

Origins

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of The Archives

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

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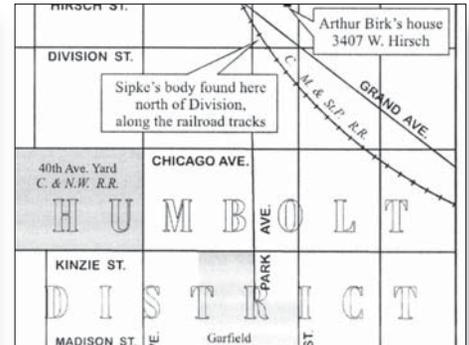
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Cover photo:

Mina Kalsbeek, Ruby Liu, and adopted
daughters Helen and Jean.



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This Issue

This issue begins with the account by Dr. Kurt Selles of the meeting and mixing of Dutch-American and Chinese cultures on the mission field beginning during the 1920s. We also have Robert P. Swierenga and Robert A. Hoekstra's account of Sipke Hoekstra, a teamster who was killed by Chicago mob in 1915. Ed Gerritsen describes the many facets in the life of his grandfather. As we announced last time, we also present the first installment of noted children's author Meindert De Jong's autobiography of his youth. Lastly, we have an update on the Van Hinte diary, described in the last issue, and two book reviews.

Available On-Line

We received the information about the members of the Maxwell, New Mexico, CRC, 1893-2008. The data was reformatted and published digitally and can be accessed via http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/Maxwell_church.htm.

These data were collected and compiled by Paula Vander Hoven and Angie Ploegstra from a number of non-church sources, since the congregation membership records were not saved.

News from the Archives

We received and organized the papers of William Van Regenmorter, a prominent West Michigan politician, who specialized in the rights of crime victims. The Dr. Quentin Schultze research and reference files on Christianity and the mass media and Christians and information technology also were organized. These 28.5 cubic

feet of material are already providing valuable research opportunities for students. We also opened the papers of Dr. Bernie Zylstra, which had been housed at Redeemer University College, which will complement the papers of Paul Schrotenboer, Pete Steen, and H. Evan Runner.

Smaller collections opened for research include the records of the Fremont, Michigan, (Calvin College) Alumni Guild; the papers of Leo Peters, an active critic of Calvin College and its faculty during the 1980s and 1990s, which came from his estate and include correspondence as well as copies of advertisements he purchased in the *Grand Rapids Press*; the papers of Rev. Emo F. J. Van Halsema; and the WW I correspondence and diary of Edward DeVries, who was killed in action.

Among the material received, but not yet processed, was raw stock video footage of the Spoelhof

biographical project, 1951-1975; ten cubic feet of records from the CRC Chaplaincy office; the records of the Ottawa (Ontario) Region of Christian Reformed Ladies' Societies, 1954-2008; records of the Gainey Institute for Faith and Communication, 2004-2005; and records from the denominational Sesquicentennial Committee.

Thanks to the efforts of the Calvin College Physical Plant staff, we were granted additional storage space in the basement of the Surge Building. This space was specifically designed for record storage with a fire suppression system and environmental controls. Although the distance between our two areas is not ideal, this arrangement is workable and helps us deal with the critical lack of storage space noted in previous reports.

Publications

In November 2008 we were contacted by representatives from a project

sponsored by the Friesian Provincial Government to contribute to a book (published in August 2009 by Friese Pers Boekerij) titled *Famous Frisians in America* (published in Dutch as *Gevierde Friezen in Amerika*) as part of the celebration of four hundred years of Dutch-American ties. We contributed dozens of images from the collection as well as text for eleven of the more than seventy people featured. A review of this book is contained in this issue.

Staff

Richard Harms is the curator of the Archives; Hendrina Van Spronsen is the office coordinator; Wendy Blankespoor is librarian and cataloging archivist; Melanie Vander Wal is departmental assistant; Dr. Robert Bolt is field agent and assistant archivist. Our student assistant is Chrissy Lutke. Our volunteers include Rev. Dr. Paul Bremer, Mrs. Willene De Groot, Mr.

Ed Gerritsen, Mr. Fred Greidanus, Mr. Ralph Haan, Mrs. Helen Meulink, Rev. Gerrit W. Sheeres, Mrs. Janet Sheeres, and Mr. Ralph Veenstra.

Endowment Fund

Thanks to recovery in investment markets and the generosity of many *Origins* subscribers our endowment has recovered its losses from last year (15 percent) and the current value of \$413,915 is now one percent above the level of two years ago. Needless to say our financial condition is sound and the annual subscription rate remains at \$10. We are most grateful to our supporters, many of whom contributed well above the subscription cost. 🍀



Richard H. Harms

“Inseparable Partners”

A Portrait of Two Inter-cultural Relationships, 1925–1951

Kurt D. Selles

Americans first began having contact with China at the end of the eighteenth century when the *Empress of China* arrived at the port of Canton (Guangzhou) in 1784. For the next 150 years, American contact with China expanded and included commerce, diplomacy, and missions. Much of this interaction took place between large, impersonal institutions, such as government bureaus, banks, corporations, and church denominations. At its most basic level, however, the contact between China and America was between individual people who had to cross cultural boundaries in order to communicate and achieve the goals of the institutions they represented.

From 1800 to 1950, of the Americans working in China as merchants, diplomats, and missionaries, it was the missionaries who had the closest contact with Chinese people. By the nature of their work, merchants and diplomats lived at a distance from Chinese people, because they represented and protected national institutions and interests. American missionaries, on the other hand, went to China in order to *be with* Chinese people. Whatever might be said about their failures, missionaries were, as John K. Fairbank put it, the “main actors” in the historical encounter that took place between China and the U.S. up until 1950.¹ They spent the most time with Chinese people,

frequently living in close proximity, struggling to learn their languages and understand their customs and their religious views.

The following study paints a portrait of the friendship and the ministry partnerships of four individuals over a twenty-six-year period, between 1925 and 1951. These two sets of relationships, between a Christian Reformed Bible woman and a Chinese Bible woman, and between an ordained Christian Reformed missionary and a Chinese evangelist, provide a lens to explore the dynamics of intercultural partnership between these Chinese and Americans. Letters, church articles, and conversations with family members and friends suggest that these four individuals had linguistic and cultural sensitivities allowing them to cross cultural boundaries, and that these facilities, together with a shared Christian vision, provided them with flexible resources for developing lasting friendships and effective working partnerships that carried them through several decades of the tumultuous Republican period. Of particular interest to Americans of Dutch descent, the portrait of these two Dutch-Americans suggests that their multi-lingual, multi-cultural backgrounds contributed to their ability to develop relationships and partnerships with their Chinese colleagues.

Dr. Kurt Selles is Director of the Global Center for World Missions at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama. An ordained minister, he served as Field Director of the Calvin College study program in Beijing, China, for seven years.

Shared Experience

One crucial aspect of these relationships was the amount of time the four individuals spent together. Christian Reformed Bible woman Wilhemina “Mina” Kalsbeek and Chinese Bible woman Liu Shuying were friends and working partners in China for twenty-five years. Kalsbeek had arrived in China in 1922 as the first single woman missionary sent by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) to the mission field. A party of ordained, male missionaries had arrived before her in 1920 but, finding the doors to women and children closed to them, they had lobbied the denomination to send a woman to work with women and children. After language study in Nanjing, Kalsbeek moved to the Rugao district, on the north bank of the Yangzi River in Jiangsu province, in the spring of 1924.² Initially, like the men, she found herself shut out



Wilhemina “Mina” Kalsbeek. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Liu Shuying (Ruby Liu). Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

of Chinese homes. To gain access to Chinese homes and hearts, she decided she needed to enlist the help of a Chinese co-worker.

Finding a Bible woman for work in Rugao, however, proved to be no easy task. Because the CRC mission was the first Christian presence in the district, there were no Rugao native

Christians to help with the evangelistic work. Kalsbeek, instead, hired a Bible woman from a Presbyterian mission in Shandong province. But Kalsbeek discovered that because of language and cultural differences this woman could not communicate with the people of Rugao and so had to send her home. The situation reoccurred with the next Bible woman; then Kalsbeek found a good friend and ideal working partner—a young woman, twenty-four, named Liu Shuying³ from Anhui province. Short of women workers for an evangelical campaign in the countryside during the winter of 1926, the Rugao CRC mission hospital had loaned Liu, an accountant at the hospital, as a Bible woman.

For most of the next fifteen years, Kalsbeek and Liu were “inseparable partners” doing evangelistic work with the women and children of

Rugao. Unlike the married, ordained CRC male missionaries who lived with their families in Western-style houses outside the city wall, Liu and Kalsbeek made their home in a Chinese house inside the city walls just off the main thoroughfare. Kalsbeek wrote, “I can hear the neighbors on both sides talking and laughing and scolding by turn. If I do not reach the women of the neighborhood it won’t be for lack of physical proximity.”⁴ Their home quickly became a beehive

of activity, with sometimes hundreds of women and children visiting for Bible study, English lessons, or just to satisfy their curiosity.

Outside their home, Liu and Kalsbeek did a variety of activities to further the goal of establishing a church. One activity was street preaching, which they did tirelessly crisscross-

ing the city and county, telling the “old, old story of Jesus,” as Kalsbeek put it.⁵ Many of their other activities involved building relationships, especially with young women who, because of the social and economic transition taking place during the Republican period, were particularly vulnerable to exploitation. They took young women into their home to provide them shelter and education. To provide them an employment option other than prostitution, Liu and Kalsbeek hired some of them to make handicrafts for sale in the United States.⁶ Some of these young women became Christians, and joined in teaching Sunday school, holding after-school activities for children, and organizing women’s meetings and Bible studies, including a weekly meeting in the local women’s jail.

“Inseparable partners” could also be used to describe the relationship of Albert Smit and Wang Aitang. Smit had arrived in China in 1924 and, after a year of language study in Nanjing, moved to Rugao to help establish a church in the district. Following his graduation from seminary in Nanjing in the spring of 1926, Wang, a native of Xuzhou in northern Jiangsu province, arrived in Rugao to take up mission work.⁷

Wang moved with his family to Rugao and began working as a language teacher with the missionaries and as an evangelist in one of the city’s chapels. While Wang helped the missionaries become proficient preachers in Chinese, they helped him learn the task of constructing the evangelical messages he was required to give every evening in his chapel work, a job which one missionary stated was “by no means an easy task to remain fresh and interesting.”⁸ With time, Wang excelled in the role of preaching evangelist: He was reputed to be not only a man of “impressive bearing,” but also one of the best Chinese preachers in



Evangelist Wang Aitang. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Doria and Albert Smit with children (left-right) Harvey, William, Eunice, and Hazel. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

the mission, with sound theology and excellent communication skills. One of the missionaries called him “a natural leader of his countrymen.”⁹

Wang and Smit worked together in the full range of the mission’s work in Rugao. Smit lived in a CRC mission compound house just outside the Rugao walls, but Wang, his wife, and three children, over the years moved around Rugao county where the mission needed his efforts for establishing preaching points in the countryside. The two met on a regular basis at meetings with the other missionaries and the Chinese evangelists, and more loosely worked together in the wider tasks of the Rugao work. The closeness of the two men’s friendship and working partnership developed during the several times that their work in Rugao was disrupted by war and its tumult, and especially in the almost constant turmoil between 1938 and 1951, during World War II, and the subsequent Chinese civil war that followed. During this decade of chaos, these two men worked closely together, at times inseparably, to provide refuge and stability for the Christians in Rugao.

Language and Culture

Critical factors in these relationships were the ability to negotiate language and culture. Language differences, perhaps the most fundamental gap that needed to be bridged, do not appear to have been an insurmountable obstacle for any of the four.¹⁰ All four appear to have had native linguistic abilities that allowed effective communication across cultures.

One advantage they all shared was that they had all grown up in settings where more than one language was spoken. Both Kalsbeek and Smit grew up in immigrant communities where Dutch was spoken. Kalsbeek grew up hearing Dutch all around her in the Dutch immigrant community of Grand Rapids, Michigan. In China she showed a remarkable aptitude for language acquisition. On her first Chinese-language test, taken soon after arriving in Nanjing in 1922, Kalsbeek scored 98 percent. For the rest of her study she maintained a 96.5 percent average, and became the first student in the history of the Nanjing Language School to complete the five-year Mandarin program in just over two years. Though she did

exceptionally well in language school, Kalsbeek had no delusions about just how well she could actually communicate with Chinese people, and even into the late 1930s she dedicated time to improving her Chinese.¹¹

As a seventeen-year-old from the Netherlands in 1905, Smit learned English as a second language. He mastered English, completed high school, graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary, after which he studied for a year at Princeton Theological Seminary.¹² Arriving in China at age thirty-six, Smit set out to learn Mandarin. The emphasis at language school was on learning spoken Chinese, and consequently involved much vocabulary memorization and pattern drills. To give the students exposure to a variety of accents, the school constantly rotated teachers. An effort was also made to prepare the students, most of whom were missionaries, to give short speeches in Chinese to their classmates. Although the language program stressed speaking, it also included instruction in reading and writing characters.¹³ Unlike Kalsbeek, Smit did not set any language school records, but after getting a start he

could report that, “We’ve been plugging hard so far, but are glad to be able to say we enjoy it.”¹⁴

During their almost three decades in China, Kalsbeek and Smit used Chinese in innumerable contexts, formal and informal, to navigate and negotiate social, religious, educational, commercial, and political interactions. She had preached, Kalsbeek wrote home, in a Buddhist nunnery and on a sacred hill where hundreds of pilgrims were toiling. She had preached in countless homes, both rich and poor.¹⁵ She had told the Christian story in bedrooms, guestrooms, ancestral halls, stores, carpentry shops, coffin shops, pewter shops, bakery shops, and silk shops. She preached in courtyards where ten families lived; on busy streets; in quiet nooks against the wall of some house, in gardens, in parks, in graveyards, along country lanes, in teahouses, in hotels, and in hospitals.¹⁶ Smit, too, though he would have spoken English at home with his family, spoke Chinese in a wide variety of places and situations. Frequently his use of Chinese included dangerous settings, such as when he had to pass through military checkpoints during WWII and during the Chinese civil war of the late 1940s.

Liu and Wang both also grew up speaking more than one language. Assuming her parents were natives of Anhui province where Liu had been born and raised, she would have grown up speaking the Wú dialect.¹⁷ Growing up in Xuzhou in the far northeastern corner of Jiangsu, just south of the Shandong border, Wang would have grown up speaking a heavily accented version of the northern Beijing dialect. During the period of their youth and educational years, when China was going through a period of language reform in both the written and the spoken language, both would also have

learned standard Mandarin. Not until 1916 did the Nationalist government promulgate Mandarin as the national language, but Liu and Wang, because they were educated in missionary schools by missionaries who spoke Mandarin, would also have learned Mandarin at a young age.

When they began work in Rugao, Kalsbeek and Smit, as well as Liu and Wang, had to adjust to the Rugao dialect, not something everyone was able to do.¹⁸ Liu, despite being from a region with a different dialect, was



A view of Rugao from the city wall. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

able to adjust, and in fact proved to be an extremely effective communicator. About one evangelical tour the two women made soon after joining forces, Kalsbeek wrote, “She [Liu] gave some splendid messages, and seemed able to reach all classes of women, beggars, peddlers, countrywomen, and the women dressed in gorgeous satins all listened with the same eagerness.”¹⁹ Being from northern Jiangsu province, just south of the Shandong border, Wang would have come to Rugao with a strong regional accent, but he also was able to make the linguistic adjustment and spent most of the rest of his life in the city.²⁰

Wang and Liu also knew some

English. Wang had been exposed to native English speakers at the Presbyterian mission school in Xuzhou and at the Union Seminary in Nanjing. For Wang, knowing some English would have been helpful at mission meetings, when all of the CRC missionaries were together and, perhaps, for interacting with the families of the missionaries, many of whom were not fluent in Chinese.²¹ Several letters Wang wrote to the United States during WWII and after the missionaries had left Rugao in the early 1950s,

though far from flawless, effectively communicate in English the situation of the other evangelists and the church in Rugao.²²

Liu’s command of English was even better. She probably learned some English in the Seventh-day Adventist school she attended, and would have had opportunities to speak English with missionaries in Wuhu. Because the CRC mission doctor who hired her in Rugao, Dr. Lee Huizenga, had little time for language study and consequently struggled with Chinese, she probably used her English in the hospital as well. In 1927 when the CRC missionaries were repatriated because of civil war in China, Liu

accompanied Kalsbeek to Brooklyn, New York, where she had even more opportunity for improving her English. The two women lived together in New York while Kalsbeek took classes at the Brooklyn Bible Institute. On weekends, during this year in America, and especially during the summer before their return to China in the fall of 1928, the two women visited CRC churches where “Ruby,” as she was called in CRC circles, frequently sang solos and gave a short testimony.²³

Certainly there were language-related misunderstandings between the four of them—because of unfamiliar aphorisms, misused colloquialisms, and missed humor—but all four appear to have had native linguistic resources allowing them to overcome the fundamental obstacle of language in intercultural communication. Communicating across cultures, however, would have been more difficult for them than knowing the right words; it also involved a measure of cultural



Rugao’s city gate. Kalsbeek and Liu lived inside the wall; most missionaries lived in a separate compound outside the wall. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



The Kalsbeek-Liu home in Rugao. From left to right are Mr. Kong, the contractor who built all of the CRC mission buildings in Rugao, Paul Lui (brother of Ruby), and Wang Aitang. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

competency.²⁴ In short, there were important cultural obstacles that would have been necessary for the four to negotiate.

There is very little information available about these cultural gaps,

but at least two can be assumed. Etiquette, because of its importance in Chinese culture, would have been a factor in the interaction of the four. Because they were guests in Chinese culture, the burden would have been

on Kalsbeek and Smit to master Chinese etiquette. At first they probably felt disoriented and lost in the high-context setting of Chinese manners but, over the years, Chinese forms of address, of greetings, of respect, of banquet seating, and of leave-taking became familiar.²⁵ As foreigners they would have been “allowed” some leeway in cultural interactions, but without understanding and fluency in Chinese etiquette they would have been grating to the people with whom they came into contact, and it would have been virtually impossible for them to establish close relationships with Chinese people. Liu and Wang, through their contact with foreigners, would also have understood the basics of American politeness, but the burden of appropriate etiquette would have been on Kalsbeek and Smit.

Food, too, because of its importance in Chinese culture, would have been a factor that would have had to be navigated. For the Americans, food had the potential either to be a barrier or a way to express appreciation for Chinese culture and Chinese people themselves.²⁶ For Kalsbeek and Smit, being able to eat Chinese cuisine in a variety of settings and levels of hygiene was crucial for their being able to cross cultural boundaries. At first, eating Chinese food was difficult for Kalsbeek and, in a letter home after three years in China, she recounted her lingering ambivalence about eating Chinese food. After an afternoon feast at a neighbor’s house, she admitted she was “paying my usual penalty for having eaten Chinese food.”²⁷ Nevertheless, she realized the social importance of eating Chinese food, and several months later wrote:

During the past few months I have been slowly acquiring a liking for Chinese food and greater facility in the use of chopsticks. This accomplishment will be a great asset in my work, as I always felt that my inability to eat

with my Chinese friends was a hindrance to my getting in closer contact with them.²⁸

Because of his extensive contact in the homes of the wealthy, of peasants, in inns, on riverboats, and in villages, it seems safe to assume that even if Smit did not like Chinese food, after more than twenty-five years he could tolerate it and it did not prevent him from getting close to Chinese people.

Wang and Liu also had opportunity to eat American food. Wang liked to drink milk, which, given the scarcity of dairy products in Republican China, would have been highly unusual.²⁹ He also had the opportunity to eat American food with the CRC missionaries. Because she lived with Kalsbeek, Liu would have had opportunities to eat American food. She made reference to foreign food once when, in a letter to CRC mission secretary Henry Beets, she thanked him and his wife for the “the delicious [sic] babbelaars” which she had eaten at their house in 1928. Liu continued, “Sometime when you have time will you please send me the recipe for them so I can try to make some too.”³⁰ While the note without question demonstrates Liu’s sensitivity to American manners, more likely in their home the two women ate Chinese food.³¹

A Shared Christian Perspective

Their language and cross-cultural skills contributed to their sustained interactions. One important intersection to help explain these relationships was a shared Christian world view. All four received and appropriated the Christian world view of their families and the schools in which they were educated. Kalsbeek and Smit came from Reformed Dutch-Calvinist immigrant communities where a Christian world view permeated every aspect of their lives. Kalsbeek had been born in 1894 into an immigrant

family in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a strong Dutch-Calvinist immigrant enclave. Smit had been born in 1888 in Nijeveen, a farming village in the province of Drenthe, and his family had immigrated to Grand Rapids in 1905.

Though Smit and Kalsbeek had been born in different countries, their family and community lives were remarkably similar. In both homes, they gathered around the “family

Christian day schools.³⁴ Through this similar background, Kalsbeek and Smit would have shared thick webs of meaning and significance wound tightly around a core Christian world view.

Liu and Wang also had been raised in Christian homes and educated in Christian schools. Wang had been born in 1896 in the Xuzhou county of Jiangsu province, into a second-generation Christian family. Wang’s



Smit and Wang (back row, far right) at the weddings of two brothers. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

altar,” which consisted of daily reading from the Bible and prayer together, an activity that instructed the children in knowledge of the story of the Bible and aided in their spiritual formation.³² Similar values of thrift, seriousness, and humility would have permeated their homes and community life, and on Sundays they would have heard similar values, circling around the themes of sin and grace, preached weekly from the pulpits in their CRC churches.³³ Moreover, because Christian schools were so strongly promoted in their community, Kalsbeek and Smit attended

father, an educated man who, when he first encountered Christianity, rejected the faith, later became a Christian and eventually an evangelist for the Presbyterian mission in Xuzhou.³⁵ Liu was also born into a second-generation Christian family in Wuhu, Anhui province, in 1901. After being spared during the Boxer Uprising in 1900, her parents had dedicated their new-born daughter’s life to serving the Lord. Both her parents worked for Christian missions, her father teaching in a Christian school and her mother serving as a Bible woman. As she was growing up, Liu’s



A group of women and orphans who lived with Liu and Kalsbeek. The women sewed and knitted to augment the household income. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

home was a refuge for those in need, something Kalsbeek noted after a visit to the family home in 1925: “Miss Liu’s mother is a Bible woman and her home is a place where everyone in trouble knows they will find comfort, so there was an almost constant stream of people coming and going from morning until night.”³⁶

Like Kalsbeek and Smit, both Liu and Wang had also received a Christian education. Profound changes had taken place during their childhoods in the realm of education when the imperial examination system was abolished in 1905. Unlike children of an earlier generation, education was available to both Wang and Liu, and both attended missionary-run Christian schools, Liu a Seventh-day Adventist school and Wang a Presbyterian school. As in most mission schools, all but Chinese literature classes would have been taught by American missionaries.³⁷ Liu’s Christian family background and Western-style education are almost certainly the reason her feet had not been bound as a girl.³⁸ Liu benefited from other social changes as well. For her mother’s generation, working in the church had been a social breakthrough, but when Liu graduated from high school her Western-

style education opened doors to other occupations, and upon graduation she chose to work as an accountant.³⁹ Wang moved to Nanjing and finished his schooling at the Nanjing Union Seminary, graduating from that school in 1926.

Their Christian families, communities, and educations created for the four individuals a similar way of looking at the world. This is not to suggest there were not significant differences between the *American* perspective of Kalsbeek and Smit and the *Chinese* perspective of Liu and Wang. Whereas Kalsbeek and Smit had been shaped by Greco-Roman civilization, the European tradition, and the Judeo-Christian religious heritage, Liu and Wang had been shaped by the philosophical and religious traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism under the two-thousand-year-old Chinese imperial political and social system.⁴⁰ But the world of China was changing rapidly, and at the turn of the century China was being wrenched from its cultural, social, and political isolation and dragged into the orbit of Western economic, political, social, cultural, religious, and intellectual influence. Consequently, for educated Chinese in the 1920s, there would have been more cultural understanding between Chinese and Americans than previously possible, even several decades earlier.

Something even more fundamental than the breaking up of the Chinese tradition and the introduction of Western thoughts, categories, and

patterns, however, had the potential for drawing these Chinese and Americans together: their Christian world view. Through the lens of the relationship between these four individuals, it is possible to see the impact of their Christian world view, a meta-narrative which transcended national narratives and explained larger, even ultimate questions about the nature of life, the purpose of life, and the relation of humans to the cosmos.⁴¹ This is not to suggest that their shared Christian world view nullified local concerns, but that it relativized them and allowed sympathies and attachments beyond the concerns of their own culture. The biblical story that they shared through their families, their education, and their communities would have been deeply ingrained in each, and it would have provided a resource for their relationships and for their mission work in Rugao that allowed them to stick together during the turmoil of the Republican period.

A 1931 incident on the eve of the Autumn Festival shows Kalsbeek’s sympathy for Chinese popular culture and provides a glimpse of the role that their shared Christian world view played in their work. In a letter to CRC mission secretary Henry Beets, Kalsbeek recalled how she had felt left out on the day of the Moon Festival, “But to my joy,” she wrote, “in the evening one of our neighbor children came to invite us into her courtyard to see their altar. It was a night of rarest beauty—the moonlight was glorious! I could not help thinking that if I did not know the True, Living and only God, I too might feel inclined to worship the beautiful, mysterious moon.”⁴² Liu, who was at Kalsbeek’s side in the courtyard, took the opportunity to present the Christian message. As Kalsbeek, recalled:

After a few comments and questions on our part, Miss Liu found her ‘point

of contact,' and there at the altar of the moon goddess in the presence of about twenty neighbors she was able in her winsome way to tell them the story of the creation of the moon and all other things and witness for the Creator, and to point out the folly and sin of worshiping other gods. They did not resent her message a bit and from time to time gave voice to their agreement of what she was saying. After she had finished one of the women said, "We know that what you say is true but this is our custom and if we don't do it people will laugh at us." Another said, "We might give up these gods—but what about ancestor worship? Ruby explained that we are commanded to honor our parents but that since they are men and women like ourselves we may not worship them."

Another incident in 1932 illustrates how the intersection of their Christian world view may have also provided a resource for translating and adapting the Christian message into a Chinese setting. In the early 1930s, when the mother of one of Mina Kalsbeek and Liu Shuying's young women followers died of rabies, the women held a memorial service every seven days after her death, following the traditional custom of the "seven sevens" sacrifices for the dead. The body of Tzan Toh Tzen's mother was placed in a coffin with the characters for "Christian" painted on it in black, and the coffin was placed in the family's house. Although the immediate family's refusal to burn incense angered the extended family and some neighbors, the memorial services for her were well-attended, sometimes topping seventy people, and the two women were pleased that so many non-Christians had an opportunity to hear the Christian message at the funeral.⁴³ Because Liu knew the Chinese tradition and the Christian world view, she was able to help in the process of translating Christianity into the Chinese setting.

Both of these incidents highlight the shared world view of the two women and suggest its potential for their relationship, drawing them together and providing focus for their work. In the case of Liu and Kalsbeek and Wang and Smit, all four had been brought up in Christian homes and educated in Christian schools. This

At least one other factor must be considered, and that is the question of what benefit each individual gained through association with their friend and co-worker.

There certainly were benefits to be gained for each of the four through their relationship with the person in the opposite culture. For one, these



A Bible class studying the Book of John led by Liu (back row, far left). Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

background created a deeply engrained way of viewing the world that did not eliminate ethnic, cultural, and national differences but transcended them, and provided the four with a resource for friendship and carrying out the mission work in Rugao.

Benefits

For these four individuals, there were interactions through extensive shared experiences facilitated by language and cultural fluency, and there were also important intersections in their family, educational, and community backgrounds that coalesced in the Christian world view the four shared.

were employer/employee relationships. Though Mina Kalsbeek had visited her home and they had developed a fast friendship, Liu Shuying was first and foremost an employee of the CRC mission. As her *lao ban* (boss), Kalsbeek paid Liu (directly or indirectly) "\$30 Mex." per month, and she reported to CRC mission secretary Beets their monthly activities, such as the number of visitors to their Rugao home, Bible studies they had taught, the tracts they had passed out, and the total number of contacts they had had with women and children. Kalsbeek never appears to have expressed dissatisfaction with Liu's work, but



Smit and group of believers after World War II, 16 May 1948. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

if she had been displeased she could have “let her go,” as she had done with two other Bible women before hiring Liu. Wang Aitang was also an employee of the mission. When he “came to terms” on a riverboat off Nanjing, it certainly included negotiating his salary and benefits. The Chinese evangelists in Rugao received a salary based on level of education and experience, and their compensation included housing, medical benefits, a “heavy furniture” allowance, a travel allowance for Chinese New Year, and a children’s allowance with a built-in tuition benefit. Being one of the few workers in Rugao with a seminary degree, Wang started out almost at the top of the salary scale, despite his inexperience.

But before he had worked in Rugao six months, he had expressed his dissatisfaction with the CRC mission’s salary schedule. In December of 1926, when anti-Christian sentiments were running high across China, Wang and three of the mission’s other evangelists

appeared before the CRC China mission council and requested an upward revision of the salary schedule. The China mission had been struggling to come up with an equitable salary schedule for some time and agreed to consider the request. Before they could resolve the issue, however, the evangelists sent a letter to the mission, this time *demanding* a salary increase or they would go on strike. In their letter demanding a raise they wrote, “We will do no preaching or Sunday School work next Sunday, will not conduct Bible classes, and will not preach in the chapels.”⁴⁴ After the CRC mission had dismissed all four evangelists, Wang claimed that though he had requested the salary schedule to be revised in December, his name had been added to the strike letter without his knowledge or consent. Although one missionary expressed skepticism about Wang’s innocence, the CRC China mission council decided to exonerate him and received him back into full service.

After the strike incident, Wang Aitang continued to work as an evangelist for the CRC mission for more than two decades and rose to the position of senior evangelist in Rugao.

In addition to their salaries and other benefits, Wang and Liu received other advantages through their employment by the CRC mission. Through her connection to Kalsbeek and the mission, Liu traveled to the States, received gifts from CRC churches in the United States, and was provided with free housing in Shanghai, even after she stopped officially working for the mission during WWII and until 1949. Her family benefited from her association with Kalsbeek and the CRC mission as well: her sister Liu Shufen worked in the Rugao CRC mission hospital as a drug clerk, and in the 1930s her brother Liu Shuhua moved to the city to work and eventually married one of the young Christian women working with Kalsbeek and Liu. Wang’s oldest daughter suffered from tuberculosis of the bone as a child, and several times Wang requested and was allowed to change his place of service to accommodate the needs of his daughter. Both Liu and Wang received safety from their association with the CRC mission during WWII prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Without question, through their friendship and working relationships with Kalsbeek and Smit, Liu and Wang had advantages not available to most of their fellow Chinese. But the benefits went in both directions: Kalsbeek and Smit also benefited from their connections with Liu and Wang. Their Chinese colleagues helped interpret China for them. Through their Chinese colleagues they were introduced into networks of relationships that eased the way for them to get things done. In fact, without the help of their Chinese colleagues Kalsbeek and Smit’s work would almost

certainly not have been as fruitful. This appears to have been particularly true for Kalsbeek. Together they made an excellent team committed to the evangelistic work in the district and, as Smit himself wrote in 1937, their work together was some of the most successful in the city: “In all we now have forty-two Christians [in Rugao city]. Most of these are women, due to the splendid efforts of the Misses Kalsbeek and Liu.”⁴⁵

The two women’s relationship included emotional benefits as well as work benefits. Before meeting Liu, Kalsbeek had a deep sense of futility about her work in Rugao, and had decided that she wanted to return home when she finished her first term of missionary service. She wrote the CRC mission secretary Henry Beets of the mission, “I have been feeling more and more of late, that I am a superfluous worker on our field. . . . The money which goes to my salary could be used to better advantage in the Kingdom. . . . I think it is a poor investment of money to keep me here. I shall of course stay on until furlough time, during which time we can talk things over more fully, but I felt I owed you a ‘warning.’” But when she began working with Liu, Kalsbeek’s perspective on her work changed dramatically. Together they created a home, and in 1938 the size of their “family” doubled when they took in two orphans, two young girls that Kalsbeek adopted and gave the names of her younger sisters, Helen and Jean. This alternative “family” arrangement appears to

have substituted for both women the emotional ties of traditional marriage and the nurturing relationships of the traditional family.

These Chinese and Americans benefited from knowing each other, but at times the relationships could be costly, demanding sacrifices and putting themselves at risk. For instance, in the fall of 1937 Kalsbeek and Liu, along with hundreds of others, including members of her own mission, were trapped in Guling, the missionary summer resort in Zhejiang province, when the Japanese army marched up the Yangzi River valley. The foreigners were stranded on the mountain for about a month until passage was negotiated with the Japanese for a train to transport them to Hong Kong. Despite her colleagues urging for her to leave,



Kalsbeek, Liu, and adopted daughters Helen and Jean. Left to right: Helen, Mina, Ruby, and Jean. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Liu with Helen and Jean (standing), June 1939. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Kalsbeek refused to go without Liu, who, because she was a Chinese national, was not permitted on the train. The two women continued on at Guling helping with war-orphan work for almost a year before being able to take refuge in Shanghai, before Kalsbeek, after a stint in a Japanese prison camp, was repatriated in 1943. Then in 1949, just before the Communist army took Shanghai, Kalsbeek stayed behind, sending Liu and their daughters off to America. About their painful departure, she wrote, “I have just returned from seeing Ruby and my girls off for America—and oh, how empty this place seems without them! My heart aches because of the separation but I am comforted by the fact that it would be so much, much harder for all of us if I were leaving and they were staying, I commend my dear ones to your love.”⁴⁶

Wang's friendship with Smit and his work with the CRC mission also carried risks for himself and his family. During WWII and the civil war until 1949, Wang continued to have contact with the CRC missionaries and to be a courier of messages and money, carrying at times thousands of dollars between Shanghai and Rugao. Most of the contact that Wang had was with Smit, who did relief work in western China during the war, and stayed on in Rugao after the Communist victory in the fall of 1949. This was dangerous contact for both men, but especially Wang, who, by having this contact with Smit, put his family and his own life at risk. In the spring of 1951, when Smit finally had to leave the country, Wang and his family saw him off at the docks in Shanghai. In this final parting, Smit offered to take Wang's oldest son, but Wang, despite the profound uncertainty facing himself and his country, wanted to keep his family together. The two men corresponded several times after Smit left, but they never saw each other again.

The above demonstrates the ability of Chinese and Americans to work together, but lingering implicitly behind this portrait is the question of what Kalsbeek's and Smit's Dutch-American identity contributed to their success in these relationships. In terms of their national identities they were Americans, but as members of a Dutch-immigrant community (and in the case of Smit as an immigrant) they were both also "third-culture" individuals, meaning they were culturally

American *and* Dutch. While unquestionably native ability played a crucial role in both individuals' cross-cultural proficiencies, cross-culture skills are also learned skills and Kalsbeek and Smit's Dutch-American identities potentially provided them with cross-cultural background and resources not as readily available to the typical American missionary of the period. As third-culture individuals, they were exposed to another language from an early age, they were sensitized to issues of culture through being outsiders to some extent in American culture, and they had a wider sense of the world through their immigrant community's continuing contact with Europe. Although it is difficult to quantify these advantages, it seems likely that their Dutch-American identities and backgrounds provided Kalsbeek and Smit with cross-cultural training even before they left America and may perhaps have contributed to their success in forming cross-cultural relationships with their Chinese colleagues.

A closing epilogue should be added about the fate of these four individuals. On his voyage back to North America, Smit stopped in Japan to investigate the possibility of his church doing mission work in post-war Japan. Once home, rather than be saddled with the confining responsibilities of a traditional pastorate, he chose to end his career with preaching in Dutch and working with Dutch immigrants in Ontario, Canada. He died in 1964 at the age of seventy-four. Wang continued to serve the

church in Rugao long after the missionaries departed, holding worship services and preaching, teaching and doing pastoral work as best as he could, work which included baptizing new members and burying the dwindling number of those attending church until the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 when all religious practice was halted.⁴⁷ In the late 1960s, he and his wife were sent to the countryside to work. When the Cultural Revolution ended, the two moved to Shanghai where he died in 1980 at the age of eighty-four. According to Wang's daughter, Wang Shuangen, at the funeral his Bible was tucked in his arms.

After reuniting in the United States in the late spring of 1949, Liu and Kalsbeek, with their two adopted daughters, Helen and Jean, bought a house and established a home in Kalsbeek's hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Both women graduated from Calvin College and taught at Creston Christian School. When Kalsbeek died of a heart attack in 1954 at the age of sixty, Liu raised the two girls on her own. Until her retirement she continued to teach at Creston and often provided hospitality for Chinese students studying in the city. To the end of her life, those who knew her say she dressed in Chinese attire and ate only Chinese food. She died in 1974 at the age of seventy-three and was buried next to Kalsbeek, her friend, co-worker, and "inseparable partner."⁴⁸

Endnotes

1. John K. Fairbank, "The Main Faces of Protestant Missions in China and the United States," in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974) 2.
2. For background information about Rugao county during the Republican period, see: Lenore Barkan, "Nationalists, Communists, and Rural Leaders: Political Dynamics in a Chinese County, 1927-1937" (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1983).
3. In Chinese the family name comes first, so subsequent references to Liu Shuying will be Liu. In the CRC she came to be known as Ruby Liu.
4. Kalsbeek to Beets, 30 April 1925, Henry Beets Papers, Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan (hereafter cited as Calvin Archives).
5. Kalsbeek, "Lengthen Thy Cords, Strengthen Thy Stakes!" Undated manuscript. Kalsbeek Christian Reformed Church (CRC) World Missions file, Calvin Archives.
6. It is unclear whether this scheme was ever completed.
7. Simon Dykstra to First CRC, 6 June 1926. S. Dykstra CRC World Missions file, Calvin Archives.
8. Ibid.
9. Albert Selles, "Our Native Evangelists," *Banner* 80 (2 November 1945) 1032. Ed Van Baak, who met Wang in the late 1940s, confirms the impression of Wang's bearing and preaching skills. Conversation between author and Ed Van Baak, 15 April 2003.
10. For the importance of linguistic ability in intercultural communication, see Carley H. Dodd, *Dynamics of Intercultural Communication* (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Publishers, 1992) 48ff.
11. See Kalsbeek to Beets, 3 August 1925; Kalsbeek to Beets, 1 October 1925; and Kalsbeek's annual report for 1938, Beets Papers, Calvin Archives.
12. Albert Smit spoke English without a Dutch accent, a remarkable achievement for someone learning a language in his late teens. Letter to author from Hazel Smit Timmer, 18 December 200.
13. Smit to Beets, 5 December 1924. Smit CRC World Missions file, Calvin Archives.
14. Ibid.
15. Kalsbeek, "Lengthen Thy Cords."
16. Ibid.
17. See the map of Jiangsu dialects in Emily Honig, *Creating Chinese Ethnicity: Subei People in Shanghai, 1890-1980* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992) 25.
18. The Rugao dialect is a form of Southern Mandarin spoken on the linguistic border between Jianghuai Mandarin Chinese (also called Lower Yangzi River dialect) and the Wú dialects prevalent in southwestern Jiangsu province. Honig, *Creating Chinese Ethnicity*, 25.
19. Kalsbeek to Beets, 1 March 1926, Beets Papers, Calvin Archives.
20. Wang Aitang's daughter has said that though she had grown up in Rugao and spent most of her adult life working there as a school teacher, she could only understand and communicate a little in the local Rugao dialect. Conversation between author and Wang Shuangen, 20 March 200 in Nanjing.
21. Because the children of the missionaries were educated either in international schools, in Rugao with an American tutor, or at home, their Chinese was limited.
22. For two of Wang Aitang's letters, see Wang Aitang to John DeKorne, Secretary of the Christian Reformed Mission, 1945, CRC World Missions Collection, Calvin Archives; and Wang to Smit, written sometime in 1952 and signed "Truly yours, A. T. Wang." Smit CRC World Missions file, Calvin Archives.
23. Kalsbeek to Beets, 6 January 1928, Beets Papers, Calvin Archives.
24. Dodd, *Dynamics*, 48ff.
25. Cultural anthropologists describe "high-context" cultures as those in which most of the information involved in communication is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, with very little content in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. As with many Asian cultures, China is considered a high-context culture; whereas the United States, though not at the other end of the spectrum, is considered a "low-context" culture. A low-context culture is defined as one where the bulk of the message is drawn from the verbal communication. See William B. Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim, *Communicating with Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communication* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1984) 12-13.
26. China has been described as a "food-centered culture." See Frederick Simoons, *Food in Culture: A Cultural and Historical Inquiry* (Boca Raton, FL: Telford Press, 1991), 14; and Lin Yutang, *My Country, My People* (New York, NY: Halcon House, 1935) 335ff.
27. Kalsbeek to Beets, 1 February 1926, Beets Papers, Calvin Archives.
28. Kalsbeek to Beets, 1 June 1926, Beets Papers, Calvin Archives.
29. Conversation with Wang Shuangen. Given Chinese susceptibility to lactose intolerance, this is a remarkable fact about Wang Aitang.
30. Liu Shuying to Mrs. Henry Beets, 20 August 1928, Beets Papers, Calvin Archives. "Babbelaars" are a Dutch creamy, butterscotch flavored candy.
31. According to Peter Tong, who knew Liu from his student days in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the 1960s, Liu was an excellent Chinese cook and preferred Chinese cuisine to American food. Conversation between author and Peter Tong, 30 November 2007, in Fontana, California.
32. For a discussion about the unity of the Christian Reformed Church and its immigrant church communities, see John Kromminga, *In the Mirror: an Appraisal of the Christian Reformed Church* (Hamilton, ON: Guardian, 1957).
33. James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984) 42.
34. It is unknown whether Smit attended a Christian day school in the Netherlands, but he did graduate from a Grand Rapids (Michigan) Christian High School.
35. For more information about the Presbyterian Church (US) mission in Xuzhou, see G. Thompson Brown, *Earthen Vessels and Transcendent Power: American Presbyterians in China, 1837-1952* (Maryknoll, NY: 1997) 137-139.
36. Kalsbeek to Beets, 1 June 1925, Beets Papers, Calvin Archives.
37. Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984) 16.
38. Kwok Pui-lan, "Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity," in *Christianity in China: From the*

Eighteenth Century to the Present, ed. Daniel Bays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) 204-205.

39. When Kalsbeek was seeking a Bible woman in the 1920s to help her with women and children's work in Rugao, she wrote home about the difficulty of finding a quality young woman because, as she said, "There seems to be a sort of 'stigma' on Bible woman work and so all the fine young women go into teaching or business." For some of the "stigma" attached to the position of Bible women, especially related to their low levels of education, see Kwok Pui-lan, "Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity," *Christianity*, 202-203.

40. For a detailed treatment of key social and cultural differences between Western and Eastern cultures, see Dodd, 75-83; for the impact of Confucianism on Chinese social interactions, see June Ock Yum, "The Impact of Confucianism on Interpersonal Relationships and Communication Patterns," in *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, Richard E. Porter and Larry Samovar, eds. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1994) 5-8.

41. L. E. Sarbaugh, *Intercultural Communication* (Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden Book Company, 1979) 15.

42. Kalsbeek to Beets, 1 October 1931, Beets Papers, Calvin Archives.

43. Kalsbeek to Beets, 3 October 1932, Beets Papers, Calvin Archives.

44. Minutes of Special Mission Meeting, 3 February 1927, Art. 3. CRC files.

45. Smit, "Letter of Albert Smit," *Missionary Monthly* 41:480 (June 1937) 135.

46. Letter to Broadway Avenue CRC, 6 April 1949. This was her last letter home.

47. The information about Wang Aitang's work in Rugao following Smit's departure comes from church records found in the Rugao Religious Affairs Bureau office and conversation with Wang's daughter Wang Shuangen.

Murdered by the Mob: The Fate of Chicago Teamster Sipke Hoekstra

Robert P. Swierenga and Ralph A. Hoekstra

The Chicago mob of a century ago was a foe to be feared. Al Capone and his ilk held cops, coroners, judges, and politicians in their grasp and literally could get away with murder. Dutch scavengers and teamsters were at particular risk when they challenged competitors operating under the protection of union “goons” tied to mobsters. Sipke Hoekstra was one of those who paid with his life for standing up to the mob. In 1915, hit men shot him to death and left his badly burned body alongside a railroad track in Chicago’s Humboldt Park district. Chicago “garbio” Peter Ter Maat was more fortunate in 192 when he refused to join the teamster’s union. He escaped with his life when thugs met him at the Cicero dump, yanked him out of the cab of his loaded garbage truck, and sent the vehicle into the pit, never to be seen again. No wonder Rev. Edward Masselink, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Cicero in the 1940s, feared for his safety when he led a citizens’ crusade to clean up the corrupt town government.¹

Sipke Hoekstra was born 22 May 1864 in the municipality of Oostdongeradeel, Friesland, the first of seven children of Roelof and Jantje (nee Houtman). At age seven, his family moved eastward to Marum, Groningen, where his father worked in the



Sipke Hoekstra as groom (1892). Image courtesy of Ralph Hoekstra.

peat fields. Peat was used as fuel in the Netherlands. In 1884, Sipke began his Dutch military obligation. A year after his discharge, on 28 March 1892, he married Bartha Dijk, the oldest child of peat foreman Louwe Dijk. Bartha’s wedding present from her mother-in-law, Jantje Hoekstra, was an apron full of potatoes, which speaks to the lowly economic status of the families. Before the year was out the newlyweds immigrated to America, arriving in January

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A 1961 graduate of Calvin College, Ralph Hoekstra has retired from Hughes Aircraft Company and now lives in Southern California.

1893. The couple settled in Roseland, a Frisian enclave on Chicago's south side. In a typical chain migration, with Sipke in the lead role, his nineteen-year-old sister Marijke arrived at Ellis Island in July 1893 and headed for Roseland. In 1896, his father, then a farmer, and mother and the younger siblings, Rommert, Aafke, and Wiebe, came to Roseland.

In 1894, Sipke was a gardener living west of Roseland at 111th and Halsted Streets (800 West), but in 1897 he moved the family to the "Groninger Hoek" (neighborhood) on Chicago's Old West Side, in a rented flat at 1723 (724 old numbering) West Fourteenth Street. There they joined the First Christian Reformed Church, known as the Old Fourteenth Street Church. Sipke was elected as elder in January 1899 and held the trusted post for the next thirteen years.² His father and family remained in Roseland, working a truck farm at 10753 South Wallace Avenue (600 West) until Roelof retired in 1920.³

Ann Smilde (nee Evenhouse), the best friend of Jennie Hoekstra, Sipke and Bartha's oldest child, recalled the Sunday morning that Elder Hoekstra stopped at their home, apparently concerned about the family's financial difficulties. "Mr. Hoekstra showed up at our home after church. He asked for a cup of coffee. My mother thought, how rude! Doesn't he know we are poor? Mother used our last bit of coffee to make him a cup. Mother came in with the cup of coffee and he asked for a cookie. This made Mother really angry. She went back to the kitchen for the cookie and that is probably when Mr. Hoekstra hid a \$10 bill under the saucer. We didn't see the money until he left."⁴

Sipke Hoekstra was an entrepreneur at heart. He became his own boss, like many Groningers, but he was more successful than most. Within a decade Hoekstra was the equal of any of

some seventy-five Dutch "garbios" on Chicago's West Side, including Henry Bilthuis, James De Boer, Harm Huizinga, Hendrik Evenhuis (Evenhouse), Bonne Iwema, and Conrad Ottenhoff.⁵ Like his fellow scavengers, Hoekstra generously contributed to his church and Ebenezer Christian School, where he enrolled his children—Jantje (Jennie), Louwe (Louis, 1895), Catherine (Kate, 1897), Roelof (Rudolph/Ralph, 1899), Sikke (Samuel, 1902), Wiebe (John, 1905), Rommert (Raymond, 1907), and Albert (1910).

that he was certain to fail. The seller would then take back the business and sell to another immigrant. This crooked practice came to an end with Sipke. He paid \$100 for the route and then counted out another \$100 for the horse. The wily Sipke knew the horse would take the correct route if given his head. Bartha helped run the business into the early 1900s by repairing the kerosene cans.

The family in 1903 bought their first home. It stood a block to the east of their original flat in the heart of the



Sipke Hoekstra family portrait, 1907. L to R: Ralph, Louis, Bartha, Raymond, Jennie, John, Sipke, Catherine, and Samuel. Image courtesy of Ralph Hoekstra.

Like other Groninger immigrants who knew little but farming and working with horses, Sipke began peddling kerosene by horse and wagon to homes and businesses. He acquired the business in a most unusual way, by getting the better of a swindler, whose routine was to "sell" the business to a fresh immigrant and then take it back after the "greenhorn" failed. The routine was to confuse the buyer when teaching him the route by taking a convoluted path that was so inefficient

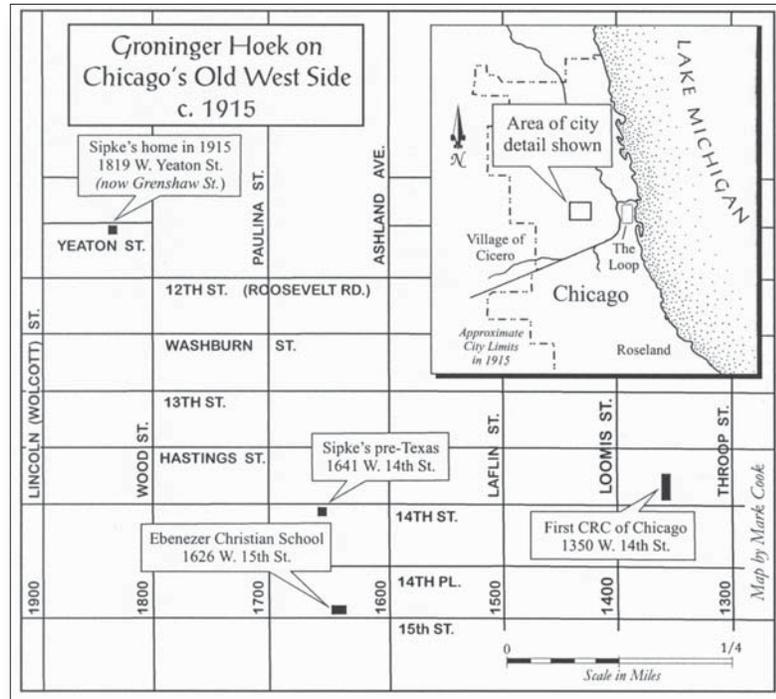
Dutch neighborhood, at 1641 (688 old numbering) West Fourteenth Street. The house was more pretentious than most; it stood on two lots, with an adjoining lot purchased the next year. It was barely a block west of Ashland Avenue, the main thoroughfare, and within sight of the Douglas Park Elevated Railway ("L") station at Fourteenth Place.

Sipke and Bartha regularly exchanged letters with her parents; eighteen letters written from 1904 through

1910 survive. These letters tell much about Sipke's home and church life, and especially his thriving business. By 1904 he had switched from kerosene to trash and cinders, under the Americanized name "Samuel Hoekstra Teaming." He employed seven men at \$14 each per week, fed thirteen horses for \$15 a month, and ran six or seven wagons. Five of his employees were relatives—his younger brothers Sikke (Samuel) and Wiebe (later John), brothers-in-law Jan Danhof and Albert Hoekstra, and Jan Vander Velde. "Although there are lots of expenses," he wrote his parents, "there usually is something left." So rapid did the business grow that only one month later Sipke wrote that he had ten employees and fifteen horses. "All this makes me very busy."⁶

By December 1904, Sipke reported having sixteen horses, ten to twelve steady employees, and more work than he could manage. "Last year I turned over many thousands," he boasted to his family, besides extra jobs farmed out on commission. And it was far more lucrative than working in the peat fields. Some days he simply rode alongside his dump wagons on a small pony supervising the work. "Mostly," he added, "I'm very busy, and it takes a lot of worries to manage it all, what to contract, and then to make sure the work gets done." To accommodate the wagons, horses, and a family milk cow, Hoekstra bought a large vacant lot adjacent to his home for \$1,000 and built a large barn for his animals and equipment.⁷

When the city in 1905 banned the usual practice of spreading cinders on unpaved alleys, Sipke hit on the idea of using cinders for bedding material for concrete sidewalks. This gave him an edge over competitors, who were paying to dump their cinders. He subcontracted the work with cement contractors. The growing city needed mile after mile of new sidewalks and



Map courtesy of Robert P. Swierenga.

Sipke would do it for less. But the construction work proved to be his undoing because he was competing with shady, mob-connected contractors who made sweetheart deals with corrupt city officials.

For Hoekstra to add sidewalk work as a sideline to his garbage business was common for scavengers. For a time, life was good, Hoekstra told his in-laws in early 1908:

We have good bread (i.e., a good living), yes, even better than [sic] we ever could have hoped for or expected or did expect. We still have the same business; it was real good so far, although nowadays business is a bit weak. . . .



Sipke Hoekstra's business stationery cropped from a letter envelope. Image courtesy of Ralph Hoekstra.

This probably will be better soon.

We now have 23 horses and a cow for our own use. I am always supervising and watching the work being done. We have an older man as a stable hand who has to watch over everything. . . . One of my horses doesn't do anything else, that is my horse. Last summer I have done a lot of work, sometimes I have 30 teams working for me, including the ones I hired, and on top of that, a number of men extra. For a team of horses and a man, they pay 5½ dollars a day here, so that runs into a lot of money. But those days sometimes were too busy for me.

About church life, we are happy to be in the midst of our congregation. Our congregation has 260 families. I have been an elder for nine years now and have just been chosen by a large majority for another two years. . . . We have a great Chr. School here; four of our children are going there, and they also learn some Dutch there. Of course, among each other they always speak English.⁸

Sipke and Bartha Hoekstra first scouted out Winnie, Texas, for three weeks in June 1909, according to a



Douglas Park “L” station at 60th Avenue (Austin Blvd.) identical to the station at Douglas Park and Fourteenth Place, where the Hoekstra’s initially lived. Image courtesy of Ellen Lempera and John Calia at Historical Collection of the Cicero Public Library.

postcard penned on 1 July to their children in Chicago. Four months earlier the pair had informed Bartha’s family in the Netherlands of their plans to move to the South. “Sip is planning to buy some land in Texas, where in the past cows used to be grazed fat. That land is for sale now.”⁹ That Sipke did indeed buy land is confirmed in a January 1910 letter. Sipke wrote: “Bartha and I made a trip through America last summer, have been away

for three weeks, especially to Texas where I bought 8 hundred acres of land there for 12.50 an acre [i.e., \$10,000]. We travelled by railcar over 5 thousand miles then, and after that we were glad to be back home.” The “homestead,” as the family called the property, contained a house and barn. He added: “We are still in our old business, although the profits weren’t great last year. I did over 25 thousands [\$25,000] of work, but didn’t make

much. . . . I have been an elder for 11 years and just chosen for another two years. We have a large congregation here, and since last winter we have been

without a minister for 4 months.”¹⁰

The Hoekstras, like hundreds of other Dutch immigrants in the Midwest, were lured into the Texas land venture by advertisements in the *Banner* by the Theodore F. Koch Company of St. Paul, Minnesota. This railroad land promoter, who sold a million acres in Minnesota alone, opened an office in Houston, Texas, in 1906 for the purpose of planting a Dutch colony at Hampshire and Winnie in Jefferson County, some twenty miles from Port Arthur and midway to Galveston Bay. Koch’s modus operandi was to donate land and money for a Reformed church and manse, which he knew was essential to attracting Dutch buyers. Rev. Peter Moerdyke of Chi-

Wie over de nieuwe Hollandsche kolonie

WINNIE, TEX.,

de waarheid van onpartijdigen hooren wil, vrage of schrijve aan de hieronder volgende namen en adressen van Hollanders die tot nu toe (30 November 1909) land bij Winnie en Hamshire, in Jefferson County, Texas van ons gekocht hebben, en die aan belangstellenden gaarne mondeling of schriftelijk, inlichtingen willen verstrekken over hun reis naar, en onderzoek van de landen in de Hollandsche kolonie, Winnie, Texas.

John Stob	1454 Blue Island Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Pieter Ter Maat	28 Yeaton St., Chicago, Ill.
Lucas Piel	454 Robey St., Chicago, Ill.
Derk Tjerk Boersma	551 W. 15th St., Chicago, Ill.
Wm. v d Kamp	39th St. & Crawford ave., Chicago, Ill.
Henry Teune	555 W. 15th St., Chicago, Ill.
Ben Renkema	1540 W. 15th St., Chicago, Ill.
H. Muntingh	Winnie, Texas
Lucas Holtrop	Hawthorne, Ill.
Charles L. Simmons	627 Loomis St., Chicago, Ill.
Jacob Tulp	7145 Sangamon St., Chicago, Ill.
Martin Tulp	7031 Sangamon St., Chicago, Ill.
Henry v d Werken	7155 Sangamon St., Chicago, Ill.
Bartels Huiuzenga	7121 Aberdeen St., Chicago, Ill.

alle alles grondig onderzocht hebben.
Kostelooze geillustreerde boeken en kaartjes op aanvraag van de Hollandse eigenaars dezer landerijen.

Theo. F. Koch & Company,
1025 Unity building, Chicago, Ill.,
405-509 Binz Building, Houston, Tex. 26-17



One of Theodore Koch’s advertisements from *De Wachter* (15 December 1909, p. 7), then the official weekly of the Christian Reformed Church. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Henry and Anna Stob and their farmhouse near Winnie, Texas. Between them is one of their six children, Henry, who later was on the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

cago's Trinity Reformed Church, near the Old West Side, noted in his weekly column, "Chicago Letter," in the *Christian Intelligencer* of 26 September 1906 that "Rev. J[ohn] A. De Spelder, formerly of our Church, is active in promoting the settlement of Hollanders in a Texas colony, and Revs. J[ohn] Van Westenberg of [First] Pella [Reformed Church] and C[ornelius] Jongewaard of Baldwin, Wis. [formerly Macon, Michigan, Reformed Church] are moving to some Texas point for the recovery of health."¹¹

The *Banner* ads touted the favorable Texas climate for farming and ranching, which snagged a number of Dutch truck farmers around Chicago, including John Stob, Koch's Chicago agent, who had gone south in May and June of 1909 and purchased 14 acres near Winnie for \$35 an acre. This was one-fifth the acreage and three times the price that Hoekstra paid. Quite likely, the Stob and Hoekstra couples traveled to Texas together.¹²

The favorable reports by Stob and Hoekstra encouraged five Chicago-area truck farmers to migrate to Texas in January 1910. By April, some forty families followed and all bought land. In June, Stob held a series of promotional meetings at the First Chicago Christian Reformed Church, and recruited people for a special excursion to check out Winnie, with fares subsidized by the Koch firm. Within a

month of their return, sixty more families from across the Midwest left for Winnie and purchased farms there.¹³

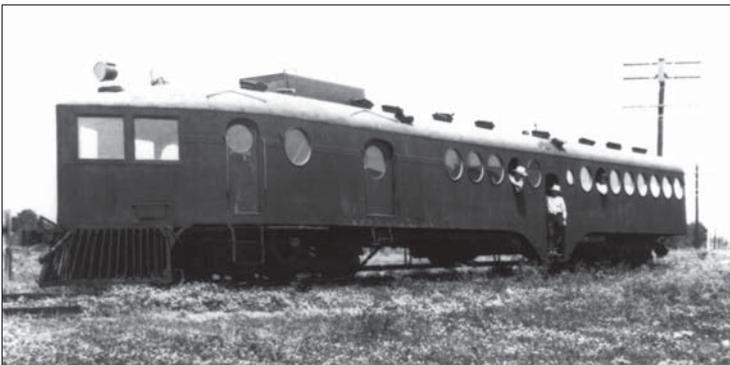
In preparation for the move south, Sipke sold his garbage and teaming business in pieces to fellow Hollanders for a total of \$50,000. He and Bartha sold their Fourteenth Street home, barn, and adjoining lot to fellow scavenger Thomas S. and Sientje Mulder. With the money he bought a Chicago apartment building for \$10,000, and another \$10,000 went to an Illinois cattle dealer for a boxcar of "white-faced" Herefords and some workhorses. While the family comfortably rode in a passenger car, Louis, his oldest son, tended the livestock in a cattle car. In Texas these animals, unfortunately, succumbed to native cattle diseases. Hoekstra purchased a different breed for another \$10,000, but they met the same fate, according to Sam's son Samuel. The corn crop also failed due to drought. The family's sojourn in Texas was short-lived and Sam's career as a cattleman was a financial disaster, reportedly costing him \$30,000. He abandoned the property and was back in Chicago by summer 1912. The Stobs stuck it out for three years and returned eighteen months later in more dire financial straits.¹⁴

One can understand Koch's wily ways; it was his business. He took advantage of desire among the Dutch to own land, the highest aspiration of every farm boy, but attainable by very few. According to old country values, land brought status like nothing else. Hoekstra gave up prosperous businesses in Chicago for the 800 acres. No

grote boer owned that much farmland; it was a kingly amount. The Hoekstras clearly valued land over capital; they clung to the aspirations of the Old World. But the bitter Texas experience ended that dream once and for all.

Back in Chicago, Hoekstra found temporary housing for the family at 1857 West 13th Street and resumed his contracting and hauling business, Samuel Hoekstra Teaming. To raise cash to buy a home and several Mack trucks to augment his six teams of horses and wagons, he sold the apartment building for \$10,000. Trucks were all the rage among scavengers at this time. The Hoekstra's bought a comfortable house a block from their rental, at 1819 W. Yeaton (later Grenshaw) Street. It stood on the western fringe of the Dutch neighborhood. Tragedy hit the family soon after this. Ten-year-old son Ralph was burned by a flash fire in a tar kettle near their home. He and younger brother Samuel were throwing chunks of tar into the kettle when it exploded. Ralph died the next day at Cook County Hospital. He was clad only in pajamas (he had been sick in bed when he went out to join the fun); Samuel's leather jacket saved him from serious injury.¹⁵

In 1915 Hoekstra expanded his contracting work to Cicero, a burgeoning town that needed miles of new sidewalks. He wanted to keep his six wagons and teams busy and add more if possible. He easily underbid rival contractors, who had to pay "kickbacks" to corrupt local officials and the Cicero mob that controlled the town government. Cicero's location on the western border of Chicago attracted criminal elements wishing to evade the city's law enforcement agencies. The Cicero mob boss at the time was Johnny Torrio. His organization owned or controlled most, if not all, of the saloons, and had many city politicians in their vest pockets. In the 1920s, Torrio turned over his



The self-propelled railroad car that Theodore Koch used to take prospective buyers through the land he was selling near Winnie, Texas. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



A horse-drawn grader similar to the one Hoekstra used for sidewalk work in the Chicago area. Image courtesy of Bass Photo Co. Collection, Indiana Historical Society.

interest in the Cicero mob to Chicago gangster Al Capone, who moved his headquarters to Cicero. Al's brother Frank Capone was quoted as saying, "Try to deal before you have to kill," and "You never get no back talk from no corpse."

Hoekstra's first sidewalk contract in Cicero was a \$2,000 job to pave several miles between Sixtieth and Sixty-second avenues. He began the work on 8 September 1915. While at work on the following Saturday, two "mysterious assailants" beat him and left him lying unconscious on a Cicero street. Robbery was not the motive because the thugs left untouched \$80 and other valuables in his pockets.

The beating was the mob's final warning to the Dutchman to stop doing business in Cicero; but he took no heed. When a *Chicago Daily Tribune* reporter asked him about the incident, Sipke replied, "Them Cicero fellows don't like us contractors from Chicago to come out there and underbid them and take the business away from them." He assured Bartha, "I knew they are after me, but I didn't think they would go that strong. I'll be on my guard against them from now on."¹⁶

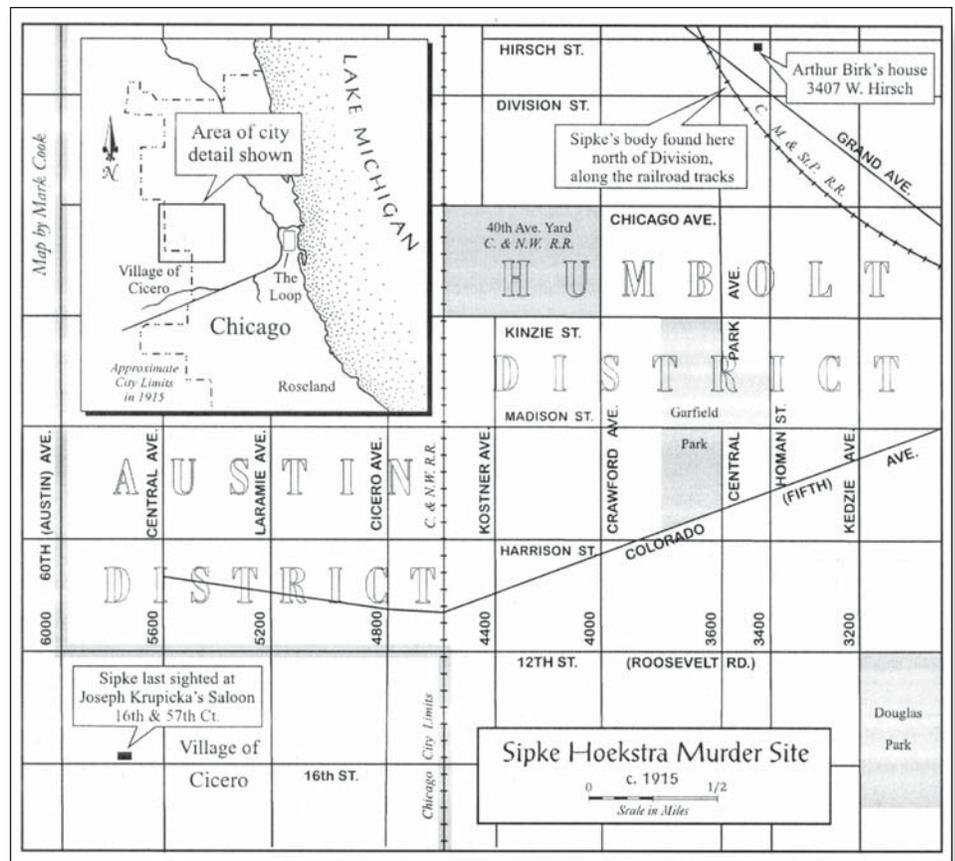
Six weeks later, on Halloween night (a Sunday), Hoekstra's burned body, with a bullet hole in the head, was found in a vacant lot in Chicago along the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad tracks north of the Division Street viaduct. The viaduct was one-half block east of Central Park Avenue. The mobsters obviously wanted the body to be found outside

of Cicero city limits. The site of the murder was about three miles east and three miles north of the Cicero saloon where Hoekstra was last seen alive. His was the tenth murder in little more

than two weeks in the Chicago area!¹⁷

Chicago newspapers, notably the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, gave the crime considerable coverage, beginning on 11 November. They cast it as a "mystery at the bottom of which, the police believe, lies a motive of business rivalry between a group of rival contractors and the slain man." In a tip-off to a different scenario, however, the newspaper placed quote marks around the word business in the bold subheading: "The 'Business' Murder: A Story of Rivalry." The abridged news report of Hoekstra's last hours follows on page 23.¹⁸

The *Tribune* account clearly points to murder, not suicide. The paper quotes Detectives Burns and Carmody who, after several hours of investigation, concluded: "We are now convinced that the man was murdered. We have found that he had no known business in the neighborhood where



Map courtesy of Robert P. Swierenga.

Find the Burned Body

Yesterday morning two men walking along the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul railroad tracks near Division Street found the nude and badly burned body of a man lying on the prairie near the foot of the railroad embankment.

There was a bullet hole in the head. Only a few charred bits remained of the clothes, which had been burned from the body. The fire had consumed the dead man's right hand. Nearby was a small, cheap, new revolver and several charred bits of paper by which the body was identified as that of the prosperous contractor.

"Finally Got Him," says Wife

When the police of the Thirty-fourth Precinct brought word of the murder to the contractor's house, they found Mrs. Hoekstra frantic over her husband's absence overnight.

"They have got him at last," she said as she recovered from the shock of the news. "He had feared it's all on account of him underbidding those out of town [Cicero] contractors. Not only on the job in Cicero, but for the last week he has been working hard to get a school contract at Norwood Park [a northwest Chicago suburb]. He promised me that he would be careful after they assaulted him, but now they have got him."

Today detectives are combing Cicero and nearby towns for evidence supporting the department's belief that the business rivals or their agents lured Hoekstra to the lonely prairie, murdered him, and then set fire to his clothing in an attempt to hide evidence of the crime.

As far as the police can find out, Hoekstra was last seen early Saturday night when he alighted from a streetcar at Twelfth Street and Crawford Avenue [later Pulaski Road] and remarked to a friend on the car that he was going to attend to a business matter.

It is possible that he was intending going to the home of George Kehl, another contractor who lives at 1225 North Maplewood Avenue [1.5 blocks west of Western Avenue]. Kehl had sublet the sidewalk grading contract in Cicero to Hoekstra, but the latter, still reaching out for more business, was seeking advice on how to land a school contract in Norwood Park. . . .

Seen Saturday Evening

Jacob Ritzman [Reitsma], one of Hoekstra's drivers, saw the contractor at 5 o'clock Saturday night. Hoekstra at that time was walking north on Sixtieth Avenue [later Austin Boulevard] between Eighteenth and Nineteenth streets. The police found a saloonkeeper who saw Hoekstra between 6 and 7 o'clock on Fifty-seventh Court and Sixteenth Street. So far the detectives have been unable to learn that Hoekstra was being followed at that hour.

Arthur Birk, who lives at 3407 W. Hirsch Street, two blocks from the murder site, reported that about 9:15 he heard three shots fired from a point corresponding to the place where the body was found. Presumably two shots were to test fire the new revolver, followed ten minutes later by a single, fatal shot. Birk also told police that a dairyman by the name of Lumberg had reported seeing a small blaze on the prairie as early as 3 o'clock yesterday morning.

Under the railroad viaduct, fifty feet from where the body was found, the police found seven new thirty-two-caliber cartridges and a number of cigarette stubs. The detectives believe that these cartridges fell to the ground while the gun was being loaded.

Suicide Theory Wanes

At first police were inclined toward the suicide theory in the belief that Hoekstra may have set fire to his own clothing and then shot himself. This theory lost weight when it was learned that the contractor carried no insurance, and was happy and apparently in the best of health.

"My husband never owned a revolver," Mrs. Hoekstra told the police. "Once one of the boys found one in one of the barns, and brought it home and father wouldn't let them keep it around the house. He would be the last man in the world to commit suicide. He was happy in his home life and took a great interest in the church. He was a member of the Christian Reformed Church at Fourteenth Street between Throop and Loomis streets. He was a deacon and later elder."

he was killed."¹⁹ Other newspapers said police were investigating Cicero labor camps to track down business "feuds," "intrigue," and "rivalry" behind the murder. The *Chicago Daily News* identified the environs of the railroad embankment as a known teamster haunt, where they gather on

weekend nights to "play cards, commune, and roll dice," and the ground was littered with "teamster's cards torn into little bits."²⁰

The *Chicago Daily Journal* noted, however, that the police were talking suicide, since the contractor had recently suffered "financial reverses."

They hinted that this drove him to drink, and he had "visited several saloons in Cicero" the night of his death." The *Daily News* said that Lieutenant Edward Grady is almost resigned to a theory of suicide. "I learned that Hoekstra had been drinking considerably of late, that he had

a mortgage on his house that was to fall due November 6, and that he had recently made bad investments in Texas.” The *Daily Journal* account also quoted a police spokesperson as theorizing that the fire that burned his clothing was “set by a spark from a locomotive alighting on a celluloid collar Hoekstra wore.” Another officer suggested that “flame from the burning gunpowder” had ignited his celluloid collar, which burned the rest of his clothes.²¹

George Ottenhoff of the realty firm of Wierenga and Ottenhoff, issuer of the Hoekstra mortgage, and another fellow Hollander and church member, immediately disputed the conclusions of Lt. Grady:

I knew Hoekstra pretty well and often had little chats with him. I do not believe he had reason to commit suicide. We hold the first mortgage on his home, but there was nothing unusual in his request to have it renewed, as most people do that. . . . Three years ago Hoekstra had hopes to make a fortune. He went to Texas and bought a thousand acres of land. He was a well to do man at the time. The land was practically worthless, considering his investment, and he lost approximately \$10,000. He realized a little on it, however, and succeeded in trading it for some improved property at East 45th Street and Calumet Avenue [on Chicago’s South Side]. This was too big a proposition for his equity—it was an eighteen-flat building, and he traded his equity for a small farm in Canada, which is absolutely clear [of debt]. So while he lost three years ago, he had bettered himself in a measure and seemed happy over the fact that he finally got land that was clear.²²

The *Chicago Evening Post* added that when Ottenhoff had met Hoekstra a few days earlier to discuss the mortgage renewal, the contractor had seemed “very excited and nervous,” but this was because of trouble with one of his teamsters, who had not done what he was directed to do. “It

was a trivial affair, however,” added Ottenhoff, “and would have nothing to do with his death.”²³

The coroner’s inquest two days later, on 3 November, under Deputy Coroner Samuel L. Davis, gave further credence to the suicide theory by accepting without question the testimony of the Cicero saloonkeeper, Jeremiah Sullivan, who “identified the body as the man who entered his saloon about 11 o’clock Saturday night” and showed him the same revolver found near the body. “The police are convinced,” said the coroner, “that Hoekstra committed suicide.” On the death certificate, the coroner was more judicious; he simply attributed the death to a “Gun shot wound of the head.”²⁴ Clearly, within three days of the crime, the coroner and police were “reading from the same page” that had been written by the mob.

Other facts came out in the various newspaper accounts. Hoekstra had left his home on Yeaton Street after breakfast on Saturday to collect bills, some long overdue. He traveled by streetcar. He went first to collect a bill at the Omaha Packing Company two miles southeast at Twenty-second Street and Halsted Avenue. From there he backtracked to Twelfth Street

(later Roosevelt Road) and went west to Western Avenue and north to Kehl’s Maplewood Avenue home to see about the Cicero sidewalk contract. His good friend James De Boer, a fellow church member and teamster, later saw him on the westbound Twelfth Street streetcar talking with Jan Boven, another church member who lived at Keeler Avenue (4200 West) and Fourteenth Street. De Boer reported to the police that Hoekstra “appeared to be nervous and acted peculiarly” before he alighted at Crawford Avenue (4000 West). “He told Boven he had some business to transact.” To his knowledge, said De Boer, Sipke “had no enemies.”²⁵



Joseph Krupicka’s Saloon, 5722 W. 16th Street, Cicero, where Hoekstra was last seen alive. Image courtesy of Ralph Hoekstra.



Bartender serving customers, Krupicka’s Saloon, c. 1910. Image courtesy of Ralph Hoekstra.

7381
31108

H. D. Y. 104 100-1110
1933
31108
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH—CORONER'S FORM
CERTIFICATE AND RECORD OF DEATH

REGISTERED NO. 31108
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
CITY OF CHICAGO

1. FULL NAME Dejka Nachtra
2. (a) SEX M. (b) COLOR W. (c) SINGLE Married
3. (a) BIRTHPLACE Holland (b) DATE OF BIRTH _____
4. AGE 50 YEARS _____ MONTHS _____ DAYS _____ HOURS _____
5. DIED ON THE 31 DAY OF October 1915 AT ABOUT _____ M.
6. LAST OCCUPATION (a) Contractor (b) _____
7. FORMER OCCUPATION (a) _____ (b) _____
8. (a) PLACE OF DEATH Division & St. Paul RR Tracks (b) LONG AT DEATH _____
9. (a) USUAL RESIDENCE 1819 W. Madison St. (b) WARD _____
10. HOW LONG RESIDENT IN CITY 22 yrs
11. HOW LONG IN STATE _____
12. HOW LONG IN U. S. _____
13. (a) NAME OF FATHER Ralph (b) BIRTHPLACE Holland
14. (a) MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER Maria Hartman (b) BIRTHPLACE Holland
15. INFORMATION Mr. Bartha Nachtra (a) ADDRESS 1819 W. Madison St. (b) LICENSE NO. _____
16. (a) NAME OF UNDERTAKER Cornelius Leenhouts (b) ADDRESS 1457 W. Ashland St. (c) TELEPHONE Call 1586
17. (a) NAME OF PASTOR Rev. Sjoerd Vander Heide (b) ADDRESS _____ (c) TELEPHONE _____
18. DATE OF BURIAL Nov. 3-1915 (b) ADDRESS _____ (c) TELEPHONE _____
19. HOUR 1:30 P.M.

CORONER'S CERTIFICATE OF CAUSE OF DEATH

I hereby certify that I took charge of the remains described above, held an inquest, and thereon and from the evidence obtained by said inquest, report or inquest, find that said deceased came to his death on the day and at about the hour stated above, and from the cause hereunder written.

(IF UNDER ONE YEAR OLD, STATE HOW FED)

(a) CAUSE OF DEATH <u>Gun shot wound of the head</u>	SECTION 14 Is This Death Due to Injury?
(b) COMMENTARY (REQUIREMENTS) <u>Found dead about 200 ft north of Division along the south side of the C. & N. W. & St. Paul tracks</u>	

Withdrew my hand this 30th DAY OF Nov. 1915 (SIGNATURE) Peter M. Hoffman M. D.

DEC 14 9 23 AM '15

Image courtesy of Ralph Hoekstra.

Hoekstra next boarded a south-bound Crawford Avenue streetcar to the Douglas Park “L” station at Twentieth Street, where he transferred to a westbound train and alighted at the Sixtieth Avenue station. Daughter-in-law Jennie Hoekstra (nee Huyser) reports in her memoirs that her father-in-law went to Cicero to collect an overdue bill from an Italian for cinder removal.²⁶ He had been unsuccessful in several previous attempts to collect the money. About 5 p.m. Jacob Reitsma, one of his employees, saw Hoekstra walking north on

The newspaper’s scenario leaves too many unanswered questions. Why did the police take the word of the saloonkeeper, whose story did not jibe with the facts? How could Hoekstra have been at the saloon in Cicero at 11 p.m. when at 9:15 p.m. Arthur Birk heard shots near the railroad viaduct on Division Avenue? How could the police track Hoekstra to several saloons, when there was only one in the area of Cicero where he walked? How likely was it that his clothes were set on fire by a spark from a passing train? Why did the

Sixtieth Avenue between Nineteenth and Eighteenth streets. Between 6 and p.m. he was seen by saloonkeeper Jeremiah Sullivan at a tavern on Sixteenth Street at Fifty-seventh Court. Son Samuel recalled that his father called Bartha from the saloon to tell her he would be home soon.

police not track down the owner of the revolver?

Funeral and Recriminations

Bartha had to deal with her husband’s funeral, the grieving of her seven surviving children, and the rumors that filled the air about his “suicide.” The undertaker was Cornelius Leenhouts, and the body was viewed in the parlor of the family’s home, as was the custom. The funeral took place in the Fourteenth Street Church under the pastor, the Rev. Sjoerd Vander Heide. Sipke was buried on 3 November in the family plot in one of the Dutch sections at the Forest Home Cemetery in Forest Park, where Rudolph (Ralph) had been buried three years earlier. Bartha had an impressive marble gravestone erected on the plot.

Even before the funeral, the grieving widow determined to lead the investigation into her husband’s death. The family immediately disputed the police suicide theory and the coroner’s ruling of suicide, and Bartha hired a private detective to prove otherwise. Bartha told a *Chicago Daily Tribune* reporter that her husband “was happy, never carried a revolver, and could have no motive for suicide, while he had many enemies who might have carried their resentment to the point of murder.” “It was enemies,” Bartha declared; “they murdered him, the brutes.” At the morgue she was told



The area of Chicago’s Southside where the Hoekstras lived, from an early postcard. Image courtesy of Ralph Hoekstra.

that his clothing reeked of oil. Daughter Catherine cried out: “My father was murdered,” and vowed to find his killer. “We only want justice,” she insisted. Son Louis spent a full day scouting the Cicero neighborhood where his father was last seen alive, making inquiries of every one of his father’s acquaintances he could find.²⁷

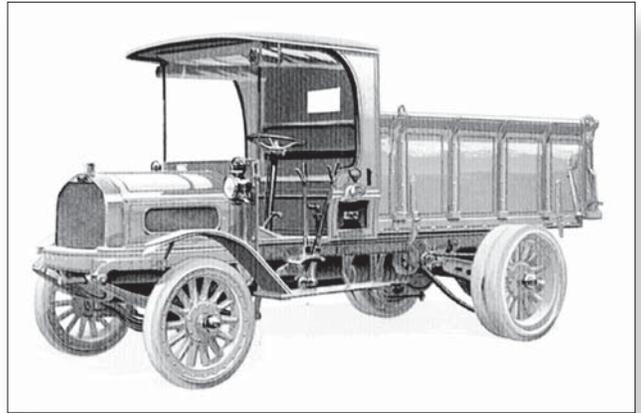
The public protests, and a nudge from the press, forced the coroner to reconvene the inquest a month later, on 8 December. This time the jurors reached an “open verdict nullifying the verdict of suicide” returned at the initial inquest, and they agreed that the revolver found at the scene “was not identified as his property.” They recommended that “the police continue their investigation into the case.” But the jury then gutted these findings by concluding that the fatal bullet was “fired from the hand of the deceased or by a party or parties unknown to the jury.” In short, the coroner’s jury perpetuated the mob’s “cover story” that Hoekstra shot himself in the head and then set his clothing on fire.²⁸ The legal proceedings never resumed. Intriguingly, the official reports of both inquests into Sipke Hoekstra’s death are missing from the files of the Chicago coroner’s office.²⁹

Aftermath

Louis took over the trash business and

became the family’s sole supporter. Sipke had not purchased life insurance to provide income to the family in the event of his death. And without his leadership and contacts, the business failed. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* quotes an acquaintance of Sipke who said that he “really knew how to get the business.” Bartha sold some of the business assets, including the trucks, and also the family home and barn, and became a renter. The once prosperous Samuel Hoekstra Teaming was no more.

The tragedy took its worst toll on the eldest daughter—Jennie, single and twenty-two, fell into such a deep depression that the family felt she needed immediate treatment at the Pine Rest Christian (Psychiatric) Hospital in Cutlerville, Michigan. Three weeks after Sipke’s death, his brother Sikke (Samuel), who worked for him, asked the consistory for financial help for Jennie’s care at the asylum. The deacons reported at the next meeting a week later that she must be hospitalized “as soon as possible.” The extended family agreed to contribute \$3 a week, the congregation would pay the rest. While the deacons were



A 1908 Mack truck like the one Hoekstra owned and from which his son Raymond fell and was killed in 1917. Image courtesy of Ralph Hoekstra.

arranging transportation for Jennie, she came down with pneumonia and became too weak to travel. Within ten days, she died. The death certificate listed “bronchial pneumonia” as the cause, with “melancholia debility” a contributing factor.³⁰

Less than two years after Sipke Hoekstra’s murder, in 1917, tragedy struck the family again when son Raymond was killed in a vehicle accident. He was standing on a running board of one of his father’s Mack trucks driven by his brother Louis. The truck hit a pothole and Raymond fell and was run over. He was pronounced dead at Cook County Hospital from severe trauma to the head. Bartha Hoekstra needed all her strength and faith in God to withstand these deaths. ❧



Hoekstra plot, Forest Home Cemetery, Forest Park, IL. Photo by Ralph A. Hoekstra.

Endnotes

1. Robert P. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of Hollanders in the Windy City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 595; Robert P. Swierenga, "Masselink Challenges the Mob," *Origins*, 24 (No. 1, 2006): 36-41.
2. Letter, Sipke Hoekstra to Bartha Dijk's parents, brothers, and sisters, 18 Jan. 1910; Consistory minutes, First Christian Reformed Church of Chicago, Archives, Calvin College. Marijke Hoekstra married Jan (John) Danhof.
3. Chicago City Directory, 1894, 1905, 1912; US 1900 Population Census. Rommert Hoekstra later farmed in Griffin, Indiana.
4. Recollection of Ralph A. Hoekstra as told in 1950 by Ann Smilde nee Evenhouse. Ann was the oldest daughter of Henry Evenhuis (Evenhouse), a scavenger, who had immigrated to Chicago with his wife and four children in May 1904. Hoekstra's visit likely took place in 1905, when Ann was about seven years old (Cook County, Illinois, 1910 Federal Population Census).
5. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 5-8, 82-98.
6. Letters, Sipke Hoekstra to Bartha Dijk's parents, brothers, and sisters, 16 Feb. and Mar. 1904. Albert Hoekstra was the husband of Bartha's sister Alberdine. Danhof was the father of Ralph J. and Benjamin J., both of whom graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary and served the denomination.
7. Letter, Bartha and Sipke Hoekstra to her parents, brothers, and sisters, 4 Dec. 1904.
8. Letter, Bartha and Sipke Hoekstra to her parents, brothers, and sisters, 29 Jan. 1908.
9. Postcard, Bartha and Sipke Hoekstra, Houston, to Children, Chicago, 1 July 1909. Bartha's undated letter to her parents and siblings in the Netherlands was penned on 25 Jan. 1909. In the letter she mentions that Rev. Breen preached his farewell sermon "yesterday." Rev. Evert Breen preached his farewell on 24 Jan. 1909, according to the "Abbreviated History" in the *Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the First Christian Reformed Church of Chicago, 186-1942* (Chicago, 1942), 13.
10. Letter, Bartha and Sipke Hoekstra to her parents, brothers, and sisters, 1 Jan. 1910.
11. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 569-3;

Afterword by Ralph A. Hoekstra

I am one of the twenty-three grandchildren of Sipke (Sam) Hoekstra who never had the joy of knowing our grandfather. His first grandchild was not born until 1918. Sipke would have been seventy-three when I was born, an age ten years less than his father achieved. We all grew up knowing that something bad happened to him, but we never heard the details. It wasn't because we didn't ask about him; it was because his children didn't want to talk about it. We had family legends—he lost a lot of money in Texas and he was killed in a murder made to look like a suicide. It wasn't until my daughter searched the archives of the Chicago newspapers that I learned the horrible details of his murder. But the newspaper articles didn't reveal much about him as a person.

This dearth of information ended when Laura De Vries (my grandmother Bartha's sister) sent me an email. Laura had discovered that Seine Lok (a descendant of Bartha's sister Antje Dijk Bos) had a carton in his attic of family records of Louwe Dijk and Anna Catherina Burgstra, which included eighteen letters written by Sipke and Bartha Hoekstra between 1904 and 1910 to her parents in Nieuwe Weerdinge, Drenthe. Laura sent me copies of the originals, along with translations, using her best high school English. These anxiously awaited letters revealed much about our grandfather and his family life, thriving business, church leadership, and involvement in the building of Ebenezer Christian School. It took ninety-three years for my cousins and their children to finally get to know their grandfather and his roles in Chicago's West Side Dutch community.

Robert P. Swierenga, compiler, Peter Moerdyke, "Chicago Letters, 1891-190," *Christian Intelligencer* (weekly periodical of the Reformed Church in America).

12. Henry Stob, *Summoning Up Remembrance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 6-9.

13. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 50.

14. Stob, *Summoning Up Remembrance*, 9; Jennie Huyser Hoekstra Memoirs; Membership Records, First Christian Reformed Church of Chicago, in the vault of its successor congregation, the Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church of Berwyn, IL. These records were kindly photocopied by Marten LaMaire.

15. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 521.

16. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 Nov. 1915 tells about Hoekstra's business foray into Cicero and the first repercussions. Valerie Hoekstra researched the Chicago newspapers for articles relating to her great-grandfather's murder.

17. *Chicago Examiner*, 1 Nov. 1915.

18. "Two Murders Bared in One Day: Man, Woman, Contractor Rivals Victim?" *ibid.*

19. Quoted in *ibid.*

20. *Chicago Daily News*, 1 Nov. 1915.

21. *Chicago Daily Journal*, 1 Nov. 1915; *Chicago Daily News*, 1 Nov. 1915; *Chicago Examiner*, 1 Nov. 1915.

22. Quote in *Chicago Daily News*, 1 Nov. 1915.

23. *Chicago Evening Post*, 1 Nov. 1915.

24. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 Nov. 1915. The verdict was returned on Nov. 1915.

25. *Chicago Examiner*, 1 Nov. 1915.

26. Jennie Huyser Hoekstra Memoirs.

27. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2, 3, and 10 Nov. 1915.

28. *ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1915.

29. The archives clerk told grandson Ralph A. Hoekstra that it was not uncommon for inquest reports in mob-connected murders to mysteriously disappear.

30. Consistory minutes, First Christian Reformed Church of Chicago, Nov. 23 (Art. 14), Nov. 29 (Art. 8), Dec. 14 (Art. 7), 1915.

Adrianus G. D. Gerritsen Jr.

Ed Gerritsen



Adrianus Gerrit Dirk Gerritsen Jr, storekeeper, church leader, school teacher, community activist, and artist. Image courtesy of the author.

Experiences of Dutch families emigrating from the Netherlands to the United States have been well documented. Not all of these families found what they expected in the new land and some of these returned to the Netherlands. Fewer still were immigrants to the United States a second time. The extended Adrian Gerritsen family, from Amsterdam, was in this last, small category.

Adrian was the second child of nine born to Adrianus Gerrit Dirk Gerritsen, a tailor, and Diederika Jonsje, who were married on 2 April 1859. The father operated a shop next to the Haystack Brewery, purchased in 1864 by Gerard Heineken and renamed Heineken Breweries in 1873. Sixteen months after their marriage, Hendrick, named after his maternal grandfather, was born. And on February 1862 a second son was born and named after his father (called Adrian after immigration to the United States, he was one of the nine children, three of whom died in infancy.

Little is known about Adrian's early years, but growing up in mid-nineteenth century, when the bustling city of Amsterdam must have been exciting. He probably helped in his father's tailor shop

and received the typical education at the time. Given his interests in writing and art later in life, he probably demonstrated some ability in these areas during his schooling.

In 1886, at the age of 24, Adrian married Johanna Werner, the daughter of Dominee Kaspar Werner and wife Johanna. Werner was a pastor of the Amsterdam Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church, the national church). Adrian and his family were members of the Christelijke Gerformeerde Kerk (Christian Reformed Church), which had seceded from the national church in 1834. In spite of the potential for friction from the religious differences, Adrian and



The Gerritsen family in 1899. Image courtesy of the author.

Ed (Adrian G. D.) Gerritsen IV was an engineer in New Jersey. Since retiring, he and his wife moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he donates many hours volunteering in the Heritage Hall Archives.

his parents-in-law got along well.

On 2 March 1887 their first child, Johanna, named after her maternal grandmother, was born to Adrian and Johanna Werner. Five years later a second daughter, Theodora, was born. The only evidence of Adrian's occupation as an adult is that when the family emigrated in 1893 he listed his occupation on the ship's manifest as "merchant."

In 1893 Kaspar Werner received a call from the Turner Street Holland Reformed Church (now the Netherlands Reformed Church) of Grand Rapids,¹ Michigan, to "come over and minister to our flock."² Deciding to leave for a foreign land must have been difficult, but he accepted the call. Later evidence suggests that Johanna Werner may have been reluctant to leave her family. Perhaps this is the reason why several of their adult children, including Johanna and Adrian and family, agreed to emigrate. Rev. Werner, his wife and two sons, Johan, 19, and David, 15, left from Rotterdam on SS *Spaarndam* on 24 July 1893. Adrian, his pregnant wife, Johanna, and two daughters followed on 27 November on SS *Maasdam*. Johanna's sister, Catharina, 27, traveled with the Gerritsens. No account of the crossing was left, but sailings that late in the year were often stormy experiences.

The Werners landed in Hoboken, New Jersey, in early August 1893 and made their way to Grand Rapids, where they were welcomed by their new congregation and moved into the parsonage at 336 Turner (now 1044 Turner Avenue NW). There they began the task of acclimating themselves to a culture that was vastly different from the one they had left, even though they were living in a community made up of immigrants whose language and religious faith was the same as theirs.

The Gerritsens arrived in Hoboken in early December 1893, and after making their way to Grand Rapids



One of Gerritsen's earliest works was this portrait of his father. Image courtesy of the author.

lived on the south side of West Leonard Street, just over a block west of the Grand River. Because of their church association in the Netherlands they became members of the Coldbrook Christian Reformed Church, located on Ionia, between Barnett and Coldbrook, about five blocks from where they lived.³ Adrian and his brother-in-law, Kaspar T. J. Werner, who had arrived in July 1893, opened a grocery store on West Leonard Street about a block east of the river, about two blocks from the Coldbrook church.

On 27 April 1894 Johanna gave birth to their third child, a boy who was named Adrianus Gerrit Dirk III. Because of his birth, Adrian III was the only US citizen in the Werner and Gerritsen families.

Less than a year after arriving, the elder Adrian came to conclude that his talents should be focused in direction other than storekeeping. He applied to enroll in the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church,⁴ which had just moved into its own building at the corner of Madison Avenue and Franklin Street (then called Fifth Avenue). The minutes of the school's Board of Trustees meeting of 5 September report that he, at age 32, along with eight others wished to take the entrance examination and were not

asking for financial assistance while students. The minutes go on to report that all except one were admitted and that Gerritsen and [Jan Bartels] Jonkman were exempted from the study of Latin and Greek, an exception made for older students, whom it was thought were not as able to learn other languages as younger students.⁵

After about a year in America, Rev. Werner became sick and died. Johanna Werner, never comfortable with having left the Netherlands, found herself a widow in a strange land. She prevailed on her family to return to the Netherlands. This must have been a great disappointment to Adrian Gerritsen, who was immersed in his studies. Nevertheless, being a dutiful son-in-law, he and his family returned to the Netherlands with the Werners in 1897.

Adrian did not resume his theological studies in the Netherlands, as two more daughters were added to the family, Jacoba in March 1898 and Gerharda in August 1899. Because of his piety and theological training in America, he became very active in church activities, serving as *voorlezer* (precentor) in the Buiten-Amstel church in Amsterdam, as well as elder in the church at Breukelen for four years. He also began a career in journalism and worked for Abraham Kuyper's publication *De Standaard* until 1905. During this time he was appointed to a government commission to study the Boer War, which had broken out between the Dutch settlers in South Africa and the British. He served as secretary to that commission and had a personal relationship with Paul Kruger, the president of the Transvaal, the Dutch State in South Africa.

Growing up and again living in a culture rich in the art of painting, in a city with museums containing the works of many master artists, and apparently possessing some talent for

drawing, Adrian began to cultivate an interest in drawing and painting. It is not known when in his life he began to paint, since he did not date his paintings. But the portrait that he painted of his father dates to a time before the Gerritsens returned to the United States in 1905.

Whether because of good memories of America from their time there nine years earlier, or to provide a better life for their children, or for some other reason, Adrian and Johanna and their five children boarded the SS *Ryndam* on 12 August 1905, for a 10-day voyage to America. The manifest of that voyage notes that they were joining a relative, Mr. J. A. Werner of 100 Randolph Avenue, New Jersey. Adrian also reported that he brought along \$225.

The family again docked in Hoboken, traveled to Paterson, New Jersey, and obtained lodging on Water Street, an area of the city populated by many Dutch immigrants as well as Orthodox Jews. Adrian III, who was nine years old when they arrived in Paterson, told the story of how on Saturday mornings he would go next door to their Jewish neighbor and light their gas stove, since it was against their Jewish law to perform this act, considered to be work, on the Sabbath. The elder Adrian enjoyed having theological discussions with their Jewish neighbors, even though their theological views differed.

The family's stay on Water Street was relatively brief. Adrian decided to once again go into the retail business. He rented a house on the corner of Westervelt Avenue and North Eighth Street, in the Ashley Heights section of Hawthorne, a town a few blocks from Prospect Park, a Dutch enclave then, as it would continue to be for the next fifty years. On the first floor was an empty store in which Adrian opened a grocery and dry goods shop. The family's horse and carriage were housed a few blocks away on North Ninth

Street; one of the younger Adrian's tasks was to go there and feed the horse and harness it when needed.

In 1907, because others saw talents in the elder Adrian beyond storekeeping, he was asked and agreed to teach the lower grades in the Amity Street Christian

School. The school was begun with the formation of the Holland Reformed School Society in 1892. Three men had taught classes in "De Hollandsche School" held in both the First and Second Christian Reformed Churches in Paterson. It had taken almost two years to raise the \$1200 needed to build a school, but on 8 November 1893 the Amity Street Christian School was dedicated. Another Christian school had begun in 1899 in the basement of the Fourth Christian Reformed Church, a few miles away in the Riverside section of Paterson. In 1901 this school dedicated a building on Third Avenue and became known as the Riverside Christian School. In 1908 because of overcrowded classrooms, the Amity Street students, waving flags, marched triumphantly to their new building on North Fourth Street several blocks away. From 1907 to 1919, when he died, Adrian taught in all three buildings and was remembered by his students for the beautiful Dutch scenes he drew on the blackboard, as well as the fact that he expected much from them in their studies.⁶

In addition to teaching in the



Gerritsen's career as a school teacher took him to three early Christian schools in Paterson, including the Riverside Christian School. Image courtesy of the author.

schools, Adrian contributed to the Christian Reformed Church and larger community in the Paterson area. He served as elder in the Second Christian Reformed Church in Prospect Park, teaching catechism and visiting the sick; he was also in demand in local Christian Reformed Churches to read sermons when pastors were sick or unavailable to preach. Some even said he "editorialized" at times, adding his own words to the prepared sermon he was reading. In addition to teaching, he wrote numerous articles on Christian education. In 1918 he was asked to write a paper in support of Christian education, which resulted in a booklet titled "Christian Instruction." This in many ways echoes views still expressed today. In his concluding thoughts he makes a plea for Christian higher education:

Therefore let us pray and work for an institution of more extended instruction where God's word will be the only soil and our reformed faith the only root from which springs up a knowledge which can be of blessing to us in our home, our church and to our people.⁷

Adrian Gerritsen was also editor of the Dutch newspaper *De Oostersche Kerkbode*, often promoting the causes of Christian education and Christian mercy. When in 1911 the need for a home for the “feeble minded” was acknowledged, the combined deacons of the area Christian Reformed and Reformed Churches worked to organize such an institution. Adrian was appointed to the first board of directors and served as its secretary. Ten acres of farmland was purchased in Wyckoff, New Jersey, about five miles from Paterson, for \$4500. The existing building was renovated and the first patient was admitted to the Christian Sanatorium on 20 August 1917, officially incorporated as the Christian Insane Asylum Association. Today it is known as the Christian Health Care Center, providing services and care far beyond what its founders could have imagined.

In spite of all the time spent in these activities, Adrian found time to develop his passion for painting. The *Paterson Evening News* in a 1917 feature article titled, “A Visit to An Artist,” concluded by noting, “Few people perhaps know that in this city there lies hidden, as it were, an artist whose work must be encouraged and appreciated in order that our idea of the beautiful and our sense of beauty may be richly developed.” He enjoyed painting at his easel on the porch of the family home at 250 Haledon Avenue in Prospect Park, purchased sometime around 1916. Visiting friends often admired his work and asked to buy one of his paintings. His response usually was, “Oh, just give me a box of cigars.” He especially enjoyed copying works painted by some of the nineteenth-century Dutch artists such as “Women Digging Potatoes” by Philip L. J. F. Sadée, and “Awaiting The Fisherman’s Return,” by Jozef Israëls, along with the portrait he painted of his father, now owned



One of Gerritsen's copies from the work of nineteenth-century Dutch artist Jozef Israëls, “Awaiting the Fisherman’s Return.” Image courtesy of the author.



An original by Gerritsen, of Water Street, where the family briefly lived. Image courtesy of the author.

Landscape by Gerritsen.
Image courtesy of the author.



A copy of Sadee's "Women Digging Potatoes." Image courtesy of the author.



Landscape by Gerritsen. Image courtesy of the author.





In 1908 the new North Fourth Street Christian School opened, with Gerritsen as one of the teachers. Image courtesy of the author.

by the author. Many others are owned by various family members and still others have found their way into other private hands. About thirty years ago

a great granddaughter, while a student at Calvin College, met a fellow student who told her that his parents living in California had one of his paintings hanging on their living room wall.

During 1918 flu pandemic, which lasted until 1920 and claimed more than fifty million

lives worldwide, Adrian developed a kidney infection, which was complicated by the effects of the flu. Adrian realized that there was a strong pos-

sibility that he would not survive and on February 1919, though weakened by the effects of his disease, he wrote his last will and testament in Dutch in a composition book. Years later his son had it translated into English. The translation, consisting of eighteen single-spaced typewritten pages, is a testament to his faith and the hopes for his children and their heirs.

On 25 April 1919 Adrianus G. D. Gerritsen Jr. passed away, surrounded by his loving wife and children; he was 57, one might say young for a man of such talent and promise. William Botbyl, in an “In Memoriam” article published in both the *Banner* and *De Wachter* on 8 May 1919 concluded by quoting Psalm 3:3, “Mark the perfect man and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.” ❧

Endnotes

1. Since then Turner Street has been renamed Turner Avenue. The congregation was known by a series of names, including “Netherlands Reformed Church of Grand Rapids” in 1876. It was independent for forty years, after which it joined with the denomination that included the other Netherlands Reformed Church in Grand Rapids.

2. In the Reformed tradition, the

biblical language of Acts 16:9, when St. Paul had a vision of being called to Macedonia, was used when issuing a call to a pastor.

3. The congregation is now the Beckwith Hills Christian Reformed Church.

4. The school later becomes Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary.

5. The minute books are located

in collection C1, boxes 1 and 2, the Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

6. Reported to the author by former students at the North Fourth Street Christian School Labor Day Picnic, 1960.

7. A. G. D. Gerritsen, “Christian Instruction” (Paterson, NJ: Eastern Schoolboards, 1918), P. Stam Jr, translator, 61.

“When I Was a Kid”

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

Meindert De Jong, with Judith Hartzell¹

FOREWORD

Just a word before we tell our story. If I'm known to anyone at all, it's as a writer of children's books. I'm often asked the question about this book or that, “What really happened?” Since realism is what I love to read and write, there is a great deal in my books which did really happen—to me as a boy or man.



Meindert and his wife Gwen Zandstra (née Jonkman). The two had been friends since high school and were married about eighteen months before he died. They celebrated their marriage date every month. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

My two favorite books, *Shadrach* and *Journey from Peppermint Street* are based on real life, as are all the books set in the Netherlands.

The animal and farm books, like *Along Came a Dog* and *Hurry Home Candy*, are derived from my experiences working with my father, mother and brother Neil on a little farm outside Grand Rapids, Michigan, during

the Depression. But those experiences are outside the young life scope of this book.

House of Sixty Fathers, set in China during World War II, was inspired by my war experience. I was with the Chinese-American wing of the US 14th Air Force. All sixty of us men who shared a barracks temporarily adopted a young Chinese boy who had been separated from his family in circumstances much like those I described in that book.

Birth—the Family

Everybody in our village [Wierum, Friesland] remembered the year of my birth. It was the year of our flood, 1906. On 12 March, furious rain lashed our village all day, but it wasn't until deep night that a seaquake turned the North Sea into another attacker. Great sea waves crashed upon the dike, again and again, with what seemed evil intent. Like other coastal villagers in the Netherlands, we trusted the dike, our man-built hill of earth, to hold back the angry sea.

The family was awakened by the relentless tolling of the church bell. At night the ringing bell meant only one thing: danger.

Father leaped from his closet bed,² hastily threw on some clothes, and ran into the narrow streets to find out the trouble.

“A flood! A flood!” the worried villagers were calling.

Meindert De Jong was an award-winning author (the first American to win the Hans Christian Andersen Medal) of twenty-seven children's books. Judith Hartzell is a professional writer now living in Greenville, South Carolina, who became a friend and co-writer with De Jong after he retired.

He hurried home and helped Mother bundle the eight days old baby—me—in warm clothes. Then he made a cradle in the crook of his elbow and gently placed me there. My big brothers Dave, almost 5, and Rem, 3, he carried on his back and under one arm. Mother followed close behind, struggling to stay on her feet in her sodden wet long skirts. So he led our way through the swirling black water to safety in somebody's high-up attic.

The seaquake had caused a tidal wave which washed over our dike to flood the village. Six or seven houses built into the dike were carried away into the canal, and several people died.

My father became an important person in our village—maybe the most important person. From his house-building business he donated sand and gravel which volunteers bagged and stuffed into the breach which the great waves had made on the seaside of the dike. It worked. The village was saved, and so were we.

If the dike had broken, it would have been different. Our village lay on land lower than the sea, and only the dike kept the sea, which roared above our heads, in the boundary set for it. The seaquake wave washed over the dike and flooded the village a few feet deep; a complete break in the dike would have washed us all away. Never again could anybody build his house into the dike: after our flood it was outlawed nationwide.

Grandmother—Earliest Memories

My earliest memory is of my Little Beppe, pronounced “bep-pa.” This word means grandmother in Frisian, the language we spoke at home. Little Beppe was quite fat, but her social rank was decid-

edly less than Father's mother, “Big Beppe,” who was a sort of queen dowager in our village.³ That's why the whole family called Big Beppe big and Little Beppe little.

Very vaguely I remember a generous presence doling out sweetmeats to beloved grandsons. But what is clear in my mind is Little Beppe's funeral, shortly before I turned three. Over one hundred people formed the long single file funeral procession, headed by our pastor in a high hat and formal black clothing. Then came the black-painted oak coffin carrying her body. Because of her size, it took eight strong men to handle the coffin.

Next came the men who knew and loved Beppe, all dressed in black. Behind them marched the women and children, led by the leader of the women's parade. The woman who held this position was greatly respected. Before her death, Little Beppe herself had been the leader. It has always mystified me how she managed to land that honor, for she had been, by the family's reports, an extremely quiet and unassuming person.

My own mother, her daughter, marched in a place of honor along with her three sisters, near the front of the women's parade, wearing the

customary long, black veil which covered her from head to toe. Only her nose showed and her black-gloved hands, which held the veil shut.

What I remember is tugging on my mother's veil time after time. I had to go to the bathroom, and I kept telling her so. But she was powerless to help. The parade had to go on sedately winding up Corpse Street⁴ on its way to the burial ground around the high ancient old church where all our dead were buried.

Again and again I tugged on her veil, and was told in a whisper to behave myself. In desperation, rather than shame the family, I finally broke away from the procession and pounded on the door of a stranger's house. A kind lady answered the door and invited me in to relieve myself.

That dire incident is about all I remember about my grandmother, Little Beppe.

When Queen Wilhelmina gave birth to a daughter, Juliana, on 30 April 1909, it was a big event for us Dutch. Since I was the baby of the family, Father chose me for an honor. He was the town bell ringer, so with me hoisted onto his shoulders he climbed the many ladders through all the lofts until we came to the highest loft of the ancient church's tower. From that loft I helped hang out a



Wierum of De Jong's youth, hard behind the dike that held back the Wadden Sea. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

flag in the royal baby's honor; then we descended to ring the joyous bell hour by joyous hour. This was the spring when I was just past three.

Another memory dates from 1910, when I was four. The town was again excited over a great event: the predicted return of Halley's Comet, which people viewed in 1910 and again, more recently, in 1986. I was too short and small, so Father held me up to see the coming comet. But I don't remember it at all. It was far too exciting to be up on the dike with all the dark-dressed people of Wierum, watching the starry night skies over the black North Sea.

These scenes are accompanied in my mind by lullabies sung in Frisian by my mother. Especially I remember her crooning to me:

*Hossah Bossah Boosah,
More and more and more.
Yester Night was such nice weather,
But now the wind does roar!*

My Brother Rem

My boon companion when I was young was my brother Rem, christened "Remmeren" in honor of Father and Father's father (who had died before I was born.)⁵ Freerk was a good friend too, living nearby over on Peppermint Street.⁶ But Rem was far and away the most fun of anybody. He was a character as a boy and as a man strong, fearless, freckled, red-haired and red-cheeked, and always into something.

When I was very young Father made a little wooden wheelbarrow for me, which Rem used to like to wheel down the streets. He became my baby-sitter but without a baby-sitter's temperament. For about ten minutes he would wheel me, until that became too tame; then he'd open the door of a stranger's house and shove me in. Once he shoved me under a stranger's kitchen table and ran off, leaving me there in my wheelbarrow, under the

tablecloth.

He meant no harm by it. He was always good-hearted, but he loved mischief more than anything.

Also Rem was very emotional and he cried easily. He had a life-long problem with schoolwork, at least until he was old enough to quit school. Just seeing a schoolhouse would make him burst out crying.

Only once did Rem have a teacher who understood him. This man loved natural science and soon found out that nobody knew flowers or sea life like Rem. Anything that ran, swam or scuttled, anything that sprouted, and especially anything that bloomed was Rem's field of study and expertise.

Together they fished and dug for slugs, grubs, and worms. And together, when the tide was out, they explored all the sea life on the emptied sea bottom. In early spring every year Rem would bring home armloads of wild flowers for Mother. Before anybody else even knew they were blooming, her vases and pitchers would burst with blossoms. Rem taught the schoolmaster all about daisies, buttercups, dog flowers, and cornflowers. He was a master of the secrets of the outdoors.

With this schoolmaster as his friend, Rem began to excel at reading, writing, and math. He even began to memorize the Bible texts we had to learn for recitation every Monday morning in school. Unfortunately the teacher didn't last long, and the next one didn't understand Rem, who began to come to school late or not at all. And when he was there, he would tend to mischief more than lessons, so he was often made to stand in the corner. About that time Father began discussing the possibility of moving to South Africa. Rem decided that was for him—he'd become a big game hunter, so school was not necessary. After that, he fell to the bottom of the class.

On Saturday afternoons, Rem's task was to polish the family's leather shoes, in preparation for church the next day. This chore he did in the attic, and while he did it he tried to memorize his Bible verse for Monday morning's recitation. Always this work was accompanied by loud crying as Rem anticipated his up-coming failure on Monday morning.

Once the Bible text was from Jonah 1:2, shortened especially for Rem: "Arise, go to Nineveh, and cry against it."

For an hour the family heard this little verse over and over, coming down from the attic accompanied by loud cries of distress. Everybody in the house had memorized the verse by this time. At last Rem made the inevitable mistake and Mother shouted the correct words up to him.

Poor Rem wailed on, giving out the command: "Arise, go to Nineveh, and cry against it."

When at last he descended with his polished shoes for Mother's inspection, she asked for the verse once more before he could put on his red stocking cap and head outdoors. And then, try as hard as he could, he couldn't get beyond, "Arise, go to Nineveh . . ."

Once more he noisily ascended the attic steps. It was all useless anyway—by Monday morning the text was forgotten.

Dave didn't figure much in my young life. He was too old for one thing, and too quiet and scholarly and indoors-loving for another. So Rem and I used to leave him to his books and maps—he was a super brain at geography—and we went roaming.

Some other Important Characters and Some Sickness

Grandfather

Pake David ("pa ka," the Frisian word for grandfather) was a tall, blond,

blue-eyed farmer with a penchant for spoiling his grandchildren when they were very young, until he couldn't handle them anymore. When a boy got so old that he back-talked Pake, that one was banished, and the next youngest inherited his favor.

Rem and I lived at Grandfather's as much as we could. It was wonderful at his house. Mom always took her babies to her parents' quiet house for their naps, so from earliest days we really had two homes.

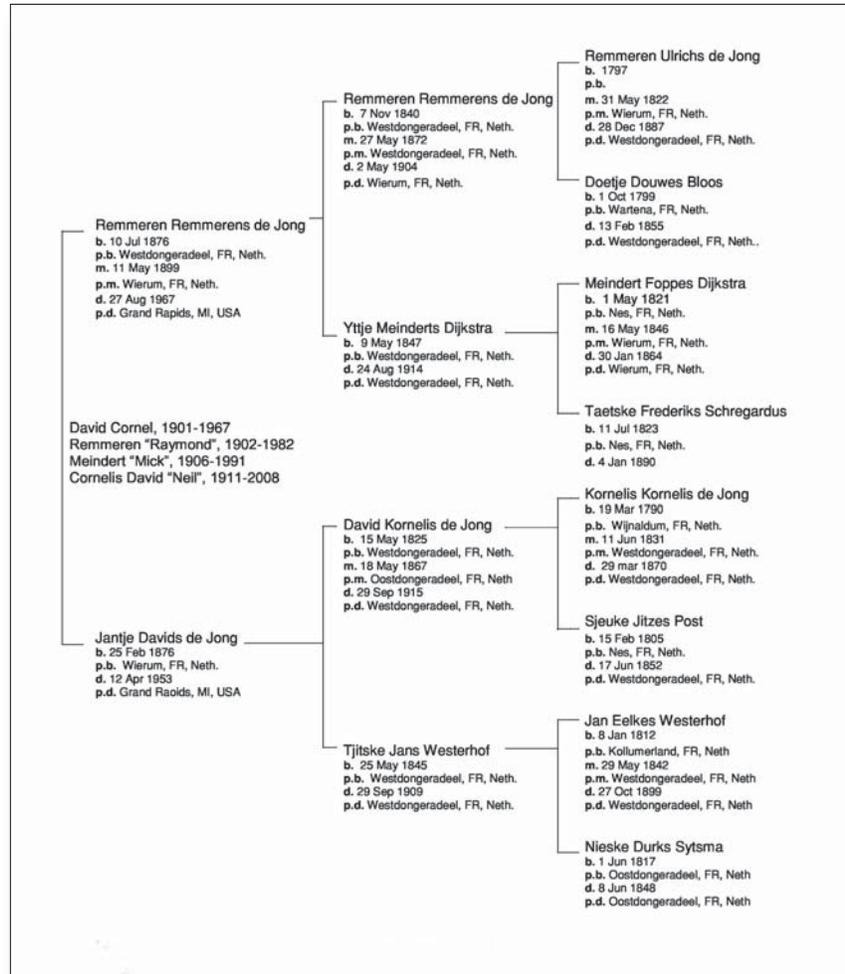
This we relished, especially in herring season. My grandparents ate at different times than my parents. So when the delicious herring were in season, I would go to Grandfather's first for herring and then tear home for some more.

"They're so fresh they're still jumping high in the pan," Mother would say as she fried them. Even though full of Grandfather's herring, I would manage to cram down another meal.

Pake lived in a very old brick building, attached to other buildings in a cluster around the graveyard mound, where lay the town's dead. In the center of the mound, up high where it was safe from the sea, stood the ancient church with its twelfth-century tower.

It was in Pake David's quiet house, sitting close next to him at his table that I learned to read before I started school. He sat in his big reed chair, and I in a small chair built up with pillows, and together we peered at the big family Bible, lying open before us. He started me off at Genesis, first explaining how the different letters sounded in Dutch.

And then, for more than a year, we sat together in the evenings reading straight through to Revelation, skipping some parts which he thought were too outspokenly sensual (and which, of course, I always looked up for myself afterwards). He wisely skipped parts of Leviticus, with its endless legalisms, and the never ending



Four generations of the De Jong family tree. Grandmother Ytje Meinderts Dijkstra was "Big Beppe" and Grandmother Tjitske Jans Westerhof was "Little Beppe."

census-taking of Numbers.

Later I decided that my love of words came from this reading time with Grandfather. Here was an old, important man treating me, a small child, as if I, too, were important and had a mind. With him I came to love the sound of the Bible words and the heroics of the Old Testament Bible stories. I would remember and sing to myself the sound of those Bible words. Like any child I loved the repetition of words and phrases and the inversion of great sentences which by reversing and repeating themselves hammered themselves into the soul like music.

Grandfather and I were companions on his garden plot too, where I helped him plant beans. He taught me how

by making a game of it for me. Thus: "Three white beans to a hole, like three little white pigs, one in front of the other two, for he's the captain bean-pig."

I would chant a little sing-song of the beans while I worked, "Up they come. And up they come. Eyes down, backs up, so they'll push up through the soil and sprout." Grandfather always seemed to enjoy my little bean songs.

Pneumonia

Before antibiotics were discovered, the coming of pneumonia to a family was serious. One winter thirty people died of it in our little village of one thousand souls. It was an epidemic.

This was the only time death came near me when I was young. Before I



The De Jong brothers in Grand Rapids, from left to right: Neil, Meindert, Ray, and David. Meindert and David were authors by profession; Neil also began writing but much later in life than his brothers. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

was four, I was sick three times with pneumonia in the space of three years. Three times I was on the brink of death. During the last siege the whole town prayed for me, and some townspeople sprinkled sand on the street under my windows, to mute the sound of passers-by.

My family's concern, especially my mother's, was great. There was nothing they could do for my healing but pray. There was no penicillin. All that the doctor knew for them to do was bathe my chest with brandy when the fever got very high: the alcohol in the brandy would cool my body. When the fever had gone on long enough in me to burn out the pneumonia germs, I would get well, the doctor said, if I didn't die first.

When I was delirious with fever one time, I looked at my little toy horse, standing on his shelf at the foot of my closet bed. It seemed to me he was many wild, vicious horses, alive and circling me, rearing and pawing—wanting to hurt me.

I cried out in my terror and Mother

came running. At once she understood the trouble—she was sick herself one winter with pneumonia and in her delirium had been terrified by a circle of skulls constantly revolving around her pillow. Now she reached into the high bed, snatched the little black horse, hid him behind her back, kissed me, and whispered that I'd get better.

Once Dave and Rem came home from school while I was delirious, they stopped by my bed to see how I was, and I said, "Please pick up those dimes on the floor for me."

Rem and Dave looked at the bare floor, gazed at me in bewilderment, and said, "Kid, there aren't any dimes anywhere."

But Mother heard and hurried over, scooped up the dimes which weren't there, and pressed them into my hot hand. She understood.

In my times of fever-suffering, Mother hit on a plan to help. There weren't any dolls in our house of only boys, but she felt I needed something to hold onto, something which would be-like holding onto life itself. She

gave me the little case which held her perfume bottle, the beautiful bottle with its gold throat and crown which held her expensive perfume. The little case was like a mummy case: it had the shape of a human form with the arms pressed close. So I held onto my mummy doll, and it got me through all the fever attacks.

Great-Aunt Doetsje

A person almost as important as Grandfather in my young life was Great-Aunt Doetsje, Grandfather's sister, who came to live with him as his housekeeper after Grandmother died.

Great-Aunt, whom I called *Muoike* ("moo oi kah," Frisian for aunt) had been married to a deaf and dumb man, Uncle Tsjippe. They had lived in an ancient monastery, built by the Gray Monks centuries before. This was at Sjoerda in the eastern polders;⁸ lands which once lay below the sea but had been reclaimed for man's use by the building of dikes to hold the sea back.

Muoike's monastery was now a big, sprawling farmhouse with some strange features left from its days as a monastery. In the big living room was a well, and in the well lived a frog. Lonely Muoike, with a deaf-mute husband who worked from 4 a.m. until dark, kept it as a pet.

Uncle Tsjippe was a fearsome person to small me when I knew him, he not only being huge, but deaf and dumb to boot. He really was gentle, and once, when I visited them and got homesick and wanted to come back home early, he carried me all the long seven miles home on his shoulders.

A short time after Grandmother's death, Uncle Tsjippe died and left my aunt a widow.

I guess I was the cause of Muoike's coming to Wierum, which turned out to be a blessing for her and all of us kids. One of my cousins, the daughter of Mother's oldest sister, was appointed to care for Grandfather. But she was

a young girl, about twelve, and cared far more about playing than keeping house.

I then was already in the habit of hanging out at Grandfather's. One day I went over there and was shocked to find the living room full of young girls, all my cousin's friends, wearing pieces of Grandfather's clothing, dancing around in them and behaving in a hilarious way. They treated me rudely and I began to cry, whereupon they all turned on me and chased me out of the house, calling me, "Crybaby."

I ran home, scared, and when Mother found out what happened, she went on the warpath, and almost immediately arranged for Muoike to come and care for Grandfather. My cousin and her girlfriends were fired.

Muoike was a tiny wren of a woman, short and slight—less than five feet tall. Her greatest asset was her eagerness to listen to me. At least that's the way it seemed to me then. She had the great wisdom to treat a child as if he were fully a human person with interests and talk as important as that of any adult—as it is to the child.

She became my confidante, even more than Mother, who was busier, having a household with three boys and a husband to feed and care and knit for.

Aunt was very patient and indulgent with Rem and me. The only thing I can remember ever being scolded for was slamming into the living room of Pake and Aunt so hard that the living room door crashed against the wall and made the two startled old people jump out of their chairs.

The living room was at the end of (to me) a very long hall. Halfway down that hall was a little room that held Pake's books. It was unused and very musty smelling. What scared me was that it had a sort of saloon-type swing door, with rectangles of night blackness above and below it. Its only window faced on the cemetery which

surrounded the tower and church. With the smell of the room in my nostrils, and the scare of the black cemetery-darkness in my heart, there was only one thing to do: gallop as hard as I could toward the tiny rims of light around the living room door—the only light anywhere—then burst into the room and its blessed, safe light.

Of course, I thought of myself as a big boy and could not admit how scared I was of the little room's musty graveyard darkness, so there was nothing to do but meekly accept their scolding. I couldn't even promise never to do it again. Any time I arrived at the old people's home after dark there was absolutely—for me—no other way to get into the living room but at terrified speed past the gloom under and above that door.

Shadrach

When I was almost recovered from the last attack of pneumonia (this was just before I started school), Pake David came up with the idea of giving me a little rabbit of my own. He ordered it from a traveling peddler, Maartens, who delivered orders with his horse and wagon. Most of the peddlers had just dog-carts, but Maartens sold big things like samovars and drums of petroleum, so he owned a horse.

People had to always order things a week ahead. So Pake put in his order with Maartens for a little rabbit. In a week, if possible. Black, if possible.

That waiting week was an eternity to me. I still remember the day Maartens was to come, a rainy Saturday. I stayed with Grandfather in the barn, while he worked, and every three minutes I asked him, "What time is it?"

He carried a watch in his pocket which he wound once a day with a key kept on a chain around his neck. Hardly anybody in town owned a watch. Many people couldn't even tell time.

Pake bore with my impatience that long Saturday morning as best he could. He even came up with a diversion which, at any less anxious time, would have been wonderful. He uncovered, deep inside his barn, a little boarded-up room which had once been his own schoolroom when he was a little boy. He showed me the desks where he had sat, and even where Mother had sat as a schoolgirl. The amazement of it was that all this had gone on before I was ever born. School is the biggest thing in the life of a five year old beginner. It was something to think that my grandfather had been able to buy his own schoolroom and build his own barn around it.

But with my rabbit about to come, even this couldn't divert me this great day. Pake finally sent me home for a herring lunch at Mother's. Everything was ready for my rabbit and had been for days. Father had built a hutch of wooden slats for him, with a crib for his food.

Beside the hutch I had experimented with names for him. Maybe "Satan." He was black. Oh, but my little rabbit wouldn't be evil.

I tried "Shoe Polish," but it sounded sticky. Suddenly the word "Shadrach" came to me. That was it! It fit! In the Bible, Shadrach had been rescued from a fiery furnace. He certainly must have been black after that.

Now that I'd picked the only possible right name, it began to sing itself in me, as if from the Bible: "Shadrach, Shadrach, little black rabbit—fairest of ten thousand to my soul."

Besides naming him, one day during that waiting week I'd gone off for my little black rabbit's food—halfway to the next village I'd gone alone to collect clover.

But Mother had gotten worried at my being gone and had sent out Rem. By the time Rem found me I had gathered three burlap bags of red clover for one little rabbit—it seemed the least

I could do and almost not enough for my little still-to-come rabbit. In the deep clover, awesome buzzing, droning bees were all about me, even landing on the red clover blossoms as I plucked them and stuffed them in my bags. Somehow my love conquered fear, even of stinging bees.

Rem found me as I was filling my third bag. But that seemed fortunate, for Rem was big and strong, and easily carried two whole bags of clover, one on each shoulder, while I could shoulder only one. There were the three bags of clover on their way home to prove I was going to have my little black Shadrach. With my bag on my shoulder, I proudly swaggered on behind big strong Rem.

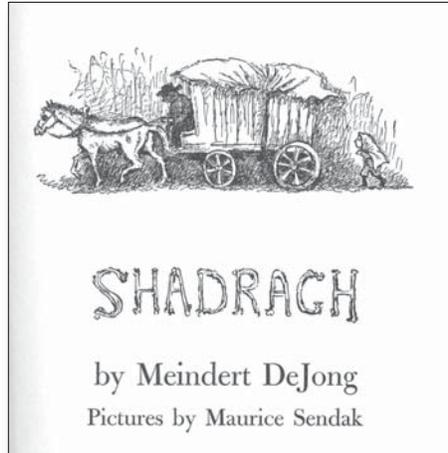
Then Rem announced that red clover wasn't good for rabbits. It made them bloat, he said, and my rabbit might explode. Rem was supposed to know about such things. But when he saw my face, we took all three bags home anyway.

Finally, on that Saturday, everything was ready: the crib, the name, and proper food—grass, dandelions and oats. And then at endless last Maartens came—but in the rain. Mother wouldn't let me go alone to meet him. She came too. And there in a little black box was my Shadrach. There he was, black like Grandfather had ordered, even blacker than the box. He was a total wonder to me, soft and warm and alive—all alive, and all mine!

But then sadly as the weeks went by Shadrach didn't fatten up, even though I fed him diligently. He got so skinny that he could even escape through the slats of his hutch into the barn.

One Sunday I was in the barn, trying to find him. He had escaped again. And Mother and Father and Dave and Rem were having tea with Pake and Muoike in the house.

In the murky darkness of the closed barn I saw something behind a post I



From the title page of De Jong's autobiographical story.

thought was my rabbit. I crept up on it, grabbed it by the tail—but it wasn't Shadrach. It was a rat! Too petrified to let go of it, I still just hung onto the beast and raced out of the barn into the house. The women both screamed as my grandfather jumped up, grabbed it away from me, raced outside and got rid of it.

When he came back, Grandfather said that several days earlier he had put rat poison in the rat's hole. They figured the creature must already have been half dead—that's why he hadn't bitten me.

Then, besides Grandpa, how I loved my dad with all my grateful little being. Even though it was Sunday, the day of rest, he went right to work and put cross-pieces across the bars of the hutch so it was impossible for Shadrach ever to escape again.

And with nothing else to do, he had to stay in the hutch and eat.

The Wider Community: Beginning of Adventure

Rem and the Corn Caper

When we knew him, Grandfather was a farmer. He had once been a fisherman on the North Sea and then a canal boat operator, but he had now settled into farming. "Scratch a Dutch-

man and you'll find a gardener and a theologian" was the saying in those days, and Pake was both.

Anything that grew attracted his attention. Mostly his planting was in fields outside the village, but once only he was a grower of corn in his back yard.

It happened like this: amongst the chicken feed were kernels of field corn. We didn't call it "corn" it was such an unknown grain to us we called it "stony wheat." That was all my grandfather had ever seen of that particular food. There wasn't any corn in Friesland; in our northern province by the sea the climate wasn't hot and sunny enough. But I found a space between the cemetery fence and the windows of the kitchen which was sheltered, and where the sun shone unhindered. And there, in childish ignorance I planted a single row of chicken-feed corn kernels. They grew, and Pake was watching the new plants with much interest.

Then one day Rem persuaded me to help him with one of his projects.

"You hold onto the tops of the plants," he said, "to steady them, while I chop them down."

Rem didn't know of Pake's interest in the plants. He didn't even know Pake was aware of the plants, which Rem considered to be weeds—but food good enough for some wild animals he was befriending in his rambles about the countryside.

It didn't feel right to me—they were my little plants after all—but I agreed to help Rem. He was more than three years my senior, and his authority was hard to resist.

I held the tasseled tops and watched Rem swing his hatchet at the tender green plants, near their base. When we had finished, a row of cut-off shoots was all that was left of our proud cornstalks.

Never have I seen anyone so angry as was Pake David that day when he came home. Thank goodness he blamed Rem for it, not me. Rem was already, at

age eight, working up a reputation for mischief. That prank cost him Grandfather's favor, and he was banished.

David had long since been kicked out of Grandfather's house. His habitual retreat was at Big Beppe's. But Rem wasn't welcome there either, being too boisterous for the company of a rich lady and her four seamstress daughters. When Rem lost his welcome at Grandfather's, he took to the fields and countryside, where he really belonged anyway. He was, life-long, a nature's boy.

Going to School

I was going on four when Grandfather started my reading lessons, and just five when I started school on 1 April 1911, able to read the Dutch language then but not write. We never had to study spelling in school; unlike English or Frisian, Dutch words spell themselves. Every letter is pronounced in one clear way, and there are no silent letters. I still remember my first astonishment that capital letters, while they differed from small letters in appearance, still sounded like them.

Our school was the private Christian school. All the parents who didn't go to our church, and who therefore didn't pay tuition for their children at our school, sent them to the public school, called the old school. The two groups of children were about equal in number, and between them was a fierce rivalry which often expressed itself in street fights. In Wierum, Rem learned to be a champion fighter. He would whisk off his wooden shoes and set about to clunk public school boys over their heads with them. He became a respected and feared opponent, so that Dave and I, who preferred not to fight, could relax in the knowledge that Rem would defend our persons and our sacred honor.

School wasn't made pleasant for us little kids then. We worked at the business of learning. Except for

a week's vacation at Christmas and another in the summer, at the end of August, to celebrate the Queen's birthday, school was year-round. We studied six days a week too, except for Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. And there were no recesses or gym classes or playgrounds.

We had one exception to this hard work, though. For the little kids on their first day of school came "The shaking of the honey-cake tree." The teacher would say, "Today is April first, the day the honey-cake tree usually bears its fruit. I wonder whether the crop is any good this year."

At a certain time there would be a big rumpus in the school attic (some big kid was up there), and the teacher would say, "Something's shaking the honey-cake tree!"

Then down from the attic loft would come rattling lots of cakes. The little pupils would run and grab them and carry them home, where Mother or Grandmother would tie the cake to the little one's arm. These weren't soft squishy cakes with icing. They were tough, solid, crusty cakes.

Your mother or grandmother would tell you that the longer you wore your cake on your arm, the brighter scholar you would become. So to become a star pupil you stood for hours with delicious cake tied to your arm that you shouldn't eat. At least it seemed like hours.

Ours being a Christian school, emphasis was placed on the telling of Bible stories. Every day the school-teacher told a new one. Then the next day, he'd ask some pupil to repeat the one from the day before. Because my early Bible reading with Grandfather had made me good at Bible stories, I usually got the job. That teacher, Mr. Diekman, was a master storyteller. Starting with the Old Testament he told our way through the whole Bible in the three years of elementary school. I give Mr. Diekman and Pake

David about equal credit for giving me an excellent storytelling background, though surely they had no thought of setting out to do such a thing.

Big Beppe

Father's father and mother—the woman we called "Big Beppe"—raised six children. One of them, the Meindert for whom I was named, was the deaf-mute older brother of my father.

Grandfather had been a house builder. After he died Grandmother ran the building business for a short time until my father could move back to Wierum and take over. This honor would have fallen to Uncle Meindert had he been able to talk and hear.

In one small room of her house, Big Beppe kept a secret, for-women-only, tavern. Her four daughters all worked in that same house, operating a stylish and successful seamstress business. Even though they all objected to her tavern, my Beppe paid no attention. Since the carpenter shop adjoined her house, women could discreetly stop in to buy a small friendly drink, and it would simply look as if they'd stopped for nails or a bit of lumber.

When I think of Big Beppe, I see a business woman, dressed in long skirts with slits in them so she could reach inside to a pouch strapped securely around her waist which held the coins she earned from liquor. She loved to reach through the slits and rattle the coins in her pouch. You could hear her coming by her rattle.

Supposedly, Beppe's four daughters were the cream of the crop of Wierum society. Three of them were unmarried when I knew them, and one was already widowed. They kept their mother company in her big beautiful house, which was right across the street from us, on Corpse Street. Proximity didn't breed friendliness though. I far preferred Pake David's more modest, further-away home, beside the cemetery and the ancient church.

Little Ytsje

About my cousin Ytsje, the daughter of Father's widowed sister, the main thing I remember is that she innocently got me in trouble once.

We boys were playing a game, something like baseball. You hit a little stick with a big stick, and there were fielders trying to catch the little stick. This time when I batted, the stick accidentally hit Ytsje in the mouth. She was only about four years old at the time. Unfortunately, we were playing right behind the carpenters' shop where Uncle Meindert was working, and he saw it happen. But he couldn't hear.

He burst out of the door, saw little Ytsje crying and bleeding, and turned angrily on me.

"It was just an accident!" I cried desperately, "I didn't mean to do it!"

The other boys shouted, "Run! Run!" and it seemed the right thing to do, so I took off towards the dike, confirming his suspicions that I had deliberately done a mean thing.

It was like in a nightmare. I ran as hard as I could, but with the loud noise

of his big wooden shoes behind me, I felt as if I were in a stationary run, frozen in fear. He caught me on the street below the dike, picked me up, turned me upside down, and began to beat me. The fishermen who were gathered on the dike steps, to shelter from the wind, watched and shouted loud encouragement to my deaf uncle.

He couldn't hear my screams and didn't know how badly he was hurting me. But at last he let go and I ran home and told my mother what had happened. I was only about six years old.

When Father came home later from work, she told him about it—that it wasn't fair—I hadn't deserved a beating.

Dad took my hand in his and marched off to set things right. When he got to Uncle Meindert in the carpenter shop, he bawled him out good. But to me it was one of the biggest let-downs of my little life. Father stood there, moving his fingers at his big brother. That was all. It was a scolding, but in deaf-mute's language.

A child has a sense of justice. I

thought great injustice had been done. At that age, I trusted in my father as all-powerful and was terribly let down that he didn't beat his brother the way my Uncle Meindert had beaten me. Now that would have been justice. 3

Endnotes

1. We would like to thank Dr. Bernard J. Fridsma, head of the Frisian Information Bureau in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Emeritus Professor of Germanic Languages and Literature at Calvin College, for his advice, especially on matters Frisian.

My brother, Corneil De Jong, generously supplied us with information about his pet dog, Feka, for which we thank him. In fact, he wrote a small book on the subject, demonstrating writing skills which I always knew he possessed, though they have lain fallow for all these seventy-eight years until now.

Especially we are indebted to my late brother, David De Jong, for all the information on our family life in the Netherlands which he supplied us through his own autobiography, *With a Dutch Accent*, published in 1944 by Harper & Brothers, New York.

Also, we thank that tough, merciless editor, who helped and encouraged us, Thomas Hartzell.

2. At the time, due to lack of central heating, beds were built into cabinets, or closets as De Jong calls them. Once people were in bed, the doors were closed to preserve as much warmth as possible. In larger homes, a canopy over a bed with bed curtains all around served the same purpose. The doors also provided a degree of privacy since several such cabinets might be in a small house with few rooms.

3. In the original De Jong refers to his grandmothers as Great Beppe and Little Beppe, translated literally from the Frisian *Grute Beppe* and *Lytse Beppe*. In English usage 'great' is typically juxtaposed with 'small' and 'big' with 'little,' so we selected use as Big Beppe and Little Beppe.

4. Apparently so named because it was the road along which bodies were carried for burial.

5. The name was Americanized to Raymond.

6. Actually known as Muntjestege, or Mint Alley (alley in the sense of a pedestrian lane).



The church that towered over Wierum and De Jong's youth, with its surrounding graveyard was built on a mound raised above the surrounding terrain to avoid seasonal flooding. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The Long Lost American Diary of Jacob Van Hinte: Pioneer of Dutch-American Studies

In the previous issue of *Origins* I published two lengthy articles on Jacob Van Hinte's 1921 travel diary *To America*. The diary was the result of an intensive research trip by Van Hinte to the Dutch settlements, particularly in the Midwest. His observations and experiences were later included in his magnum opus *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the United States of America* (1928; 2 vols.). The diary itself was believed to have been lost.

In October 2009, after the previous issue of *Origins* had gone to the printer, I discovered the original diary. After Van Hinte's untimely death in 1948, the diary was in the possession of his youngest brother, Jan Engelbert Van Hinte (1899-1992), and his sister, Geritje Van Hinte (1888-1985).¹ After Jan Engelbert's death in 1992, his cousin and namesake Jan Engelbert Van Hinte (son of Jacob's brother Maarten, and



Jacob van Hinte. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

father of Monique Van Hinte who had produced the first transcript) took care of the material, including the diary.² He saved the diary and kept it in his private files. This next relocation of the diary was unknown and it was assumed that the diary had somehow vanished.

In October I arranged to interview Jan Engelbert Van Hinte (born in 1935), then professor emeritus of Paleontology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.³ In preparing for the interview Dr. Van Hinte, much to my surprise, produced the original diary from his files and showed it to me.⁴ The 1981 transcription by his daughter Monique was done upon his request. Dr. Van Hinte noticed the increased international interest for the work of his Uncle Jacob—particularly the translation of *Nederlanders in Amerika* project of Robert E. Swierenga—and thought a transcription of the diary would be most useful.⁵ He also was convinced of the added value of the travel notes by his uncle in understanding Dutch emigration to America. The transcript was also meant as a present for his Uncle Jan Engelbert Van Hinte, who was eighty-two at the time. Monique typed the travel diary as a summer job.⁶

Endnotes

1. Jan Engelbert and Gerritje were both unmarried and for forty years shared a house in Delft (at the Oostsingel); see *Netherlanders in America*, Editor's Introduction, Note 1.

2. Including the travel diary notes made by Van Hinte on his study trip to Australia (1932) and Indonesia (1932).

3. The date of the interview was 20 October at Dr. van Hinte's house in Amsterdam.

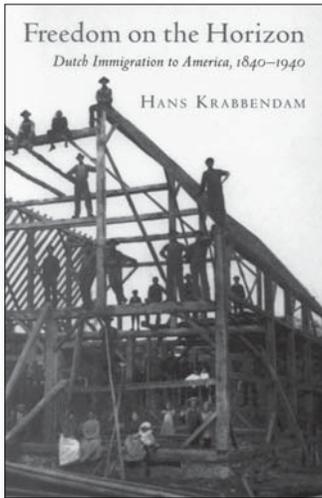
4. The diary is only 16 by 20 cm (6.3 by 7.9 inches).

5. Personal interview with Jan Engelbert Van Hinte on 20 October 2009, with Monique Van Hinte on 26 October 2009,

and following email correspondence with Jan Engelbert Van Hinte, Monique Van Hinte, and Robert E. Swierenga (26-30 October 2009; November 2009).

6. "Please find herewith a copy of the opening page of Jacob's diary. My daughter (1) is presently typing the diary (120 pages) as a 'summer job' for my uncle in Delft." Dr. Jan Engelbert Van Hinte to Robert E. Swierenga, 1981; included in the Van Hinte file in Heritage Hall, Calvin College (Collection No. 460), Grand Rapids, Michigan. In a November 2009 email Van Hinte added, "We are proud of Uncle Jaap and we give him all posthumous credits."

book reviews



Freedom on the Horizon: Dutch Immigration to America, 1840–1940

Hans Krabbendam (translated by
Gerrit Sheeres and Harry Boonstra)

(Grand Rapids:
William B. Eerdmans, 2009)

\$32.00

Freedom on the Horizon: Dutch Immigration to America, a translation of Hans Krabbendam's *Vrijheid in het verschiet: Nederlandse emigratie naar Amerika 1840-1940*, dealing with the history of Dutch immigration to the United States, like a fine old Rembrandt painting, is a study in light and shadow. Some things are highlighted, while others remain hidden in the darker edges of the picture. The main characters and places stand there in the middle of it all, while lesser known persons and locations are consigned to the shadowy edges. The thrill of discovery is to be found in those corners.

At the brightly lit center, Albertus C.

Van Raalte and Hendrik P. Scholte stand with West Michigan and Pella, Iowa, forming the backdrop. A bit off center, but still clearly visible, Northwest Iowa, Chicagoland, and Wisconsin are bathed in less brilliant hues, behind slightly less looming figures: Henry Hospers and early Protestant and Catholic clerics (Theodorus J. Van Den Broek, Cornelius Vander Meulen, and Seine Bolks). Edward Bok stands amid this secondary group, clutching a copy of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, the publication he edited for more than twenty years, and serving as an occasional business leader. He symbolizes the less visible majority of Dutch immigrants who did not define their ethnicity in religious ties. Beyond these focal points, off in the shadows, are places like Minnesota and New Jersey, California and Texas, Washington and North Carolina, and people who dealt in real estate promotion or steamship tickets.

While the characters and settings may be familiar to some, Krabbendam's picture hangs in a frame constructed in the Netherlands. Less encyclopedic than Jacob Van Hinte's venerable tome, here we see a panorama punctuated with glittering details. Krabbendam is beholden to and very familiar with the masterworks of Henry S. Lucas and Robert Swierenga, who are cited faithfully. But they are joined to other works from the other side of the Atlantic, especially those of George Harinck and Krabbendam's earlier efforts.

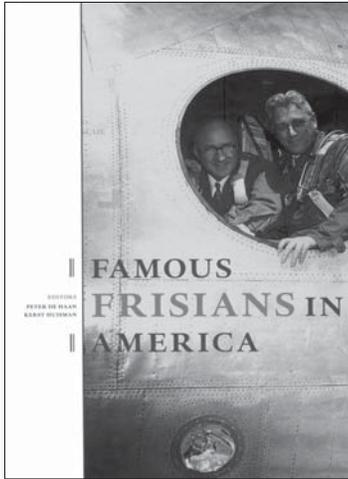
Good historians write stories buttressed by reliable sources. As a result, the heaviest emphasis falls on those groups, regions, and individuals who left the most visible finger and foot-

prints on the historical landscape and so the extensive coverage of Reformed churches and the Great Lakes/Great Plains settlements. Krabbendam freely admits the majority of Dutch immigrants did not join the "Dutch" churches, and their lack of organization and focus largely leaves them in the historical shadows.

Those who are familiar with Dutch American immigration will take comfort in the familiar places and people mentioned. The uninitiated will find a useful summary of the story. Both audiences will need to exercise occasional caution since here and there are factual inaccuracies. The date of the fire that destroyed much of Holland, Michigan, in 1871 is wrong, as is the placement of Nieuw Amsterdam on the Minnesota side of the Mississippi River, when it was actually in Wisconsin. But these examples are rare in this engaging summary of the story. Others will take note of overlooked details or anecdotes. The omissions generally reflect the secondary works that form the foundation of this synthesis. And for the impatient, the final chapter provides an excellent rendering of the book's major points. A major flaw in the editing or publishing process is that translators Gerrit Sheeres and Harry Boonstra are not credited on the title page but relegated to one sentence in the preface along with those who provided research assistance.

Krabbendam's new book is much more than a new copy of the old masterpieces. It combines the best of the old narratives with the methodologies that have influenced serious historians in more recent decades. It deserves an honored place in the gallery, and on the bookshelves of those who enjoy Dutch American history. It certainly has been awarded a prominent place on my shelf. 🐾

by Rotbert Schoone-Jongen



Gevierde Friesen in Amerika
[Famous Frisians in America]

*Edited by Peter de Haan and
 Kerst Huisman*

Translated by Barbara Fasting

Published by Friese Pers boekerij,
 Leeuwarden

Price: English version \$20.00;
 Dutch version € 24.95

This book presents seventy Frisians who, in a variety of ways, made a name for themselves in America. After a brief introduction, pages 19 to 30 detail early Frisian and American diplomacy whereby Friesland became the first of the United Provinces of the Dutch Republic to recognize America's independence from Great Britain. These pages give us a fascinating glimpse of the "behind the scenes" negotiations waged to get a concession for recognition. From Friesland's vantage point it may have been as simple as setting up trade relations with the new colony, but it may also have been

admiration for the colony's desire for freedom that played a key role in the decision of Friesland's major assembly. For the colonies, recognition by Friesland meant that hopefully other Dutch provinces might follow Friesland's lead, which they did. In the end John Adams was able to sail home not only with the recognition but with a heavy purse of five million guilders from Amsterdam bankers.

Pages 31 to 44 highlight Frisian emigration to America in the nineteenth century, and the events that led so many Frisians to look west and brave the voyage and hardships that accompany emigration, laying the foundation for those who themselves or whose offspring became successful in America.

The biographical narratives that follow are written in chronological order, beginning with Peter Stuyvesant, the first governor of New Amsterdam. This account is the longest in the book, in part due to the author inserting his own observations in his search for the real Stuyvesant. While this may be a distraction for some, others might find it interesting to read how historians go about searching for the truth behind a historical figure that has long since departed the scene and cannot be interviewed personally.

What is surprising is the sheer diversity of careers and positions of these seventy. From authors and artists to astronauts, from company presidents and tycoons to labor leaders, from musicians and models to movie stars, from clergy and congressmen to communists—they form a multi-layered canvas, proving that a "typical" Frisian does not really exist.

Some stories were just a bit too brief to be satisfying. For instance, the Dow Drukker account was somewhat truncated compared to that of Frank Cooper, next to it. One would have liked to have known a bit more about how Drukker managed to expand his road building business. His Union Building & Construction Company became the largest construction company for roads and airfields east of the Mississippi. How did he manage that? One would also like to know a bit more about his personal life. Did he marry? Have children?

Twenty people contributed articles—a joint effort by Frisians and Americans. Dr. Richard Harms, director of the Calvin College Archives and one of the people assigned the title of "famous Frisian" contributed eleven articles, the second largest number. When they began the project, the editors worked hard to have the book published in time to coincide with the 400th anniversary of Dutch-American relations that would take place in November 2009 in New York. In this they succeeded. The result is a very appealing book, richly illustrated, and highly readable, with interesting side bars; the map on the last page is also helpful in identifying places of origin. Some purists might decry the lack of citations and in-depth research, but the editors make no claim to present the book as the final authority on the people whose narratives they chose to tell. The book should be enjoyed exactly for what it is—a celebration of lives from one culture enriching another culture. ♪

by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

for the future

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

When I Was a Kid, the autobiography of children's author Meindert De Jong

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

Brother Ploeg: A Searching Saint or a Burr under the Saddle?
by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

Now I Will Tell You Children: Hendrik De Kruij's Account of His Immigration
by Jan Peter Verhave

A Soldier Remembered: Martin Douma Jr., 1920–1944
by Richard H. Harms

The New Jersey Dutch
by Richard Harms



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