to English could not be avoided, the process was, as usual, prickly. The original immigrants did not want to abandon either Frisian or Dutch. Eventually, however, the children, who learned English in school and spoke Frisian at home, could not understand the formal Dutch used in sermons. Thus, the need to connect the upcoming generations with the church forced their parents and grandparents to adopt English. While troublesome, the language transition was not destructively disruptive to the Frisian subculture, and the church continued as a unifying influence within the ethnic community.

The Whitinsville experience clearly illustrates the validity of recent theories about the immigration process. For example, the effective units of migration were neither in-



*Tzummarum village street.*

dividuals nor households but sets of people linked by acquaintance, kinship, and work experience. The emigrants commonly drew on information from network members who had already gone to Whitinsville and often received help from them as well. The reports of people arriving in Whitinsville with tickets prepaid by their already-migrated family members, former neighbors, or friends in the USA, tell us as much. The fact that the Dutch group in Whitinsville was very homogeneous, consisting largely of emigrants from the same Frisian province of origin, shows that this migration was a transplanted network, a knitting together of networks that spanned place of origin and destination. An immigrant letter to the province of Friesland in the 1950s best captures the community spirit: *"De Friezen binne hjirre hast ien famylje meiinoar en allegearre hast meiinoar forgroeid."* ("The Frisians here in Whitinsville are one big family closely connected one by one.")



Work places

# Recollections of Whitinsville

Jacob Kooistra

## Business

Whitinsville now has 16,000 inhabitants, including a number of Frisian businessmen. The five Van Der Baan brothers (their father immigrated from Tirns) have a large grocery business, including meat and bacon. Part or the whole of a hog can be purchased there or a hind quarter of beef. Herman Bakker (son of "Little Sjoerd" Bakker) has four dry-goods stores, selling all the household articles required for young couples who may be contemplating the Double Harness Act [marriage]. Arnold Banning, born in Makkum, owns five greenhouses, which keep him very busy. Beinema has a grocery store, Schotanus sells refrigerators and washing machines, and Van Den Akker, Jasper De Jong, Jan De Haan, and Robert Nydam have auto-repair garages.

## Trades

Peter Koopmans owns the largest carpentry business, with two stores—one for hardware and lumber, the other for farm implements such as tractors, plows, and so forth. Koopmans builds houses continually and, needless to relate, is a very busy man. Berghuis and

Wynia are close companions with the paintbrush. They do wallpapering and all else that is connected with their thriving painting business. Martin Vierstra, who hails from Snits (Sneek), gains his livelihood as a tinsmith and furnace salesman.

## Farming "on Their Own"

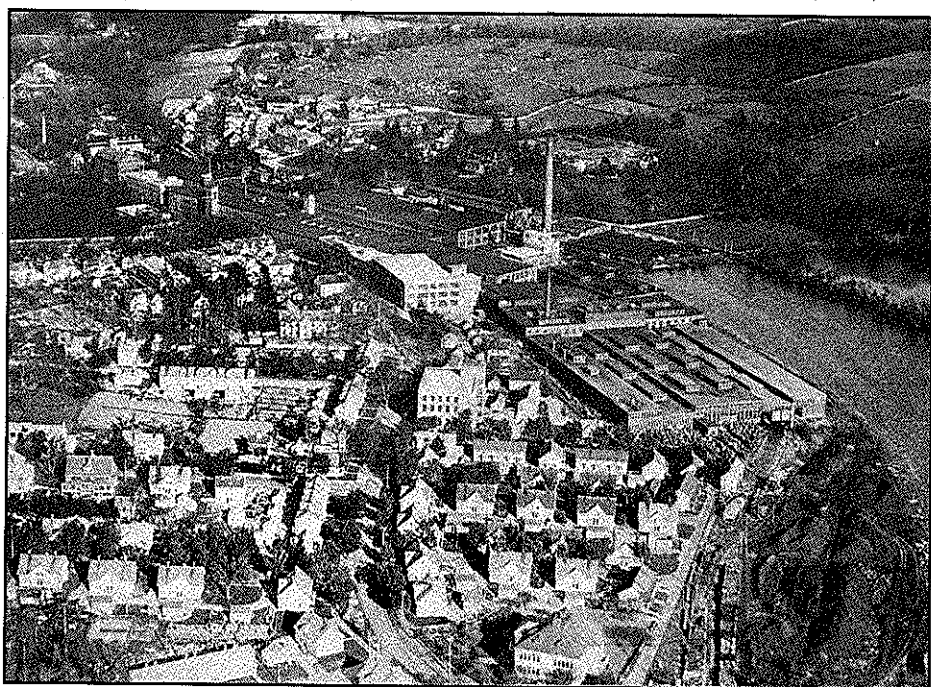
After the first Frisians were established somewhat, a few bought run-down farms in the area. At first they gained little because the land needed proper tilling, clearing, and

fertilizing. Determination was the primary cause for their success, and today many of these are large productive farms utilizing the latest machinery.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

Among the largest farms is that of Louis Wiersma from Dokkum, who has a herd of over a hundred cows. Krol from Driesum has sixty cows, as does Hylke Bakker from Koudum. Arend Bakker, son of "Little Sjoerd," has a fifty-cow herd.

*"Aerial View of Whitinsville, 1925," page 6 in A Trip Through The Whitin Machine Works at Whitinsville, Massachusetts, USA, 1925.*



These recollections were written by Jacob Kooistra in 1950.



Others, also immigrants from Friesland, have herds of thirty to fifty cows. Among them are Jouke Van Den Akker, Louis Bangma, Jan Vos, George Nydam, Harman Haringa, Dirk Visser, Albert Koopman, Ruurd and Geert Bosma, Jacob Wassenaar, and the Vander Zicht family. Milking machines are used almost exclusively now, and the milk is pasteurized to meet health requirements.

Along with dairy farms we have Teake Oosterman's piggery with some five hundred screwtail hogs, large and small. Japik Wiersma keeps a forty-head goat herd and milks them by hand. He says that goats are more profitable than cows because they eat less than cows. Goat's milk retails for ten cents more per quart than cow's milk. His customers are children afflicted with asthma.

### **Barn Fire, 1947**

Frisians in Whitinsville work indus-

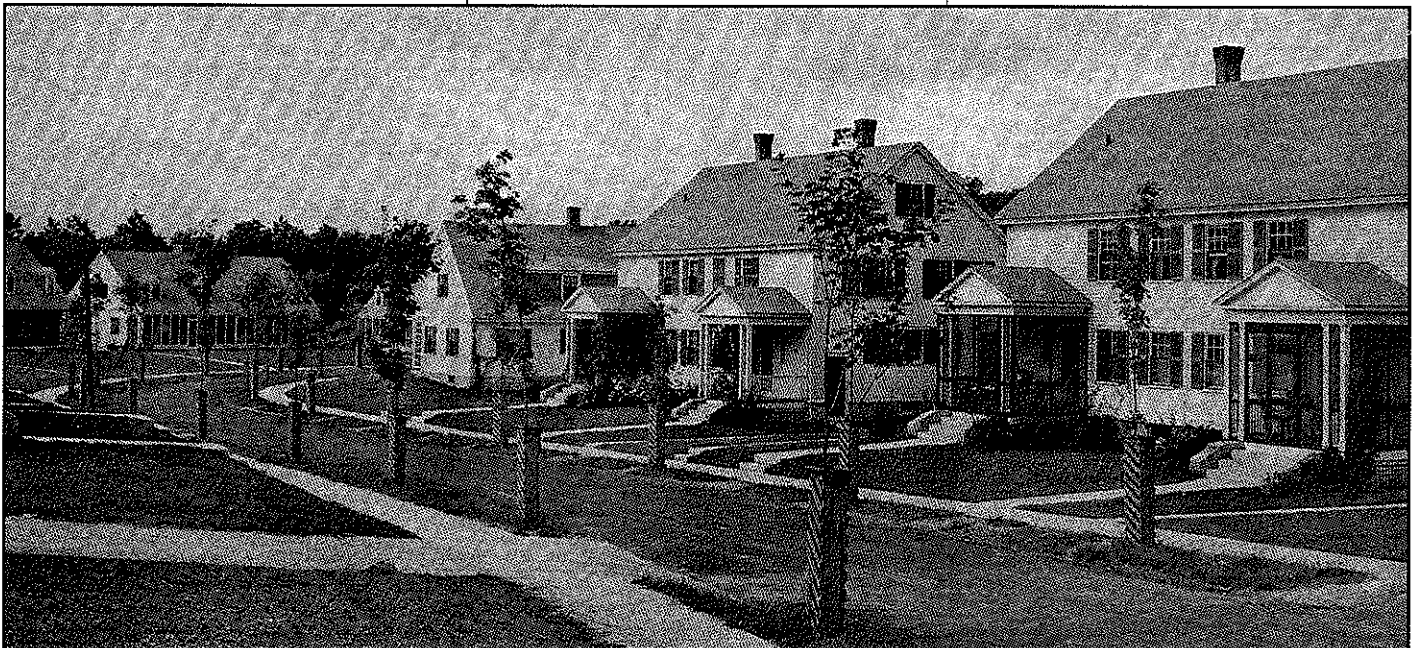
*Whitinsville company housing.*

triously and cooperate well with each other. In cases of need or disaster the community springs into action, as it did when Arend Bakker's barn burned. The fire that destroyed Bakker's barn on October 27, 1947, was probably caused by spontaneous combustion. The evening's milking had been about completed, when suddenly the upper sections of the barn were enveloped in flames. The cows were hurriedly "let out" and saved. The many people who were attracted to the fire carried out the grain and the equipment from the milk room. Although the evacuation was done in a helter-skelter manner, the grain and the milk-room equipment did not fall prey to the flames.

Five fire engines responded to the call, but the barn was a roaring mass when they arrived. The large house, housing four families, received most of the firemen's efforts; it remained untouched, evidence of their effectiveness.

For Bakker sound advice was now priceless, for the winter months were around the corner,

and the hay that had been gathered during the summer months had gone up in smoke. Bakker's immediate future looked ominous—like that of the man who, while holding a black hog by the tail, said, "Things look rather dark ahead of me." But then the Frisians banded together. "Bakker," they said, "we are going to lend a hand. The factory is idle on Saturdays, and many a tradesman and carpenter works there." Peter Koopmans, of the large "carpenter business," was chosen to supervise. He had to provide all the necessary lumber and building material. The first few days were days of labor with a capital L. Andrew De Vries, whose business includes the digging of trenches and cellars and the erecting of cement walls, arrived with his largest steam shovel, and the Castle Hill Farm sent trucks and tractors. All the half-burnt hay, still a smoldering mass, and the burnt farm machinery were pushed aside by bulldozers. The hay was carried into a nearby field, where it again burst into flames. The fire engines



had to be called out again. In two days' time the ruins were gone and cleared away, and the burned walls had been pulled down with a tractor. The time for building anew had come.

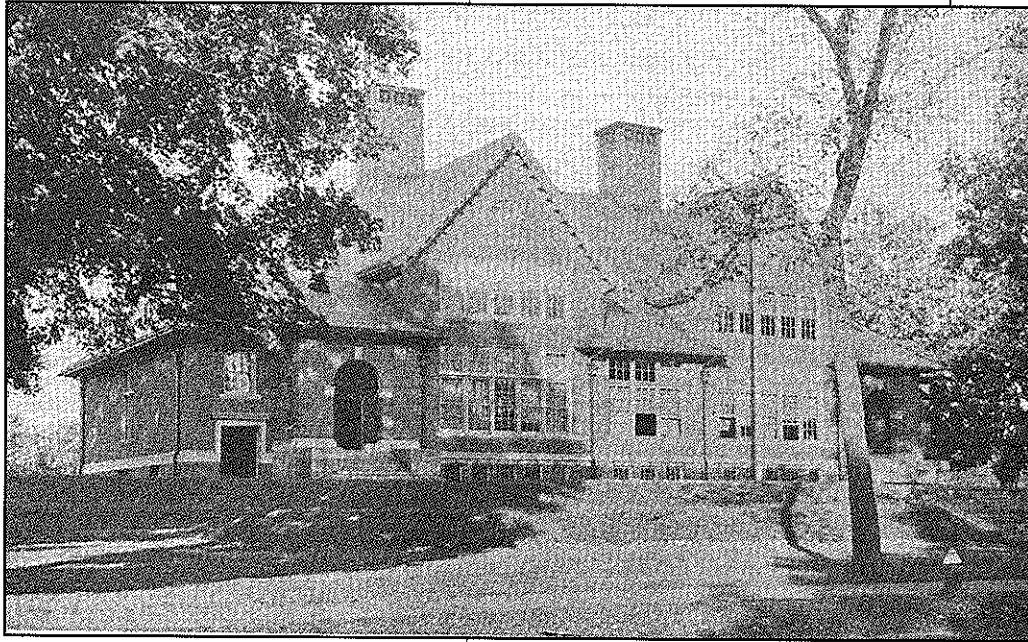
It soon became evident that a lot of measuring and fitting had to be done. The best carpenters were given charge over the less experienced. Our new minister, Reverend Veltman, donned a pair of overalls

and offered his services. It was soon evident that he and the hammer were not strangers, and, to the curious few who came to inquire as to his progress, he replied, "Brothers, the time for conversing will come later. Action is needed now. Soon the snowflakes will be flying. By that time there must be a new shelter for Bakker's cows."

And the work progressed by leaps and bounds. Fifty men were

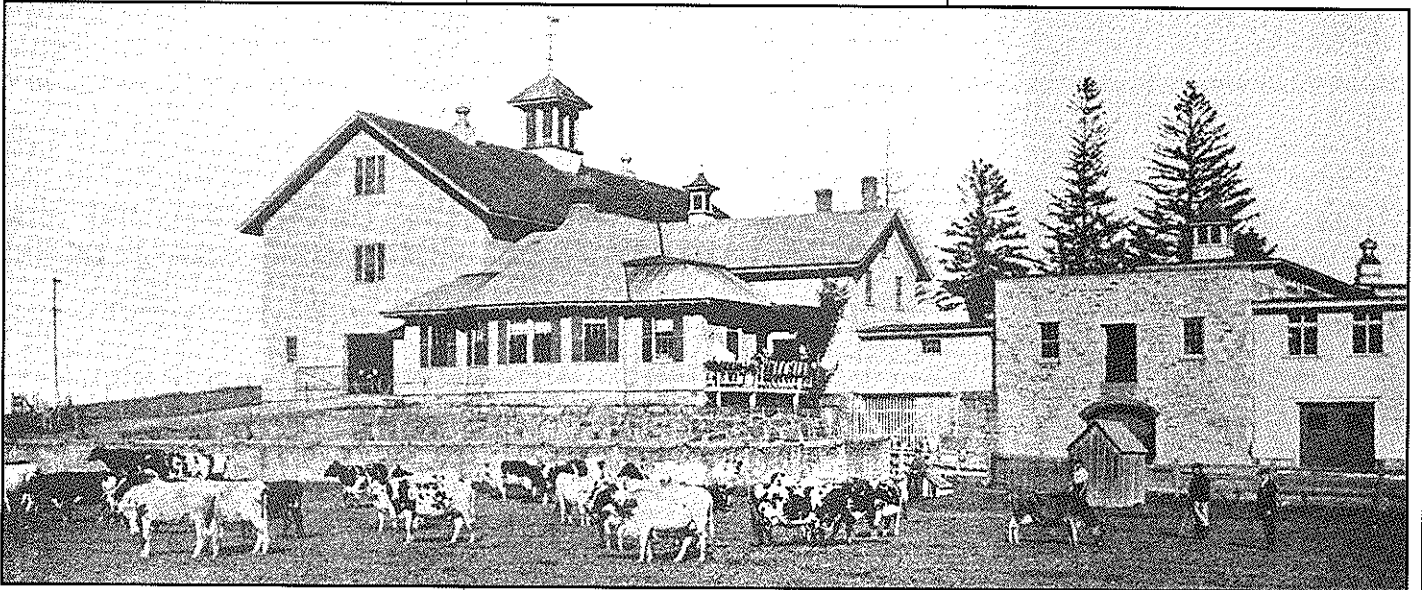
crawling over the roof and walls. The din of the hammers was deafening. The women, too, helped as they could. Coffee and cake, fried cakes and pastry were brought to the scene of action. The Reverend's wife, also doing her share, baked cakes and pies. And every morning and afternoon a recess of fifteen minutes provided a breather. The large coffee urn from the church parlor did yeoman service. The buns and pastries were looked forward to, and they provided tasty snacks.

One month later, on the twenty-eighth of November, the barn had neared completion to the extent that it could house the cows, its length—one hundred and twenty-six feet, its height—thirty-five feet.



(left) Whitin-Lasell High School.

(below) Whitin family farm.



## From Whitinsville to California

Annette Poelstra Yff

Although agriculture was possible in Whitinsville, the area's soil and climate could not sustain the lush crops and pastures which the immigrants remembered in Friesland. It was not strange, then, that those who were driven by a desire to own and operate large and prosperous farms kept an eye open for agricultural possibilities in other parts of North America. By 1912 a cluster of about forty families had already moved from Whitinsville to Neerlandia near Edmonton, Alberta. Homestead land was available there, but the climate was even

less moderate than that of Whitinsville.

After exploring Neerlandia in 1911, Gerrit Visser decided to remain in Whitinsville. He knew that

his arthritis would not improve in Alberta, but later, in 1917, advertisements in *De Wachter*, the CRC's dutch-language periodical, promoted Modesto, California, as an

Annette is the Workman family historian and has written an account of Johannes and Gooitsche Workman and their descendants—the Vissers, Poelstras and Bakers. This account, privately printed, is titled *Looking Back: Workman/Werkman: 100 Years in America 1993-1893*.

*Werkman family portrait, Johannes and Gooitsche (Oppewal) Werkman Family, 1895. Children, left to right: Marijke (Mary), Rein, and Trijntje (Theresa). This family immigrated to Whitinsville in 1893, losing two younger children to death on Ellis Island. Mother Gooitsche died in 1897, following the birth of another child, Teake.*





*Poelstra family farm in Ripon, California, about 1950.*

area for dairy farming. An enthusiastic realtor, Albert De Jong, responded quickly to Visser's letter of inquiry. Before long the Visser, Poelstra, and Baker families left Whitinsville to cross the continent and resettle in Ripon, California.

The move was necessary for Gerrit to lead a normal and healthy life. Thus, it was decided that the Vissers would move first and, if farming looked promising, the others would come later. The Vissers left in November of 1918, traveling by train. On this date, Gerrit was 39, Theresa 34, Grace 8, Joe almost 4, and baby Madeline almost a year. World War I was still in progress,

and the great flu epidemic of 1918, which eventually killed 20 million people worldwide, was raging. All of the train passengers were required to wear masks. Getting little Madeline to keep her mask on presented quite a challenge for her mother. The soldiers, expecting to fight on French battlefields, were still en route on November 11, when the announcement came that the Armistice had just been signed. Joe Visser relates, "Those soldiers went crazy! They whooped and hollered, and threw their caps in the air. I was scared, and hid be-

hind my mom's skirt." The Vissers arrived in Ripon, California, to find the town nearly shut down by the flu epidemic. Even church services were canceled that first Sunday. They stayed at Hotel Markham until they found a small house in Ripon. In March 1919, they purchased a farm on Frederick Avenue. There was a house on it, just four walls, which the Vissers soon laid out in six rooms. Then they set out to farm, to build barns and purchase livestock.

Reports from Gerrit and Theresa Visser were favorable, and the

*Swimming in the irrigation ditch, about 1925.*



Poelstra family left Whitinsville in April of 1919. Apparently they took a small train from Whitinsville to Worcester, where they caught a larger train going west. Dick Poelstra was 33. His wife Mary was 36, and their three children were under five years of age. On this trip the train was loaded with servicemen returning from battlefields. They were in a good mood, many anxiously anticipated seeing their own children. They helped Mary keep her little boys entertained along the way.

One month later Douwe and Jennie Baker with their three children also took the train to California. For a time the three families lived in the Visser home—the Bakers in the front rooms, the Poelstras in the middle, and the Vissers in two back rooms. Soon father Johannes Werkman decided to join his daughters and other relatives in Ripon. He left Whitinsville reluctantly but at 69 he was still in good health and able to help his children and grandchildren on their farms.

The Poelstras moved to a farm on the corner of Frederick and West Ripon Road, a stone's throw from the Visser's and the Bakers found a place on Roberts Avenue. The Vissers must have been happy to have their house to themselves again. Crops failed for the Poelstras, and around 1921 they moved to a farm on Lyons Avenue, off Austin Road, another mile away. At that time land sold for \$300 to \$400 an acre. A horse cost \$35, and a cow around \$75. Eventu-

ally the Vissers started a door-to-door milk-delivery business, similar to that of the Bakers in Whitinsville.

In Ripon, farming depends on irrigation because it doesn't rain during the summer. If it weren't for irrigation, the San Joaquin Valley, where Ripon is located, would be a desert. Water from rain and melted snow is collected in dams and delivered through an underground pipeline. In Dick and Gerrit's farming days, the water came down to the valley in "canals" or "ditches"—terms which should have made any Dutchman feel at home. The farmers took turns irrigating their crops about every fourteen days. A man called "the ditch tender" would come to announce when the water would enter each farm's ditches. This could be any time of day or night or on Sunday. If the water came during the night, the ditch tender would knock on the window of the farmer's bedroom and call, "Water, water!" The sleepy farmer would get up, dress, grab his kerosene lantern and his shovel, and head for the field. His dog would go crazy at the sight of

the shovel. As gates in the ditches were opened to irrigate each section of land, gophers would be flooded out of their holes. They became toys and then meat for the dogs. Irrigation time on hot summer days also meant swimming for the Visser and Poelstra children.

The Vissers and Poelstras bought horses early on, as they were needed for all field work. The children often rode the hay wagons. Joe Visser tells of the time several Visser and Poelstra children were alone on a run-away wagon. The horses, having been frightened, took them on a terrifying ride which ended, fortunately, straight back at the Visser barn. When wood was needed for the wood-burning stove, farmers would contact owners of big oak trees along the Stanislaus River a couple miles away. They would buy one of the trees, chop it down, and haul it home in sections by horse and wagon. On Sundays the families would drive the three or four miles to church by horse and carriage. The horses, tied to hitching rails, were expected to stand devoutly

through the services. Occasionally one horse would invade another's territory, and there would be a horse fight during church—much to the delight of the sometimes bored children. In the mid-Twenties, the Vissers and Poelstras replaced their horses and carriages with Ford touring cars, which seemed to have an unlimited capacity. Older children sat on the laps of the adults, and little children stood up, hanging on to the backs of seats.

The seventy-five Dutch families (not just Frisians) in Ripon by 1920, were rapidly outgrowing their church. In May of 1924 the cornerstone was laid for a new church at Second and Orange Streets. The congregation provided much volunteer help. The basement, for example, was dug out with shovels by the men of the church, except for the very center, for which horses were brought in. By August the

church was nearing completion. Johannes Werkman, his children, and grandchildren must have looked forward to worshiping in the new church. A dedication was set for August 21, 1924.

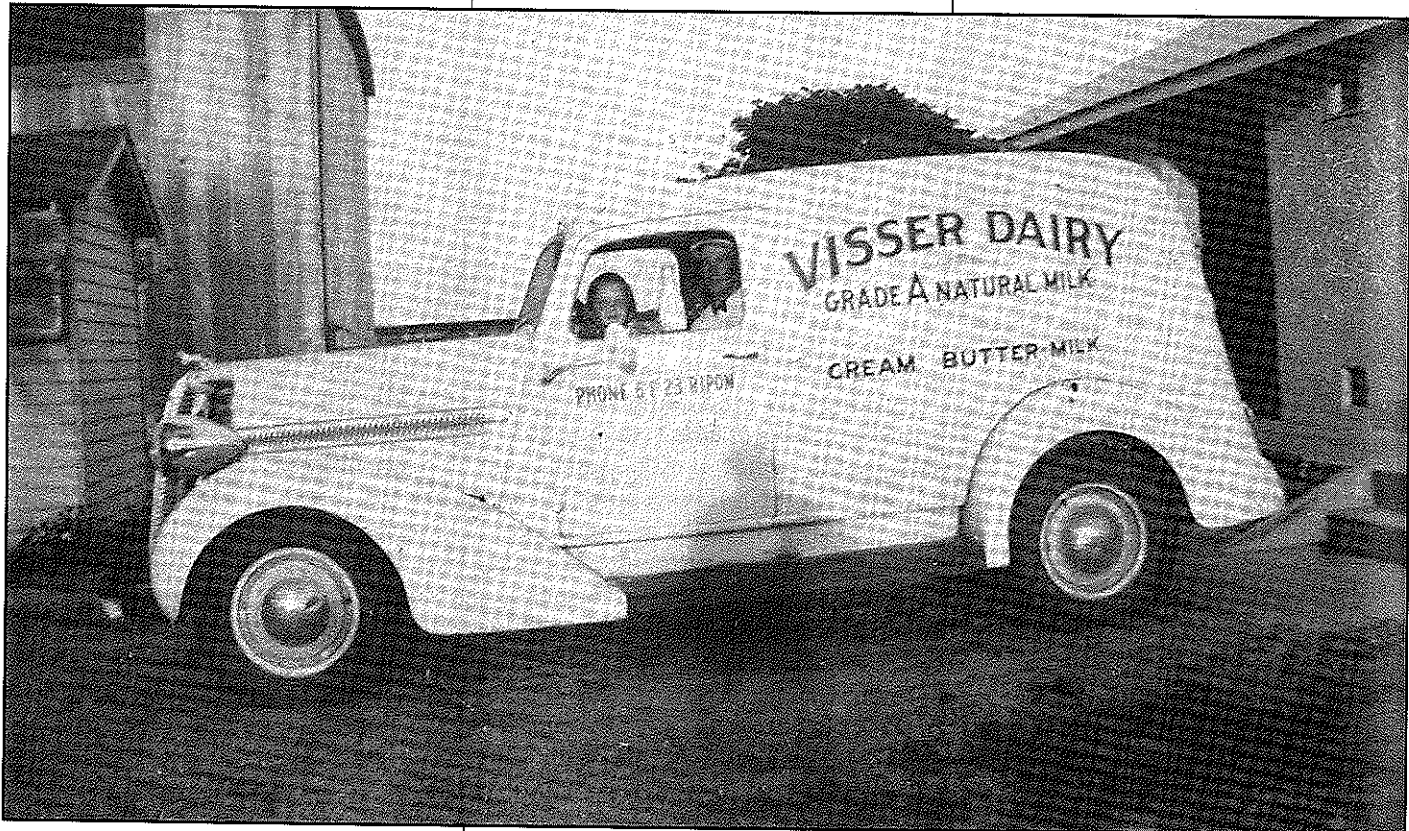
Before then, on August 13, Dick Poelstra and his ten-year-old son Ynze went to the Visser farm to help Gerrit with the haying. Some hours later a cow went into labor on the Poelstra farm and needed help. Cows often need helping delivering; the farmer pulls while the cow pushes. There wasn't a phone to call Dick, so seventy-four-year-old Johannes went out to help. While assisting the cow in delivering the calf, Johannes suffered a fatal heart attack. Mary summoned their neighbor, Carl Anderson, who drove to the Visser farm to inform the rest of the family. Subsequently, a funeral was held in the new First Christian Reformed Church of

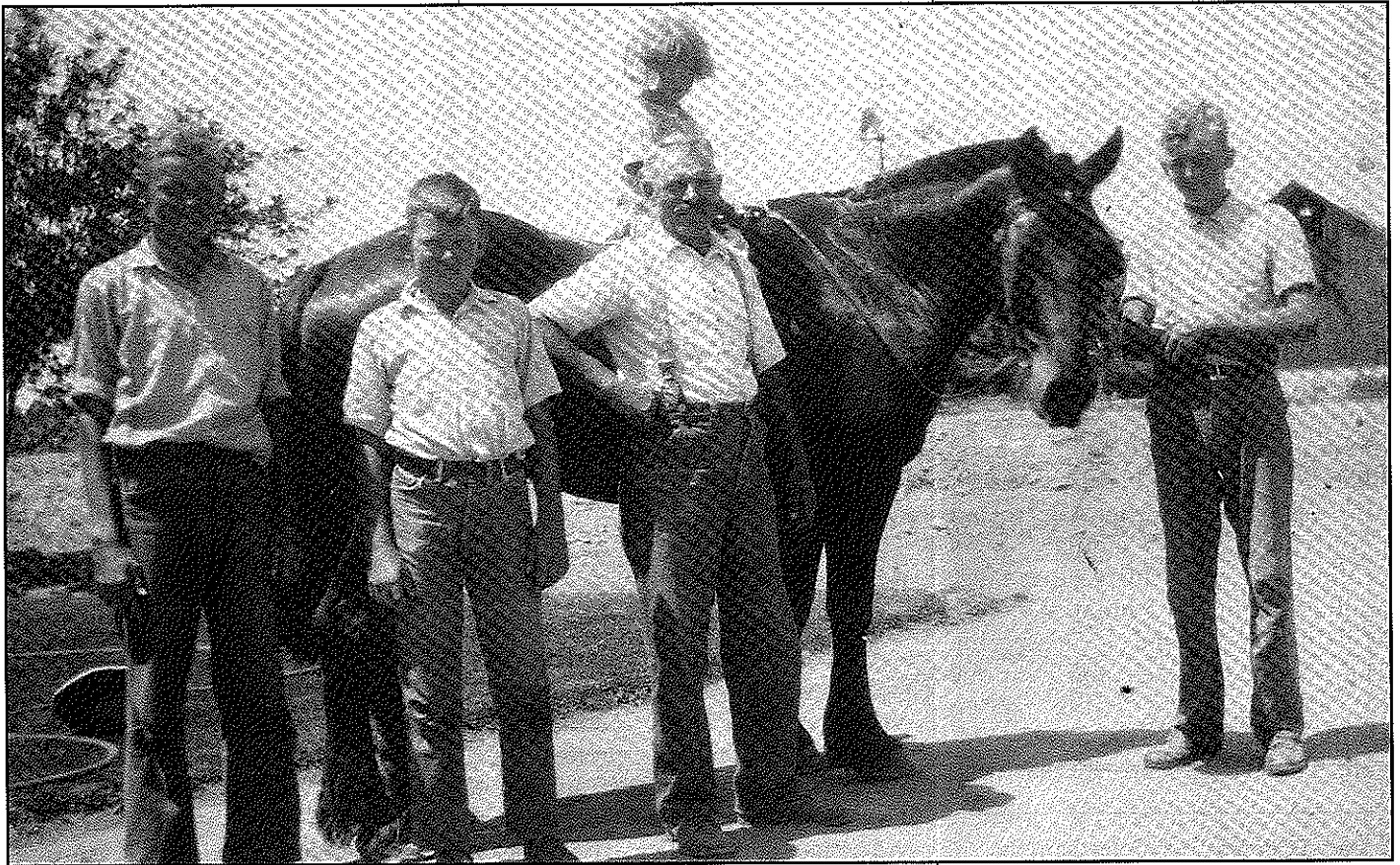
Ripon even before the church was dedicated. Family and friends gathered in the beautiful sanctuary where Johannes had looked forward to worshiping.

Following the funeral, the coffin was taken to the Ripon train depot to be transported back to Whitinsville. Because two tickets had to be purchased for a coffin whether someone accompanied it or not, Henrietta Workman traveled with the body, taking this opportunity to visit her family, the Haringas, in Whitinsville. The family gathered in a final farewell. Seven grandchildren watched in awe as their grandfather's coffin was soldered shut as required and placed on the train.

Upon arrival in Whitinsville, the

*Joe Visser and daughter, about 1943.  
At 79 Joe Visser is still farming  
almonds on the Visser ranch.*





coffin was taken to 51 North Main, the home of Rein and Elsie Workman. Black crepe (cloth) was hung on the outside of the front door, indicating there was a death in the family. The coffin was placed in the living room for viewing by family and friends. Johannes had left Whitinsville only five years earlier and was well remembered. The funeral was held in the home on August 22, 1924. Granddaughter Mary Workman Dudley, twelve years old at the time, vividly remembers singing "Rock of Ages" before going to the cemetery. "It was a very stirring experience."

From Rein and Elsie's home the body was transported by motorized hearse to Riverdale Cemetery near Whitinsville. Johannes was buried beside his beloved wife, Gooitsche, who preceded him in death by

twenty-seven years. A headstone marks the site. In the hearts of all the Workman family and in the Poelstra home there was an empty chair.\*

\*Carr's Funeral Home handled the arrangements for Johannes's funeral in Whitinsville. The family was charged the following: \$5.00 for transporting the coffin fifteen miles from the train depot, \$3.00 for gloves for the pallbearers, \$12.00 for the hearse, \$18.00 for the three other cars, and \$10.00 for burial at Riverdale Cemetery, for a total bill of \$48.00

*The Poelstras, about 1930. Gertrude on the horse; left to right, John, Oscar, Dick and Ynze.*

Beginning about forty-five years ago, after World War II, and continuing for about fifteen years, 140,000 Dutch migrants came to Australia. At that time nearly everyone, including most of these migrants, believed that assimilation was the healthy way forward. Moreover, the Dutch were seen as one of the migrant groups most likely to succeed in becoming virtually invisible in the Australian population. Over a similar period of time beginning thirty years later, another group, of similar size—the Muslims—migrated to Australia. The Muslims arrived and continue to arrive at a time when multiculturalism was and is the slogan. Their traces are increasingly

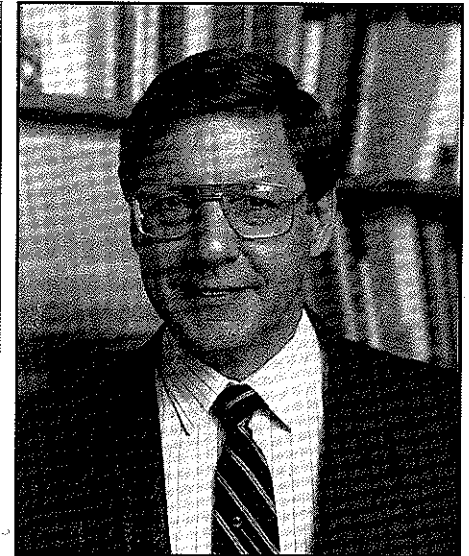
Gary D. Bouma is a professor in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Monash University (Melbourne, Australia) and a priest in the Anglican Church of Australia. Trained at Calvin College (Grand Rapids, Michigan), and Princeton Theological Seminary in Theology, and Cornell University in Sociology, his research has primarily focussed on the interaction between religion and society in Western societies including Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. His current work includes a major study of religious multiculturalism in Australia, the place and role of Muslims in Australian society and post-modernity as a context for doing theology.

clear for all to see in the form of mosques, social and welfare organizations, and a culture which is clearly different from the dominant Australian culture. By contrast, the Dutch have blended in wherever they have gone in the English-speaking world. Why the difference? Probably because the basic cultural similarities between English and Dutch cultures are quite pronounced.

*What Marks Do the Dutch Leave?*

If we were to look for the marks of Dutch settlement, of Dutch migrants, what would we look for? Wherever the French go, there are French restaurants, baguettes, and creme brulee. The English litter the landscape with Union Jacks, fish and chips, and royalty. The Greeks bring coffee shops, baklava, and Easter on a different Sunday than Anglican Easter. The Chinese open restaurants and market gardens. I could go on, but what would I say the Dutch bring? What are the tell-tale marks of Dutch migration?

What about cuisine? The mark of a country which has hosted a large number of migrant groups is a wide and varied cuisine. However, the fact that there are more Indonesian restaurants in Amsterdam than there are Dutch restaurants in Indonesia, Australia, and Canada combined leads me to suspect that



*Prof. Gary D. Bouma*

cuisine may not be one of the major marks of Dutch presence. In Australia's legitimately much-prized multicultural cuisine, there are few Dutch restaurants. For example, I could find none listed in the Yellow Pages for Melbourne. Nor are there any listed in the 1993 Dutch Australian Community Directory.

This is also true overseas. Though there are several American chains of highway restaurants called the Dutch Pantry, Dutch Oven, and Dutch Kitchen, these are inspired by the Pennsylvania Dutch (Deutsch), who are German in origin and not from the Netherlands. Indeed, in all of Grand Rapids, the

# *The Dutch Down Under*

Gary D. Bouma



heartland of Dutch migration to the Midwest for 150 years, there is no Dutch restaurant. Even Holland, Michigan, which boasts a wooden shoe factory and is the home of Holland Rusk, there is just one Dutch restaurant. In Victoria, British Columbia, the Dutch community is well-known for its cooking, but in this case it is for their sumptuous *rijstafels*, which is, of course, a Dutch colonial import from Indonesia.

Even though finding restaurants featuring Dutch cuisine is nearly impossible, wherever I have seen sizable communities of people with Dutch ancestry I have seen tulip festivals. Whether in Holland, Michigan (a half hour by car from

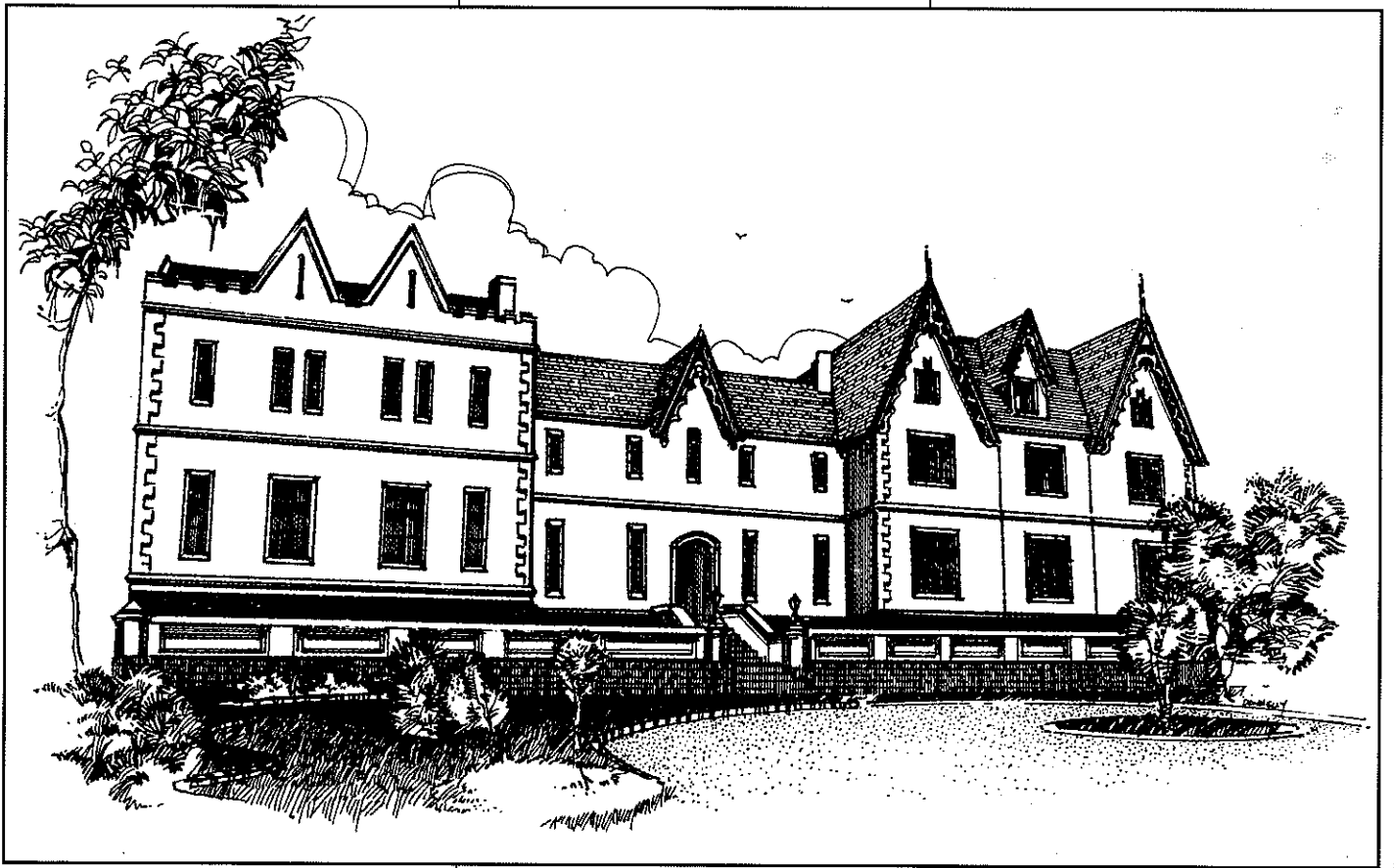
my birthplace), or in the Canadian Maritimes, or on Vancouver Island, there are tulip festivals. Australia is no exception. Every September (remember, Australia is in the southern hemisphere) tulips bloom in the Dandenong Ranges out of Melbourne and in Tasmania. In addition to being lovely in itself and a source of income for many Dutch migrants, the tulip is important to the Dutch for theological reasons as well. Not only is it a floral symbol of the communion chalice for Catholics; it is the mnemonic by which centuries of Dutch young people from Reformed backgrounds have learned the five points of Calvinism.

What traces have Dutch migrants left for all to see in the rest of the world? Yes, tulips and blonds, but even more prominently they have

left churches. It is a bit ironic that while no one seems to go to church in the Netherlands anymore, the Dutch have dotted the world with an amazing array of finely distinguished churches of the Reformed tradition. I hypothesize that, after flower bulbs and Gouda cheese, the next largest export from Holland is conservative Calvinist theology and church attenders of Reformed persuasion.

In the United States each new wave of Dutch migrants from the seventeenth to the twentieth century founded a new variant of the Reformed tradition. Between waves things had changed sufficiently enough to create cultural distinctions between the old and the new migrants—great enough to warrant, at least to the most recent arrivals, a denominational separation from the

*Reformed Theological College, Geelong, Victoria.*



earlier groups. The Canadian Dutch were largely colonized by the US-based Christian Reformed Church, but conflicting viewpoints have punctuated the relationship on many occasions.

The migrants to Australia were 70 percent Catholic and about 30 percent Reformed. Religious differences are associated with many social differences in the Netherlands because the principle of *verzuiling*\* governed many aspects of daily life in the Netherlands. Matters so governed ranged from the church with which one identified to which schools one attended to which newspapers one read to which radio station one listened to. *Verzuiling* also divided and probably still divides the Dutch community in Australia. In the Netherlands migrants were often recruited by religiously based organizations. They were often accompanied on their voyage by chaplains from specific denominations, were welcomed in Australia by religiously based organizations, and were assisted in their early settlement by religiously based organizations.

The Catholic church in Australia refused to open any ethnically oriented parishes in the 1950s, although many groups clamored for such. Assimilation was their rule, assimilation to the Irish Catholic Australian norm. Many Catholic immigrants did assimilate, though some clustered in particular parishes to such a degree as to leave an indelible Dutch mark. According to the 1993 Dutch Australian Community Directory, there continues to be a chaplain to the Dutch supplied by

\*Clusters of institutions based on faith commitments, i.e., Christian schools, recreation facilities, newspapers, political parties, labor unions, and more.

the Catholic Church in Holland. There is also a list of Dutch-speaking Catholic priests.

Immigrants from Reformed churches were different. Some developed a working relationship with the Presbyterians and some, subsequently, with the Uniting Church as well. A few Dutch-language services are still available in these denominations in Victoria.

However, after having tried to work an arrangement with the Presbyterian Church of Australia, many Dutch immigrants were not satisfied. Their needs were not being met. While they shared some im-



portant theological foundations, Presbyterian theology is not Reformed theology, or, to put it more clearly, Scots Presbyterian theology is not Dutch Reformed theology. While the average Australian would be lost trying to tell the difference, believe me, the differences are very real. I was raised in the Christian Reformed Church in the United States and became a Presbyterian when I went to Princeton Theological Seminary in the United States. The theological differences between the Christian Reformed Church and the Presbyterians were great enough, but when I went to Canada, I was amazed by the difference between the Canadian Presbyterians and the United States Presbyterians. In Canada, as in Australia but not as in the United States, the Scots heritage was very prominent. No wonder many of the Dutch migrants from the Reformed tradition decided to establish their own denomination in Australia.

The Reformed Churches of Australia are found throughout Australia

and are enumerated along with the Presbyterians in the Australian census figures. There is a Reformed seminary in Geelong and parent-run schools for children where the community is large enough to support them. These schools have been shown to be very important in expressing and maintaining the commitment of parents and children to the Reformed tradition.<sup>1</sup> In the United States and in Canada schools also provide one of the contexts within which the Dutch heritage is celebrated and inculcated.

In addition to tulips and Reformed churches, the marks of the Dutch on a community are cleanliness, stolid decency, entrepreneurial small businesses, and well-structured institutions. Tidy suburbs, neat gardens, quiet conservative life-style, and enterprising artisans, professionals, and merchants are common among Dutch migrants.

For Dutch migrants it may well be that religion plays a very different role in the maintenance of Dutch culture depending upon the religious group with which one affiliates. Both Catholics and migrants without church affiliation experience higher rates of assimilation than do the Reformed Dutch because they have fewer institutions available to promote the celebration of Dutch culture. By contrast, being Reformed almost automatically entails connections with a well-organized, life-encompassing community. Being Reformed also promotes isolation from the larger society and results in a kind of ethnotheological ghettoization.<sup>2</sup> For some, being Reformed is the same as being Dutch. For them it is a more important part of their heritage than language, or tulips, or *soep en brij*.



**VAN EMIGRANT  
TOT IMMIGRANT**

*Een woord van  
de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk  
tot hen die gaan emigreren*

Uitgave van de  
**HERVORMDE EMIGRATIE COMMISSIE**  
Javastraat 100 - 's-Gravenhage  
Tel. 111288 - Giro 230815

*Above: Advertisement—p. 151, from A Church En Route:  
Forty Years Reformed Churches of Australia.*

*Opposite: Logo of Reformed Churches of Australia.*

*What Does It Mean to Be Dutch?*

All of this raises a fundamental question: What does it mean to be (or take to be) Dutch? Part of the reason that Dutch identity is not sharply focused is the fact that regional identities tend to prevail in the Netherlands. Historically, one was more a Rotterdamer, Frieslander, Groninger, or Amsterdammer than one was Dutch. Dutch identity had to be learned after migration. So, too, many Muslim migrants to Australia did not think of themselves as Muslims, but as Egyptians, Turks, Lebanese, etc.

What does it mean to be Dutch? Having been born in the Netherlands would certainly count. But if birthplace is the criterion, then, because Dutch migration to Australia has declined to a trickle, the life expectancy of the Dutch community and its place in Australia is short indeed. The Dutch in this sense are not being replenished. However, the requirement that one be born in the Netherlands is too narrow a criterion. Most of those who today comprise the large Dutch communities in the United States were not born in the Netherlands. Indeed, they are increasingly third- or later-generation migrants. The function of ethnic identity in the United States has been described as providing some innocuous principle of personal differentiation in the context of fundamental similarity between the groups within the melting pot. Dutch communities, Dutch culture, and Dutch heritage are kept alive by people who not only were not born in the Netherlands but have never traveled there. They call themselves Dutch because their roots are Dutch or because they choose to emphasize that part of their ancestry.

What does it mean to be Dutch? Is the use of Dutch language important? If one speaks Dutch, surely one must be Dutch. But the number of Dutch-speaking Australians is in steep decline. According to the 1991 Australian census, 47,594 (0.3 percent) persons over five years old spoke Dutch at home.<sup>3</sup> This proportion was highest in Tasmania and Western Australia (0.4 percent) and lowest in New South Wales and the Northern Territories (0.2 percent). This is hardly surprising since there has been little effort made to preserve the Dutch language in Australia and it is hardly one of the major world languages today. Once again, most of those who consider themselves Dutch have not spoken Dutch for years in most of the Dutch communities in the United States, but still they refer to themselves as Dutch. Hence the decline of language use need not be seen as the coming end of the Dutch community in Australia.

In a postmodern, postindustrial society, identity is increasingly a matter of choosing what aspect of one's heritage, life-style, employment, or leisure activities one wishes to highlight. It is also possible to have quite a complex array of identities and to participate in a wide variety of communities. For the future, then, Dutch identity is more likely to be a matter of choice and to involve partial involvement of people rather than a total identity which defines all other aspects of life. Moreover, given the high intermarriage rate of Dutch migrants, it is increasingly likely that "the Dutch" in Australia will be multiethnic and able to select among ethnic identities or even to rejoice in several.

### *The Future*

What will the future bring? Will there be less or more evidence of

the nearly 200,000 Dutch migrants to Australia? I find it interesting that many of my generation (third-generation migrant to the USA) are seeking out their roots and even learning a bit of Dutch (I took a year as part of my undergraduate course at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan). That college continues to offer Dutch and a good measure of Dutch Reformed theology by highlighting the ideas of Abraham Kuyper. Its students, still about 60 percent Dutch-American, often rediscover their ethnic characteristics in the college classrooms.

My grandparents rejected their language and spoke only English. They spoke without noticeable Dutch accents, although they used the somewhat impoverished vocabulary of someone speaking a second language. Indeed, one of the possible explanations for the image of the Dutch as stolid and relatively humorless is the fact that humor depends on facility with language and Dutch migrants rarely get to use their mother tongue. My grandparents never spoke of the "Old Country" and never went back for a visit. They had been early teenagers when they migrated. As such, they were typical of Dutch migrants to the Midwest who were born around the turn of the century and migrated to the United States before the First World War.

A true confession—my mother was not Dutch. In fact, she was known as "that American girl." Her ancestry was Irish and English, and her people had been in the United States for about five generations. She was American, not one of the hyphenated Americans—Dutch-American, Polish-American, German-American, etc. I have an identity crisis in Australia. Am I a Yank? Am I Dutch? I did not take on the identity of my mother's fam-

ily but that of my father's family. Then there is my last name—a dead giveaway in certain circles.

One of the main indicators of assimilation is the intermarriage rate of a migrant group. The higher the rate, the less the group is maintaining its identity and culture. The Dutch have one of the highest outmarriage rates of any migrant group in Australia. In 1974 only 10 percent of Dutch grooms married Dutch brides, while 14.2 percent of Dutch brides married Dutch grooms.<sup>4</sup>

Marriage within the ethnic groups simply has not been important for much of the Dutch community in Australia. It was, though, for the Dutch Reformed in the United States who migrated before World War II. There separate schools provided a context for endogamous mate selection. However, the Dutch community in Australia has been smaller and rather more dispersed, thus less able, or willing, to develop the costly infrastructures of schools, much less, tertiary institutions.

What does the future hold for the Dutch in Australia? Given the experience of the Dutch in the rest of the world, I expect there will continue to be a group of people who will promote things Dutch. They will identify themselves as having Dutch heritage, as being of Dutch descent, as valuing the expression of things Dutch in multicultural events. Children will ask their parents who they are, and parents will answer partly in terms of their ethnic heritage. But developing one's identity takes different forms in different generations. The first generation clings to language and specific remembrances of a birthplace. The second reacts to the unreality of their parents' nostalgia. The third seeks to define itself in a society comprised increasingly of a number

of interestingly distinct cultural groups differentiated by national origins, religious heritage, and cuisine. Each generation holds to things Dutch differently and is misunderstood by preceding generations. What is precious to each is different. Rediscoveries are as fre-

quent as losses as each generation reapprehends what it means for them to be of Dutch descent. In this age of multiculturalism there will be a rush to rediscover roots among those who have forgotten them or ignored them for some time.

Advertisement—p. 151, from *A Church En Route: Forty Years Reformed Churches of Australia*.



Naar welke Kerk in  
Australië?

#### Endnotes

1. Donald H. Bouma, "Religiously Mixed Marriages: Denominational Consequences in the Christian Reformed Church." *Marriage and Family Living* 25. 4 (1963):428-32 and Gary D. Bouma, "Keeping the Faithful: Patterns of Membership Retention in the Christian Reformed Church." *Sociological Analysis* 41(1980):259-64.

2. For a description of this process among the Dutch in the United States and Canada, see Gary D. Bouma, *How the Saints Persevere: Social Factors in the Vitality of the Christian Reformed Church*. Melbourne: Monash University, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, 1984.

3. The ABS Census of Population and Housing, Basic Community Profile Catalogue No. 2722.0-8.

4. Jerzy Krupinski, "Demographic Data on Marriage and Family," Chapter 2, pp. 6-17, in J. Krupinski and A. Stroller (eds.), *The Family in Australia*. Sydney: Pergamon, 1974.

# Lynden Is Not Another Pella

Howard Spaan

*Lynden's recent (1970s) discovery of a profitable ethnic theme and identity has little to do with the actual history of its founders and original Dutch settlers. That, however, is neither exceptional nor surprising. Other towns which have used Netherlandic origins for architectural ornaments and festivals have, like Lynden, also been more imaginative than historical. Holland, Michigan, for example, had no Tulip Time until 1929. Similar festivals in Orange City and Pella, Iowa, date their annual celebrations respectively from 1936 and 1935. All of these places have gone back to the Netherlands to discover the architecture, dances, and clothing which, except for wooden shoes, had no place in their original settlements.*

H.J. Brinks

As I travel about the country, I meet people who imagine that Lynden, Washington, has a history and character much like that of Holland, Michigan, or Iowa's Pella and Orange City. That is certainly a misconception, one which was erroneously reinforced by a 1990 *Banner* article about Lynden. The Dutch cultural veneer upon which the article focused has been acquired only recently, and, although Lynden's business district has benefited from its new Dutch look, the town I remember had an entirely different face.

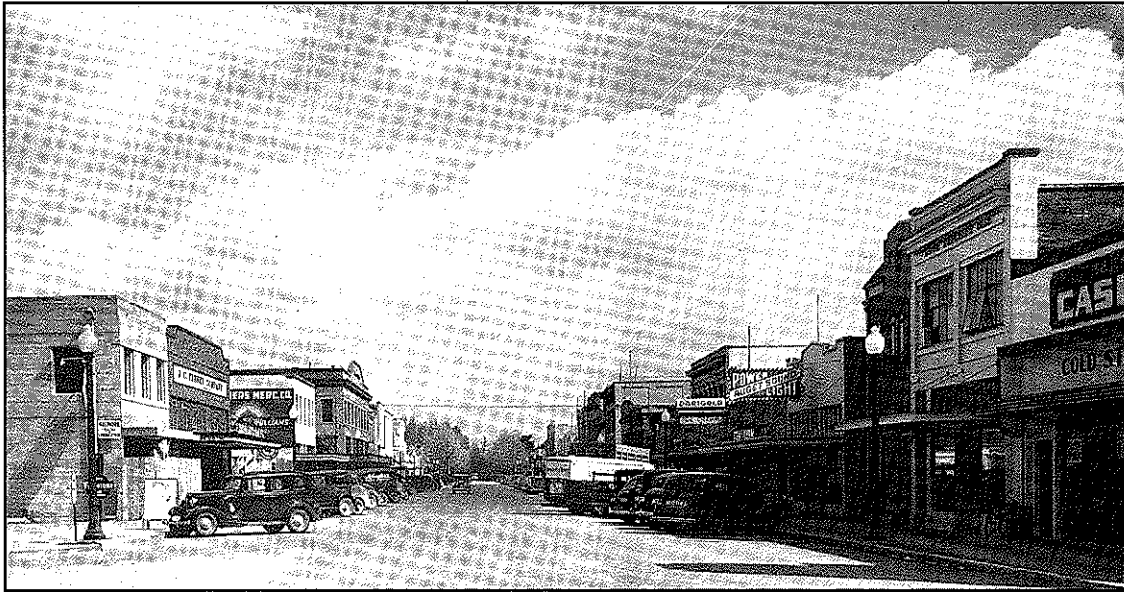
The story of Lynden begins with

Rev. Howard Spaan, the pastor most recently to several Christian Reformed Churches in Oregon, is officially retired but remains an active pastor in Oregon.

Holden and Phoebe Judson, who left Sandusky, Ohio, in 1853 to find an "ideal home." Phoebe Judson detailed that effort in *A Pioneer's Search for an Ideal Home*, a book that has always fascinated me. Holden and Phoebe and their very young daughter, Annie, left Independence, Missouri, and followed the Oregon Trail, which, apart from tracks left by Conestoga wagons dating back nine years, was unmarked. While their party was crossing the La Bonta Creek area in present-day Wyoming, Phoebe gave birth to a son, whose second name became La Bonta, the name by which we knew him in Lynden. I remember the Judsons' frame house, and I was deeply disturbed when it was razed by a new owner. It should have been preserved as a historical site.

The Judsons had an arduous though relatively uneventful trek to

the Willamette Valley of present-day Oregon. In their quest for an ideal home over the next eighteen years, they lived mainly in Washington Territory's Olympia area, but after learning about the Nooksack Valley, they traveled to Bellingham Bay with its two small settlements, New Whatcom and Fairhaven. A number of years later, after my people had come to the area, these two towns merged with Sehome to form the city of Bellingham. Indians who lived in the valley transported the Judsons in canoes to a spot below present-day Lynden. It was all a dense forest. From a point about seventy-five feet higher than the river bed, Phoebe saw the glistening snowcapped peak Kulshan, the Indian name for the peak which explorer Captain George Vancouver renamed Mt. Baker. I grew up being



(left) Main Street 1930s.

(below) Main Street 1980s.



quite aware of the Indian name, although the mountain was generally called Baker.

When the Judsons arrived in 1871, the area contained 450 native Nooksacks living in fifty-two villages, including their fishing and shellfish sites. Their longhouse and fishing site on Fishtrap Creek were

located on the present site of the Christian high school. Until the Hawley family moved to the Judsons' settlement, Phoebe was the only white woman living north of Bellingham Bay.

Soon shingle mills began to appear throughout the forests of the valley. As the village began to develop, the Methodists gathered some residents together into a church. They also built a boarding school in 1890 on Stickney Island, which was created by a side channel of the Nooksack River.

The church, founded in 1887, survived, but the boarding school disappeared after a brief existence. There was also a lumber mill in Lynden in 1884, the Maltby-Robinson Mill, which provided the lumber for the church. The shingle and lumber mills attracted workers, and Lynden's population grew to

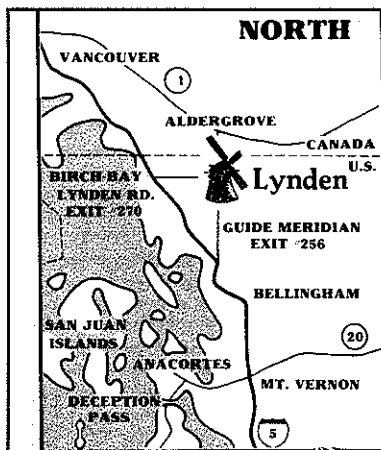
nearly a thousand by 1890.

Phoebe Judson named the town in 1874, when it acquired a post office. She had read a poem about a linden tree and fancied that name to be pretty. But there was no linden tree around, for the native forest

grew mainly fir, cedar, maple, and alder. She changed the *i* of *Linden* to *y* in accord with her sense of beauty in spelling.

The demographic composition of Lynden and immediate environs was a mix of several national backgrounds. The Scandinavians were the dominant group, but an identifiable group of Germans also clustered in Timon, to the south. The native Nooksacks remained in the area, and a number of the settlers, like my uncle Fred Polinder, established friendly relationships with them. His stories about these original people always intrigued me.

Twenty-five years after the Judsons' arrival, Aart Veleke interested two other Oak Harbor residents, Herman Oordt and Douwe Zylstra, to investigate farming possibilities. They walked the sixteen miles from New Whatcom through the forest to Lynden. They concluded that the Nooksack Valley stump land, when cleared, would make an excellent place to establish dairy farms. So began the Dutch-American influx into Lynden and Whatcom County the following year.



Proceed past Fairway Shopping Center to downtown Lynden



Virtually all the people of Dutch extraction in Lynden came from other parts of the United States, and most were American born. Both of my grandfathers were born in Pella, Iowa, prior to the Civil War. The Spaan family moved to Orange City when that area opened for farming in the very early 1870s. Few immigrants came directly to Lynden from the Netherlands.

As the nineteenth century closed, there were enough Dutch families to form a church, and Pastor Abel Brink gathered these folk into a congregation. In July of 1900, the Christian Reformed Church was officially organized. This church became Lynden's second substantial congregation, the other being the original Methodist Church, which had organized thirteen years earlier. Both churches influenced the local culture, and their proximity altered both the Yankee and Dutch populace so that neither of them mirrored the New England and Midwestern communities from which they originated.

It is a curious reality that al-

though most of Lynden's people originated in Midwestern Dutch-speaking villages,\* Dutch had little currency in Lynden. It seems that the newcomers left most of their Dutch culture behind. Some of the older people spoke Dutch among themselves, but English was the language I heard most while growing up. Typical Dutch items—lace curtains, delft ware, wooden shoes, heavy rug-like table coverings and the like—were never obvious in Lynden. Our homes looked no different than those of our neighbors. Thus the currently popular Dutch veneer in Lynden is not a revival but an artificial novelty with nearly no connections to Lynden's past. There never was a windmill in early Lynden. Instead, the area's history stems from the experiences of a mixed populace—Indian, Yankee, Scandinavian, German, and finally, Dutch.

The townsite was carved from the dense high-ground forest above the river valley. Soon a series of small shingle mills appeared, and in 1884 the Maltby-Robinson mill

\*My maternal great-grandparents, Cornelis and Aagje Slotemaker, with their son, John, became part of the Lynden scene after leaving Orange City, Iowa. This was in 1900. Four years later my grandparents, Bastiaan and Boukje De Hoog, left their farm south of Monroe, Iowa, to move to Lynden. Grandpa cleared stump land to make way for a small dairy. In 1907 Grandpa and Grandma Spaan and their children, mostly in their teens, moved from Middleburg, Iowa, to Lynden. Except for

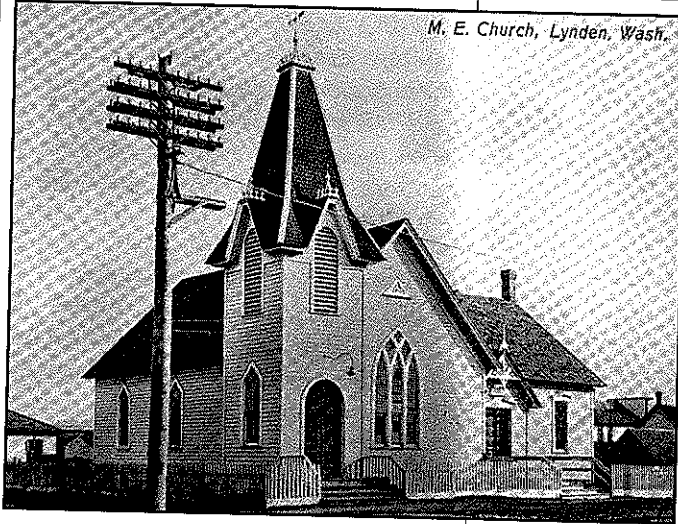
came to the village. But when I was a child, the sounds of Lynden were already changing. Replacing the shrieking of the saws cutting logs and the shrill whistle blasts from the mills were the mooing of cows and the crowing of roosters. When the Klocke-Imperial Fir Lumber Company mill, located just east of the Christian school, was destroyed by fire during the mid 1920s, lumbering as an industry in Lynden died. In its place the Darigold plant and Washington Poultry Co-op became the town industries. These two plants, which no longer exist in the 1990s, produced cheese, milk, eggs, and dressed poultry.

When my De Hoog grandparents arrived in December 1904, they had traveled by train to New Whatcom on Bellingham Bay. The cord road between New Whatcom and Lynden was constructed of logs laid side by side to form a roadway over which the horse-driven vehicle traveled. Mom said it truly was a bumpy sixteen-mile ride, but the family was much impressed with all the December green, including forest undergrowth and patches of grass during a month which is very wintery in Iowa.

My Spaan grandparents built an attractive home in 1907 after clearing a patch of dense forest one mile southwest of Lynden. Dad said the forest undergrowth was so dense you could not drive a cow through it. The house and barn were on high

the Slotemakers, who came to the United States in 1882, all these people grew up in Iowa and Lynden. Grandpa De Hoog's family had lived in a "Yankee" community. Their only Dutch connection was on Sunday at the Dutch-speaking Reformed Church in Otley. With my dad's family it was different. Middleburg was very Dutch in its ways. Dad told me that at the country school lessons were in English but the kids all spoke Dutch on the school grounds.





M. E. Church, Lynden, Wash.

Methodist Church, established 1887.

ground above the river bottom. For some time the high land remained in forest while the bottomland was cleared for pastures and hay crops. Dad told me often about coyotes howling at night and cougars roaming in the forest. It was on this farm that I grew up.

In my earliest recollections the highlands were logged-off stump lands, a wonderful childhood playground. Gradually the stumps were removed—a fascinating operation. Sticks of dynamite placed into a hole under a large stump were lit by a fuse. Then Dad and I took off running to a safe place to watch the blast, which sent dirt and wood flying through the air. Then a tractor pulled the fragments from the ground, and a horse-pulled scoop filled in the gaping hole. It took some time for the smell of dynamite to disappear, and I can still remember that smell.

A wood lot near the barn was

Logging—near present-day Fairway Shopping Center.

preserved to shade the cows; the only other reminders of the dense forest were a wagon trail through this woods to the neighbor's place and one giant Douglas fir tree near the edge of our second-growth wood lot. When I was in high school, Grandpa decided it had to be cut

down because it had interior rot. How well I recall impressing our New Jersey guests with the size of this stump. Three young lassies from the Garden State and two other kids from our neighborhood climbed onto the flat area of the stump, where I had placed a child's table and chairs. The kids had a great tea party on the stump.

Stories about wildlife in the old forest always captured my imagi-

nation, but we experienced a real adventure one day during my high school years. The back end of Grandpa's farm touched the Nooksack River on its southeast and southwest corners. Immediately beyond that lay a wooded area inside a big bend in the river which attracted a bear from the mountains about twenty-five miles away. Soon about thirty hunters were tramping through the woods. But no bear was to be found. It had retreated to a gravel bar at the corner of Grandpa's land. Joe Satterthwaite, our neighbor, saw him there several times that day while hauling gravel, but he did not reveal his secret until he was finished working. The hunters discovered that the bear was feeding at night on fallen plums from a tree bordering Grandpa's land. One brave hunter decided to climb the plum tree with his gun pointed in the direction of the gravel bar, but he could not change his position without creating noise. Sometime



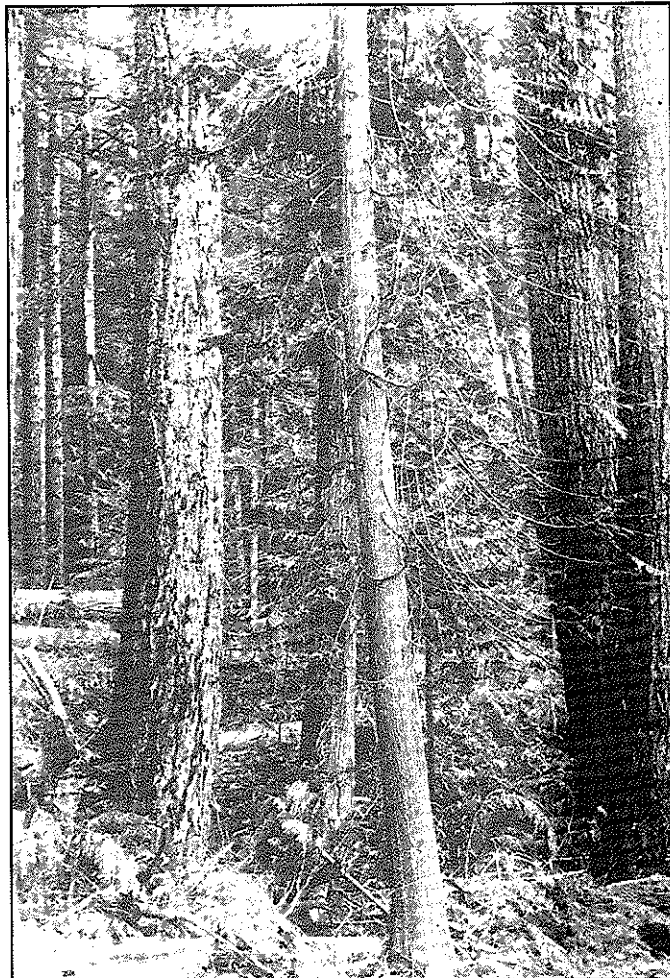


(above) Lynden Sawmill, the town's first industry.

(below) Forest near the Spaan home in 1910.

after midnight the bear arrived after traveling around the river bend to approach the trees from the opposite side. When the excited hunter noisily moved his gun, the bear was up on his haunches, looking into the tree. The gun fell to the ground, and the bear scampered off to the west while the hunter raced eastward without his gun. On the following day the bear was treed by dogs and shot.

The changing uses of Grandpa's farm reflected the general patterns of the region's economic development. Stump removal transformed the woodland into a dairy farm—my dad's responsibility. Grandpa established a poultry farm, and Grandma devoted her energies to flower gardening. She made the farm a bit of a show place with roses climbing the fencing of the chicken yard and with many



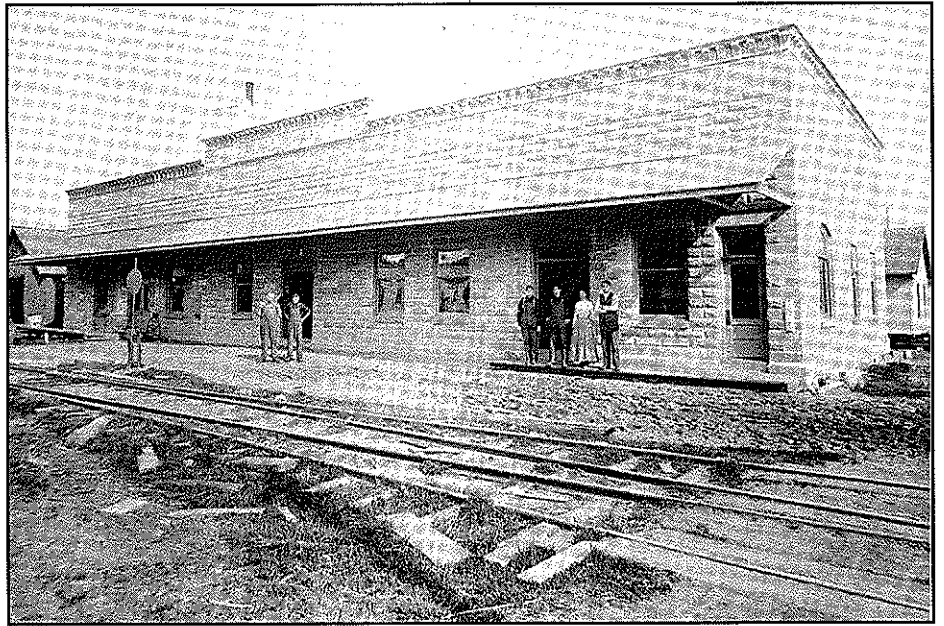
blossoms around the house lot.

Farming took many shapes in Lynden. The Great Depression of the 1930s forced families to diversify in search of cash crops. For a time Dutch flower-bulb growers did rather well. And that product provided the name for Dad's milk-delivery business—the Daffodil City Dairy. I also remember growing sugar beets on Grandpa's farm for the Bellingham sugar refinery.

And we raised Blue Lake pole beans for the cannery in Everson. We tried table beets and even roses. None of these became prominent, but strawberries and raspberries continue to flow from Lynden's frozen-food plants. I worked in one of these (R.D. Bodles) during a college summer and came home with strawberry stains on clothes and skin at each day's end. Ultimately, however, dairy farming has persisted and remains king. But today the Jersey and Guernsey cows which dominated the pastures of my youth have been replaced by black and white Frisian Holsteins.

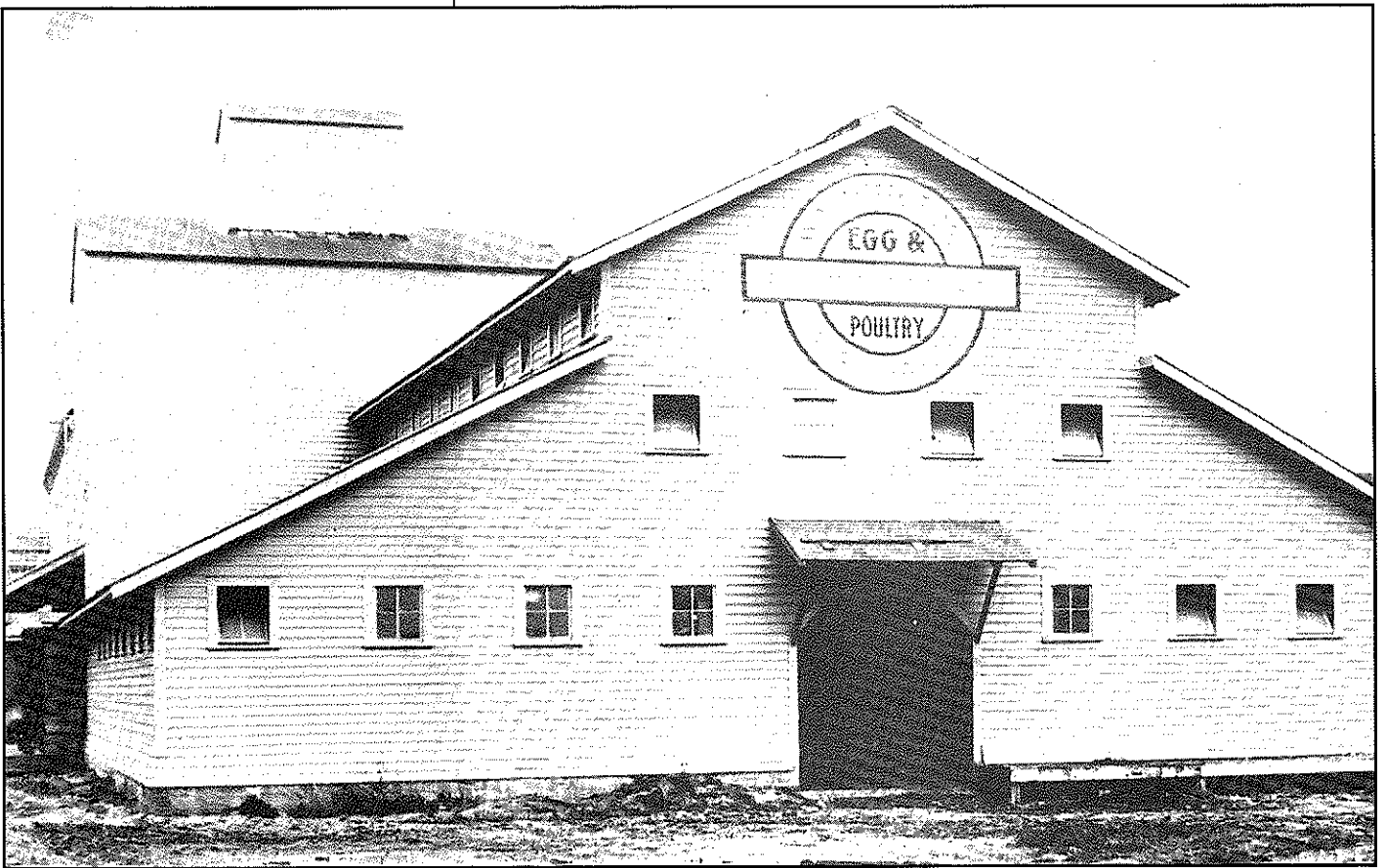
In 1911 the First Reformed Church was organized, and, loyal RCA man that he was, Grandpa became a charter member. During the seven years he had lived in Lynden, he had never joined the CRC but kept his membership in the Reformed Church of Otley

Iowa. Like its counterpart, the RCA worshiped in the Dutch language. I am still puzzled by the fact that these people could abandon nearly every feature of Dutch culture but maintain a Dutch context for church life. The next major church to appear (1920) was the Second Christian Reformed Church—the first English-speaking church west of Chicago in the CRC. It grew slowly and steadily but remained small compared to the other two Dutch-American congregations. Change came rapidly, however, during the Thirties, when many new arrivals were driven west to Lynden by dust-bowl years in Montana and the Midwest (especially the Dakotas). These people wanted English—especially for their children. And because the other Reformed churches were in the middle of the



*Above: Lynden Creamery, about 1910—later the Darigold Plant.*

*Below: The Washington Cooperative Egg and Poultry Association, 1930s.*





*Spaan home, 1910. Seated, Henry and Anna. Standing, left to right, John, Cornelia, Cornelius, Henry, and Agnes.*

language controversy, the Second CRC gained many new members. Although I was baptized in First CRC, I spent my formative years in Second Church. Nonetheless, I can recall sitting through the Dutch-language services and counting organ pipes or ceiling squares to occupy my mind. Until the 1930s the Dutch contingent in Lynden was a decided minority, but thereafter it grew rapidly until today it has become the majority.

The western approach to Lynden, on Front Street, features two burial grounds. Monumenta, founded on the north side by the Dutch Burial Society, is paired on the south side

by the American Lynden Cemetery. That resting place originated as a lodge cemetery, and that, doubtless, is the reason why the Dutch have their own burial ground. On at least one occasion the bones of a Dutch couple were moved from the lodge cemetery to Monumenta. Although the American cemetery has not been linked to the lodge for many decades, the separate burial pattern has persisted. The impression that Dutch Lyndenites have carried their ethnic exclusiveness to the graveyard is not entirely accurate. It was the lodge issue, not ethnic solidarity, which motivated the development of a separate burial ground.

Because I attended the Christian school and had little experience outside the Dutch community, it was easy to imagine that Lynden

was an essentially Dutch settlement. But that impression was altered for me when, at age twelve, I helped my dad deliver rural mail, a contract he acquired to keep busy while recovering from an illness. From the names on roadside boxes I soon discovered that large portions of the area were Swedish and Norwegian, with names like Larson, Olson, Swenson, Swanson, Holmquist, Rasmussen, and the like. When I returned to Lynden for my fiftieth high school class reunion, I was reminded again that the dominant ethnic group in my high school was not Dutch but Scandinavian. We called

them "Americans." Those in my class from the public school called us "the Christian school kids" (not Dutch kids).

Before attending high school Lynden's students were rather clearly divided—the Dutch going mainly to the private Christian school and all others attending the public grade school. In high school the two groups met and intermingled; although the two segments maintained some level of separate identity, it was not often apparent. Dancing, for example, did not become a controversial issue because the school never sponsored dances. Apparently the public school yielded to the Dutch Reformed behavior patterns on the issue.

My own special encounter w

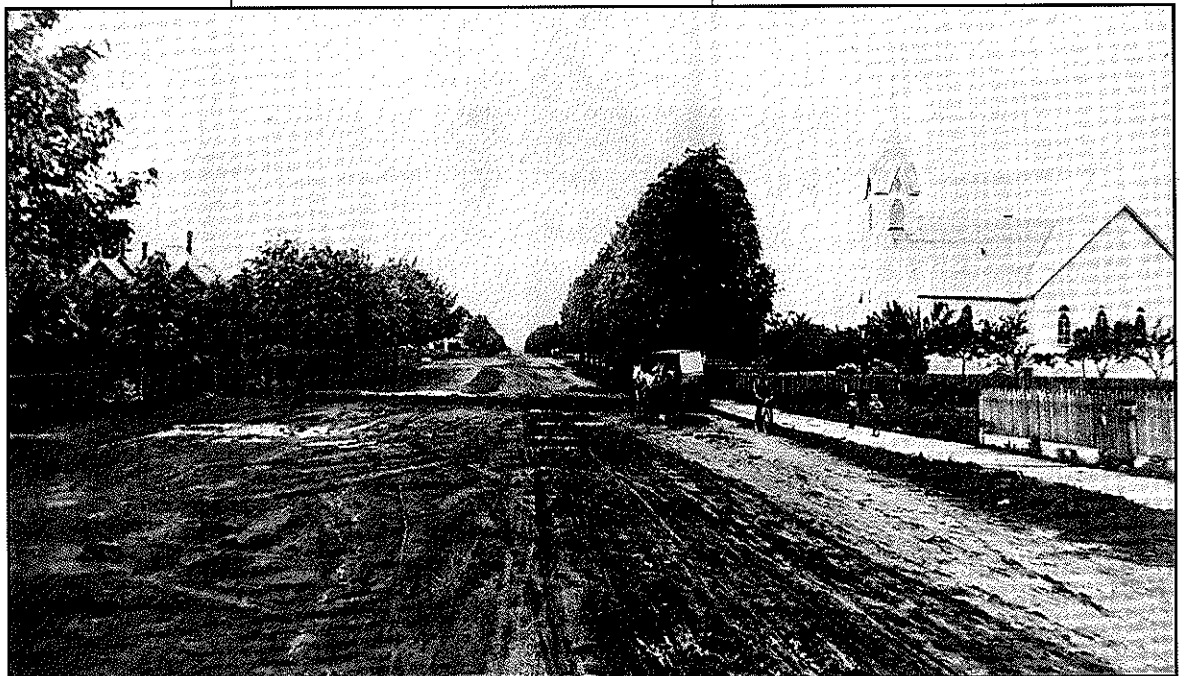
these behavioral distinctions came from my school superintendent, who was neither Dutch nor Reformed. It occurred during the year that I was president of the Knights, a school service club. To raise money, the club decided to hold a raffle. It was not my choice, but it was what the club wanted, and I did not intend to block it. So I went to the superintendent with our plans. Rejecting them immediately, he said, "How could a student from the Reformed group allow a raffle? It obviously violates your principles. I will not allow it in this school." I was startled, but the experience has taught me to be wary of those who easily impose their religious values on a diverse community.

For primarily economic reasons Lynden's diverse populace has embraced the imposition of a Dutch motif on its main-street stores and shopping mall. However, the strategy which resulted in that development came from the University of Washington, not from Lynden.

When Leavenworth, a nearly defunct mining town, was profitably recast as a Bavarian village (no Bavarians ever lived there), the University urged other towns, including Lynden, to feature an ethnic motif. The city fathers bought into the idea. I recall reading about it in the *Lynden Tribune* during my college days. During one summer I went home with great expectations to view the transformation, but I was thoroughly disappointed. A few downtown stores had Dutch gables added across the front. The two-by-four props which held them in place were visible from the street. It reminded me of a cheap movie set. That was about the sum of the restoration. It and the plan died soon thereafter.

Later, in the late Seventies, Jim Wynstra and several other Lyndenites visited the Netherlands for three weeks to study Dutch architecture. They came home with five hundred pictures of Dutch places like Vollandam and Marken to inspire and guide the redevelop-

ment of Lynden's town center. The Wynstra family opened the Dutch Mothers restaurant with a menu and decor drawn from Holland, and a Dutch bakery quickly followed. Then, in a major development, the former Elenbaas creamery was transformed into a shopping mall with a huge landmark windmill, a canal, bridges, and a water-side restaurant. The windmill dominates the downtown business area and contains a shop, an auditorium, and hotel rooms. At the other end of the business district stands the town museum which features carriages, tools, household items and a wealth of early artifacts depicting life in the first seventy-five years of the town. It occupies the former quarters of the North Washington Implement Company, the center for farm business which was owned by my uncle John Spaan. The museum features the Lynden I knew as I was growing up—before the town put on a Dutch face.



Lynden CRC,  
about 1910.

# A Proper Little Calvinist

Allan Ramerman

For the first nine years of my life we lived at 104 Grover Street in Lynden. This was an old boxy house built in 1904. It was very cold in the winter and heated by a small wood heater in the dining room and a wood range in the kitchen. We boys slept upstairs, where there was no heat. Downstairs, Mother would hang a blanket in the front room during "northeasters" that roared down the Fraser River Canyon from the frigid Canadian prairies. Old

*Lynden Christian School, about 1920. Teachers: George Ramerman, Emma Zylstra, Matilda De Valois, and Jennie Haveman.*



stockings were stuffed around the windows and doors to stop the drafts.

Among the vivid memories I have of 104 Grover Street is when my youngest brother, Gerald George, became ill with spinal meningitis. There was no sophisticated treatment for that disease, and Gerald died at one and a half years old. It was the custom in those days to bring the deceased home in the coffin to be placed in the living room until the funeral so that friends could visit and view the body at the same time. This always seemed macabre to me, and I can still see the tiny coffin in the dimly

lit living room, standing by the large front window. I was largely unsupervised during these days of mourning, as my mother and father were extremely busy with details and were upset as well. I would hang around the periphery while friends came to call and would disappear quickly when the coffin was opened.

I was so impressionable at this time that for years I viewed the death of my brother as a sort of curse that spread gloom and sadness over the family for quite a period of time. At the funeral Dad's eighth grade class sang "Safe in the Arms of Jesus." This song fills me

with emotion to this day.

But there are happy memories of 104 Grover Street too. I can remember helping my father work at

In 1985 the *Bellingham Herald* published Allan Ramerman's recollection "A Proper Little Calvinist," which contains a number of episodes from his boyhood in Lynden, Washington. Several of these are reprinted here.

the old Grover Street School on hot summer days. One of the chores I used to help with was mixing ink for the coming year. It was a light blue powder mixture that was not washable and would stain clothes forever and skin for several weeks.

Father sometimes made toys for us. One I can remember was a contraption made with a small wooden box and a tin can. He would fill the can with dirt and with a windlass haul it and dump it into the box. He would also make kites and fly them with us. We made whistles from maple branches in the spring when the shoots were tender and the sap high.

For my sixth birthday I got a pocket knife. This was quite a compliment as my parents judged me to be safe with one. When I was seven, I got a bathing suit. It was dark blue with red trim. It covered everything but my arms and legs, as men didn't bare their breasts while swimming in those days.

I was the envy of my brothers as Joseph was in Bible times when I was the first of the three to get a long-pants suit. It was gray, and I was very proud of it and loved to flaunt it in front of my brothers. It pays to be the pick of the litter.

On snowy days our phone would ring constantly when parents called to ask if there would be school. Announcements by radio would have been useless as few people had radios.

My father had a good sense of what being a boy was all about. He stood between the requirements of Mother and what he knew to be the behavior of normal boys. Dad would let us go to the library after dark and sleep out under the stars on warm summer nights.

In 1929 my parents bought the Harry Beernink place on the Depot Road. It was a small chicken ranch

of seven acres. We were thrilled at the prospect of moving. Mother sent us to look at the house before we moved in to see if it had the old green window shades or the newer, more fashionable, tan ones. It had the tan ones.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Life was never really dull for me. Then, as now, it is too full of challenges and interesting things to do. One must never, never refuse to gamble on an interesting experience or refuse to take a calculated risk. To do that is to stifle life's challenges.

In 1932, Father bought Harold and me new stamp albums for Christmas. They were general foreign albums. They had black covers and colored pictures of stamps on the front. I have been a stamp collector ever since.

We spent many hours combing the city dump at the back of John Siegel's place looking for "10-cent bicentennials" and whatever other philatelic gems we could find. Harry Fountain, who ran the Lynden Department Store's feed store, would delay the burning of the store incinerator until after school when we made our daily visit to look for stamps. Then Harry would look the other way as we sneaked into the feed store to weigh ourselves on the sensitive feed scale.

My father bought a .22 rifle for Harold and me when we were about twelve years old. The first day we had the gun Dad saw me shoot a robin from the light wire in front of the house, and the gun was impounded for a month. Harold was laid up with a dislocated hip when we got the gun, so we opened the bedroom window and let him fire through it.

I mentioned earlier that our life

revolved around the church. We not only attended church twice on Sunday but also attended Young People's Society meetings on Sunday evenings, catechism classes on Tuesday evenings, and Young Men's Society on Thursday evenings. Sometimes we would take our catechism offering, skip the class, and play pool at one of the local dens of iniquity. Most of the time, however, we attended and recited our lessons like proper little Calvinists.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

While I chronicle these lighthearted episodes, I recall one that changed the course of our family life.

Dad never seemed to run out of energy. He taught school for a living and for whatever reason took on gargantuan extracurricular tasks as well. For sixteen years he served as elder of the Second Christian Reformed Church. For twenty years he taught citizenship classes for immigrants of all countries. He taught these classes each Wednesday night year-round if there were people to be taught, and there usually were. Of course, he had to attend all the school board meetings. He taught Men's Bible Class at the First Reformed Church and Sunday school at the Second Christian Reformed Church.

In the summer of 1938, it became evident that Dad was not well. He was getting out of the car one day and bumped his ankle, and it swelled greatly. The doctor immediately suggested he have a physical. The doctors found that he had hypertension and extremely high blood pressure. They also found that his kidneys had been damaged. They forecast that he would live about three months. As if programmed, ninety days later he

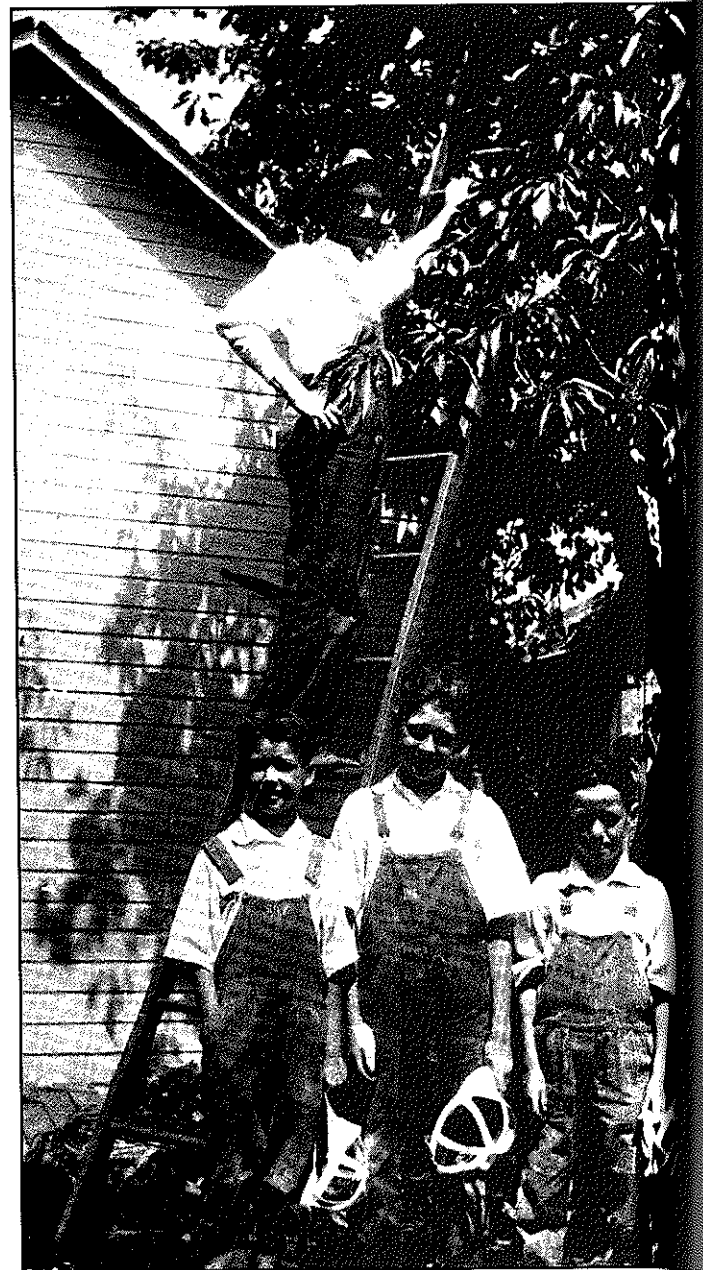
died. The trauma that surrounded these events is hard to relate. My mother, who was proud of Dad and his position, was devastated. In addition, the prime source of income for the family was gone. There were no Social Security survivor pensions then, and the Christian School Pension Trust Fund had just been started and paid Mother only twelve dollars a year.

Byron was not working but was planning to get married. Harold's income was low, and I had not yet left the ranks of the unemployed. Byron and Mother decided to start a ladies' apparel store in Lynden. They borrowed all the money and started a small shop in Dr. Frank Wood's building, where Ken's Jewelers is located on Front Street today. They did a fairly good business, but they did not have enough volume to survive. The business was closed after one year, and they were left with the initial investment to pay back to local men.

A more recent and expanded (28 p.) version of *A Proper Little Calvinist* is available from:

Allan Ramerman  
2015 24th Street #86  
Bellingham, WA 98225-8189

Ramerman family picking cherries, about 1928. George (on ladder); boys, left to right: Allan, Byron, and Harold.







## My Grandmother's Truth

Alma Roberts Hoogland

I am a second-generation American, fortunate enough to have been born in the United States but still having intimate ties to people once rooted deeply in foreign soil. In the case of my immigrant grandmother, Maartje Bouma, that alien soil never completely fell away: to this day, she remains "Old Country" in my memory.

No doubt her arrival in New York in 1890 at eighteen years of age and her rapid immersion in a Dutch Calvinist immigrant church and community were sufficient reasons for her continuing "Dutchiness." As a child, I confess, I felt a little embarrassed around my friends who had "American" grandmothers—they didn't pronounce *th* like *d*, or say *yah* instead of *yes*, for instance. Neither did they wear dark and somber hats, coats, and dresses nor pull their long white hair into a stern bun at the nape of the neck. *Their* faces were jolly and frivolous, or at least happy. *My* grandmother's face, however, often looked careworn and serious. But even while feeling embarrassed, I also felt ashamed about such feelings, because she was my grandmother and I loved her. She needed my protection, I thought (she was *old*—in her sixties—by the time I was born), and she *certainly* needed my sympathy. After all, it couldn't have been easy leaving "home" and never really feeling at ease in her adopted country.

And it is no wonder she couldn't fit in well. I learned of Grandma's early experiences in the United States, her "New Country," from my mother when I was in high school and college. They were heartbreaking tales, mostly; even now, years after her death, they bring tears to my eyes. She settled in a town near Rochester, New York, where she married Walter, son of a grocer, with whom she had fallen in love. Soon

Maartje Bouma

after the marriage, Walter traveled to the West to investigate prospects there—to seek his fortune, as the old fairy tales often put it—but it wasn't long before he returned to his young wife, Maartje, with a severe cough from which he would never recover. It was tuberculosis, of course; many people were afflicted with that deadly scourge in those days. When their baby son was only six weeks old, Walter died. Having no other means of support, Maartje found work as a housekeeper for a Dutch clergyman's family. Every day she gave up the care of her sickly, crying baby to her sister-in-law, turned away, and went with aching heart to her work. But at sixteen months of age, her beloved baby, too, died.

By the time she married my grandfather, a widower eighteen years her senior with a teenaged daughter—he importuned her relentlessly, until she finally gave in—Maartje was resigned to the belief that life is indeed a vale of tears, albeit relieved occasionally by scattered scenes of pleasure, even joy. I never personally knew my grandfather, but I do know that life with him was far from idyllic: his temper and meanness were, and are, legendary amongst his six children and their many offspring. He once hanged the family's pet dog, a special favorite of my mother's, because the dog sometimes invaded the chicken coop. My mother, I think, never forgave her father for that. At least she never has forgotten it, although she also remembers him in some of his gentler moods. My mother, youngest of Grandmother's six children, was born when Maartje was forty and her husband, fifty-eight. My mother's name, Francis, honors grandmother's sister-in-law. Grandfather Jacob died in 1932, and three years later my mother married Louis Roberts.

Because Grandma lived for several years with my parents when I was young, many idle afternoons of my childhood were spent at her feet as she sat rocking, singing her Dutch renditions of the Psalms from memory. Often she would interject the Psalm number: "That was Psalm 139," she would say, or 90 (her favorite) or 21 or 100—whatever it happened to be. She seemed to know them all. I was awestruck. Or she would just reminisce about her life in the Old Country—Grandma, tell me about when you went to school. Or, tell me about your mother. Or Dirk or Klaas (her brothers), or your friends, I would plead. And the stories she told me, the daguerreotypes and photographs she showed me, were wondrously fascinating

to my childish mind and imagination. I absorbed all that I could, not even recognizing what an incomparable treasure was being turned over to me. But I recognize it now—now that I have my own grandchildren—because this is part of my heritage which must be preserved and passed on.

Perhaps those stories of the early years explain her best. Born in 1871 in to a rather poor family of Sint Jacobiparochie, Friesland (at that time a largely agrarian province with deep social divisions), she lost her mother before she herself had reached the age of twelve. That must have meant the abrupt end of childhood for her, because at that point the full care of the household—her father and two brothers—fell upon her shoulders. Never again could she attend school, even though she loved it. Life dealt harshly with poor children in those days.

As she grew older, she hired out as the live-in nanny for a well-to-do family in "the big city," Leeuwarden. Those were much easier, happier days; I can still see in my mind's eye the photograph of her—tall, stately and dark haired, arms encircling her young charges. With things at last so satisfying for her, why would she have chosen to leave? But leave she did, in 1890, with her brother Klaas, following their father, who had emigrated in 1889. They wanted to become Americans. America meant freedom and opportunity.

My grandmother never returned to the Old Country even briefly. I don't know why, but I have thought about it often. Were her memories, distilled from childhood, too painful for her to risk their resuscitation? Or were they, rather, so cherished, so encrusted by then as if with gold and precious stones that they must never be disturbed lest they turn to dross? I would like to hope that the latter was her truth, but I fear that the former is far more likely. Somehow she knew, deep within, that a person really can't go home again. For home, after all, lies within our memories, which build stories from selected facts, remaking them into creative reconstructions with private values and meanings.

My grandmother summed up the life she remembered time and again with Psalm 39, verse 4: "Lord, teach me to know mine end and the measure of my days. What it is; that I may know how frail I am." Although not especially joyful, these words fit everything I remember about Grandmother. I wish now, always have, that she could have had a happier life

# Hard Times in Grand Rapids: Marten and Frouwke Schoonbeek, 1873-1890

H.J. Brinks

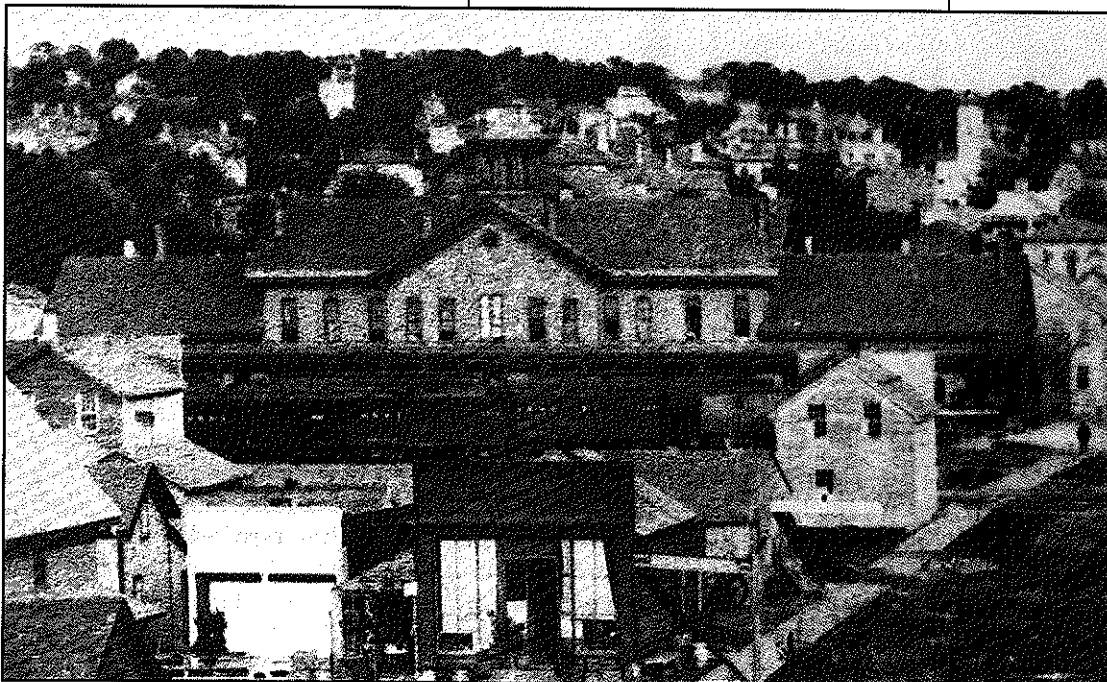
It is wrong to assume that the Netherlanders who came to Grand Rapids, Paterson, and other Dutch ethnic communities were nearly all devoted Christians. Many families (the Spoelhofs in Paterson, the Zandstras in Highland, and the Van Kootens in Montana, to name a few) were drawn to the church and Christianity after they immigrated. Before then they were nominal Christians who rarely worshiped in any church. In all probability, social acceptability, community concern, and economic advantages moti-

vated them to join their neighbors in Sunday worship. Thereafter, faithful preaching drew them from ambivalence to commitment. Cultural converts of this sort have enriched the Reformed community of churches significantly. No one can estimate their numbers without conducting a major research project, but the case of the Marten Schoonbeek family provides an example of the process.

Marten and Frouwke Schoonbeek and five children arrived in Grand Rapids on a Saturday morning in

1873. With several others (Jan Stuit, Eiso Wiegman, Geert Klooster and R. Rozenboom), Marten set out to find an apartment. The day-long search produced only temporary shelter in an unused barn. Schoonbeek expected to do better on the following day, but of that venture he reported, "On Sunday, May 25, I went out walking to find a house. But I couldn't do much because a person can't buy a cent's worth of anything around here on Sunday, and no one was around to talk with. That is how strictly people observe the Sabbath here.

Finally I made contact with an old acquaintance, Geert Stel. He had lived near us in Nieuwolda when he worked as a hired hand. Stel has been here for three years, and he had an experience similar to ours when he arrived



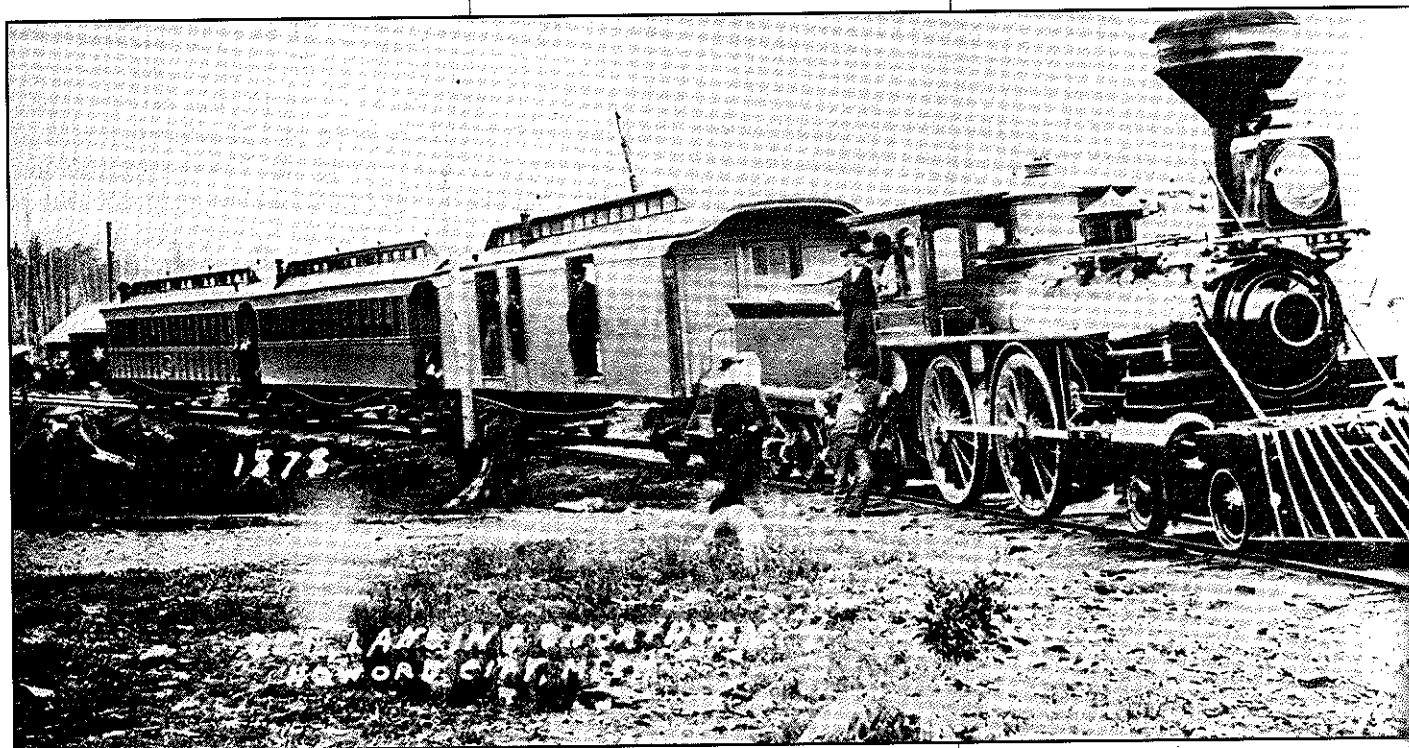
*Grand Rapids Union  
Railroad Depot, 1870s  
Courtesy of the Michigan  
and Family History  
Department, Grand Rapids,  
Public Library*

in Grand Rapids—worse in fact. But he is successful now and owns several apartments along with his own home. The Stels were so good as to allow us the use of their basement . . . If our baggage had arrived with us on Saturday, things would have been better. But, since nothing can be done on Sunday and no trains are running either, we had to stay in the barn until Monday.”

formed] you would be especially well cared for because they cannot find a good teacher here.” The position Marten had in mind was that of Dutch language instructor for the children of the First CRC, located then on Spring (now Commerce) Street. That position went to W.H. De Lange in 1873, but he was a bookkeeper and did not plan to continue on as a teacher.

mon was read to us. I did not enjoy it, and I became quite bored.” He added, “There are some modernist churches here where the sermons are preached in English, but I don’t understand them at all.”

Despite Marten’s illness the Schoonbeeks had settled into their new surroundings rather comfortably. Marten’s April 26, 1874, letter to Jacobus was both optimistic and



The Schoonbeeks lived in Stels’ basement until July 1, when they rented a first-floor apartment from Piet Otte. With these initial difficulties behind him, Marten began to urge his son Jacobus to join the family in Grand Rapids. Jacobus was a school teacher in Nieuwolda and had, apparently, made a vague promise to immigrate after the family was settled. Thus Marten wrote, “It would be a great pleasure to have you here with us. You would be able to get along very well here—even as a teacher. If you were a seceder [Christian Re-

By September 7, 1873, the Schoonbeeks had moved into their new house at 36 Logan Street Southeast, but Marten’s health was beginning to fail. He could work only sporadically, and the economic depression (1873-76), intensified his problems. Nonetheless, he wrote that by making and selling wooden shoes door-to-door he was able to survive. In April 1874 Schoonbeek reported that he was going to the seceder church and commented that Rev. Gerrit E. Boer, Spring Street’s pastor (1873-76), “was preaching in another church on Sunday, so a ser-

*Detroit, Lansing & Northern Railroad, 1870s*

surprisingly pious. “Dear Son,” he wrote. “It is about one year since we last saw each other. We remember [our departure] so vividly. What a change in our lives! What a change in our work! It is remarkable how many privileges we have enjoyed without suffering any losses, and now even good health. All of this reminds me to show gratitude to God almighty. May our hope, that we be together soon, be realized.”

He noted also that his daughter

Tryntje and Harmanna were gainfully employed as housemaids and able to contribute to the family's coffers. He worked occasionally but spent much of his time finishing their new home, building a fence around the yard (to keep out roaming cows), and preparing a vegetable garden. When the general economy improved, he expected to gain a steady income. Unfortunately, all of these plans were cut short by his unexpected death on May 14, 1874.

In her report of that event, Marten's daughter Tryntje informed her brother that their father "became very ill on May 9, and he died on May 14. According to American customs," she continued, "and also because it was very warm, Father was buried on May 15. Yes, dear Brother, the blow struck us very hard. But it is God's will. . . . Father and Mother were just beginning to get along nicely. Their little house was being improved and also the garden. They had a water well near the house. So everything was beginning to look bright. Harmanna and I had almost repaid our travel expenses, and we were getting a good supply of clothes. But what are we to do now?"

By July 1874 the Schoonbeek family's fortunes were beginning to deteriorate. Marten's widow, Frouwke Pul, wrote, "Dear Son . . . this is my situation. The house is ours, but we borrowed thirty dollars from Rozenboom. He is not pressing us, but on August 10 he must receive three dollars for the interest. I still owe five dollars and seventy-five cents on the land. He does not exert pressure for that either, but I do have to pay by July 25. The man who sells me wood must also be paid one dollar. And I must buy a new stove. Where the

money for that will come I do not know."

Frouwke Pul added that both of her daughters were courting and hoped to be married quickly. She feared that they would no longer contribute to her support but noted that her neighbors were very helpful. "There are two boys at the home of Isaac de Pagter, and they help me as much as they can. Cornelis van Partsen, a boarder there, and Leen de Pagter helped me a great deal when Father was sick . . . . They side with the seceders [CRC], but Father was always glad to see them." She concluded, "Dear Son, I wish so much

their mother and that public assistance was not available as long as the daughters were single. "Your sisters say," he wrote, "that they have withheld support from your mother because you have not been inclined to come here. They think that they will be left to support her by themselves . . . . And, now, finally, your mother is asking for financial support so that she can provide for herself and her [3] children. Your mother and her children enjoy good health, a tonic amid all her circumstances."

Frouwke was desperate and wanted to return to the Netherlands. "I was pleased to receive the



*Grand Rapids—East bank of the Grand River, 1874.*

that you were here with me. Dear Son, do not forget your mother."

By February 1875 Jacobus contributed twenty guilders to help defray his mother's increasing debts, but not before receiving an urgent letter from Mr. C. van Aarten. As a neutral third party Van Aarten declared that Frouwke's daughters were no longer willing to support

twenty guilders [\$8.80]. But something else. I would like to return to the fatherland, and now I plan to sell all of my property because Father said so often, 'If Jacobus were here . . . then it would be all right.' But now there is no possibility of



(top)  
Logan Street near Eastern today. Typical housing left over from the old Dutch neighborhood. Note double house lot.

(middle)  
Logan & Division — present streetscape near Schoonbeek's 31 Logan Street house in 1873.

(below) 21 Prospect Street SE — the Freeman house where Harmanna Schoonbeek worked as a maid in 1873.



about eight years (1875-1883). Thereafter, and until her death in 1890, Frouwke's younger children, Jetje and Harm, lived at home and supported her. Meanwhile, Tryntje married Anthony Stormzandt, and Har-

American society. Branches of the family migrated to California, Ohio, Denver, and Detroit. The married daughters (Stormzandt, Rozenboom, and De Graaf) probably have descendants still living in West Michigan. It is a virtual certainty, however, that these people know nothing of the hard times which their immigrant ancestors experienced—their griefs, anxieties, and poverty—and amid these, their turning to the Christian faith.\*

that . . . Help me get away from here, for I write you honestly, dear Son, please help me."

Five months later, in July 1875, Frouwke remarried. It was an unfortunate marriage, to a man named Berend. Tryntje wrote to Jacob, "I think it is my duty to inform you that Mother has another proposal to marry a thirty-eight-year-old man who is a bricklayer and a plasterer. That is a good occupation in America. He has never married and has no children. He boards with his sister. That is all that Mother has told us about him . . . I believe, Brother, that she will marry this man. [I can only hope that he will be good for] Little Harm, Jetje, and Klaas."

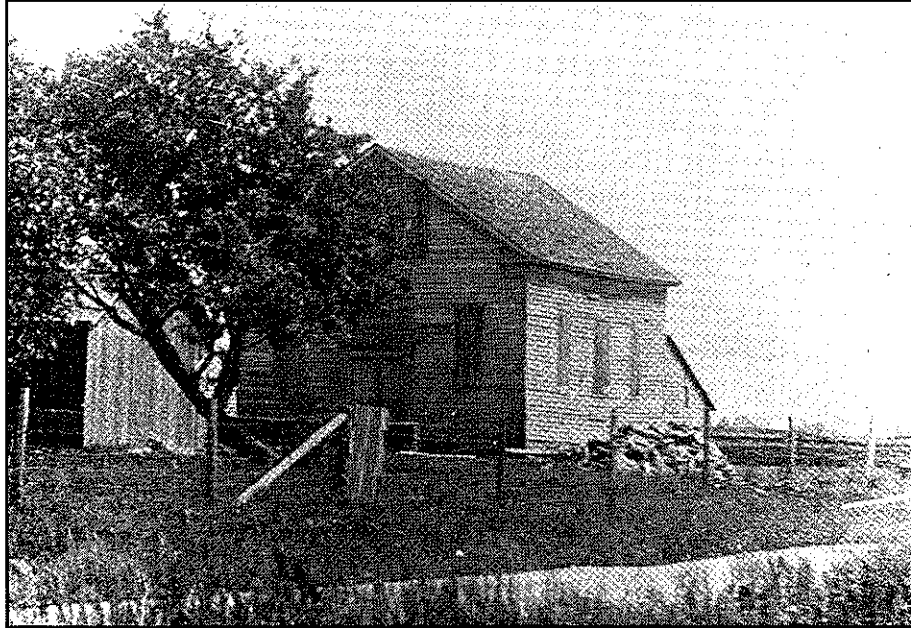
As it turned out, Berend was abusive both to Frouwke and especially to her retarded son, Klaas. Nonetheless, the relationship was patched together time and again for

manna married Gerhardus Rozenboom. They and their children were incorporated into local Dutch Reformed churches. The whole family gained a considerable measure of support and stability from the surrounding Reformed community. In addition to the solace of worship, helping hands, food, firewood, and advice contributed much to Frouwke's survival during her trials between 1874 and 1890.

Ultimately Marten and Frouwke's descendants were absorbed into mainstream

\*In the spring of 1995 the full text of the Schoonbeek correspondence will be published in *Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850-1930* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1995).





First frame church.

## *The Early Church at Polkton, Michigan*

Loren Lemmen

Polkton was not one of the original Dutch settlements in Western Michigan. In fact, the first Dutch-speaking<sup>1</sup> immigrants didn't arrive there until the summer of 1849. From the beginning, Polkton was isolated from other Dutch settlements and it remained so for thirty years. It was located in Polkton Township, on the north side of the Grand River about halfway between Grand Rapids and Grand

Haven, an entirely rural area between Eastmanville and Lamont, villages that looked promising in the days of river traffic. The initial growth of the Polkton community came primarily from passengers on the ship *Garonne*, which had arrived in New York on July 3, 1849. Among them were the families of Wubbenius and Fenne Horlings, Freerk and Martha Witkop, and others. All of them were members of the Seceded Church in the province of Groningen. Some had settled first in Grand Rapids and later moved on into the countryside.

Effectively organized religious life was slow to develop in Polkton

because of its isolation and lack of leadership. Local tradition<sup>2</sup> tells us that the first religious service was held in the late winter of 1850 after Wubbenius Horlings was killed while felling a tree. Martha Witkop, who believed he should not be buried without a religious service, could not find a man who would volunteer to conduct one, so Martha read from the Bible, prayed, and gave a short address herself. After that she began to visit the various families on Sundays, reading the Bible and talking to them, but the absence of an ordained pastor continued to trouble the community.

Mr. Lemmen, raised in Coopersville, is an avid local-history researcher and the joint author with Swenna Harger of *The County of Bentheim and Her Emigrants to North America*.

In late 1853 the newspaper *De Hollander* asked readers from the various settlements to write about their situations. From Polkton, Lucas Elbers responded by saying that materially the Dutch settlers were getting along well—the soil was fertile, there was good access to nearby markets, and the wages were high due to the construction of a railroad in the area. The spiritual situation, he asserted, was less encouraging.<sup>3</sup>

If we look at spiritual matters and count the fruits of the spirit as our Lord Jesus taught us, it is most disappointing. We could cry and say with Psalm 12: "Help Lord, for those who love thee fail. The faithful ones fall from the ranks and leave the liars to their tale, false gratitude and treacheries." There is much disagreement here over worship matters and hatred and envy among the church members. This is no wonder because we have no role models and no teachers to instruct us . . . Although we have Sunday services, those who attend are so indifferent and spiritually dead that we can only look forward to what our Lord said to the church in Laodicea—"Since you are neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth." On top of this there is something that makes a believer's heart weep. Among the eighteen or nineteen households here there are eight or nine unbaptized children; many are three, four, and five years old. Now, if you read this report, don't you agree we should have a Christian teacher here who would straighten things out for us? Probably the preachers in the Colony are not aware of our situation. Some know about it, but not all of them! Our hope is that the Lord will sustain. That after a long and barren winter a season of refreshing may come over us. That with one heart and

soul we may serve the Lord and work for each other's well-being in this life and for eternity.

A response to Elbers' letter appeared in the 1854 minutes of Classis Holland,<sup>4</sup> which reported, "There was a petition from Elbers for preaching and the founding of a church. Rev. Bolks, to whom it had



Lucas Elbers, 1810-1876. Founding elder at Polkton.

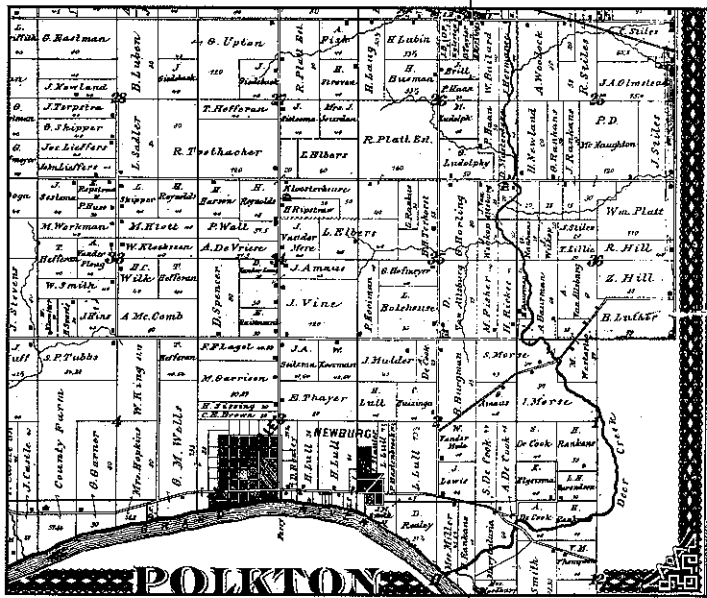
been assigned to look after this district, makes excuses. Rev. Vander Meulen is appointed to go there, but at the same time to point out to Elbers the impropriety of complaining of neglect openly, in the newspapers." Rev. Vander Meulen of Zeeland came a few weeks later and helped organize the church at Polkton, named after the township in which it was located. Lucas Elbers was elected elder, and Jan Snoek, deacon. The church had an initial membership of twenty-one souls, but it grew quickly because many families moved to the area between 1854 and 1856. They built a log structure at Four Corners,<sup>5</sup> an intersection near the center of the Dutch settlement.

The organization of a church with formal leaders did not bring

an end to disagreements. Indeed, no congregation in the larger community of Dutch Reformed churches has better credentials to be a grieving mother church than the Reformed Church of Coopersville, Michigan. That congregation, originating from the Polkton RCA, consists currently of about 220 families. It was founded in 1854,<sup>6</sup> disrupted by secession in 1857, and re-organized in 1859. Internal controversies caused about one-fourth of its members (fifteen families) to leave in 1868 and 1869, but by 1870 most of them returned to the fold. From 1879 to 1883 the membership was decimated once again when nearly one-half departed.

Unfortunately these early membership hemorrhages did not result in the establishment of vibrant new congregations or even a vigorous competing institution. The first secession, 1857, arose with the founding of what became the Christian Reformed Church, but in Polkton the fledgling CRC dwindled to little more than a house church by 1859.<sup>7</sup> It sent no elected delegates to the CRC's synods after 1858 and never gained the services of a pastor. Until 1879 the membership of this independent house church waxed and waned in direct relationship to the controversies which troubled the Polkton RCA. In 1868, for example, a disputed election of church officers caused two of Polkton's founders to lead about fifteen families into the house church. At that time they considered the possibility of organizing and affiliating with the CRC, but the members were divided by conflicting loyalties, and most of them returned to the Polkton RCA by 1870. Shortly thereafter key members of the house church moved to other areas—Grand Rapids and





Map of Polkton Township from Illustrated Historical Atlas of the Counties of Ottawa and Kent, p. XIII. Church indicated in Section 35.

manly often left the RCA. Eventually most of these dissenters joined the CRC. In Polkton's case

Graafschap. With that the potential organization of a Polkton CRC vanished. But the Polkton RCA continued to experience difficulties.

From 1879 to 1882 the church lost about one-fourth of its members, mostly to the newly organized CRC in Lamont. In 1883 two major issues disrupted the church. The decision to move from Polkton's Four Corners to the village of Coopersville resulted in the loss of about one-fourth of the members.<sup>8</sup> But this issue was also intertwined with the Masonic Lodge membership debate which swept through the whole of the RCA. Its 1882 synod decided that secret-society membership was not automatically incompatible with Christian orthodoxy, and the synod urged each congregation to exercise its own judgment in this issue. The Western part of the RCA generally favored a complete prohibition of lodge membership, and those who held this view most ada-

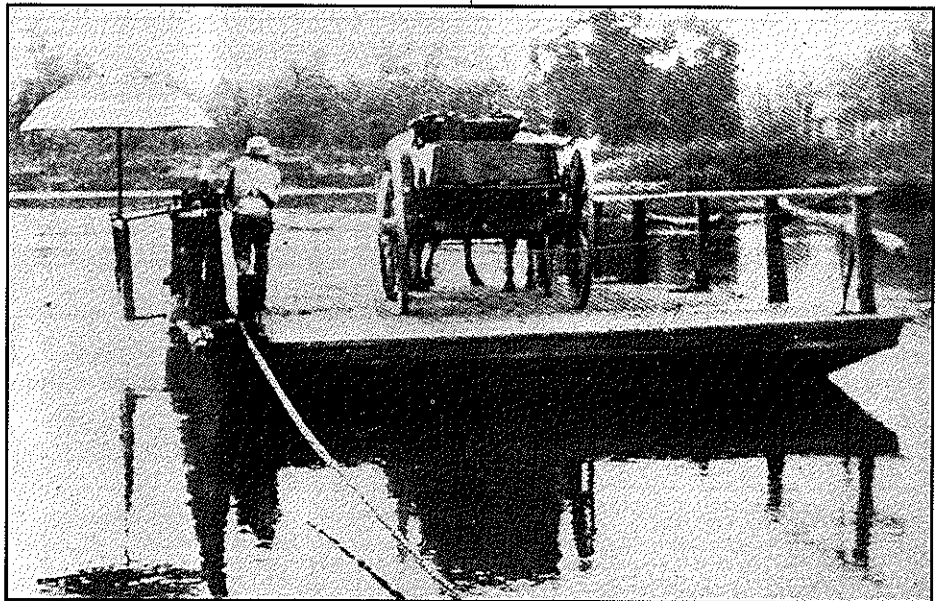
both the Masonic Lodge controversy and the change of location caused a severe membership leakage between 1879 and 1883.

Some of Polkton's dissenters were active in organizing churches in Lamont (1879) and Eastmanville (1884). It is significant that L.J. Hulst, the leading opponent of the Masonic Lodge in the RCA, was the pastor of Eastmanville's CRC from 1906 to 1910.

But the new CRC congregations

in Lamont and Eastmanville grew primarily from an influx of migrating settlers and new immigrants. Because available farmland was getting scarce in and around the Holland Kolonie, the populace was shifting to the fringes of the original settlements in order to purchase farmland in Allendale, Eastmanville, Lamont, Coopersville, Fremont and in townships surrounding Grand Haven and Muskegon. In addition the rate of immigration from the Netherlands bounded upward in the 1880s, and many newcomers settled in the corridor between Grand Rapids and Grand Haven. After 1890, all the Reformed churches in that region grew and became relatively stable.

Polkton's early religious instability, 1854 through 1890, demonstrates that its parishioners contained a considerable number of seekers who were not at ease in any religious organization. Except for Lucas Elbers, all Polkton RCA's early elders were amazingly foot-loose. J.H. Vander Werp, Polkton's second elder, led the 1857 secession, moved to Grand Haven in 1858, and returned to the Polkton



River Scene—Grand River Ferry crossing connecting Lamont and Allendale.

RCA in 1861. He was elected elder in 1862 but left once again in 1864 to join the Graafschap CRC.

Polkton's third elder, Gerrit Van Tubbergen, came with the credentials of a candidate and received some freewill offerings for conducting religious services. When the consistory decided to alternate worship responsibilities among themselves in 1861, Van Tubbergen balked and held private services in his home for a time until he left and joined the Graafschap CRC. Eventually he was censured there for conducting services for the local Scots Presbyterians. Thereafter he transferred to East Saugatuck RCA, where he served as an elder until he died.

Polkton's fourth elder, Petrus Haan, left the RCA in 1856 with his father, Gysbert, and returned in 1862. He left again during the Polkton controversies of 1868. He returned in 1870 only to leave for good during the 1883 disruptions. Henry Vinkemulder, the church's fifth elder, was the deacon during the 1857 secession. He rejoined the RCA with the rest of the seceders in 1858 but left again in 1868. When

the attempt to organize a Polkton CRC failed, he moved to the Graafschap CRC.

Each of these officeholders attracted a small cluster of followers, often family members and relatives, who trooped in and out of affiliation together. But Polkton was not alone in experiencing such internal conflicts. Similar patterns are evident in Paterson, New Jersey, the Chicago area, and in several West Michigan congregations. In all these areas, as in Polkton, ecclesiastical peace did not prevail until the late 1880s. Recounting these old conflicts is an uninspiring task, but they are legitimate chapters of the ethnic and religious story. We should be as honest about our past as the biblical authors were about the lives of Abraham, Jacob, and his children.

**Endnotes**

1. The term "Dutch-speaking" rather than "Dutch" is used because so many of the early immigrants came from Grafschaft Bentheim, Germany. For example, in 1885 five of the seven council members of the Reformed Church came from the village of Nordhorn in Germany.

2. The story of Martha Witkop comes

from the *Coopersville Observer* of April 29, 1929.

3. The letter to the editor by Lucas Elbers was translated by Swenna Harger of Holland, Michigan who also translated council minutes.

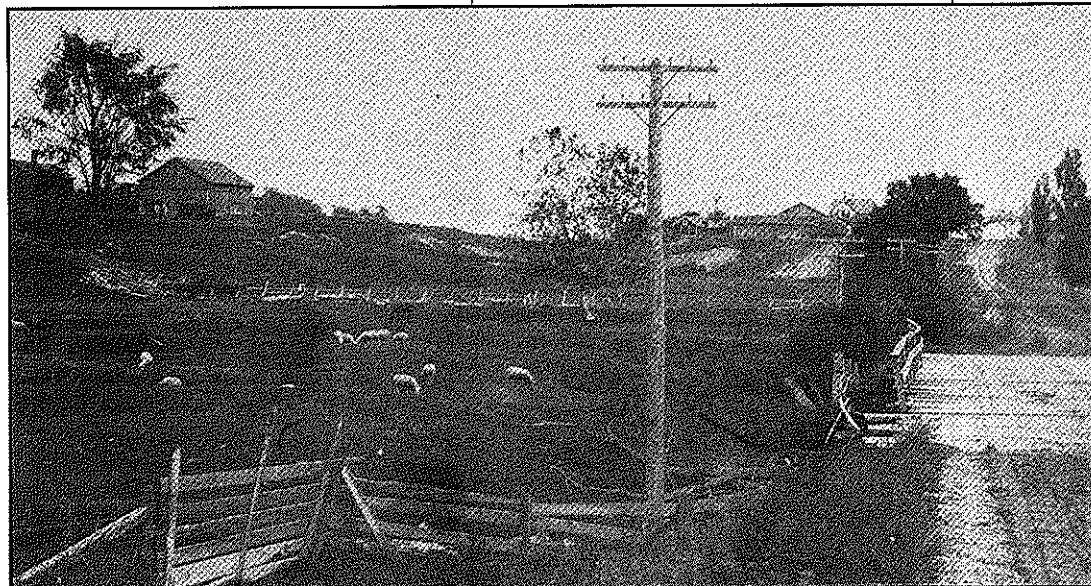
4. *The Classis Holland Minutes 1848-1858* by Joint Committee.

5. The old Reformed Church building at Four Corners no longer stands. In its place is a small chapel. The property, which is part of the Ernie Meerman farm, is still one of the more rural locations in Polkton Township.

6. The primary source of information for Polkton RCA history was the council minutes of the Coopersville Reformed Church 1854-1883, some of which were included in the 1944 anniversary book *The History of the Reformed Church of Coopersville* by John Ter Avest.

7. In September 1857 Lucas Elbers became the first to return to the RCA. Others followed, and soon there were two groups of equal size. The RCA ministers Vander Meulen and Oggel addressed a meeting of both groups in October of 1858. After hearing a message on I Corinthians 13:13, all but the widow Horlings, her family, and Jan Snoek decided to reunite under the Reformed Church. Snoek moved to Grand Rapids and joined Spring Street CRC; the Horlings remained in the area as part of the house church. They helped form Lamont CRC (1879) and Allendale CRC (1881).

8. The post-Civil War immigrants had settled north of the original settlement and favored a move to Coopersville. A great tragedy further aggravated the situation in August of 1883. A "mysterious fire" during the night of August 10 destroyed the new church building, which was about two-thirds complete. Perhaps those who had opposed the move to Coopersville saw this as a sign from God. At any rate, many of the church's early leaders and others left at this time.



Farm scene near Coopersville.

# BOOKS

Review by Conrad J. Bult

**And the Swamp Flourished: The Bittersweet Story of Holland Marsh.** Albert VanderMey. Surrey, BC, and Lynden, WA: Vanderheide Publishing Co. Ltd., 1994. Canada \$29.95, US \$25.50.

In 1791, Samuel Johannes Holland, Surveyor-General of the province of Quebec, mapped the area now called Holland Marsh and gave it the name it bears today. At the time, Holland, born in the vicinity of Nijmegen, the Netherlands, had no way of knowing that about one hundred and forty years later many from his native land would drain this swampy area and make it one of the most productive areas in North America for such crops as carrots, onions, lettuce, dandelion, and mustard.

The story is recorded by Albert VanderMey, whose second book, *And the Swamp Flourished*, is dedicated to all those of Dutch descent who have made their home in Canada. Holland Marsh, Ontario, is located about thirty miles directly north of Toronto. Though the Dutch came there around 1930, they were not the first to see the agricultural possibilities of this swamp. As early as 1910, David Watson, a businessman-farmer living in Bradford, thought optimistically about reclamation of the swamp and asked William Day, a physics professor at the University of Guelph, to explore drainage possibilities. Something of a visionary, Day had grandiose notions about this marshland, and, al-

though very modest success crowned the efforts of the syndicate he formed, it was unable to cope with persistent mechanical problems of the drainage system and with the collapse of the lettuce market in the early 1930s.

VanderMey mentions by name many of the first Dutch-Canadians in Holland Marsh. They include John Van Dyke, an original settler and "unofficial historian" of the area; John Sytema, who spent the years 1932 through 1946 farming there; and John Snor, an entrepreneur who, though he himself did not farm, influenced the lives of many who made Holland Marsh their home. (Ansnorveldt, a small community in Holland Marsh, is named in his honor; the name literally means "on Snor's field.") Another pioneer, Jan Rupke, was called the "burgemeester" because his house was a bit more elaborate than the simple homes of other settlers and, consequently, visitors to the community assumed it was the house of the mayor. About Rupke and Snor the author writes, "If Rupke could be called a father of the Marsh, so could John Snor, who got the Dutch people there in the first place" (p. 33).

The word "bittersweet" in the book's subtitle aptly describes the day-to-day life of early settlers in the Marsh, and it applies equally to the life of those immigrants from the Netherlands who settled there after World War II. To say the least,

## And the Swamp FLOURISHED

*The Bittersweet Story of Holland Marsh*



Albert VanderMey

VANDERHEIDE

living standards among the earlier settlers were not high. As the author notes, "It was tough slugging, especially for the large families. There never seemed to be enough money for household items and clothes" (p. 33). Women worked next to their husbands in the fields, and the men were quick to admit that without the help and encouragement of their wives, Holland Marsh would not have prospered. As VanderMey observes,

While they groped around in the muck, some of the women also had to keep an eye on their toddlers. For them, there was no such thing as idleness. When fa-

ther called it a day in the fields, mother still had hours of work ahead of her at home (p. 25).

"Bittersweet" also describes the 1954 devastation and flooding caused by Hurricane Hazel. Houses floated, cars were completely submerged, and crops were lost. A glance at the illustrations leaves little doubt about the results of this disaster. Yet, when it was over, Jack van Luyk, a Holland Marsh grower, had this to say: "What the flood did was clear the land of a lot of old fertilizer and junk. It actually did the Marsh good" (p. 105).

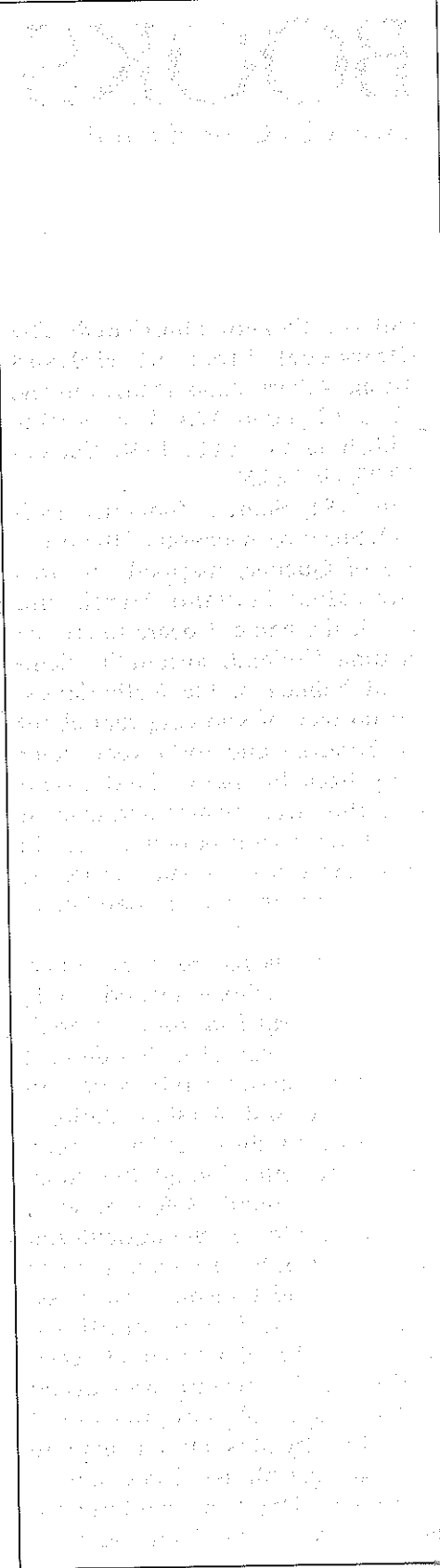
A strong sense of community and a cohesive Reformed faith were, and still are, the primary ingredients of the social glue essential for the success story of the Holland Marsh. During the early Depression years, religious services were held in homes, each member bringing a chair. By 1935 this arrangement was no longer feasible because the homes were too small and the floors sagged under the weight of a crowd of worshippers.

On June 21, 1935, the first Christian Reformed church building in Holland Marsh was dedicated with Rev. John S. Balt from Hamilton officiating. Sunday collections in those economically tough times sometimes totaled no more than thirty-eight cents but later increased to about \$3.00 for the church fund and an additional \$2.50 for the deacons. Nelly Rupke and Tony Sneep were the first couple to exchange wedding vows in the church. (Their reception at home provided tea, cake, cookies, fancy sandwiches, and a sip of wine. There was no honeymoon. The groom reported for his fifty-cents-an-hour job the next morning.) The church was the social center of Holland Marsh. Here, especially in the early years, these

folk found spiritual food and associated with others who faced the same daunting difficulties they did.

A Christian school with eighteen pupils opened in 1943 with Jacob Uitvlugt as its first teacher. His salary was \$1,020 plus a rent-free house with a large garden. Rev. Martin Schans, who served Holland Marsh during the years 1940-1945, played a pivotal role in the development of the Christian school.

VanderMey, an immigrant himself and presently a member of the editorial staff of a Toronto newspaper, has written a narrative history of Holland Marsh liberally sprinkled with random recollections of its citizens past and present. When you leaf through the book's lettuce-green pages and look at the many well-chosen illustrations, you will experience vicariously what might occur if you had a conversation over teacups with a resident of Holland Marsh. VanderMey found out that Holland Marsh folk expect you to take their past for what it is and them for what they are. These characteristics make this a very down-to-earth book. In short, reading VanderMey's book is almost as good as a personal visit to Holland Marsh.



# FOR THE FUTURE

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

Lark, North Dakota: John Nicolay's Recollections, 1905-10

Remembering World War II, Recollections by H. J. Brinks

Working Together for Good: An RCA/CRC Family Heritage by Thomas Boslooper

The Dutch and Their Neighbors in Grand Rapids by James D. Bratt

Ministering on the Canadian Prairies: Menzo Dornbush 1950-1962 by David Zandstra

The Dutch of Highland, Indiana by David Zandstra

Holland Michigan in Transition by Hero Bratt

The Case of Rev. Henry Wierenga, 1925 by H. J. Brinks

Baxter Christian School Days by John Pastoor

The "Turfskipper" by Nicholas Fridsma

Christian Education in Northern New Jersey

Frontier Women: A Different View of Immigration

Another Look at Grand Rapids' West-Side Dutch by H. J. Brinks, et al.

More About Pella by Muriel Kooy



The "Turfskipper" from Jan A. Niemeijer, Drente, d'olde lantschap (Assen, Van Gorcum, 1982), p. 110.

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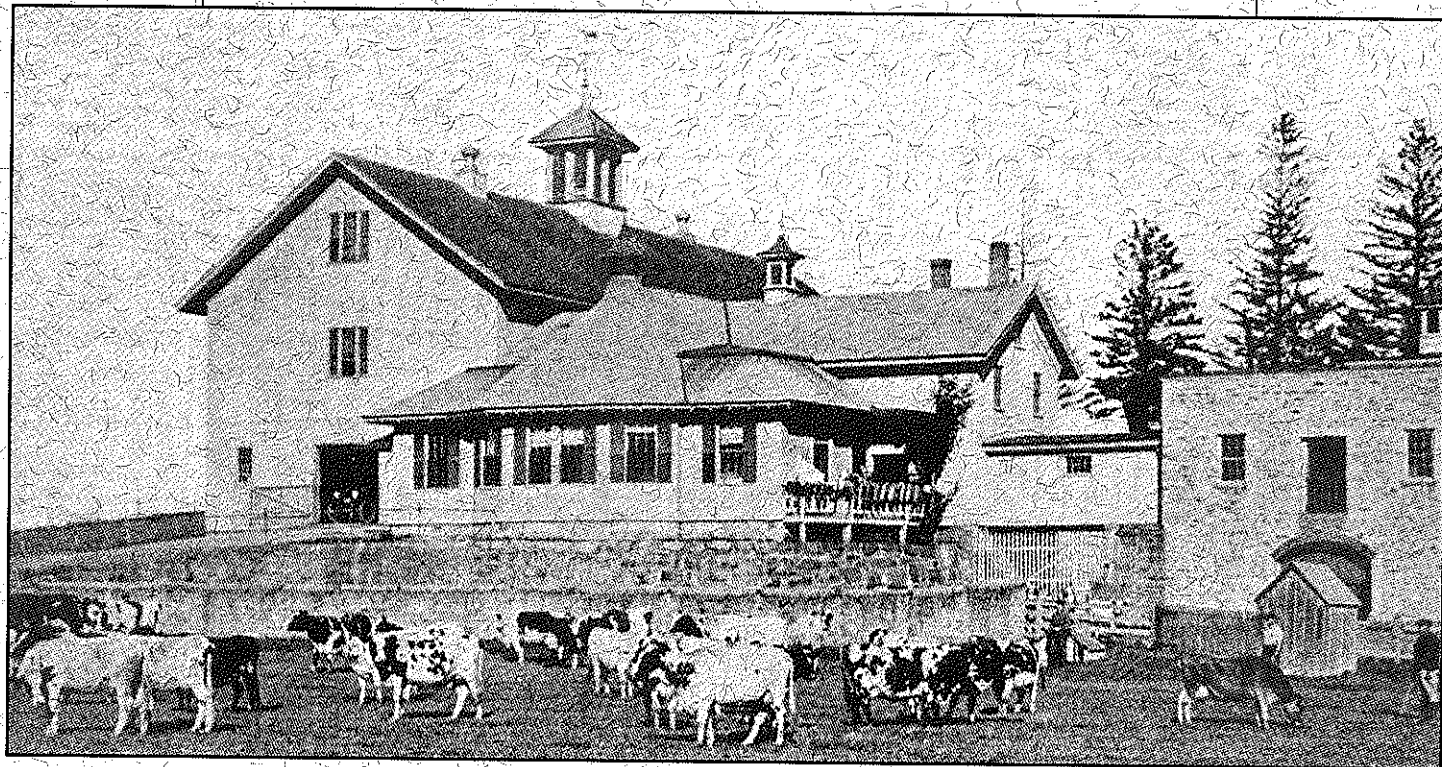
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