

EARLY DUTCH SETTLEMENTS IN SOUTH DAKOTA

The first families came to this area from the Netherlands because economic conditions were such that there was no future for farmers and artisans. Wages were very low, both for the laboring class and the farmer. Many farmers had retrogressed to such an extent that they were forced to abandon their farms, and many workmen were unable to find employment. I recall that many carpenters complained about conditions, and they did not believe that it would be much better in the United States. Moreover, there were very few who had the means to pay for such a journey. Only those who had received some money from an inheritance began to think about emigrating. Riekele Zylstra, son of Jelle Zylstra, made plans to go to America with his family. I believe that he left during the latter part of 1881, and his brother Rein went with him, as well as a few families from Wolvega. The latter had acquaintances in BonHomme County, and all first went to that area. In 1882 these two sons of uncle Jelle went to Charles Mix County, and took up a claim. Riekele built a sod house for his family, but Rein returned to the Netherlands to be married. But alas, the girl of his choice refused to go to America, so Rein returned alone. In 1883 Douse, the third son of uncle Jelle, came here, and with him a family from the province of Groningan, namely J. Dyksterhuis, with his wife, son, and two daughters. An older son had arrived a year earlier. These two daughters were married soon after their arrival: the older of the two became the wife of Rein, and the younger married Douwe (still living in Washington, and eighty years old). Rein's wife also lives in Washington.

In 1882 many others arrived. Some had been living in Iowa for a while, and others in BonHomme County, South Dakota. They had heard, while in Iowa, that this section had been opened for claims, and many thought that this land was as good as in Iowa. I will list the names of the Hollanders that arrived during 1882 and 1883, as my memory serves me:

Reikele, Rein, and Douwe Zylstra;
Mr. Buren with wife and two adult sons and a daughter;
The Eerkes family; Simon Stoffels;
Gerben, John, and Klaas Wynia; Jacob Lugterma;
Van Delden; Jouke Koster; Marten De Boer;
Douse, Martinus, and Frans Fransens. Martinus had a wife and children, and the other two were single, and all were along in years;
Fedde Ferwerda; Liewe Dyk; Peter Dykstra (husband of the old woman);
Minne Abma; Jan De Roos; Evert, Hendrik Jan, Albert, and Gerrit Beltman; Sipke Zylstra, Sr.; Piet Zylstra; Wiebe Dyk; Jurjan Dyk;
Jacob Pilon; Geert Bles.

Five miles to the east there was another settlement; in our area most of the people came from Friesland or Groningan, while those in the area to the east all came from Overysel. I cannot say that there were any leaders in either settlement. In old Platte, where there was also a small Dutch settlement, they had Mr. Albert Kuipers, who was at that time already along in years (he was the father of H. Kuipers, the storekeeper). This old man persuaded several people to come here. I have been told that he was able to get a free passage from the steamboat company to go to the Netherlands for the purpose of recruiting passengers for America. At times he ran into considerable trouble, when the poor people arrived without any funds. He made strenuous efforts to obtain jobs for them, but was not always successful. A few years later, in 1894 and 1895, he obtained free passage to Texas, but without results. I will not list any names, because they would be of little interest. There were several families in old Platte, but we were not acquainted with them. You will be interested to know that many of our people, including ourselves, were without farming experience.

On June 9, 1885, we traveled by boat from Nijmegen to Rotterdam, where we spent the night. A clerk from the steamship office took us to a hotel which was recommended as a good place to stay overnight, but it was so filthy that my sisters did not go to bed at all. The following day we went to the large harbor, where a very old ship, named C_land, was waiting to take us. We obtained a cabin in the forward part of the ship; it was the only cabin that boasted a door. All other cabins were open to full view. We received this special consideration because father (your grandfather) had insisted on it in his correspondence with the steamship company. Late on that Saturday afternoon we set sail; it was a rainy day. When the ship reached the open sea it began to rock a bit, which we enjoyed. But before long the joy was gone; we all became seasick. This continued for two days, but it was not too bad. There were very few Hollanders on board, not more than twenty-five out of a total of three hundred passengers. We traveled steerage. Many of the passengers were Polish Jews; they did not look very attractive. There were also quite a few Germans. We had enough to eat, but could not afford to be very particular. After a few days of rain the weather became very fair; we were always on deck, even until eleven o'clock in the evening. We and a few other Dutch families would sing, and when some young English people heard it they joined in the singing. Below deck they were dancing until very late in the evening; there was an orchestra on board. We saw white caps only once, caused by a strong wind. Most of the time the weather was beautiful, and the sea smooth as a mirror. The ship was constantly followed by a large school of fish; the Dutch call them "bruinvissen" (porpoises). These fish were waiting for whatever was thrown overboard. There was a large group of Germans on board, and they were a jolly lot. We were happy when the American shore finally came in sight. We arrived toward evening, but still in broad daylight. Yes, and we saw the Statue of Liberty, which was then not yet quite complete. The shores of the Hudson were beautiful with their green foliage.

We were taken to a large old building, called "Castlegarden", and were not permitted to go out except when our trunks were inspected by the customs officers. Some of the people ran into considerable trouble; if one had an unopened box of cigars he was fined. One of the passengers had a box of cigars, which had been opened but was still full. The officers said it might not be taken out without paying the tax, but when the owner gave the officer a handful of cigars all was straightened out. A farmer from Iowa, who had made a trip to the Netherlands, had a large basket of long Gouda pipes (church warden pipes), which he thought he might smuggle into the country. However, he was ordered to go to the office, and had considerable difficulty. He had to pay a heavy fine, and was obliged to remain in New York an extra day.

We landed on July 3rd; saw nothing of New York; had to board the train on Saturday; we were driven like a flock of sheep. My brother Gjalt, who had learned a few German and English words, occasionally tried to get some information about our baggage, but received no answer. The officials were accustomed to this and feigned deafness. The train trip was very tiring; it took us three days to get to the Kimball, Dakota territory. In those days they had special trains for immigrants; wooden benches, and no cushions, as I recall it. When we arrived in Chicago, uncle Gjalt went out to buy a bar of soap, and sure enough, he came back with soap. We thought it was toilet soap, but discovered later that it was laundry soap. Since we all were dirty, so that our faces felt stiff, this soap was quite an improvement. In Chicago we had to wait several hours, but were not permitted to leave the train, because it was not considered safe. Finally we arrived in Kimball, where Reikele, the son of uncle Jelle, lived at that time. He was working in a lumberyard. This cousin Riekele was poor, although at the outset he had more money than his brothers and sisters. Uncle Jelle had his second wife. When his first wife died her mother lived on the farm with them, in a separate room, near Drachten. She was quite wealthy, and when she died she willed a large portion of her estate to uncle Jelle's children, but uncle Jelle administered her properties until the children were of age. The oldest son, Riekele, was married very young, and at that time he received his portion of the inheritance. He sold his land which, at that time, was much more valuable than when the younger children sold theirs. As long as uncle Jelle's children remained at home, uncle had the use of the land and the interest on the money. When the two younger children became of age the land was worth much less. Uncle also had two daughters; the oldest was married in the Netherlands to a Rev. Kaptain, and never came to America. The youngest daughter of uncle Jelle was married here to Eerke Berkee, before we arrived here. Both of these daughters died many years ago.

Now we return to Riekele. It seems that whatever he undertook to do worked against him. At first he was skipper of a freight boat for several years; then he became a butcher. He had little more than enough to pay for his trip to America. When we arrived in Kimball, Riekele was at the train. He went with

us to a hotel, where we had a meal, and then to his small house just outside of the town. I still do not see how he managed to house us. At that time he had four children, born in the Netherlands. A day and a half later Douws and Rein came to pick us up with their lumber wagons. I think Geert Dyksterhuis was with them. Then we rumbled and bumped along on the wagon for a distance of forty miles. It was particularly hard on my dear mother, who was very thin. We arrived at our destination about midnight, having lost our way once. Of course, the sons of uncle Jelle had been here only three years. I was then eighteen years old, and went with Douwe, where I remained about one year. Most of them remained with uncle Jelle and some with Rein.

The next morning father and Gjalt unpacked the trunks in a frame house where Riekele had lived before he went to Kimball, and which was vacant at this time. I was not with them, but remained with Douwe for one year. Uncle Jelle, who had arrived the previous year (1884), had started a garden for us on his land. Soon some attempts were made to buy land. Father had only approximately \$800.00, and therefore could not do anything on a large scale, because there was no more government land available. Jake Logterman had eighty acres south of here, the spot where Ben Hoeksema is living at present, and we bought this for \$350.00. About twenty-five acres had been broken. A house and a stable had to be built immediately. Father was a carpenter, and wanted to build a good house for little money. The lumber had to be transported from Kimball (Armour did not yet exist). As was his custom, father drew a plan, which looked very good. An octagonal house with a nice porch. That was the living room, and back of it, on the west side, the house was half below ground level and the upper part of sod. Father's big mistake was the front of the house. Instead of boards and siding there was plaster lath and ordinary plaster to make the walls of the living room. It looked very good, and many people came to see the octagonal house. I think some came to ridicule. The house was completed, and the family, except myself, enjoyed living in it. The rear of the house was about five feet underground, and the upper part was constructed of sod. Father had made a good job of the sod, better than most. But when the rainy weather came in the Fall, the plaster began to loosen and when winter came we could see that it was a failure. The frost was the least of our worries. The following summer we had an octagonal house covered with sod about two feet thick; we had not money to cover it with lumber. The inside was quite neat, for those times. To the east of the house there was a creek or draw, and there we built the stable, partly below ground level. The roof was covered with grass, three feet long, which Eerkes had mowed for us in Cedar Creek. The grass was tied in bundles, according to Dutch custom, as father remembered it, and it made a very satisfactory, watertight roof covering, so that was not a mistake.

We bought our first cow from Simon Stoffels, but who was to do the milking? We tried it, but mother told us that during her girlhood years, when she was visiting her grandfather, she had done some milking. She thought, however, that she had forgotten the technique, but when she began she

immediately milked like an expert, although at first her wrists were very sore. Later we all learned to milk. We bought a team of oxen from Jan Wynia. At that time I was still with Douwe Zylstra, and brother Gjalt had to work with the oxen. It was autumn and there was no fieldwork.

One evening, when I was visiting at home, I heard that father and Gjalt had bought five acres of corn fodder from Douwe, with whom I was living. Brother had some doubts about the matter. He began to wonder whether there might be some standing corn along the road, because he was afraid that he would then be unable to hold the oxen; he would rather detour a half or even a whole mile. When Gjalt came to pick up his corn fodder I had to assist him. One of us had to hold the oxen while the other was loading, and when we went from one shock to the other we had to let them go on to the shock. We could not hold them and it was difficult to coax them away from the shock, even with a club.

In the spring of 1886 I came home, and became responsible for the oxen, because Gjalt was often working for the neighboring farmers; sometimes he earned \$1 per day, sometimes less. Uncle Jelle's boys still had some Dutch money; while in the Netherlands they were accustomed to hiring needy laborers for the heavy work for 10 Dutch cents a day-the poor wretches. Our sisters also occasionally worked for their cousins for 25 cents per day, altogether too little. What a change for our family, in Nijmegen we lived in a fine brick house, with water piped into the house, all very neat. And here we lived in a sod house.

When we arrived here the farmers had broken very little ground; the majority had only 30-40 acres under cultivation. Breaking prairie ground was heavy work; oxen were the most satisfactory if one had patience; at best an acre a day. Horses were a bit faster, but those who had horses did not have more than two, usually not the best kind, and the work was too heavy for two horses, so that they could break an acre or two only occasionally. Later we had four oxen, which was an improvement. Most of the farmers who bought more horses financed the deal by taking a loan on their land. Until 1891 I had to get along with oxen. To make a trip of 33 miles to Armour, with oxen, was quite an undertaking. During the early years we raised quite a bit of flax, and later we also obtained some hogs, and began to grow wheat. All of these products had to be taken to Armour. I would leave the house at two o'clock in the morning and halt half way to feed the oxen and eat my own lunch (not more than twenty minutes) but I was satisfied. At best we covered two miles per hour, and on every trip the oxen were crippled with sore hooves, and would require a week of rest before starting another trip.

During the winter of 1889 I had to go to Armour with a half load of wheat in the front of the wagon, and two fat hogs in the back. We loaded our wagon in the evening, according to custom. At one o'clock in the morning it was snowing, but later it stopped, and by nine o'clock the weather was beautiful. The wagon was still loaded, so we decided to leave about noon. In

order not to arrive in Armour in the middle of the night my mother advised me to stop in Bloomington, about ten miles from home, and have supper at the hotel in that little town. I followed this advice; the oxen were unyoked and tied to the wagon, and I spread the corn fodder before them on the ground, and went into the hotel. It was already six o'clock in the evening, and in order not to arrive too early in Armour I remained in the hotel, near the stove, until nine o'clock. The weather was clear, but no moon. Five miles east of Bloomington I reached the Yankton reservation. This was not opened for settlement until nine years later. Nothing but prairie, and not a house for a distance of twelve miles. When I had gone a few miles into the reservation it began to blow hard; the sky clouded over and the snow came. It soon developed into a storm, and I could no longer see the road, and could hardly see the oxen, I was afraid, because the previous year we had experienced that terrible blizzard. After walking another distance (I always had to walk because of the cold) one of the oxen lay down. I had just climbed back onto the wagon to rest for a few minutes, and I was startled, thinking the beast was sick or possibly dying. I jumped from the wagon, and had to get down on my knees to see the ox's head, and then I saw something that set my mind at ease. The beast was chewing its cud and wanted to relax during the process; moreover, it was night, and time to rest. I soon got the beast back on its feet, and again we went jogging along. The first house along the road was ten miles west of Armour, and I thought that, if I succeeded in reaching that spot, I would drive the oxen into the yard and tie them, and find a place for myself in the sod stable. But after traveling another mile or two the weather improved, the snow diminished, although the cold increased, and when I finally reached the ten mile house the snow diminished, although the cold increased and when I finally reached the ten mile road the snow had almost stopped. I therefore decided to go on; I did not unyoke the oxen but stopped for a while, and threw about twenty ears of corn on the ground for the oxen, and then knelt before the beasts, covering my head with an old blanket. I had a piece of bread in my duck coat which I intended to eat at this time, but it was frozen so hard that I could not eat it. It did not take the oxen long to eat the twenty ears of corn, and so I went on. The air was clear, but bitterly cold. I could not keep warm walking, and didn't have an overcoat, only a duck coat, and it wasn't sheepskin lined either. Well, I arrived safely in Armour and halted before a grain elevator. The owner opened the large doors, and when he saw me he felt sorry for me. I became faint, and the man noticed it, and told me to come inside near the stove. When I recovered he gave me an apple, and soon I felt fit again, and the load was sold. I arrived there at nine in the morning, and remained there until the next morning, as we had agreed before I left home. All day long I remained near the stove in the lobby of the hotel, except for a short walk to run errands. I crossed the street, but it was so cold that I was glad to get back to the hotel. The next morning the weather was clear, and I started home. The weather was so good that I had little trouble with the cold, and I reached home at midnight in good health and spirits. You may be getting a bit weary of this story, but it was the most difficult trip that I ever made, and I thought that I ought to relate it.

The old woman: Her husband was Peter Dykstra; he was a member of the Christian Reformed Church, and very faithful. This man died soon after we arrived here. He had a hard life with that nasty woman. They were elderly people, and had a large family. Two of the sons had already taken up land in this area, and she remained alone with a daughter, but she soon left her mother. The old woman rented her land, but continued to live there. We had a few acres of land just east of her house, and whenever I worked that plot the old lady soon joined me. I hated this so much that I kept the oxen in motion, but that was to no avail. She walked along with me and the oxen, sometimes circling the plot two or three times, and constantly talking about her bad children, for she could not get along with anybody. A certain Rev. Frederick Smeemer (Zwemer?) who was serving here as a home missionary, called on her to discuss her spiritual condition. She told him: "You are not converted. I have been converted since I was thirteen years old." some time later an American came to town, and after a few days he married the old lady. The young people heard about it, and decided to have a bit of fun. I was also one of the bandits. We went to the house while the young /old people were on the way to Wheeler to be married. The blankets were thrown back, a layer of Russian thistles was spread on the sheet, and then the blankets were replaced. Everything in the house was turned upside down, because none had any sympathy for the old woman. That same evening, before the couple returned, a group of married men added to the confusion. They brought the cow from the stable into the house and tied it to the cook stove, and then brought a pile of hay and corn fodder for the cow. The man soon left her, and a bit later she was married again to a certain Kool, also an old man, but he likewise left her very soon. I do not know whether she was legally separated from the American. I think not. Two daughters of the old woman also had their troubles. One of them was also separated from her husband, and later was brought into court and convicted of fraud.

Jouke Koster was one of the pioneers. He was a carpenter and built the homes for most of the Zylstras. He had been a contractor in Holland, and was almost reduced to poverty. Like my father, he never worked on the farm. Koster was a quick tempered man and a real modernist. Once he talked with my father and stated that he could prove that the Bible was a fraud. They continued their discussion by mail, without ever agreeing (which is often the case). Koster was an enterprising man, but all of his enterprises resulted only in poverty. He constructed a windmill on a well which was only about twelve feet deep; this mill operated fairly well for a while. In 1894, Koster had a large number of pigs – he did everything on a grand scale – but there was no corn. The farmers had many acres sown in corn, and they all mowed or chopped green corn (about two feet high) for the cows and horses. But Koster wanted to take his pigs through the winter. He built a stove of stone, and in a large cooking pot he made soup for his pigs. His own sons joked about it. Later I saw some of those pigs, and they were as thin as a plank. I doubt whether many of them survived the winter.

During the years when a considerably large amount of grain was grown, and many farmers raised pigs, there was no railroad, and some men conceived the idea of getting a boat to make shipments by water, but nothing came of it. Then Koster decided to build a boat and to operate it himself between here and Sioux City. His plans were perfected, or so he thought; it was to be a wooden boat with a 1 H.P. motor. Nobody knew where he obtained the money – some thought he received money from the Netherlands. Well, he bought a variety of materials, all of which had to be hauled from Armour. The strangest thing was that at first he did not get much lumber, but a lot of hardware, such as nails, bolts, etc. I did not see much of it, but we understood that he was busily engaged in building it. After a while we heard that the government would not permit a freight boat to operate on the river without a licensed pilot. To the present day there is no regular freight service on the river, only an occasional military boat. Soon after the close of this episode it was possible to buy, from the local storekeeper nails and bolts which were left over from Koster's ventures.

Koster was mechanically inclined, and a new idea began to take shape. A few artesian wells were being drilled in the area. Many of us did not know at the time that it was impossible to strike artesian flowing wells to the south of us, and Koster wanted a flowing well. He had a quarter of land just north of the present Koster school, and decided to drill there. He had seen and studied a drilling machine. He had all sorts of old machinery parts, old mowers and binders, a large accumulation of threshing machine parts, cogwheels, and shafts. He built a rather large shed on the spot where the well was to be drilled, and before long we could see the tower from our house. Sip, who was not doing much at that time, as well as some other boys, often went to observe the progress of the work, and soon we heard that the motor was running and that a start had been made at digging a hole. I also went there once and saw, but heard more. It was such a terrible racket, and everything was vibrating so hard that I thought the whole thing would explode. The 1 H. P. motor supplied the power; it was located outside of the shed and was in constant need of repairs. Koster did have an idea about operating the outfit, but knew nothing about power. That knowledge must be obtained in college, and he had never been there. Koster was very quick-tempered. He did his own blacksmithing, and if something did not work out as he wanted it he would throw everything to the ground. After several months of labor he finally had a hole about 200 feet deep. But by that time the machinery was worn out, and he couldn't deepen it another inch, so he abandoned it.

He also had a threshing machine with which he went from farm to farm for several years. When things were going smoothly Koster was not hard to get along with, but when he ran into trouble, nobody could get along with him. Once I was present when the cylinder began to burn; then he became desperate and constantly yelled: "Water, water", but there was no water available on that entire quarter except a bottle of drinking water. Koster took the bottle and held

it upside down to get the water, but bumped his fingers on a piece of iron; this was very painful, and coupled with his ugly humor it created a terrible rumpus. Fedde Ferworda, who was present, said: "Koster, how would it be if we threw in some sand?" That made an impression, for then he began to cry: "Sand, sand". We were able to extinguish the fire, and then threshed sand for the next half hour. If something broke or loosened up while he was threshing he turned savage and couldn't be checked. Sometimes, when there was only a slight hitch, he would cry out: "Stop, go home, everything is gone to pieces." Then he would run back and forth; the machine was stopped, but the men did not go home, for they knew their customer. After a slight repair the threshing would be resumed. Once, when I was present, something went wrong again, and the boss was almost crazy. He ran at least a quarter mile across the stubble, and in the wrong direction. We thought that this was going too far, and said to his son who was also on the job: "How will that turn out? Your father is going farther and farther away." But the son (Idse) very calmly said: "Don't be afraid, he will soon be back." and indeed, he did come back, and soon the machine was running again. Koster's family was very religious; a son of his brother is a minister in the Reformed Church. Such is the result when one forsakes God.

Uncle Sipke, father's brother, was a goldsmith in Holland. He married twice, and wanted to play the gentleman. He had two sons and three daughters; these daughters remained in Holland. Uncle Sip, with his grandiose ideas, went bankrupt in the Netherlands. Because he was bankrupt he was able to get his portion of grandfather's inheritance, and then he began to travel through the rural districts of the Netherlands, selling gold and silverware. Because he wanted to be the great man and lodge in the largest hotels his funds rapidly diminished. Therefore he finally decided to come here, to a son who was already settled here-also a goldsmith. Uncle Sipke arrived a few years before we came here, and obtained a very good quarter of land. Although he had gone bankrupt, he still had quite a bit of money. He was almost seventy years old when he arrived here. He had a house built, half below ground level, and about 5 feet above ground. He had a very industrious wife, aunt Reingje, who was much too good for uncle, and they lived together quite comfortable. Uncle had enough money to have all of his land broken except the pasture, and then he rented out the arable land for one-third of the crop. They also kept a cow, a few sheep, and some pigs, and thus had enough to live. Aunt had to do all the work; the old gentleman never did a stroke of work. Occasionally he would go for a walk, carrying a 4 or 5 ft. cane, and with his long beard, which he kept neatly trimmed, he surely resembled a patriarch. But when the drought came, 1893 to 1896, they were reduced to poverty, and in 1897, the same year in which your daddy and mama were married, uncle Sipke and aunt went to grand Rapids, having barely enough funds to buy their way into the Holland home. Both died there- uncle Sipke reached the age of 85. Perhaps their names appear in the records of the Grand Rapids home.

Those who received land from the government were not required to pay anything except \$14 or \$16 for expenses. There were three methods of obtaining

land-Homestead, Tree Claim, and Pre-emption. To obtain a homestead one had to live on the property, and after five years he would receive the title. A tree claim did not require residence, but ten acres of trees must be planted. In that manner the first named could acquire two quarters. Only one tree claim could be obtained per section. Those who had homesteads could get the title after two years of residence, provided ten acres of ground had been broken, but in that event \$200.00 must be paid to the government, aside from the expenses. That was rather expensive, and yet many took advantage of it, because they could then obtain a \$500.00 loan on the land, which of course gave them only \$300.00 in hand. Most of them used this money to buy horses or to make improvements on the house. A pre-emption right was a bit strange. One must prove up (as the Dutch called it) a pre-emption claim within 2 ½ years, and pay \$200.00 after which no further residence was required. Thus it happened that the earliest arrivals sometimes obtained three quarters. They would first take a pre-emption, prove it up in two years, and if one had a tree claim and a proved up pre-emption he could also take up a homestead. If one did not comply with the law, for example if one did not live on the property, or did not break enough ground, it could happen that someone would begin a contest against the owner. A tree claim contest was not possible unless not enough trees had been planted. Homestead contests occurred quite often, because a homesteader was living in another place, or in one of the Dakota cities, but would spend one night per month on the homestead, in a sod shanty built for that purpose. In the early days this worked out fairly well, but after all the good land had been taken some claims were contested, and the court decided, and in some instances the homesteader lost his land. The government was not very strict, and the farmers generally did not take advantage of their Dutch or other neighbors. The contesters were usually people who had come in from elsewhere. I said that pre-emption was a strange right, and we experienced the truth of this. When we had been living here about 1-½ years a certain James Byl and his sister came to see us. Byl had a quarter on homestead and Miss Sarah Byl had 80 acres, not far from where we then lived. They came about once a month to satisfy the terms of the law. Both had a shanty on their claim. The land was becoming scarce, and they were afraid that they might lose their land. Therefore they came to us; they wanted one of our sisters to take over James' quarter, and had another prospect for Sarah's land. The land could not be sold, but it could be taken over by means of a relinquishment of the rights. Byl wanted us to take it over, but father was not much interested. We need not pay out any money but if our sister took it over she must comply with the law until she could prove it up. Then Byl could take it over again, paying sister Aaltje well for it, or we could keep it on very easy terms. Byl seemed to trust us and he and his sister were very tired of making those trips both summer and winter. Finally father agreed, and Aaltje took over the pre-emption. It could be proved up in 2 ½ years, and one retained his homestead rights. If one had transferred a homestead he lost his rights. Also for this reason, Aaltje took it over on pre-emption. Thus Aaltje had to live on the claim, and Gjalt or I had to sleep there at night. The shanty contained a little stove. It was not difficult for Aaltje to keep house; the floor was dirt and did not

need to be mopped, or really could not. We only went there once or twice a week, but _____ soon told us we would get trouble if she did not live there all the time, so we did that for a time. But one time, when we had not been on the claim for a few days, we were sadly surprised to see another house on the claim; it was a log house, much better than Aaltje's shanty. We soon found out who moved the house on the claim; it was a certain John Smith, a single man from the river, whom we had never seen. Those that knew him said he was too good for anything. We got in contact with _____; he said since the pre-emption was soon run out we had better try to prove up, but that was very doubtful with a contest against it. Smith had taken a homestead some time ago; you must know that anyone of age who had not used his homestead rights before could take a homestead on anybody's pre-emption, whether he was faulty in requirements or not. Of course, a person would be foolish if he could take a homestead on a pre-emption holder that fulfilled the requirements of the law. In New Holland was a man by the name of William Van de Zalm; he was notary public, but on his own he studied some simple laws, and through Byl we hired him to defend our case against Smith. Well, it went before the court in Wheeler, and the outcome was not mentioned that same day, but soon we received word from the Land Office (Yankton, I think) that our proving up had not been allowed. What next? Van de Zalm, who was really beaten, told us that Alice should stay on the claim at least for some time. But most people, among whom were we too, believed that since the pre-emption was run out Smith, who had a homestead, would become the owner at the same time. We kept living on the claim, mostly Aaltje and I. then, after a while; we got the greatest surprise one morning. The log house was gone – say, were we glad? That was the farm just west of Henry Fransens, where our dear mother died in 1901, and where I lived till we married. One of the reasons that Smith could not get Alice off may have been that he planted his house in the middle of our cultivated land; he had not broken an acre on it, and we had more than ten.

(Typed as written from original 10/20/03)