

Isaac Marsilje

My father, Hubregt Marsilje was born in the Town of Biervliet, Prov. of Zeeland, Netherlands on April 8, 1811. The names of his parents were Izaak Marsilje and Pieterella Steenagert. My said grandfather died before my birth and my grandmother married again to one Adrian Nagel.

My mother was born September 2, 1812 at Groede Prov. of Zeeland, Netherlands. The names of her parents were Antonie de Puyt and Suzanna de Talierr. My mother's name was Grietje de Puyt.

My parents were married in the month of March 1839. Marinus Mozuur the "Burgmeester" officiating.

While yet in the Netherlands two children were born to my parents. My sister Suzanna Maria, born at the village of Groeda, Prov. of Zeeland, January 28, 1840, and I was at the same place November 17, 1846, said two children were the only ones born to my said parents.

The agricultural and industrial conditions of the Netherlands at this time were at a low ebb, so that working people could barely exist. From 1840 to 1850 quite a number emigrated to America, from whence came reports of much better working conditions for the common people. Some of our relations were among the number who had departed to the land of promise. Abraham de Kubber who was married to my father's sister Elizabeth were among the number who had emigrated to America. The little savings and the proceeds of the sale of their household effects gave them just about enough to reach the New World. The bad conditions for the working people in the Netherlands lead my parents to also try their fortunes in the New and Promising Country across the waters. After having disposed of their few belongings, my parents took passage for Rotterdam in small sailing craft known as "Schuiten", having purchased their tickets for the family, expecting to take ship at once for America. At Rotterdam, to their great disappointment, the ship they were to sail in was full, and no more passengers were

could be taken on. They were compelled to wait a full week before another ship would sail for New York, this delay proved to be providential, as this ship on which they expected to take passage ran into a very severe storm, when only three or four days out losing most of its canvas and part of its rigging, so that it arrived in New York fully a week after we did, starting a week later from Rotterdam, beside running short of provisions, so that the passengers were compelled to get along on short rations. All emigrants at that time were transported on sailing ships, freight carriers. The accommodations in the ship's hold were very meager indeed. Our ship being ready after a week's waiting to take on the emigrants. We were taken aboard and on April 10 1850 we left Rotterdam, and our good ship the "Lauwerina" was headed for the New World. Our trip across the Atlantic proved to be an ideal one, fair weather, no storm, steady and favorable winds, were our lot, so that we were protected and favored by a kind Providence. We ran into the harbor of New York on the first day of May A.D. 1850, having been on ship-board just twenty-one days, being the fastest and most successful trip the captain had yet made, according to a statement he made to the passengers. It was a very short time for a sailing vessel to cross the ocean in twenty-one days. All on board felt thankful for the speed and success of their ocean trip.

On our arrival in New York and the placing of our effects on shore, we were very much annoyed by the many agents and runners who desired to assist my parents in taking care of their goods, giving advice as to the shipment of same to our destination, which was Rochester, New York, where my uncle Abraham deKubber was then living, he having left the Netherlands in 1845.

Our tickets for the remainder of our journey were by way of the Erie Canal. At that time there was no Castle Garden to take in emigrants to afford their protection against the great number of sharp-

ers that infested the landing places for the emigrants in New York, to work their tricks to get a share of the little left in their purses.

In those days many a poor emigrant was robbed of what little they had on arriving in New York, until finally the government took the matter in hand, and the smooth gentry who were such a great annoyance to the poor emigrant were put out of business.

After going through many difficulties, we and our little belongings were placed aboard of a canal boat and we proceeded up the Hudson River, being towed up if my memory serves me right. Provisions had to be furnished by the emigrants themselves, for for this inland trip and also the ocean trip. One would not be taken aboard of an ocean ship unless he had the regulation amount of provisions for the trio. At this time I was three and a one-half years old. My memory goes back quite correctly to the time we left Holland, and of being on shipboard I remember of telling my mother of the location of our home in the Netherlands, of a drinking pool on the opposite side of the Cobble Stone covered way, and the cemetery with the customary bone house in the corner, which building had a little board on my mother told me which bore the following words, "Zoo als gy nu zyt wasch wy voor dasen, Zoo als wy nu zyn zult gy ook wezen." A very fit reminder of the lot of all mankind. Upon arriving at Albany, New York in our boat, we were then drawn into the Erie Canal, and we were introduced to the tow path and line, as a means of making our way to the western part of the State, this meant the speed of a horse on a walk, to say nothing of the many stopsmade for taking on and discharging freight. M My recollection is that my parents told me that it took us twenty-one days to make the nearly 3000 miles across the ocean, and about 10 days to make the trip by boat from New York to Rochester. I very distinctly remember that our boat was drawn by a long line, on which

two horses were pulling us along, and that around curves the boat men would use their long poles to keep the boat from the banks of the Canal.

There were quite a number of emigrants on this boat, it being loaded to capacity, quite a number of Germans also being aboard. There was one old Derman Grandmother some seventy-five or eighty years old who was very much frightened when our boat was passing through the deep canal locks, and she would look up at the highwalls on either side of the canal and moan and wring her hands by reason of fear. I remember this quite distinctly, and my mother told me that when the boat had again risen in the lock to the shore level and she could look over the landscape again, she would give expression to her gratitude by saying, "Gott loven and dank" or something to that effect. This canal trip might in a way have been quite interesting as the scenes changed continuously, but for the emigrant who had his destination in mind it was very tedious and devoid of interest to him.

We finally reached our destination, the City of Rochester, which was then but a town in size. We were soon at the home of my uncle Abraham de Kubber, and after a few days rest, my parents rented a small house and set up housekeeping again, this time in the new country.

My uncle being a mason by trade, my father was given work mixing mortar, and had carrier at the magnificent wage of \$.75 a day, but everything was cheap, wheat about fifty cents a bushel and flour in keeping with the wheat price, pork and beef three to five cents. I remember that several times my father brought home a pig's head from the market for which he had paid twenty-five cents, hearts and livers thrown in without extra cost.

My father was induced to buy a lot not long after our arrival in Rochester, and a small house was erected thereon, and there were few people in the State of New York who felt more pleased and satisfied

than my parents when they "had their own roof over their heads". WE remained in Rochester nearly Four years, during which time my grandfather Anthony dePuyt and my uncle Anthony de Puyt Jr. and family arrived from the Netherlands, and located on the same street we lived on adjoining our home. My uncle Phillip dePuyt also arrived during the time we lived there.

My father got along nicely in regard to work and my mother and my aunt de Puyt managed to make a little doing work for a truck garden-er near the City. They had both been accustomed to do work of this kind in the Netherlands, so their work proved very satisfactory to their employer.

The Street in the City of Rochester was named Alexander Street.

After having lived in the City of Rochester for nearly four years, my uncle John VerWest called on us at that time. He was living on a farm near Buffalo, New York, and near his place was a tannery. He induced my father to move to that place as he was sure he could get regular employment at said tannery. My father now sold his house and lot in Rochester and moved to the place near Buffalo in the fall of 1853. My father got employment in said tannery, but wages were very low and the work hard and dirty. My parents found they had made a mistake in moving away from Rochester. They found an old friend at the place where they were now living by the name of Jan Leenhouts who had a brother Abraham Leenhouts living at Kalamazoo on a farm Dr. Cornell. This Jan Leenhouts also was displeased with the work and wages in the tannery, so my parents and Jan Leenhouts decided to move to Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the spring of the year - 1854.

In the latter part of April 1854, we took passage on the steamer to Detroit, and struck a stormy time and a snow storm,

Our sreamer ran into the port of Erie for shelter and again at Cleveland. After three or four days we reached D^Etroit. There were many people on the boat, all bound Westward, and my parents talking with other passengers as to their destination, we found that in the opinion of many passengers, Michigan did not have a good reputation for health as they told us the death rate was very high from the so-called "Michigan Fever " by which I presume they meant Ague and Malarial fevers, which were then quite prevalant in the State, especially so in the newly settled regions.

On arriving in Detroit we took the Michigan Central train to Kalamazoo. The Michigan Central had been built to Kalamazoo for some time, but the line from there to Chicago had been in use but a short time when we arrived in Kalamazoo. The of our arrival at the Village of Kalamazoo was May 1st, 1854.

The home of one Willem De Visser, a friend and acquaintance of my parents in the Netherlands was kindly opened to us on the early Sunday morning of our arrival, until after a few days, we succeeded in finding a house in which to live. Kalamazoo was then a fairly prosperous Village.

Soon after our arrival, something like one or two years, the people celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the settlement by white people of the Village of Kalamazoo.

My parents found several people located in this Village with whom they had been well acquainted in the Netherlands, so that made them feel more at home than at Buffalo. Mr. Paulus den Bleyker and a Mr. Hoedemaker were two Hollanders in Kalamazoo, of some means and influence. Mr. den Bleyker was located in the South side of the Village, owning a large farm partly in the Village limits, and Mr. Hoedemaker was located on the North side, both had building lots to sell. My father finally

bought a lot of Mr. Hoedemaker, this proved to be not a good move, as we found that the growth of the place was much more rapid on the South side, so that those who purchased there were soon able to dispose of their holding at a good margin. Later my father also purchased a lot of Mr. Den Bleyker on the South side and built a home on it, and after having lived there about two years, my folks sold the property at a fair profit and moved back to the house on the North side, which they still owned, and we continued to live there until we moved to Holland, Michigan in 1862.

During the time we lived in Kalamazoo my father worked with brick and stone masons as tender at the handsome wages of seventy-five cents per day most of the time. Everything was very cheap in those times, and the small wages kept us comfortably supplied with the necessities of life and save a little to pay for the home.

My school days were spent in Kalamazoo. I attended the Public schools for about four years ending in June 1862.

While at Kalamazoo, my sister Susan got married to Gerrit Van den Belt, whose family lived at Holland, Michigan, and he having a strong desire to locate on a farm, they moved from Kalamazoo to Holland in 1860. They purchased a forty acre tract of Mr. Paulus den Bleyker of Kalamazoo which was covered with virgin forest and located on the South side of the present fairgrounds in Holland, Michigan, in Sec. 33 Holland, Township. The North half of this section was owned by said den Bleyker and was almost entirely sold to Kalamazoo Hollanders at fifteen dollars per acre, then considered to be a very high price, as people had been accustomed here to pay \$1.25 per acre when bought from the government.

The moving of my sister to Holland, Michigan, and the desire of my mother to see my father obtain other work from what he was doing in Kalamazoo, carrying brick and mortar, finally my parents to also

cast in their lot with the Hollanders of the so-called "Holland Colony in Michigan".

Mr. den Bleyker still had sixty acres of the half section of the land for sale. My father bought forty acres of this, being the Northwest corner of the said half section of the land at the price of fifteen dollars per acre, and during the summer of 1862 a small house was built for us by Simon den Uyl, for which he received a contract price of forty dollars. He made not to exceed one dollar a day on the job, but it was cash which always made some difference. There was no clear spot on the land to build a house on, it required the cutting away of some of the trees to make a clear spot for the house.

The time for us to move to Holland was set for the first part of September 1862, Company "I" of the Michigan 25th Infantry had been recruited in Holland and vicinity and this regiment was organizing at Kalamazoo at the fairgrounds on Portage Street. My brother-in-law Van den Belt made arrangements for three teams of those who had conveyed the soldiers to Kalamazoo, -to take a load of our household goods to Holland. Said Company "I" arrived in Kalamazoo on Saturday, September 6, 1862, and we loaded up the three teams on Monday September 8, 1862 and during the forenoon we started for Holland, or the Colony as it was called, arriving at Allegan in the evening of that day. We stayed over night at Allegan at the house of Mr. Stein, a Hollander, who kept a sort of "stopping place" for Hollanders traveling between Kalamazoo and Holland, and in the afternoon of Tuesday September 9, 1862 about four o'clock P.M. we arrived at our home which had been built for us on our prospective farm on the Northwest corner of section 33, then yet a dense forest, with a small opening which had been left for us to place our house in.

Times were quite and money very scarce, but at this time things were very cheap in the line of provisions, until toward the close of the

Civil War, when prices began to soar, especially coffee, sugar, tea and cotton. Ordinary coffee went up to sixty cents a pound. Sugar I think went up to something like twenty to twenty-one cents a pound. For three or four years there was not a pound of Java coffee to be found in any of our stores. Common calico dress goods was sixty cents a yard, and all the other cloth in proportion. For about two years we bought little or no coffee, and a great deal of the time we were selling our eggs at six to seven cents per dozen, and butter at ten to twelve cents per pound, all in trade. Every merchant had his little cart pulled for five, ten, fifteen, twenty-five and fifty cents. By arrangement among the merchants, we could sometime exchange some credit to stores to purchase clothing, boots and shoes from grocery dealers, but most all the merchants kept general stores dealing in boots, shoes, clothing, calicoes and groceries. The leading merchants at that time were Mr. P.F. Phanstiehl, A. Plugger, Jan Knoll and Mr. Schaddelee the father of Kommer and Ryk Schadelee.

There were also some hardware dealers such as E. van der Veen and A. Geerlings, who also made all kinds of tinware by hand. The days of large and fast production in these lines were still in the future.

We had for sale butter, eggs, potatoes, corn and wheat. After some time when our clearing increased, and from our woods, stove wood eighteen inches, cord wood four feet, and hemlock bark was bought by the about all the merchants who supplied the same to Chicago and in turn brought back groceries, clothing and foot ware.

Men in those days wore boots even to the small boys, and snow-packs as they were called were worn in the woods which were a good deal like the Indian Moccasin, only they had tops like an ordinary boot.

After the war had been on about two years, the government note known as the green back came in circulation quite freely. Silver and gold, we did not see in circulation at all. In places of small coin

we had the fractional currency, of which a few of us still have samples. The soldiers were paid off in greenbacks about every two or three months and this money became quite plentiful, but with it , prices went up. At about the close of the war hay was selling here at \$24.00 per ton, which was about six to seven dollars when we first arrived. Wheat got up to \$3.60, which had been from sixty to seventy cents, butter also went up as did eggs, but not in preportion with other farm products.

For two or three years I hauled out hemlock logs to the Plugger Mills when it was located on the present site of the West Michigan Furniture Company. I got for these logs \$1.25 per thousand feet. I made from \$1.75 to \$2.25 per day with my logs thrown in, for myself and my ox team. Horse teams were very few, as every one had land to clear, and new land to plow, and this could only be done with ox teams. A good ox team could buy on our arrival for , from forty to seventy-five dollars. These animals were a great help to us and easy to keep, as when we did not use them in the winter we would turn them out in the woods where they would eat the buds of the trees that were cut down, this is what was known as "browsching".

Our hard wood we cut up for stove wood to a small extent, which we sold to people in town at, from one dollar to a dollar and a half per cord (18 in. long), but the larger part was cut into cord wood as we called it, Such wood was cut four feet long. This was shipped to Chicago by our merchants who bought it from us. Our harbor had just been opened, so that small schooners could run in, take a cargo for Chicago and bring back store goods in exchange , for the merchants, this was called "back freight", and was quite an item to our skippers who otherwise had to return "light". Several of these schooners were owned by our people, and we had quite a number of real sailors among our young men.

The day of the steam boat as a general carrier was yet. Once Black Lake was the scene of considerable activity. In those days, to see from ten to fifteen vessels in port was not an uncommon sight.

We were very much troubled with a bar forming at the mouth of the harbor, so that in the Spring quite often a vessel could not get in or out. Sometime relief was given by storms blowing large quantities of water into Black Lake, and as the storms subsided, the outflow of the water would often carry away the bar enough to give sufficient depth of water to open navigation. A little later we usually had a tug in the harbor which when passing out and in, would by the whirl of its propeller, cut a channel sufficiently deep to allow the passage of a schooner when the sea was calm. None attempted to enter when a high sea was running.

Our present harbor was dug out by hand labor. The Legislature of Michigan had passed a law allowing the taxing of the Township of Holland and other nearby Townships to a small per cent to obtain money for a so called Harbor Fund. All the Townships however, did not do as agreed, which lead to a law suit against Fillmore Township to recover the share due from same, but by some little flaw in the law, Fillmore came out ahead and was thus not compelled to pay.

Shortly afterward the Holland people succeeded in obtaining from the State several hundred acres of swamp land, mostly located in Olive and Blendon Townships. These lands were turned over to the Holland Harbor Board and sold by them, and the proceeds used for improving the Harbor or "De Mond" as it was known among our people. These lands were not worth much as they were sold at from twenty-five cents to one dollar per acre. The money was used for putting in brush work and dredging. This brush work was put in after the manner of this work in the Netherlands. Some of our people had been employed in this work in the Netherlands, and so did quite well towards keeping our harbor open.

Sometiie after the Harbor was turned over to the United States Government, and through the help of our own representative in Congress Thomas W. Ferry of Grand Haven, appropriations were obtained and the construction of more permanent pier work was begun, until we got our present fairly good harbor.

Our famâly did not arrive too early to see the hard part of the hardships that our people went through while struggling to get our Harbor in shape, as this was the only means we had to reach the market. Values were at a low ebb in the way of houses and lots in Holland, as one could scarcely get a loan on Holland property, unless it was a farm, since no one had money to loan and we had to get this from outside, and even their money was scarce, but with all the hardships to bear and obstacles to over come, one was pleased to see the spirit of contentment among the people. There was harmony and a brotherly feeling among them which gave evidence of the true christian spirit within their hearts. If one burned out, a subscription list was at once put into circilâtion, to aid the sufferers, and likewise if a horse, or or cow died, the same aid was extended. Our later additions to our population arriving from the Netherlands did not have the hardships to go through that our early pioneers had, but sicknesses and deaths were quite prevalent among them before they became acclimated. The drinking of surface water, I think was greatly the cause of much sickness and oftentimes death. As the custom was, to put one, two or three fillur barrels in the ground and thus a well for drinking purposes was dug, resulting in a good deal of fever and ague. Almost every summer we got an epidemic of dysentery "Blood-Loop" as it was called by the Hollanders. This disease often took very toll, not infrequently, nearly entire families were carried with it. Even cattle suffered from it, known as "Cloddy Murrain", as the only water these animals could find to drink was from stagnant pools of water, full of

all sorts of germs that caused the mischief. In those days we did not know of disease germs. Fever and ague were so prevalent during the later part of the summer, that nearly every one got a share of it. The different kinds of ague cure were found in ample supply on the shelves of all the grocery stores and sold over the counters during the prevalence of the fevers, as regularly as coffee, sugar and other household necessities.

As the woods were gradually cleared away and the deeper wells were dug or driven, fever and ague disappeared and also Dysentery and murrain among the cattle.

Dr. Bernardus Ledeboer was our leading physician at the time, and served the Holland public in that capacity for many years. He was also the local leader of the Democratic party of this vicinity., as John Roest and Marinus Hoogasteger were the Republican party leaders. The latter two gentlemen were the parties who started "De Grontwet" in the year 1859. I distinctly remember seeing the first number of the paper. It took quite an active part in the campaign of 1860 when Lincoln and Douglas were opposing candidates on the Republican and Democratic tickets respectively. It soon grew to be the leading Dutch paper of the Republican party.

I had the pleasure of hearing Douglas "The Little Giant" deliver a political address at Kalamazoo. He was given a great reception. Kalamazoo Democrats and those of the surrounding country turned out to hear the great orator and the part in the great demonstration in his honor. The campaign was a hot one, each party exerting itself to the utmost to carry the day. I will remember of hearing many of the older people express their fears for the future; as the South was plainly intending to disrupt the Union or have her way. The Political horizon was full of dark and ominous clouds which portended evil for our country,

and the following April when fire was opened on Fort Sumpter, which was defended by the gallant Anderson and a handful of men, we realized that the fears expressed during the campaign were only too well founded.

I was a member of the boys' classes in the Presbyterian Church Sunday School at the time, and on the Sunday following the opening of hostilities, our Superintendent, Mr. Frask, an old and honored citizen of Kalamazoo, gave us a talk on the gravity of the situation, and with tears flowing over his cheeks, told us of the serious and the dark times we were facing. I often thought of his remarks as the war was in progress, that his vision was so much more correct than that of the general public, as most people thought it would be a four to eight weeks' affair. This view apparently was taken by the government, as indicated by its call of 75,000 ninety day men. The Civil War will always be looked upon as the most bitter and gigantic struggle of the times.

It was discouraging to see the stand taken by the war democrats as against the South's sympathizers, which were soon known as the "Copperheads".

I well remember that the move of raiding Union flag poles was then begun, and many of the democrats of Kalamazoo were loyal supporters of the move.

As the war was yet in its infancy, the mistake was soon discovered of having rated it too lightly. Men were now called by the 100,000, and the ninety day men asked to enlist for three years or for the duration. One call followed another, as the strength of the South was discovered.

In the summer of 1862 need for more men was pressing, which led to the enlistment at Holland of the 100 men who were found in Company "I" 25th Michigan Volunteers. As I have stated this was the time we became residents of Holland, what is now Holland City and Holland Township,

which was then one political body.

The Village of Holland was only a plat recorded in the Registers office. The officers annually elected were elected as officers of the entire Holland Township, extending from the Village of Zeeland to the waters of Lake Michigan East and West, and from the Allegan County line to the South Line of Olive Township. So all voters in the entire district came to Holland to cast their votes in the little building which stood at the Northwest corner of Centennial Park, which was then known as "Het Marktplaats" or market square. I think it was but little used for that purpose, as during all the time we lived in Holland "De Vee Markt" was held on 8th Street. This park soon began to be used as a gathering place of public meetings, such as were held on the 4th of July etc.

The returning soldiers were also welcomed home at this park in the summer of 1865 after the close of the Civil War. I often heard the remark made of how God in his kindness had protected this little band of soldiers, as but of their number were killed in battle. Prayers in great numbers were daily offered by mothers and fathers and the community in general for the safety of our boys. These were trying times. Every paper received was eagerly scanned to see if any of our boys had fallen in the numerous battles that were continually being fought.

Not a Sabbath day Passed but what our pastor, Dr. A.C. Van Raalte in the old first church would earnestly remember our boys in his prayers at the church service.

The taking away for military service of about one hundred young men from Holland and its immediate vicinity affected a great number of families of our then comparatively small population. Things classed as necessities of life were sold at war prices, and especially those that were not produced in the North, as it was then called.

Gold went up to 3.40 and 3.50 which made our paper money of very much reduced value, the purchasing power being less than one-third as compared with gold. Food stuffs were also affected, wheat ran up to about \$3.50 per bushel and corn \$1.25 to \$1.30 per bushel. Hay \$25.00 to \$30.00 per ton, beef and pork in keeping with the grain prices. Gold and silver money was out of circulation on account of the high premium of that class of money. Coffee and sugar were very high in price. Common Rio commanded a price of from 40 to 60 cents per pound. Ordinary cotton dress goods which had sold before at from 6 to 7 cents a yard ran up to 60 cents. Our government bonds were sold at quite a discount and ran at a good rate of interest. We were almost dependent on Europe for war loans, as our Country did not possess the wealth to draw on for the prosecution of the war. Besides all this, there was quite a competition in the sale of securities in Europe between our government and the Southern Confederacy.

England was considered to be "on the fence" in regard to its attitude toward the contending parties in this Country.

The South succeeded in selling many bonds as well as the North. It required some strenuous work on the part of our statesmen to convince England that the North was the real government and bound to succeed in the end in this line of work.

The Rev. Benj. Wash Beecher of New York did some important and faithful service.

"King Cotton" was an important and attractive factor with the business element of England.

She would have embraced the opportunity gladly if they could have found a reasonable cause for the war which is plainly shown in the so-called "Trent Affair". If our government had not then bowed to the demands of England, we certainly would have had England arrayed

against us for war. By careful handling of all diplomatic questions on the part of our government, other powers were kept out of the war. England was quite friendly to the "Blockade Runners". Fast steamers carried cotton and other goods from Southern ports to England and other countries, but mostly to England.

These Privateers were a menace to our Commercial Marine and many vessels engaged in commerce were destroyed at sea.

At the close of the war many English Capitalists were well supplied with Southern Confederacy Bonds. Many attempts were made by the South to provide for the payment of these bonds, and the "Gray Backs" as Southern paper money was called, but I do not remember that in any case this was accomplished.

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The Northern people were entirely devoid of sympathy for these Englishmen who by this financial aid extended the South, lost every dollar so invested, as the aid so extended lengthened the war and this was costly to the North, both in lives and war expenses.

In the latter part of 1864 and the beginning of 1865, the North began to feel hopeful and saw victory looming up in the distance. In the month of April these hopes were realized and the war came to an end, and the thankful hearts beat in the bosoms of the entire North. A few months after this our boys began to return to their homes, and about mid-summer of 1865 our Holland Company "I" Michigan 25th. Infantry also returned. They were given a royal welcome at what is now known as Centennial Park in our City.