Origins

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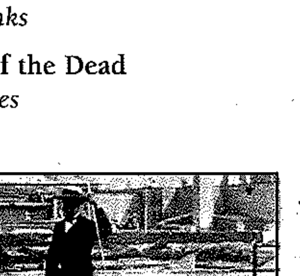

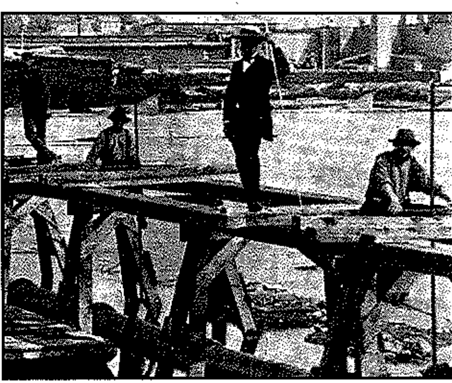

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Home Builders

*Meat, Bread, and (sometimes) Oranges!**

Suzanne Sinke

In Home Is Where You Build It *Suzanne Sinke offers an interpretation of immigrant women's experiences which asserts that beyond marriage and childbearing, Dutch immigrant women created the cultural matrix within which old and new world patterns were blended to reestablish family life in their new surroundings. Although Netherlandic customs and expectations invaded every relationship and routine the Anglo-American cultural setting altered and even eliminated crucial aspects of the European tradition.*

What did immigration to the United States mean for a Dutch woman? One way to answer that question is to compare everyday activities on both sides of the Atlantic. Food, what and how much people ate, how they got it, and what they thought about it, makes for a good starting point. For immigrants, it was one of the most important differences between life in the Netherlands and in the United States. It was also an area primarily controlled by women.

Both Dutch and Dutch American women, in their adult years, had responsibility for food in the household. This included producing or buying it as well as preparing and serving it, sometimes with the assistance of children (and more rarely, servants). This was part of women's work in the home, not for wages, but necessary for the sustenance of the family. It filled a significant part of the days of most women. Even for women engaged in wage-labor outside the home, and for those busy with farm chores, these household activities remained their responsibility. For most, America offered the economic conditions to make this task easier, even if the move entailed a number of sacrifices.

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Food in abundance was one of the most potent enticements immigrant recruiters used to try and lure Dutch people to America. In the late nineteenth century in the Netherlands women's opportunities to put food on the table differed according to the economic background of the family, which generally related to the kind of farms found in the area where they lived. On the large farms, farm workers' families complained bitterly of the poor wages and long hours which meant meager meals, even when they had their own gardens.

> [My mother would] weed the wheat and oats in the Netherlands, and that was all done by hand . . . . mornings around ten, she always took the coffee pot along, then she stoked a coal fire on the ground and put the coffee on and then she had to fix something to eat . . . and when she came home, she had to fix dinner of course, a hot meal . . . the gravy they used with the potatoes, she said, was nothing more than some water with a few droplets of fat in it.[1]

What this immigrant woman described of her mother's life appeared also in official reports from the turn of the century.[2] On average, 51 percent of a working

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W. Eelsingh

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* This article is a shortened version of a chapter of a longer manuscript, "Home Is Where you Build It: Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States, 1880-1920," based on my dissertation (1993, University of Minnesota).

family's cash income went for food in 1890.[3]

For those coming from sandy soil regions, farms were smaller and more heterogeneous, meaning that adult women helped run small farms. Women in these areas generally had responsibility for small livestock (pigs, goats, calves, chickens), vegetable and flower gardens, and to some extent milking and the subsequent manufacture of dairy products (butter and cheese) if there was a surplus, and cleaning of the milking apparatus. Help for these tasks came primarily from the children if there were any, with perhaps one young female domestic to assist at times. In addition, wives took the place of hired hands in assisting with field work. Over time factories took over the processing of milk, though women tended to retain cheesemaking in the home.[4] On slightly larger farms, where two or three generations might share the house at one point in their lives, the oldest woman (usually the younger woman's mother-in-law) was in charge of cooking.

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According to a study of Winterswijk around 1900, meals for a typical day on the farm consisted of tea before milking, pap or bread just after milking, coffee with bread at about ten, stew at noon (consisting of carrots, cabbage or brown beans with a little bacon and potatoes), pancakes at four, and pap at nine in the evening.[5] Women brought the coffee and pancakes to the fields. The women also had to prepare the slop for the animals, usually a cooked mixture of root vegetables with cut cabbage, flour, and buttermilk. At slaughtering time they made various sausages, salted, dried, pickled, and otherwise preserved the meat.[6]

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In America, women's work on the farm continued along old patterns, but eating habits underwent a change. Perhaps the family did not earn a fortune, but the food was better: "Bacon and eggs are everyday fare, potatoes, apples, onions, cabbage and all the vegetables you can imagine are here too . . . there is a surplus of butter and milk."[7] Such reports served as a potent stimulus to emigration in the agricultural laboring class, those who assumed this kind of consumption was only for wealthy farmers. Immigrants sometimes termed their letters *spekbrieven*, literally bacon letters, because little could convey their success as well as reports of eating lots of fat pork.[8] For others the term *spekbrief* implied that the immigrant letter contained money, the "fat" from one's abundance.

For those who had enough capital to start out immediately in farming, women's production took on added importance in the success of the migration venture. Anna van Beek Peters, from Baarn, reminisced that her mother brought cheesemaking forms, a butter churn, and a wire wicker for toasting bread from the Netherlands when the family emigrated. Besides being able to make

familiar dishes, this meant money-making opportunities. Once in Iowa, Van Beek's mother, with help from her daughters, made and sold both cheese and butter in the nearest village.[9] Nearly every immigrant woman who described life on a farm mentioned selling milk and/or butter, eggs, and sometimes cheese and garden vegetables in addition to the "main" money-making crops.[10]

Over time the family eating patterns changed. Van Beek Peters' description of cooking for the harvesting crew illustrated some of the encroaching American patterns. Not only did the women have to prepare a large roast for the thrashers, they also baked pies and potatoes, and cooked vegetables and other things separately on the stove.[11] The baked goods, as well as the size of the portions of meat, and the separate vegetable dishes were uncommon in the Netherlands.[12]

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Even in the midst of poor harvests and economic downturns, most Dutch immigrant women indicated that they managed to subsist quite well with their large gardens and small livestock. In immigrant letters assuring relatives that the family had enough food, and describing exactly what they ate, often fell to women. "We have a good deal to eat for the winter: a cow, one sturgeon of 125 pounds, a halibut of 80 pounds, a few salmon at 12 pounds each, and a half tub full of flounders . . . as for potatoes, cabbage, carrots, turnips, and such things, we also have enough."[13] In this family's case the Groningers of their area contributed to their food stocks, giving away the "garbage" fish they brought in with each catch. In the United States, as in the Netherlands, proximity to the ocean or inland sea made the difference in whether an individual or family could expect fish on the table.

The reports of Lubbigje Schaapman in California illustrated how drastically eating patterns could change from one side of the Atlantic to the other:

> It sure is different here than in Holland. Cooking a meal, in the morning, and at noon, and at night. There is no rye bread here. But there is canned fruit, peaches, apricots, pears, berries. Everything is first cooked, then put in bottles or jars and then you have to tighten the lids . . . [We have] Oranges, syrup, butter, eggs, meat, coffee every day . . . .[14]

The selection of foodstuffs in her area was more extensive than elsewhere, but the refrain of three warm meals a day, usually with meat, stood in stark contrast to the diet of many Dutch workers. Butter, sugar, and meat all fell in the category of rationed luxuries into the twentieth century for the class of families who normally emigrated. This quote, from 1911, also illustrated another "American"

pattern. With relatively low sugar prices and the introduction of standardized glass jars at the turn of the century, women in America began to do their own canning, allowing them to put more variation into their winter diet and to use their gardens more extensively.[15] Canning was not limited to America, but immigrants heard about it here before it made its way to the group that usually emigrated in the Netherlands, hence it seemed "American."

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Dutch American women had an easier task than those from some other ethnic groups because most standard products for Dutch cuisine were readily available in the United States. Rarely did they complain about a lack of specific foods. An early account of Pella, Iowa, indicated that nearly every house in town had a vegetable garden, and that everything grew well "except cauliflower." The Dutch settlers there planted asparagus beds "and they look as good as what is expected in Holland in the best tilled beds after two years."[16] Only at holiday time did Dutch American women consistently note the absence of specialty foods or the people who normally prepared them: *oliebollen* (a sort of spice doughnut usually eaten at New Year's), waffles from street vendors, *poffertjes* (another doughnut sort), or local delicacies.[17]

Certain entrepreneurs imported items from the Netherlands, particularly those for which women had already developed brand-name loyalty, or goods which were standard equipment in the old world. For example, Droste Cocoa and Holland Rusk sported frequent advertisements in Dutch American publications. Others manufactured Dutch goods on American soil.

According to letters, women adopted relatively few American items into their daily diet. Neither pumpkins nor squash appear in their extensive lists of food, though most Dutch immigrants lived in areas where these vegetables grew readily. Many women simply equated good food with what they already knew, and avoided new tastes. Aukjen Pruiksma explained how her relatives gave her family a nice reception after arrival in New Jersey in 1895: "Last evening [we gathered around the table] . . . partaking of a delicious meal, consisting of potatoes, meat, green beans and plum pudding. Aboard the ship we could get enough to eat, but it was all so foreign."[18]

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While the relative abundance of foodstuffs generally gave women a sense of pride in providing good meals for their families, it also often meant more work. There were more items to preserve, whether at butchering time, or during the harvest, or (for city dwellers) when things were in season.[19] There were more things to prepare and put on the table. Rather than sufficing with hot mush, or serving bread with a bit of lard for breakfast or coffee, housewives more often served meals with two or three warm dishes. Also, women added something to drink to the menu. The excess of milk products usually meant that a family had fresh milk or buttermilk to accompany the main meal, whereas many families in the Netherlands went without.[20]

Aside from the addition of meat to people's diets the most important culinary change was the introduction of baked goods from the home oven. Whereas bread-making was generally the task of a baker in the Netherlands, in the United States women baked their own bread, and other items as well: "I bake bread and cake and pie, so that does not cost too much."[21] So many women commented on this, that it indicated this as one of the most significant alterations in daily patterns. Several factors contributed to the trend towards homemade bread. First, rural women often lived too far from the nearest baker to bring their pre-shaped loaves for baking (a common practice on small farms in the Netherlands). Second, baker's bread had the reputation as the food of the working-class in the United States, with the consequence that domestics learned the middle-class

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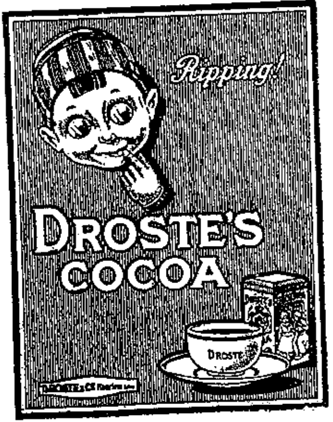
notion that you should bake your own. Third, it was cheaper to bake one's own bread, and frugality was the watchword of many Dutch housewives. In this changeover the gender associated with baking changed. While a baker was often a man in the Netherlands, home baking became a craft for women in the United States.



Just as the amount and variety of food increased, so did the standards for baking. Women reported not just who could bake, but who baked well. Thus Heintje Oggel van Bruggen wrote in 1888: "[Neeltje] can bake a tasty fruitcake and doughnuts too."[22] A good housewife needed to have baked goods on hand for coffee time. Sunday afternoons were the most common time for visiting, but "having the coffee pot on" meant an open door to guests, whether the coffee was actually ready or not.[23] The afternoon beverage sometimes was tea rather than coffee, but the ability to provide "real" coffee (not a grain-based substitute or a watered-down version) or quality tea along with some baked goods, exemplified a household's prosperity as well as hospitality; so too did the presence (or absence) of milk and sugar, the type and number of coffee spoons, the cups, the room in which it was served, the tablecloth, and a variety of other things.[24]

For the first generation, the "coffee" was one of the few social activities for both men and women which was not associated with the church. The Dutch Protestant immigrants took at least one extended coffee break every day, almost another lunch. Coffee time allowed the family to offer hospitality without the work of overnight accommodations or large meals. Failing to offer or join coffee time could engender disapproval. In Anna Brown's reminiscences she noted that her mother, an English woman, remained aloof from her Dutch mother-in-law's coffee gatherings, but Jan went to his mother's nearly every day to have coffee and chat in Dutch.[25] Likewise, *De Gereformeerde Amerikaan* cautioned Dutch American women they should not ban smoking (usually cigars or pipes, and almost exclusively done by men) from coffee time, because it contributed to the pleasant atmosphere.[26] Coffee time was a ritual of sociability, one which slowly disappeared as wage work set forth a more rigid system of time

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management. With this change coffee time took on another, less positive connotation; it became the *koffie klets*, a gossip session associated primarily with women.[27]

Meals on the other hand, retained a familial character. According to letters and reminiscences, Dutch Protestant immigrant women cooked and organized their meals so that everyone could sit down at once to eat together. Domestic servants, hired hands, visitors, non-nuclear family members: all ate at the family table, and everyone ate the same food. This stood in stark contrast to large farms in the Netherlands, where staff

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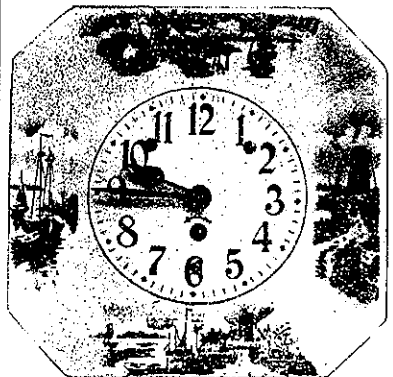

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not only ate separately (usually in the kitchen), but also were not allowed to eat the variety and quantity that stood on the table in the next room.[28]

The gender division related to cooking was strict on both sides of the Atlantic. Even when women worked side by side with their male kin in the fields, they alone were responsible for meals without the assistance of men (and often not of boys). Dutch immigrants frequently assumed men did not know how to cook. When Anna Kuijt heard her Dutch relatives took a trip to Germany, she wrote, "who cooked the meals for Uncle?"[29] Not surprisingly, single male Dutch immigrants tended to board with friends or relatives rather than care for a household themselves. But others noted that in America, at least if the circumstances required, men might manage. Lubbigje Schaapman, for example, cooked occasionally for her brother who was still single but already had a farm. Still she reported he could wash and clean and can, at least if he wasn't too busy with farm work. "There are many men here who can fend for themselves, who can bake and fry everything, but that doesn't mean they like it!"[30]

In general, for Dutch immigrant families increasing financial well-being meant greater rather than lesser gender role divisions concerning food. Women who worked somewhat less in the fields were occupied with rising standards in the home, including more elaborate meals. Women not only took charge of meal preparation, but also of cleanup. After the meal the housewife cleared the table and did the dishes, or she allocated these chores to her children, especially older daughters. Dutch immigrants considered nearly anything dealing with food a woman's domain.

Dutch immigrant women found life in the United States similar in terms of their responsibility for food procurement and preparation. It was different, however, in terms of the quantity and variety of what they could serve. More foods, separate dishes, home-baked bread, and canning differentiated what came on a Dutch American table from a Dutch one prior to emigration. For women this often meant more work in the kitchen, but with much more to put on the table as a result. Reports of meat three times a day may have been more important than any other factor in enticing immigrants to America, for unlike information on good wages or cheap land, they could convince both men *and women* of opportunities for a better life in America.

Endnotes

1. Tape 1018, woman born in Geersdijk in 1894; family moved to Nauernapolder and then to Houtrakpolder (near the Noordzeekanaal), then emigrated with parents at age eleven, settled first in Chicago, and then in Holland, Michigan. This is part of a collection of about three hundred interviews carried out with Dutch Americans in the 1960s. The collection is housed at the P.J. Meertens Instituut [of linguistics] in Amsterdam.

2. See for example *"Arbeidersbudgets," Bijdragen van het Statistisch Instituut* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1891). These indicated that in the countryside expenditures for bread generally were the largest item in the food budget, followed by potatoes and coffee. The amount spent on fat was frequently double that for meat, and fruit belonged to the luxury category. For additional citations on government reports see Selma Leydesdorff, *Verborgen arbeid, vergeten arbeid: een verkenning in de geschiedenis van de vrouwenarbeid rond negentien-honderd* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum Assen, 1977), pp. 142-143. The government undertook several studies of women's work in preparation of maximum hours legislation. Since these laws did not affect most household workers or those in agriculture, those most drawn to emigrate were not affected. In addition, major exhibitions of women's activities, the *Nationale Tentoonstelling van Vrouwenarbeid*

(1898), the *Nationale Tentoonstelling Huisindustrie* (1909), and the exhibition *De Vrouw 1813-1913*, all stimulated research focused on women.

3. Ali de Regt, *Arbeidersgezinnen en beschavingsarbeid* (Amsterdam: Boom Meppel, 1986), pp. 39, 75-76.

4. G.H. Bieleman, *"Plaats en taak der Vrouw in het Landbouwbedrijf,"* in *De vrouw, de vrouwenbeweging en het vrouwenvraagstuk*, vol. 1, ed. C.M. Werker-Beaujon, Clara Wichmann and W.H.M. Werker (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1914), p. 273.

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5. Winterswijk was one of the areas caught up heavily in emigration. The exodus of hundreds in the mid-nineteenth century meant lower prices for farmland for those who remained. See Suzanne Sinke, "Dutch Immigrant Women in the Late Nineteenth Century," Master's Thesis, Kent State University, 1983.

6. Ine van Huet, *"Tussen Traditie en Modernisering: Agrarisch Bedrijf, Boerinnentaak en Landbouwhuishoudonderwijs in Verandering, Winterswijk (Achterhoek)," Doctoraal scriptie, Rijksuniversiteit Nijmegen*, 1988, pp. 34-38.

7. Maaike Huigen to Father and Siblings, Galesburg, Iowa, 12 March 1880, Rijksarchief Leeuwarden.

8. One woman joked with her relatives, "In the Netherlands one never gets to taste sturgeon and salmon, our letters are not bacon letters as someone once said because they appear more like fish letters." Klaaska Noorda to Mother, Siblings, Nephews and Nieces, Oak Harbor, Washington, August 1897, Heritage Hall Collection.

9. Tape 1086, woman born in Baarn in 1896, arrived in U.S. at age 12, P.J. Meertens Instituut.

10. For example see Tape 1025, four persons born in Overisel, Michigan area in the 1890s; Tape 1026, three persons born in Western Michigan in the 1890s; Tape 1085, three persons born in Pernis, Zuid Holland, in 1878, 1883, and 1886, who migrated in 1880 and settled in Sheldon, Iowa; Tape 1088, woman born in Numansdorp in 1902, emigrated in 1913, and persons born in Sheldon, Iowa in early 1900s; Tape 1090, woman born in Marian County, Iowa in 1898; Tape 1097, two persons born in Pella, Iowa in 1891 and 1912, P.J. Meertens Instituut. The choices of products to sell differed, but the principle was the same for many other rural women of this period. See Joan Jensen, "Cloth, Butter, and Boarders: Women's Household Production for the Market," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 12 (Summer 1980): 14-24.

11. Tape 1086, P.J. Meertens Instituut.

12. Many women stated they did not work "outside," yet in describing their activities they noted that they did extensive gardening, much of the work in the barns, including milking and feeding the livestock, and then "helped" in the fields as necessary.

13. Klaaska Noorda to Mother and Siblings, n.d., n.p. [1890s, Oak Harbor, Washington], Heritage Hall Collection.

14. Letters from Lubbigje Schaapman to Willamientje Beltman, see for example letter of 19 March 1911, from Salida, California, Heritage Hall Collection.

15. Dutch American women rapidly adjusted to this as a normal activity: "Today I canned some raspberries and some currants and I still have some gooseberries and currants to pick . . . . I haven't very much news to write just now." Yettie to Sister, Brother and Family, Reasnor, Iowa to somewhere in the United States, 4 July 1912, G.N. Van't Sant Collection, Heritage Hall. On technological change see Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), pp. 22-23; Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 73.

16. Quoted in Jacob van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America*, ed. Robert P. Swierenga; trans. Adriaan de Wit (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985 [1928]), p. 269.

17. For example Dina Maria Oggel: "Oh how I would like to spend the Christmas holidays with you . . . . You have certainly eaten delicious waffles at Balkenende and also had *oliebollen* . . . ." Oggel to Brother and Sister, Pella, Iowa, 17 December 1894, Heritage Hall Collection.

18. Aukjen Pruiksma to Children, Paterson to Joure, Friesland, 16 May 1895, Heritage Hall Collection, their translation.

19. For an extensive example of butchering and meat preserving from Sioux Center, Iowa consult Tape 1078, P.J. Meertens Instituut; on canning and food generally see the letters of Geertje de Jong Schuiling, Hoogland Collection, Rijksarchief Leeuwarden; and the letters from Lubbigje Schaapman to Willamientje Beltman, Heritage Hall Collection.

20. Again this was class-based, since the more well-to-do could afford to buy various beverages, and farmers with sufficient stock had milk for their own uses. For an example of drinking habits see Tape 1077, woman born in 1910 in Rotterdam; man born in Barneveld in 1908; both emigrated with parents and settled in Sioux Center, Iowa, P.J. Meertens Instituut.

21. Anna Kuijt Bates to Gerrit Kuijt and Letta Retel, Morgan Park, Illinois, 15 January 1918, Heritage Hall Collection.

22. Heintje Oggel van Bruggen to Sister-in-law Mietje, Orange City, Iowa [to Axel], 12 August 1888, Heritage Hall Collection.

23. One woman from Oostwolde,

Groningen, found life in Hollandale, Minnesota a little lonesome at first. When some friends came to visit the first thing they asked was, "Is the coffee ready?" Of course she answered yes. Tape 1070/71, woman born in 1892, migrated at age 17, P.J. Meertens Instituut.

24. In the Netherlands even the better-off farmers did not always have a sufficient supply of silver spoons to serve guests. See Cornelia De Groot, *When I Was a Girl in Holland*, (Arnhem: Cor Bakker, 1991 [1917]), pp. 15-16.

25. Anna Brown, "Life Story of John Tuininga," in Henry S. Lucas, arr. *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, vol. 2, (Assen: Van Gorcum & Co., 1955), p. 193.

26. H. van Hoogen, "*Het Huislijk — en Familieleven der Hollanders in Amerika*," *De Gereformeerde Amerikaan*, May 1898, pp. 148-149. The author also assured the "young ladies" that non-smoking was not necessarily "American."

27. That Dutch women enjoyed a leisurely cup of coffee became enshrined in what two researchers called the three *k*'s of Dutch women's lives: *krant, kachel, koffie* [newspaper, stove, coffee]. This contrasted the German standard refrain when referring to women's activities. In German parlance the three *k*'s consisted of *kinder, küche, kirche* [children, kitchen, church]. Carli Schuit and Joan Hemels, *Recepten en rolpatronen: Nederlandse kranten en hun vrouwelijke lezers 1888-1988* (Utrecht: Scala, 1988), p. 17.

28. One of the interviews in *Kaatje ben je boven*? exemplifies this: "When the [dinner guests] sat eating the [servant] knocked politely and said: You sit here dining royally and I am allowed to chew the bones. But I want a piece of meat too." Barbara Henkes and Hanneke Oosterhof, (Nijmegen: SUN, 1985), p. 153.

29. Anna Kuijt to Uncle and Cato, Chicago, 12 August 1911, Heritage Hall Collection.

30. Lubbigje Schaapman to Willamientje Beltman, Salida, California, July 1914, Heritage Hall Collection.

Home Builders

Women on the Frontier

by H.J. Brinks

The following correspondence from translations by Frank Verbrugge* effectively illustrates the unique perceptions of wives and mothers, who, though consistently honored, have been too seldom quoted. Their husbands, as Suzanne Sinke notes, usually initiated the decision to emigrate and controlled major decisions like the selection of a new home and the family's source of income. Consequently, their letters reflect an inclination to justify immigration with reports of successful settlement and subsequent achievements. Women were less inclined to emigrate, and when they arrived in the new land, they devoted their energies to homemaking, to nurturing their many children, and to the creation of social amenities. Their letters, then, reflect the concerns of the kitchen and the backyard. For farmers' wives, these concerns included cultivating a vegetable garden, tending a large flock of chickens, processing canned goods, and marketing eggs and butter — together with baking bread, preparing meals, and providing a clean living space.

Two of the women quoted in Verbrugge's book, Maria van der Vliet and Jantje Enserink, by joining their husbands, left their parents, siblings, and extended families in Europe. Maria, who married Jacobus Verbrugge, enjoyed a full life in Minnesota, but her sister-in-law Jantje lost her husband, Cornelis van der Vliet, during their first year in Canada (1910) and returned to the Netherlands in 1912.

Maria van der Vliet married Jacobus Verbrugge on February 19, 1904. They left the Netherlands on April 2. Although they were well matched for their forty-seven-year partnership in the Edgerton, Minnesota area, Maria's parents at first opposed the marriage but reluctantly allowed it after Maria pressed her strong desire to emigrate to Minnesota with Jacobus. Maria's parents were relatively wealthy dairy farmers in the village of Wilnis. In contrast, Jacobus, had been raised by step-parents in a large family which combined the children of three marriages and promised only dim economic prospects.

Maria's parents were understandably frightened by the nearly inevitable poverty which faced young men in Jacobus's circumstances. Thus, immigration, though risky, offered more potential than turf digging in northwestern Utrecht.* In Minnesota, by contrast, both a farm and a farming

* *Frank Verbrugge, the youngest son of Maria Verbrugge, translated and published the correspondence of the Verbrugge family in* Letters from the Past *(1981). This 343-page book also contains the Dutch texts along with introductory segments.*

* On this point Helen R. Verbrugge comments, "For much of the year Jacobus, a day laborer, was hired to dig turf south of Wilnis. The men used boats to reach the marshes surrounding the lakes where they cut huge sections of peat. After being partly dried, the peat was cut successively into strips, logs and bricks. Finally, when it was properly dried, the owners sold the peat to regional customers and to peat dealers in Amsterdam. The work was wet, messy and difficult. Peat diggers wore wooden boards strapped to their wooden shoes to keep their footing and to press water out of the peat strips."

partner awaited the newlywed couple.

Maria's first impressions of their rented farm and of Leota, Minnesota (April 24, 1904), follow.

> . . . . The people here have demonstrated a great deal of interest in us since we came here. Some have already visited us including our neighbor, Mrs. Olivier. I had intended to go to her place for milk because our cow, not yet calved, is dry. For five cents she gave me more than two pails of milk. In the summer, when the cows are producing lots of milk, she will give it to me for nothing. They are friendly and excellent neighbors who generously assist us with our temporal needs. . . . They have a large 360-acre farm, a fine house, many buildings, forty head of cattle and ten or twelve horses. I was amazed by that. They have a veranda on the house. Many others have one but we do not.We are very much at ease here. For example, when I stepped out of church this morning it was like being in Wilnis. We rode to church. All the farmers ride to church. We are three miles from the church. . . .Today we had a pastor [otherwise sermons were read by an elder]. It is a charming little church and I am already learning to know some of the people by name.
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> During my first days here I was busy putting my house in order. I was happy when it was clean. I don't have much furniture yet . . . . Friday I took care of some meat. Cornelis Rijlaarsdam [their partner] thought it would be good to butcher a hog right away — before the weather gets too warm. I did it with pleasure. I have baked bread a couple times. The first time it didn't come out so good but the second time it was better and after that I hope it will go well. It's quite an art to bake good bread here. It is done differently from the way you do it because the yeast is different and the bread has to be worked differently.
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> Yesterday I polished my furnace ("stove" here) which was just then set up. It has six openings [burners] and a large oven. I thought it was large when I bought it, but most people have larger ones. It is a used stove and I bought it for eleven dollars. New ones cost too much, but this one is just like new and it is large enough for me.
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> Do you know what I find unique here? The people bring all of their children with them to church. Nobody stays at home except for illness or something like that. It's expected that you bring the children and nursing babies to church. It's really a good idea and they are all so quiet. The people are so friendly — so hospitable. Today they wanted us to stay at church until the afternoon service but we wanted to go home. I had already made up soup yesterday for today. The hog had been butchered when it came here so I had no mess at all.
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> I want to do my best to learn English, then we will all be able to un-

Wilnis, the Netherlands — native village of Maria van der Vliet and her brother Cornelis.

derstand each other. In Leota, however, most people are Hollanders and even some of the Americans speak Dutch.

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Today, Monday, I went out to the field and brought out some coffee for Jacobus and Cornelis. The land looks rich to me and we hear repeatedly that this is a good farm. . . . It is so beautiful today that I [only] prepared the washing for tomorrow. I have enough work for today so I would rather do the washing tomorrow. . . .

Van der Vliet family farm in Wilnis.

We have twenty-two chickens. They are not laying well yet but we can eat one egg every day and the balance, fifty eggs, I will sell — the first produce from our own farm and we have been here now for just one week.

The land around here is hilly and the views are beautiful, especially when the sun shines. When the seed has sprouted and the grain grows it will be even more beautiful.

After farming with the Verbrugges for just one year, their partner, Cornelis Rijlaarsdam, married and began to farm on his own. The Verbrugges remained on the rented Leota farm until 1909, when they acquired a $5,600 run-down farmstead in Chandler with some financial assistance from Maria's parents in Wilnis. With much effort the Chandler farm became a pleasant home for Maria, Jacobus, and their eleven children, of whom four had been born in Leota. The 160-acre farm flourished, was enlarged by 120 acres in 1917, and provided ample resources for the Verbrugge family.

The following excerpts from a variety of Maria's Chandler, Minnesota, letters disclose details of the family's hearthside routines, which focus, in Suzanne Sinke's words, on "children, church and sickbed."

James, our five-year-old, milks cows already and is always quietly thinking. Grace makes coffee already and although she teases her little brother she always gives him something to eat. Nick is afraid of nothing and climbs on top of everything. Last week he took a big knife out of the cabinet and tried to hide it from me behind his back. By himself he learns the verses that I teach to Grace and James — 'Opent uwen mond' [open your mouth], 'Ik ben een kindje' [I am a little child]. Then he asks for 'Piet Hein' which Uncle Cornelis taught him. . . . Grace repeats everything and is almost a mind reader. John, always sweet and contented, grows like a cabbage.

He wears the little bib that Heintje Meier made for him.*

* April 12, 1910, Maria to Dear Parents.

In 1914, when a photo of Grandmother van der Vliet arrived, Maria reported,

They all came and stood around me at the same time. One crawled on my lap, another on my back and another behind me and above me on the chair. Little James said, 'Mama are you happy to see Grandma once again?' It is very moving after ten years, to have your face before us once again . . . . You are nearly the same, Mother, somewhat older and a little leaner but not aged . . . . The house looks so neat. Marretje has probably crocheted the [curtain] cords again.

After reading about so many disturbing events in Europe, and also that our beloved fatherland has begun to call up troops including our youngest and beloved brother Jan, we are very eager for news. I cannot write about it without weeping

. . . . Our pastor says that we are living in solemn times, and he prayed fervently for the future of Europe . . . . If Brother Jan is already in the service send him this letter [so that we can remind him] that the

Wedding picture, February 19, 1904, Maria van der Vliet and Jacobus Verbrugge in Wilnis, the Netherlands.

> Lord will sustain and strengthen him and give him the courage and wisdom to do what the Lord calls him to do. Dear Brother, although we are far from each other our thoughts are with you. May the Lord be good to you and stand guard behind and before you. And may it be that Europe will be saved from much misery.

The family's health, gardening, and food preparation figured largely in Maria's August 19, 1916, letter, which reported,

> Last week Jacobus and two of the children were weak from heat exhaustion, but that is now over. It has been an amazingly hot summer and that without let up. Some crops need a good rain. The garden plants are dry but we have enough and have already canned beans, cucumbers [pickles] and purslane.* The endive must still grow more. The grain has been harvested and has dried well. We had some hail damage but nothing like last year. The corn is still growing and indications are that it will be ready for harvest in October and November. Even though it is hot and dry the cows are producing well. We can sell eggs from the chickens regularly and use some for ourselves. Everything is expensive here and wheat is becoming especially expensive. That is obvious when you bake your own bread and need quite a lot for a large family like ours.**

The Verbrugge's eleventh and last child, Nellie, arrived in 1919. Maria reported,

> . . . each day my strength is increasing. . . . With the little one, everything goes well. The birth was very successful and we were all happy and thankful together . . . in about fourteen days I was able to be at the table again. Everyone was happy to have mother in the room again and [had no idea] that joy would rapidly turn into concern.
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> Last week Jacobus and James were planning to go to the hay field together. . . .
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> They left with the mowing machine but before going to work Jacobus injured himself so severely that we had to call the doctor immediately. You can easily imagine how fearful that was and also the possibility of infection. Fortunately the Lord mercifully spared us from that and we expect that Jacobus will recover.* The neighbors finished the haying for us.

* This plant is usually regarded as a very hearty weed but was also used as a vegetable and salad green.

** World War I drove up the price of wheat by over 100 percent. A family of thirteen probably consumed at least twenty loaves of bread each week.

The last entry from Maria's correspondence (December 10, 1923) to contain church news asserts,

> The Lord has granted us our own minister [Lambertus van Laar] who preaches the richness of God's grace with devotion and fervor. We called him as a candidate. May we experience in him the jeweled gifts and beautiful talents which the Lord has given to the young servant.
>
> Sister, sometimes I look back to my youth when I struggled and prayed so often and when the words of Isaiah rang out so peacefully in my soul, "In happiness you will go out

* Jacobus's letter (October 27, 1919) explained that he had been thrown off the mowing machine and was caught on its blades while the horses ran down the road. The mower broke loose at a bridge.

Wedding picture, May 7, 1909, Cornelis van der Vliet and Jantje Enserink in Wilnis, the Netherlands.

and you will be led forward in peace."

Maria's full and generally peaceful life contrasts sharply with the experiences of her sister-in-law Jantje van der Vliet. Jantje's husband, Cornelis, had traveled the world. With four years of experience in South Africa (1903-07) and two years in Canada (1907-08) he returned to Wilnis in 1909, married Jantje on May 7, and left with her for Canada that same month. Their stormy ocean voyage and railroad trip terminated at Fort William [Thunder Bay], Ontario, where Jantje remained until Cornelis and his coworkers could finish building a house near Campbell Lake. They were employed there in the extension of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

While the house building proceeded, Jantje waited in Fort William for three lonely weeks. When she finally arrived at Campbell Lake, she discovered that she was the only woman in the camp and was therefore expected to cook, clean, and wash for a crew of seven men. Under such circumstances the tone of her letters seems inordinately patient and hopeful.

From Fort William on June 19, 1909, Jantje reported,

> I am still here [at a boarding house] and expect that Cornelis will come to get me today. I hope I will not be disappointed.
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> I have been busy constantly until now. I finished my skirt as far as possible and everyday I translate recipes from my cookbook. I have walked around here and helped out with a little work. So, time does not pass too slowly but I wish very much to leave and go to our own home [at Campbell Lake]. I'm getting along all right and the people are friendly, but it's not like home. People here do not attend church on Sunday. They sleep late and the lady of the house bakes several kinds of cakes.
>
> While walking I passed the Presbyterian church and went inside. Of course I could enjoy only the music. A choir of boys and girls sang first and then the whole congregation sang while standing. The choir girls were all dressed in long black gowns with wide sleeves — like a toga with white strips for the neck and their heads covered with very small caps. The boys wore ordinary clothes.
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> I have seen at least five large churches — Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran and Roman Catholic. All the stores are closed on Sundays and there is no postal service.
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> . . . I see few bicycles and women also drive horses with carriages. The carriages never seem to be washed. The Negroes have laundries here and as far as I can tell they wash cleanly. Carpenters are in high demand because houses are being built everywhere. House rent is high; these people [her landlord] pay $14.00 per month.
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> June 23, I left a small space [on this paper] for Cornelis to write but he did not arrive. I did receive a letter from him yesterday and, the Lord willing, he now hopes to come next Saturday. . . . the house is almost done and the men are good workers . . . .
>
> Naturally I was disappointed again on Saturday. Luckily Cornelis did send some money. I had just one cent left.

Jacobus and Maria Verbrugge with five children, March 12, 1910.

Late in June Jantje and Cornelis did settle into the Campbell Lake house. Her July, 1909, report from Campbell Lake soars with ambitious optimism.

> I want to tell you a few things about our past [few] days. We arrived here at ten o'clock on Thursday morning. Nobody was at home because all the men were working. All of our things arrived by 3:00 P.M. and then we could go to work. We bought a rug in Fort Williams and placed it under the dining room table — otherwise the floors are plain white boards. We have a piece of linoleum for the kitchen and wallpaper for both the kitchen and the dining room. The rooms are rather attractively furnished — the living room has a long table [covered with a] piece of red linoleum and our clock is on the end [of the table] by the window. The walls are decorated with prints and wall mottoes. We bought kitchen utensils in Fort Williams and some of them [were] here. But everything is not yet at hand, for example, water kettles. Our stove burns well and we have lots of wood outside around the house . . . . Our goods arrived safely and only one cup was broken.
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> The scenery here is beautiful but the "ongedierte" [probably mosquitoes and black flies] are terribly bothersome . . . . On Thursday the men were covered with bites. Harmen's [van der Lee] face was very swollen. If I go walking in the woods I will have to keep my face covered. I have packed away all the clothes which I do not need. Otherwise it is bothersome to hang them on the many

nails we have pounded in the walls. I will also put my bedspread away for the time being.

Yesterday we laid in a supply of necessities, and the men ate breakfast here for the first time. Before that they came here only to wash and then ran back to camp for food. This noon I cooked a pot of Sunday Wilnis stew* with some pudding. It is too much work here to cook separate dishes . . . .

A few weeks later Jantje was seriously ill from heat exhaustion. To recover, she moved to Chandler, Minnesota, where her sister-in-law Maria Verbrugge nursed her back to health. During her recovery Jantje reviewed her experiences in Canada. "Our little house," she wrote,

was pleasantly situated on a lake and among the woods, but we had no social interchange at all. There were only men who worked on the railroad. . . . But that was not the worst. We had a large household ourselves with the six men who came along from Holland to live with us. When I was there for only two weeks I became sick. I could not eat at all and I became thinner and weaker every day. No help was nearby so we could think of no better solution than that I should come here to Chandler to live with [Maria and Jacobus] and I have been here now for a little more than six weeks.

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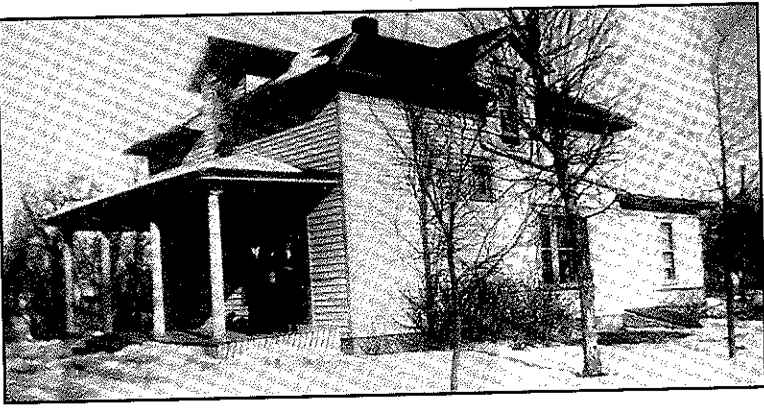
Now, by God's grace, I can rejoice in good health again. If the cost, and distance were not so great, I would gladly return to my husband. But, instead, I will wait until he comes to get me. Cornelis hopes to be finished with his work [in Campbell Lake] before winter and by next spring we hope to be farming.

Holland is too often on my mind. There is almost no fruit here, and although you can buy it in town it is too expensive. Some farmers have orchards but they require more attention than the farmers are willing to expend. Little attention is given to

* Gestoofde pot — a mixture of meat, vegetables, and potatoes.



Verbrugge home in Edgerton, Minnesota.

houses here also, although, by comparison, much attention is given to clothing.

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Cornelis van der Vliet was reunited with Jantje by the end of December 1909. By then he had gained enough cash to consider farming in Alberta, and he left to explore land near Winnipeg in March 1910. Jantje, meanwhile, had a miscarriage in late January but recovered quickly.* When Cornelis left for Canada, Jantje remained with the Verbrugges, where she helped tend the garden and their five young children. Jacobus Verbrugge was skeptical of the Canada venture and wrote,

To me it seems very hazardous to go to the far West and set up tents among the Swedes, Norwegians, Russians and what not all. It may be fine for Cornelis who takes as much pleasure from reading the newspaper as from Sunday worship services, but that is not the case with Jantje. Nonetheless, for him Canada is the land of the future where he expects to achieve his goals.

Cornelis did not gain his objectives. He died of a ruptured appendix and peritonitis on April 23 while exploring land near Stettler, Alberta, about thirty miles south of Edmonton. News of his death did not reach Chandler until April 28, and by then Cornelis had been buried. Jantje's May 7 letter to her parents tells the story of her grief.*

* Helen Verbrugge reports, "The baby was buried across the road on the Verbrugge farm. A small tree planted there as a memorial was replaced several times because on that high, windy hill it had a struggle to live and grow."

Dear Parents and Brother,

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The blow which the Lord has

Maria and Jacobus on their Edgerton, Minnesota farm, ca. 1930.

brought to me is heavy; terribly heavy and the wound is deep. "Why Lord? Oh why?" comes often to my lips. If I did not know that God was in charge of this matter I would collapse. But He does not test us beyond what we are able to carry.

* The letter has been rearranged to present Jantje's account in chronological order.

Jacobus prepared me for this shattering news very carefully. We received the telegram on April 28 . . . . That evening three of us (Jacobus, Jan and I) went to Leota for a singing performance. I had the telegram in my hands but did not open it because it was addressed to Jacobus. [He opened it], stepped off of the wagon and said he had to go home. I asked, "Is it ill news?" but received only for an answer, "you go on together, I must go home." He was terribly shocked and I noticed that something unusual had happened when I came home. But I asked nothing because I thought something had happened that was their own business and I did not need to know of it.

The tense situation continued until the following noon. Even then I suspected no evil but when Verbrugge (Jacobus) said, "Jantje, you must be thinking about our being so quiet and I'm telling you that it concerns you too." I asked at once, "Is it something about Cornelis?" Soon it became clear that there was nothing to hope for. Slowly I became aware of the whole truth and I gave vent to my sorrow in the natural way.

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At 1:00 P.M. on April 22 Cornelis had a cramp in his abdomen. He and Harmen van der Lee were out riding in search of land. They drove to the nearest farm where Cornelis received a bed and some medicine immediately but it was no use. The pain in his stomach and intestines intensified. In the morning the farmer got the doctor and when he came he gave Cornelis an injection and some brandy.

At first it seemed to help but a short time later, at 2:00 P.M. on Saturday, his life passed away.

These long distances are so painful. I would like so much to know about his last hours and to ask Harmen van der Lee more questions, but I cannot expect to see him until next week. The reality of it has not yet sunk in, everything still seems like a dream. It's still hard to imagine that such a turning point has come into my life. We loved each other so much and we hoped that a pleasant domestic life would soon begin for us. But that is not to be. I will walk my own lonely way from now on. May God give me the strength.

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Cornelis was already buried on the 25th. A certain Mr. Dijkstra, a Frisian who had been in Canada for twenty-nine years, helped Harmen in everything and he also found an English minister to conduct the burial service. Mr. Dijkstra sent me a heartwarming letter and offered to do whatever more he could for me.

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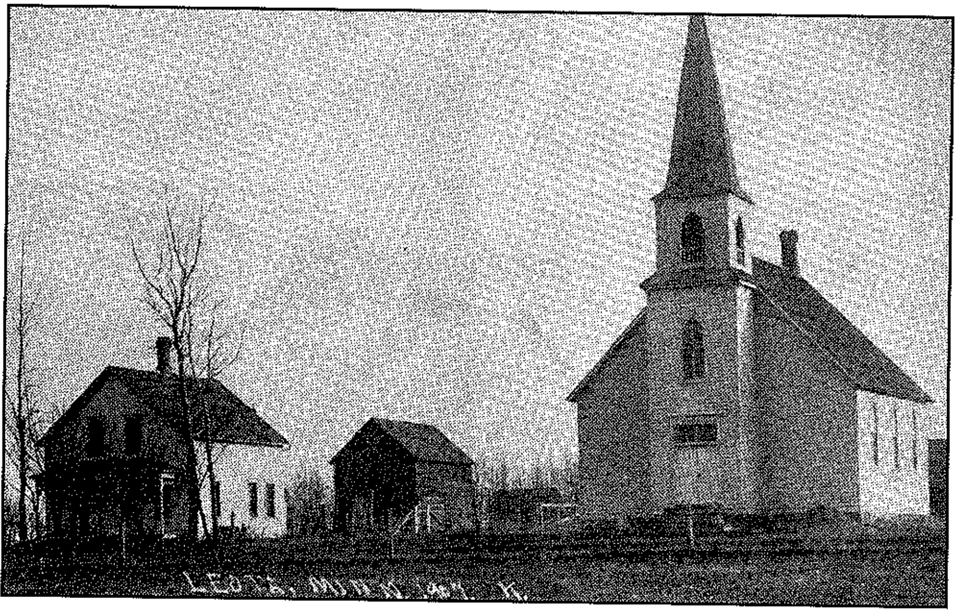
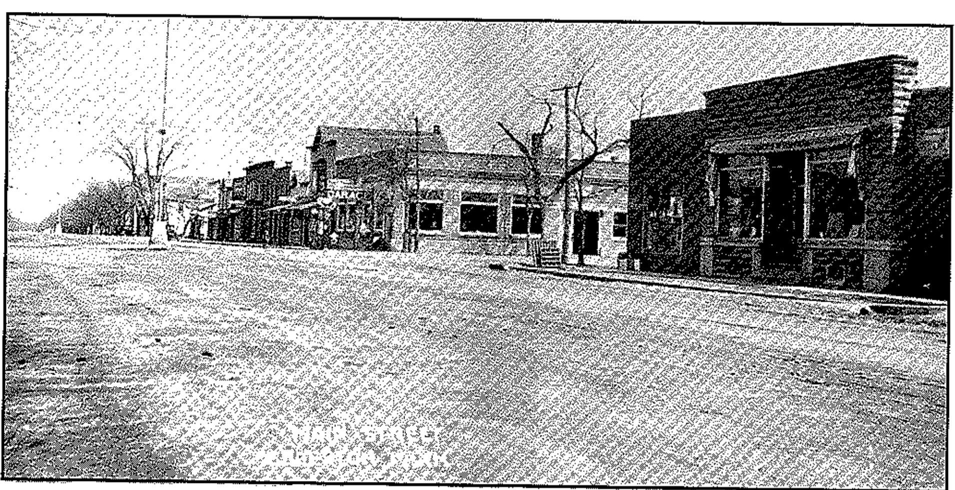
When all the details have been taken care of here, what should I do? Wouldn't it be best to return to the land of my birth? What do you think? Surely there are many open arms and many connections there. The Lord certainly still has a calling for me to fulfill in life.



Leota, Minnesota CRC — Verbrugge family's congregation, Fiftieth Anniversary, *page 10.*

And, indeed, Jantje did find a new life and career after returning to the Netherlands in 1912. There she became a housekeeper for Rev. Harm Brouwer and his two children. In 1915 Jantje married Rev. Brouwer and served with him in several Dutch churches. He died in 1928; she lived on until 1953.



Main Street, Edgerton, Minnesota, ca. 1920.

Pictures of the Dead

by Rob Kroes

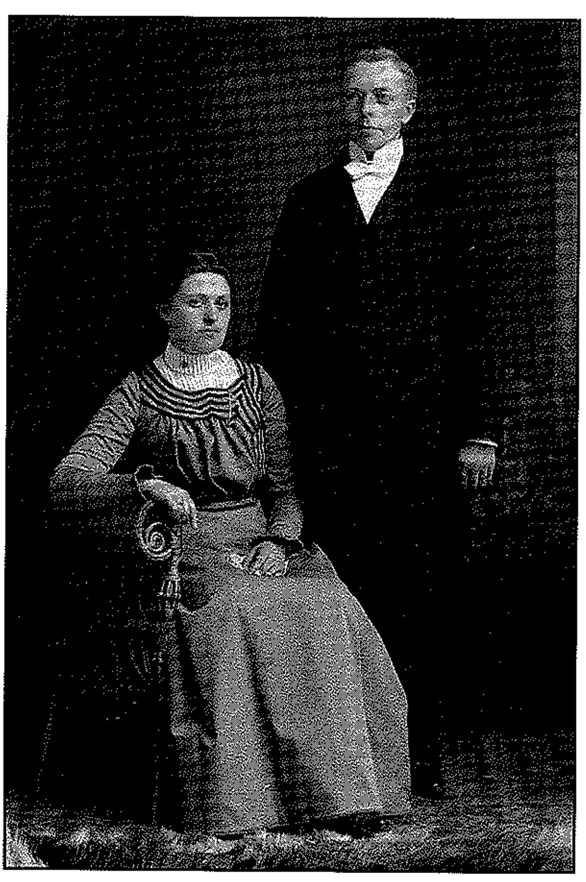
In almost all historical libraries and archives, researchers encounter many photo portraits of unidentified persons. The older pictures, usually studio photos, are lettered ornately with the studio's name, and the subjects, dressed formally for the occasion, are pictured against backgrounds that suggest opulence — a brief identification with the trappings of the wealthy. Who, one wonders, did these immigrants intend to impress — relatives in homelands such as the Netherlands, or successive generations who would examine these likenesses to discover faces and features like their own? We will never know.

What we do know is that the early immigrant photographs belong to an era and a genre of studio portraiture in which photography was made to create illusions. The new medium of mechanical reproduction made it possible for the not-so-rich to be pictured in an aura of ease, refinement, and culture that only the wealthy could afford in the heyday of painting. Costumes, props, and backdrops were all provided by the studio. Willingly the sitters subjected themselves to stage directions that had arranged family paintings ever since the seventeenth century. The mold of self-presentation was definitely patriarchal, though it came in two varieties. When husband and wife had their photograph taken, the husband was usually seated with his wife standing beside him. An extreme version of this arrangement is a photograph of an old woman standing beside an empty chair. She is a widow. But in a sense the dead husband is still there, defining her role and position. Occasionally, though, a woman was seated, with the husband standing by her side, the good provider and protector. In studio portraits of parents and their children, the parents were usually seated with the children standing around them.

Snyder children, Rockford, IL

If these photographs show a mixture of reality and fiction, it was not necessarily one consciously fabricated to mislead friends and

This article by Rob Kroes is based on a longer contribution to a volume of essays, American Photographs in Europe *(Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994). Dr. Rob Kroes heads the Netherlands American Studies Association in Amsterdam. This shorter version was prepared by H. Brinks, editor of* Origins.



Husband standing, unidentified, Gillett Studio, 122 Monroe Street, Grand Rapids, MI.

relatives back in the mother country. The code underlying this particular genre of studio photography was widely known: this was what people in Europe and America expected portraits to look like. The fact that people could have their pictures taken at all was proof not only that they could afford this relative luxury but also that even in their pioneer existence they could enjoy the amenities of a modern technical civilization. Studio photography was never far behind the frontier. Many photographs were taken in small towns all across the United States. Though a visit to a photographer may have taken the immigrants a day trip to the nearest small town, the message was clear: civilization was never far away. Theirs was not a life in a bleak wilderness.

In general, whether or not the intended message was an overstatement, photographs were accompanied by words, either scribbled on the backs of the pictures or in accompanying letters. Written messages served to add to the photographic information, contextualizing it by giving names, ages, color of eyes or hair, and by referring to the occasion for the photo, such as a baptism or a wedding anniversary. These details provided the recipients with — literally — a closer look at their distant relatives and friends. Words were meant to add focus to the photographic image, yet they could only function within the wider unspoken context of kinship or friendship. Outsiders, strangers to such intimate relationships, could never hope to get the full message. And later observers, such as students of immigration history, are at even greater disadvantage: the passing of time and of generations has filtered if not erased family recollections, has caused the loss of letters and photographs, has severed the links that connected them meaningfully to one another. There has been a massive loss of vital context. We are left with the mere fragments of what once was a meaningful and ongoing communication across the Atlantic.

Only the aged with persisting memories can bring the sitters back to life. I was reminded of this, when reading a story by James Schaap, a Dutch-American author.[1]

The story tells us of a young man who had come to see his grandmother on her deathbed. He remembers, "Nameless faces lined the walls, and an old Dutch couple peered at me from an ornate oval frame hung above the headboard. I always loved that room, for there was excitement here, the fascination of experiences long past. I loved to sneak in as a boy, to sit alone on the bed and look around." Now, for the first time, he is not alone in this room. In her final days, his grandmother tells him about the past, before it is too late, about "the nameless faces" on the wall, her father and mother. "'What was your mother like, Grandma? Like you?'" Slowly, in answer to his queries, she brings the past back to life, telling a

Wife standing, unidentified, Van Koevering Studio, Zeeland, MI.

story that she had kept to herself all along, a story about a disastrous fire on board an immigrant ship crossing Lake Michigan en route to Sheboygan.* Her father had died fighting the fire; her mother had died looking for one of her daughters. The portrait of his grandmother's parents comes to life: "I glanced at the portrait. I had seen it often before. It had come from Grandma's uncle in Holland. He was seated on a chair as big as a throne, his wife's hand rested on his shoulder as she stood soberly at his side." As his grandmother unfolds the drama of her parents' death, the grandson-narrator keeps looking up at the picture. "I tried to imagine [them] as Grandma spoke," he says. They are for him no longer nameless faces. The words of his grandmother have given them life and meaning.

Wife and husband, both standing, unidentified, Reuvers Studio, Pella, IA.

When I was reading the story, there was a strange sense of *deja vu*, of something half-forgotten pushing to resurface. Suddenly, there it was. In a book by a Dutch amateur historian who pieces together the emigration histories of his forebears, reference is made to the same tragic event on Lake Michigan. I had heard the story before and had gone through the same emotions the young man in Schaap's story went through as he listened to his grandma. I had also been looking at photographs of the author's relatives and friends who had been in the fire, which are reproduced in the book. In his act of filial piety, he manages to draw outsiders like me into a circle where "nameless faces" are being restored to their place in history through stories told by their distant offspring.[2]

In the exchanges between immigrants and their relatives and friends in the home country, photographs acquired their full meaning and sense only in a context of written words, but with the passage of time the connection between photographs and commentary on them is often severed. Either we find photographs that time has cut loose from their accompanying annotations, or we find only the annotation, cryptic references in letters to pictures that originally must have been enclosed. Currently many people have begun to collect and order what is left of the communications of their relatives across the Atlantic. They have sorted out letters; they have made copies available to official immigration archives in their home countries or in the United States. But more often than not these are the mere fragments of exchanges that went on for years if not decades.

One of the tasks that immigration research has set itself is archival — bringing together as many of these fragments as possible. And the results have been impressive.

Hundreds of immigrant letters have been collected, ordered, and made available for immigration research. Large selections have been published in the United States and in the main countries of emigration in Europe.[3] Larger collections are available in immigration archives in all those countries. Yet many of the archives are still as chaotic as before. Successful search still depends too much on serendipity; yet researchers in the field keep stumbling upon previously unmined treasures. No single researcher can claim to have seen it all, or even to have gone over a representative sample. But there is always the temptation to come up with some tentative generalizations. So, with all due disclaimers, let me give some general impressions before I go into greater detail.

My own work in immigration history has been mostly concerned with Dutch immigrants in the United States and Canada.[4] In the course of my research I have come upon hundreds, if not thousands, of letters, and there are new finds all the time. On that basis, and also on the basis of such collections of letters as have been published in other countries, it seems safe to say that photographic

*For a recent account of this "*Phoenix* Disaster" see *Origins*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 16-23.

information was not commonly passed between families. Entire exchanges between family members, even if they went on for decades, have no reference at all to photographs. A selection of quotations from Dutch-immigrant letters published by Herbert J. Brinks,[5] contains no mention of photographs.* And only few of the many photographic illustrations in the book are clear cases of pictures sent home to the mother country. There is one example of those stilted studio photographs that were described above as a genre. In it we see husband and wife, the man sitting, the woman standing by his side, both looking as if they have just swallowed a broomstick. The caption, in quotation marks, reads, "In this letter I send you my portrait and that of my husband. I can also send you the children, but then it may be a little too heavy." Another picture, from about 1906, is taken outdoors, on an unpaved street, with a group of people posing alongside a hearse. According to the legend, the photograph was taken on the occasion of the burial of a young immigrant in Grand Rapids and was intended for his mother in the Netherlands. The photograph serves as documentary reportage, capturing one of life's irreversible moments.

Unidentified family portrait.

What exactly is the communicative value and function of the photographs we do find mentioned in letters? Let us consider a few examples. For the very early period in the history of photography I have one set of letters, exchanged between members of the Te Selle family and ranging in time from 1865 to 1911. The earliest mention of a photograph is in a letter from 1869, and it is scribbled in the margin almost as an afterthought: "Here is a protrait [sic] of our little Dela. She is now eleven months old. She sits on a chair, but it was difficult to keep her still for so long." Another note in the margin adds this: "I took the letter to the post office but then it was too heavy. I will send the portrait with G. Lammers." In a letter sent from Winterswijk in the Netherlands in 1873 to relatives who also lived in the Netherlands, there were two enclosures: a letter from an elderly uncle in America and his photograph. In the accompanying note we read, "So I send you this letter, and also the portrait, so you can see him on it, and also read in this letter how he is doing. Also you can perhaps send it to your other sister, who would also like to have it and see it." In June 1873 the same old uncle writes a long letter, again from Holland, Sheboygan Country, Wisconsin. Following a pious dissertation — "And Blessed are we if we hear, do and maintain what God says in his word. But also we know that there is another, who is called Devil, Satan, Old Snake, the Seducer, Lord of Darkness, God of this, our century . . ." — there are a few bits of news about a granddaughter marrying and about the weather. And then there is this line: "Also I feel the urge to send you the portrait of my Deceased Wife; we had only one portrait of my wife, and this very same one we had duplicated, which we now send you." Again his nephew in the Netherlands passes the letter and the portrait on to his uncle's sister and brother-in-law. "The portrait is yours to keep," he adds.

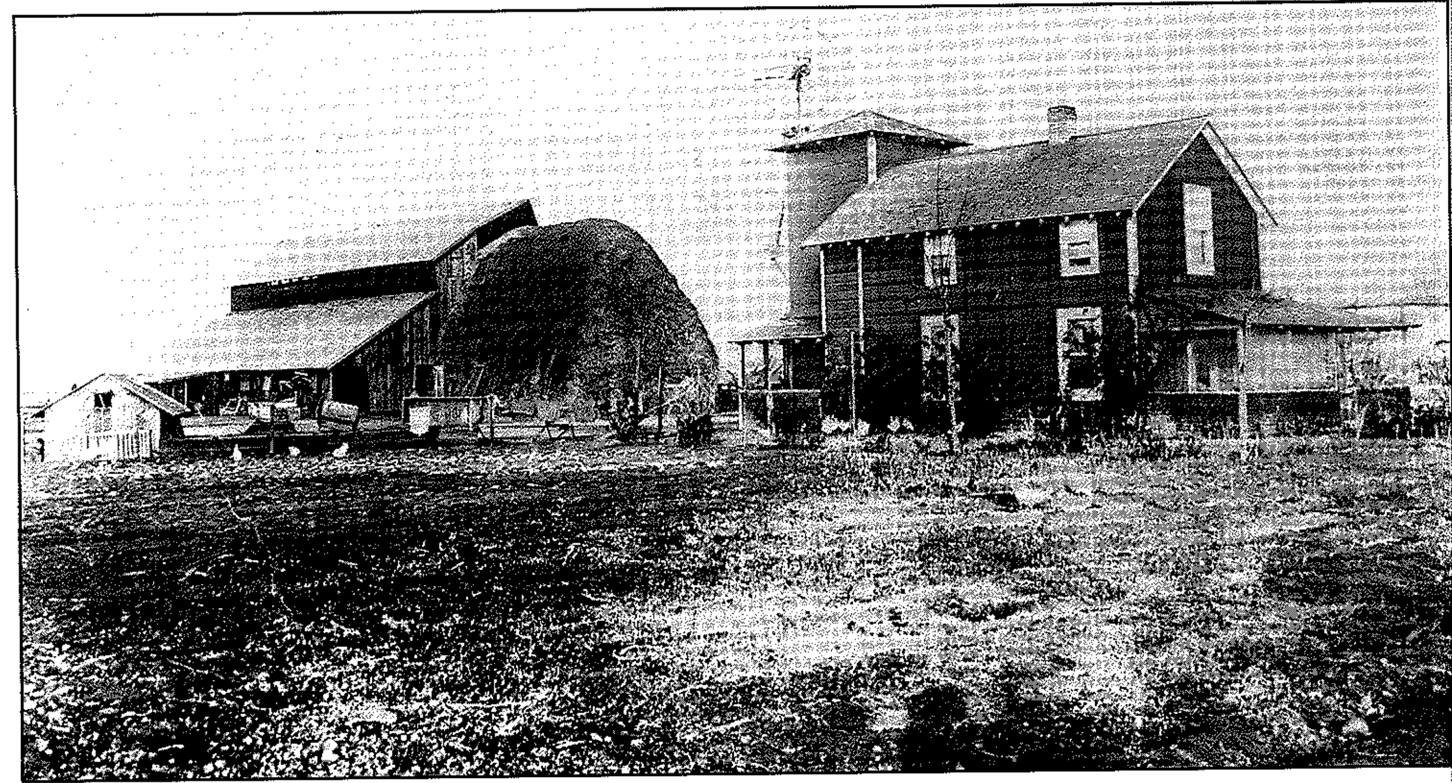
In 1883 there is a reference to a different kind of visual information, not a portrait of a family member, but a picture of a wind-driven water pump, with this commentary: "This autumn we had a water wind pump put on our well. Now we don't have to draw the water for the cattle ourselves anymore. It cost a hundred dollars. Here on this little print you

* The most recent of Brinks's books, *Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1995) contains dozens of references to portraits and photos.

see its picture." Then, in a letter of October 1892, there is the anxious query for an acknowledgement of receipt: "On February 2 this year I have sent all the potrets [sic] of my children and of my son-in-law with the request to write back soon, but then later on we got a letter from you which made me conclude that you hadn't received it: Then I have done it again once more, but if they have gone lost again at sea, I don't know." Apparently the enclosure of photographs must have been an act of great significance, worthy of repeated reference and the cause of worried inquiry.

This one collection of thirty-five letters, spanning a total of forty-seven years, is fairly representative of other such correspondences. The references to photographs are few, and of those most relate to portraits. Apparently, the main informative function of photographic enclosures was to maintain a sense of visual familiarity among family members in spite of geographic distance. This sense is vividly evoked in a letter sent from Santa Monica, California, to Leeuwarden in the Dutch province of Friesland: "Dear nephew, I have received in good order the photographs that were passed on to me from Yakima. After I had received your letter I looked forward eagerly to seeing them, and so, as you can understand, it made an unusual impression on me to see a likeness[6] of my next of kin. After such a long absence. Your mother I could not recognize as the sister which I had pictured in my memory. Her appearance, it seemed to me, had changed. Your father seemed to me more or less the same as I remembered him. A little older but the same jovial person. I value the possession of the photographs and thank you for the interest and 'attention to send them *tot mij*.'"[7]

Pictures of inanimate matter, be it the natural scene, machinery (like the windmill referred to above), or the built-up environment, figure hardly at all in immigrant letters. They are more likely to show up in business-related correspondence or publications. For example, the *Noord-Amerikaansche Hypotheekbank* (North American Mortgage Bank), operating from Leeuwarden, the capital of Friesland, with representatives in Dutch immigration centers like North Yakima, Washington, and Bozeman, Montana, produced an advertisement folder with two photographs and the following two legends: "Picking apples in one of the valleys in Washington" and "Harvest and threshing combine at work in Eastern Washington." It also gave the names of its two representatives in the United States. People looked at such visual information with different eyes, with a view to business opportunity and migration possibilities. And, of course, there were many channels conveying precisely such information:



Schaapman farm, Ripon, CA, ca. 1915.

shipping lines, land-development corporations, migration societies. But that was not the information that people expected to be carried by the much more private lines of communication that connected friends and family members across the Atlantic.

Clearly, in the early years both of the history of photography and of large-scale Dutch migration, economic considerations affected the selective nature of photographic information. Having portraits made and sending them across the ocean was relatively costly. A letter from Michigan City, Indiana, dated June 5, 1894, is quite explicit on this point: "Had we not had such a bad time, we would have had our pictures taken this summer, but now this will have to wait a while." Yet, economic means permitting, the first priority in the exchange of pictures was family portraits rather than any other topic of visual information. Our same correspondent, in a letter sent from Holland, Michigan, in the year 1900, is exultant: "Dear Brother and Sister, with joy and gratitude we received your letter with portrait. We were overjoyed, for now we could behold your family from afar: of Freerk we could not very well see that it werst thou. It is eight years hence since we saw each other."

Further evidence that this was the favorite subject of photographic information comes from the later period, when price was no longer a limiting factor. When immigrants were better off, following their years of hardship, and when photography itself had come within reach of the general public, family pictures were still by far the leading genre. Rather than economics it was now the technology of the early amateur cameras that set the constraints. Exposure time practically prevented indoor photography. But even outdoors the light was not always sufficient: "Last Sunday we have taken pictures of the children. We would take a few more the next Sunday, but it was a dark day, so we have to wait until the following Sunday. As soon as they are ready, we will send them to you. Monica is quite a girl already, and Anna comes along nicely."

Wedding of Catherine Fiekema De Jong, 1931, Doon, IA.

Photography had moved outside the confines of the studio and into the private realm of the family garden. If the focus was still on family members, explanatory notes now increasingly referred to details of the setting as well, such as "our house," "our front porch," "our garden patch." One legend reads, "This is our house; we built it." But still the eyes of the recipients of such pictures set most eagerly on the human image. Tiny details of physical appearance were added in writing or commented on in letters from the home front. Color of hair and eyes, signs of aging, and family resemblances were standard topics in the exchanges accompanying this photographic communication. Photographs went from hand to hand among family members at the receiving end. "Dear cousin . . . have you received the portrait already of the little sisters? We sent six to Aunt Klaasje; if you don't have them yet you can expect them every day now. Can you tell who they resemble? Not me. That much I can see myself." Or, in a letter from Chicago, written in the late 1920s by an American daughter-in-law married to a Dutch immigrant: "You all look so good on the picture, older of course, but aren't we all getting older every day. Mother is much thinner, but Dad almost looks the same except for the gray hair."

In this later age of the amateur snapshot there is a greater informality in the way people have themselves represented. People in their everyday clothes doing little chores around the house are a common theme (for example, "Father feeding the chickens"). Yet there are clear echoes of earlier conventions of self-representation. Often people still dress up for the occasion and stiffly pose for the photograph. The stagings may be vaguely remembered and awkwardly

executed, yet in the family groupings on the front porch we recognize the prescriptions and styles of self-representation that dominated in the era of the studio photograph.

When we try to fathom the role played by family photographs, we should never forget the importance of context. The stories told by these highly private photographs, stored by immigrant families, and circulated along with their letters among friends and relatives in their mother countries were always personal testimony to the sobering realities of immigrant life. They offered as much a constructed, retouched, and manipulated view of life in America as the pictures that circulated in the public realm. Yet they served a totally different psychological purpose. They could shore up the hopes and spirits of immigrants at times when their great expectations threatened to collapse.

Anthony De Groot family, Chicago, Heights, IL.

In "Sign of a Promise," the title story of the James C. Schaap collection,[8] there is a very moving vignette that beautifully illustrates this role and the place of private photographs in the life of immigrants. The author takes us to the pioneer house of a Dutch-American family struggling to survive on the prairie frontier in Northwestern Iowa. They had recently moved there in the restless search for success that had earlier taken them to Wisconsin and Minnesota. They are alone, the first in their part of the world to break the prairie soil. It had been raining for days, and the result of days of back-breaking work had been washed away. The woman stands behind the window, looking out. "And the sky, spewing incessant rain, seemed to combine with the desert of grass to destroy whoever, whatever tried to exist there. The endless miles of prairie seem to her a Godless expanse, and all the prayers she had learned as a child, no matter how loudly she could cry them to the heavens, could not bring her any closer to the God she had known in the old country. This land was so wide, so vast, so everlasting, that she felt her best prayers rise in futility . . . to a God who had never

Johannes Schaapman — feeding chickens.

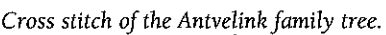
minded this region of creation." Forlorn and forsaken, forgotten by a God who is normally the last hope and refuge for people of her religious background, the woman is in utter despair. "She turned from the window and looked back to the family portrait that hung on the mud wall. It had been taken in Wisconsin. She had wanted it immediately after their arrival in America to send to her parents in Holland, for she knew their concern and felt that they would be reassured by the clean faces and the Sunday clothes of the children. They knew very little of America. Some of the stories they had heard were like those of the land of Canaan — a land most bountiful, full of opportunity. But others were fearful, accounts of drought, storms, savages, violence, strange and horrid stories of people who didn't know the Lord. The family picture had helped, she knew, for it showed them tidy and happy, wearing the smiles that reflected the hopes and jubilation of a life filled with new opportunities. She knew they (her parents) would like it, for she liked it. This was the way she imagined things."

The last line is amazingly perceptive. It catches the meaning of photographs that immigrants had taken of themselves, presenting an ideal view of themselves to family members in the old country, but, more importantly, to themselves as well. Family photographs in that sense are not so much pictures of the present or records of the past; they are visions of the future. They document the hopes and anticipations of immigrants as they themselves harbored them.

For a variety of reasons, then, photographs have played their role as a source of private information, for the earlier immigrant families as much as for those who left the Netherlands by the tens of thousands in the postwar period. Immigration began to taper off in the later 1950s, at precisely the time when the Dutch national economy began to gather steam. With prosperity coming to the mother country, and technological revolution changing international travel, a final twist occurred in the role of photography as a means of private communication: The amateur historians of family migration who enthusiastically collected family information from letters and photographs, who typed out the letters and arranged the photographs neatly in albums were able to rejoin family ties while vacationing in Europe or America. Tourists have traveled in both directions and when they succeeded they memorialized their achievements with photography. The same medium that had kept earlier generations in touch. Snapshots of family reunions join the old photos and in many cases, nameless faces photographed a century ago acquire names, dates and other vital statistics.

Corn binding, Reinder Van Til, ca. 1930, Highland, IN.

Antvelink family, reunited in 1981 in Rekken, Gelderland. From the USA — Alan Watterson and Marybeth Watterson with 3rd and 4th cousins of the Antvelink family. Photographer: Elaine Watterson.



Cross stitch of the Antvelink family tree.

Endnotes

1. James C. Schaap, "The Heritage of These Many Years," in *Sign of a Promise and Other Stories*. Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt College Press, 1979, pp. 248ff.

2. Willem Wilterdink, *Winterswijse pioniers in Amerika*. Winterswijk: Vereniging 'Het Museum,' 1990, pp. 32ff.

3. The largest recent collection of letters to be published is W. Helbich, W.D. Kamphoefner, U. Sommer, eds., *Briefe aus Amerika: Deutsche Auswanderer schrieben aus der neuen Welt, 1830-1930*. Munchen: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1988.

4. See, e.g., my *The Persistence of Ethnicity: Dutch Calvinist Pioneers in Amsterdam, Montana*. Urbana/Champaign and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1992.

5. Herbert J. Brinks, *Schrijf spoedig terug: Brieven van immigranten in Amerika, 1847-1920*. The Hague: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1978; also available in an English translation: *Write Back Soon: Letters from Immigrants in America*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: CRC Publications, 1986.

6. The writer uses the Dutch word *lijkenis*, which is an unusual synonym for "portrait."

7. I have used inverted commas for those passages that were written in English. The continued use of Dutch, though, shows the impact of English upon the writer after so many years as an immigrant in the United States. The letter was written by one of two Tacoma sisters from Friesland.

8. Schaap, pp. 61-81.

Garden Farming in Roseland

by Jacob Brouwer

After Tom Boonstra hired him, Jacob stood proud as he greeted his parents at night before supper. "I'll need a lunch tomorrow morning, Ma," he smiled. "Startin' work for Tom Boonstra. He says there's lots of weeding to do. We may work up to bunching carrots and cutting lettuce. He showed us how he gets stuff ready for market."

"That's fine," Marie smiled. "I think you can do that all right." Jake had had some earlier experience with farm work. He was aware that work began in the long vegetable beds at seven in the morning. Boonstra expected diligent and faithful effort from his young hands. A threat of being fired hung over each worker, since usually more boys than Boonstra needed applied for employment. Wages were ten cents an hour. Days started at seven and ended at six in the evening. Lunch hour was from noon till one.

Jake learned to endure long, torturous hours of crawling with his legs astraddle as he weeded rows of vegetables. In the early morning the fields were wet with morning dew, and tens of thousands of mosquitoes arose to plague him. He earned Tom Boonstra's respect with steady, conscientious effort. Jake often worked with groups of weeders, but Tom found that the boy would perform just as well when given a job to do alone.

Weeding alongside a young Dutch boy named Clausing, Jake learned that others earned more than ten cents an hour. Clausing said he got eleven cents. Jake knew that his weeding was faster and more thorough than Clausing's. One hot summer evening, after six o'clock, Jake faced Boonstra in the barn. Frightened but determined, the boy stated his case. "I want eleven cents an hour like you pay Ted Clausing," he almost shouted. "My weeding is as good as his, and I think better. My mother needs the money, too."

Tom Boonstra smiled, indulgent but stern underneath. His voice grew serious, and his face hardened. "I wish I could pay you more, Jacob, but prices have been poor this summer so

Jacob Brouwer, author of the unpublished historical novel *Roots Among the Tulips*, writes from his experiences as an immigrant boy who came to the United States with his parents in 1913. The Brouwer family — Roelof, Marie, and their two children — emigrated from the province of Overijsel and settled first near Roelof's brother Jan in Hancock, Minnesota. The whole clan moved successively to Rock Valley and Doon, Iowa, where the Brouwers rented a farm. When that arrangement ended, they moved to Colton, South Dakota, where they tilled the soil for several more seasons. Finally, in 1922, drought and the threat of abject poverty drove them off the farm and they migrated once again—this time to Roseland, Illinois. By then the Brouwers had four children, all of whom came to adulthood in Illinois. The episode printed here describes garden farming in the Roseland area during the 1920s from Jacob's perspective as a young field hand.
—*HJB*

Plowing in Colton, South Dakota — the Brouwer family home in 1922 when hard times drove them off the farm.

The author's parents, Roelof and Marie Brouwer, ca. 1920.

far. I have a big work group, as you know, and heavy expenses, like the cost of seed. Right now I can't afford it. Clausing's been with me longer than you have. Tell you what, next summer, if you keep working like you are, we'll think about it."

Jake turned away to walk home, polite but cursing under his breath. His resentment over the incident lingered many years. "That Boonstra's poor all right," he muttered, "with his $17,000 house and the brand-new Cadillac he buys every year."

Jake endured the truck farm several years. His friend Eric had quit long ago, taking short-term jobs as delivery boy for grocery stores and selling eggs for his father on Saturdays. By the time Jake turned fifteen, Boonstra paid him fifteen cents an hour. With this went greater responsibilities.

"We'll see if you can handle more complicated work. Sometimes you can be on hand when we load up for market. That's three or four in the morning. If you manage that okay, I'll pay you even more."

By 1928 Jake had earned a reputation as one of Tom's most reliable regular workers. But he hated going to the truck farm every day. The sixty-hour weeks still called for patience and fortitude, although there were friendships, humorous incidents involving the workers, sometimes fairly intimate conversations with the boss.

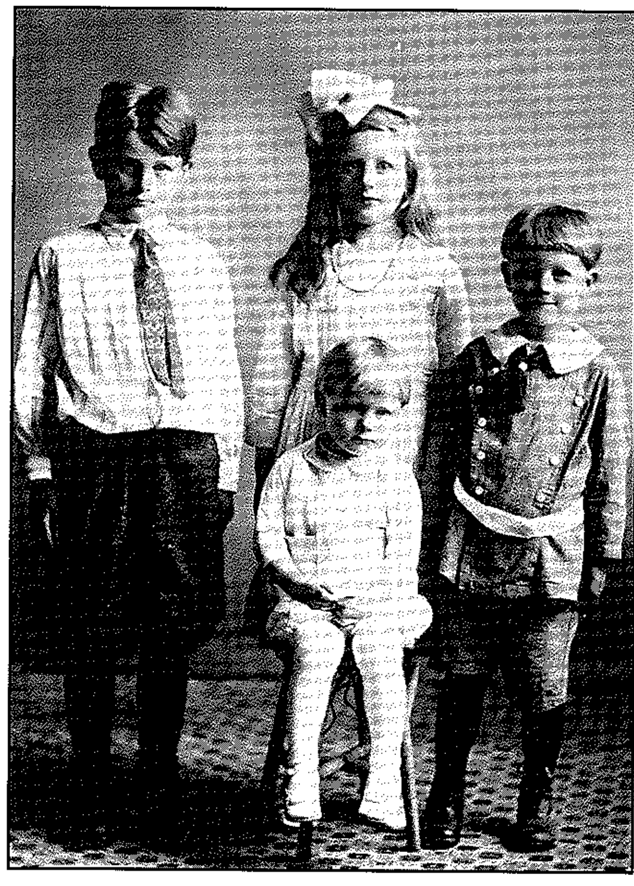
More fortunate boys played baseball, but Jake was too tired at night. Some families took vacations. On Sunday evenings after church, Jake heard his peers talk about family outings and vacation trips. Harold, a friend, related in glowing terms how a number of close-knit families had wonderful outings to Starved Rock. Jake could only dream of such joyful experiences.

The long hours of hot sun beating down on his back turned Jake's skin nut brown. His knees developed calluses from crawling on all fours as he weeded the seemingly endless rows of beets, carrots, or turnips. Tom Boonstra noticed with satisfaction the boy's long faithful hours.

"That boy is thorough," he announced at a straw-boss meeting. "He don't leave half the weeds standing. He digs down to get the roots. He's not careless like so many others, pulling out plants with the weeds."

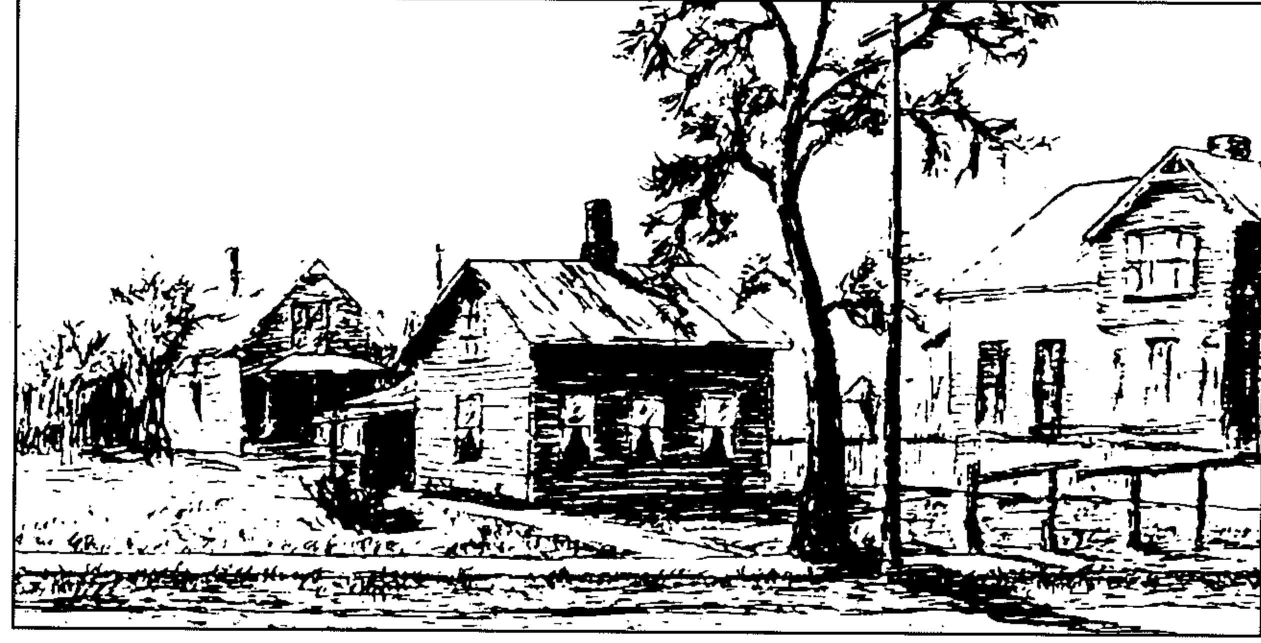
Jake and his fellow workers wore long-sleeved shirts during morning hours when mosquitoes by the millions buzzed about, searching for exposed skin. Despite efforts to ward them off, the bugs found blood by perforating bare necks, wrists, and legs. Hundreds of worms, beetles, aphids, and centipedes clung to undersides of leaves or were disturbed as they bored through the cultivated soil. Jake studied the earth creatures, talked to them, considered them friends, but he cursed the evil, blood-sucking mosquitoes.

When he would sneak up to spy on his young workers, Tom Boonstra hid behind a long-boarded fence that extended from his barn out into the vegetable beds. Every new boy learned of Tom's trickery soon after being hired. It was smart to be aware of it, especially when a boy was weeding close to the fence. Tom



The Brouwer children, left to right: Jacob, 10; Swantje, 12; John, 6; and Tony, 3.

would let out a shrill, angry tirade when he noticed someone falling behind with work: "If you don't learn to put everything you have in your work, you'll never amount to nothing. I didn't get ahead by staying in bed. You earn money by getting up early in the morning, working hard by the sweat of your brow, just like it says in the Bible." Tom thought of his criticism as training in the work ethic.



Roseland street sketch, 1925, by Henry Noble, 10428 Michigan Avenue.

Tom tried to be constructive. He taught a boy who did things the wrong way. He studied his boys, sometimes worked alongside them, showed them the techniques of weeding.

One hot midsummer day Tom surprised Jake by coming to work alongside. Jack was on a new job, trimming cauliflower and tying up the leaves to prevent the white inside from browning. Tom showed him how to speed up his ties. Jake thanked him. Then, to the boy's surprise, Tom began talking about church. Tom was a church leader, an elder. Each Sunday Jake watched as the dignified leaders escorted the minister from a back room where they had been conferring and praying before the service. "I see your family is faithful in church attendance," Tom said. "That's good, of course."

Then Tom changed the subject to matters more interesting to Jake. "How do you like farm work so far? I see Delbert lets you work by yourself quite a bit. Delbert's a good judge and knows that he can trust you." Delbert, Tom's oldest son, was the farm's top straw boss.

"Thank you, Mr. Boonstra," Jake replied. "I don't want to loaf. Keeping busy makes the time pass faster anyway."

Tom looked Jake over, appraising him. A smile broke over his face. "It won't hurt you a bit, my boy. May seem hard at times. Some fellas these days sit around the house, listening to the radio, reading comics, frittering away their time. They'll never amount to nothing. The kind of people who never make any money, don't get ahead. And then probably expecting someone else to give them something when they need it."

"Well, farm work isn't bad, I guess." Jake couldn't bring himself to be enthusiastic. "I get tired of it sometimes, but my folks need the money. I think it helps to get out and do work, to be busy."

"That's the only way you're going to make any money, boy," Tom broke in. "May not seem much to you yet, but you put a little away each pay day. It will surprise you how, in the long run, it'll grow."

"Someday I'd like to own my own farm," Jake confided. "But it won't be like this. I like animals and growing wheat and corn like we did in South Dakota. I know you can make money with vegetables too."

"Sure can," Tom broke out laughing. "But you gotta be smarter than the next guy. Hard work, of course. Up early in the morning. Not lazy like so many these days, in bed all day."

"Well, I guess so," Jake acquiesced, his feelings mixed. "I've been doing hard work all summer here, but I could keep going a long time like this and never become rich." Jake's pride made him say what he felt, no matter what Tom might think.

Tom tried immediately to correct the boy's thinking. "Right now it's hard for you to see, Jacob. You're starting out, and I'll admit, not making much. But work hard, and above all be a little smarter than the next man." Tom laughed derisively. "I see lots of dumb people at the market. They get up early, all right, but they're

dumb. They joke and tell stories, laughing all the time. Don't seem to have a care in the world, them fellas. Still, you know they're poor. They clean up after the Hollanders and Jews are gone. If you don't watch them, they'll steal your produce, though."

"Now, another type of people entirely is the Jews. They're smart. They buy the vegetables. If I'm not out foxing them they'll get my load for nothing. But I stick to my prices, and they come around. They know I got good vegetables."

A wind had come up suddenly so that Tom Boonstra and his young employee had trouble understanding each other. Crawling through the thick rows of carrots, they were too far away from each other. Tom saw that his watch showed five to twelve.

"Let's knock off now, go get some lunch," the boss proposed. "We can talk better walking to the barn."

The worn footpath they took bordered acres of lush vegetable beds. Where radishes had already been harvested for market, the land had been recultivated, fertilized, and planted for a late beet crop. Rows of cabbages showed stumps where the heads had been cut off with sharp knives. The stems remained in the soil to produce Brussels sprouts later. Tom strode through his rich fields with an owner's pride. "After all," he was saying, "what is the real practical purpose of life? Be honest, now. What do most people want from life?"

Jake, conditioned to answer global questions like this in religious terms, hesitated a moment, then mumbled, "To glorify God, I suppose." He remembered Tom standing among the elders on Sunday mornings. They rose with the minister to join in his ten-minute prayer. Jake had been impressed with them, about fifteen strong, hands folded, faces raised toward heaven, interceding together for mercy, admitting the collective sins of the congregation.

"It's making money," Tom now said, answering himself. "If we are honest, that's what we're all trying to do. And few succeed. Like I said, you've got to be smarter to get ahead. Everybody cheats a little, cuts corners, you might say. You've got to. When you market tomatoes, for example, and got strange-shaped ones on hand, you hide them on the bottom, with the best just-ripening ones on top. Make it look good to sell. Same thing with everything. That's the way to survive in the market."

Jake nodded but was quick with his rebuttal. "To me that seems different from what Rev. Trapp preaches on Sundays. The Bible teaches that Christians don't cheat, don't tell lies, and don't live primarily for worldly possessions." Jake smiled cleverly, thinking he had Tom outsmarted.

"No, no, no, boy," Tom came back, apparently enjoying this skirmish. "You're taking Scripture out of context. Yes, of course, God wants us to care for the unfortunate, the sick, and the crippled, but not the bums. Show me where it says in the Bible that we have to care for the lazy ones, those who won't work. When God threw Adam out of the garden, he said Adam would have to work by the sweat of his brow. And that's what we gotta do, whether we like it or not."

They had arrived at Tom's work shed, where vegetables were washed, boxed, crated, and loaded for market. Tom's wife had a warm dinner on the table. Jake joined the dozen or more hired hands filing in from the fields. He unfolded his lunch after finding a shady, cool spot under a tree.

Garden farmer David Leep cultivating parsnips — 112th Street and Halstead.

One of the hands chided him, "Tom been checkin' up on you? Or are ya tryin' to work up a pull with the big boss?"

"Neither one," Jake defended himself. "He just came out and weeded with me. I don't know why."

August heat intensified daily until it seemed intolerable. Determination was needed to keep going. They labored automatically, with stoicism. Tom picked out one of his best workers to serve as a pacesetter and straw boss, but Jake often worked by himself. Sometimes Tom went out in the morning with the entire crew and stayed with them all day.

Herman Belstra, a gentle person in his early forties, had been employed by Tom for several years. Gnarled and burned, somewhat stooped, Herman plodded through each day. He plowed, planted, boxed vegetables for market. Tom considered him a faithful employee and trusted him with any job.

"This is probably the ideal job for Herman," Tom confided in Jake one day. "He got no guts to do something on his own. He waits for me to line up his jobs in the morning. A nice fellow, wouldn't hurt a flea or a fly. But no initiative. Can't think for himself. That's what I mean when I say dumb."

David Leep's garden farm — onions in foreground — 1920s.

When Jake bunched beets alone with Herman and they had talked together all morning, Jake asked, "How come you've spent your whole life on farms working for somebody else? It's been twenty years, you say. Couldn't you have rented a place and gone on your own? Wouldn't that have been better for you? With your three boys you could have done better together than all of you working for Tom, don't you think?"

"Well," Herman drawled, stalling for time to think, "that may not be as easy as it appears, Jacob. My wife's been sickly, you know, and so has the baby. My wages are not much, twenty-five a week, but with what the boys earn it pays the rent and buys our groceries."

"What do you do in winter, when Tom lays you off?" asked Jake.

"Well, I'm tryin' to save a little. Tom keeps me going a few hours till about November, ploughin', cleanin' up, stuff like that. Then about February or March he calls me again. During winter months it's hard all right. I manage to get a few snow shovelin' jobs, and so far we've managed."

Tom confided to Jake that Herman's family got help from the church at Christmas. And when his wife had her fourth child, the deacons visited her, finally paying all medical bills.

Herman's sons, Pete and Joe, had learned from their father an acceptance of things and habits of faithful work. Jake talked with Pete, the oldest, and found that underneath his compliant exterior he longed for change.

"In a coupla years I'm gonna get a factory job, leave home, and strike out on my own. It may not be right, but I've helped enough at the house. I've been through lots of troubles there, and I think I could do just as well, probably better, by myself."

Farm skills like weeding and bunching carrots, could be performed almost automatically. As they worked

together, the boys could joke and talk. When working alone, Jake fell into daydreaming. Socially he had become shy, somewhat withdrawn, sensitive, bashful around girls. In his daydreams he associated with the blonde, beautiful classmate with whom in real life he was a virtual stranger.

Farm life brightened when Jonny, envious of his older brother's earnings, decided to ask Tom for a job. Tom selected Jake to break in the inexperienced youngster. Jake felt an intimacy with his brother, and they enjoyed being together. Late one July afternoon, when the sun had sunk well below its noon zenith, Jonny and Jake, working side by side, found themselves struggling well behind several other boys. Not in the mood to compete, they took to making fun of the racing weeders. Often the leaders did slipshod, careless work. Jonny observed as he looked up at the group ahead of them, "Look at them guys go, will ya? They must have a bug up their butts." Jake doubled with laughter.

Faraway factory whistles from the Pullman shops heralded six o'clock, and a distant bell began to peal. The brothers got off their knees, walked home alongside almost a mile of vegetable beds. At Wallace Avenue they usually took shortcuts by trespassing private yards. Tonight temptation overcame Jake as he followed the long beds of tomatoes and carrots. "What ya say we pull up a few carrots and take 'em to Ma?" he said to his brother. "Tom will never know the difference."

Jonny wasn't sure. "Should we? I don't know. Maybe somebody will see us." His face betrayed his worry.

"Heck no. They can't see. Look how far we are from their house."

Jake stepped over, pulled out several carrots, spacing them so there wouldn't be too many empty spaces showing together. He gathered a big bunch and, satisfied, proceeded down 107th Street.

After a few minutes the sound of a motor came from behind them. Jake looked back, fearful, and saw a Model-T approaching. His heart beat faster—the Boonstra car, it looked like. They kept walking, heads down, hoping the Boonstras only happened to be driving to town. Jake rested the carrots on his right hip to shield them from view.

Delbert Boonstra, with his younger brother Billy, coasted to a stop along-

Garden farmer with load ready for marketing. Driver, David Leep; standing left, A. Bylsma; standing right, Bert Dykstra.

side the two Brouwers. "You fellas want a ride home?" Delbert laughed, gazing deliberately at Jake's carrots. "Come on in. We'll drive you home."

Embarrassment flushed Jake's tan face. His eyes stared into the ground as he replied. "No thanks. We don't need any ride. We'll walk home like we do every other night."

"Come on, Jake. You've got quite a load there. Better ride."

"No, we don't want a ride. We'll make it all right."

Jake raised his eyes at Delbert, an angry look replacing the earlier embarrassment. Delbert pressed down the gas, and the Ford sped forward. Jonny turned with a reproving glance. "I told ya not to. They musta been watchin' us. You know it's wrong. Will Ma ever be mad when she hears of this."

"Yeah, I know," Jake reflected. "They drove out here just to make fools of us. Just my luck they seen me. They must sit out there spyin' on us every night." Jake swung his carrots to the other hip and spit on the sidewalk. "Well, I did it, and I ain't gonna apologize. I'm not gonna give it back either. They got so much."

By the time they got home, both boys decided to be honest and tell their mother the whole story. She took the carrots and washed them in the sink while she talked. "You must never do anything like this again, my boy. You know it is stealing, even though you meant to help us. Now, I judge this to be about three pounds, maybe three bunches. Tomorrow you will take fifteen cents to Mr. Boonstra. That's what it costs at the A & P. We don't need to steal, and we don't need gifts from the Boonstras.

My Credo at Eighty-two

As age creeps on and times get rough,
Lord, help me to still be healthy, tough.
Let me keep my strength, the joy of my agility.
Give me quiet peace, with deep tranquility.
Thank you for the wondrous gift of friends,
For warmth of words that through me sends
A radiant thrill, a quiet feeling of repose,
Soft and sweet, like the redolence of a rose.

Amid hectic turmoil, the strain of my activity,
Grant me the peaceful glow of equanimity.
Forgive my hot and hateful thoughts that turn
And roil. Blot out the images that sting and burn.

I thank you, Lord, for days of beauty past,
For helping me in foreign lands when giant armies
 clashed;
Where navies thundered and the sky turned smoky
 black.
Lord, through all of this you watched, and brought
 me back.

And now while I go stumbling, as the coming year
 unfolds,
Sleepless, often, fearful of what the future holds,
Bring to me the comfort which the Bible has for me;
Stoke for me the fires of hope, depict the glories that
 will be.

Jake Brouwer

Farewell to Windmills and Dikes

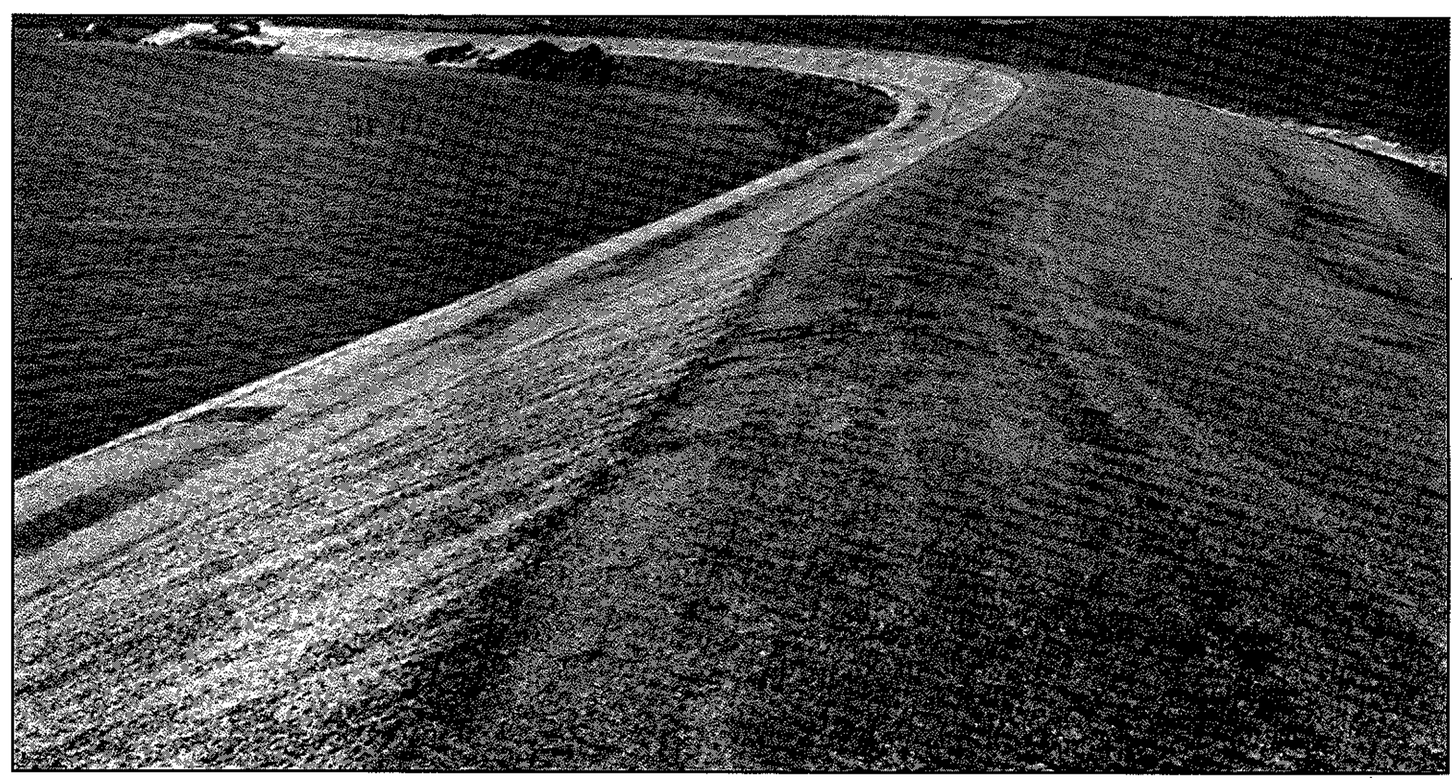
by John Clover Monsma

John Clover Monsma (1891-1970), although best known for his efforts to establish the *American Daily Standard* in 1921, also published a Christian monthly magazine, several books, and many articles. During the first two decades of this century Monsma and a cluster of like-minded Calvinists aggressively promoted projects in the United States which reflected the cultural ideals of Abraham Kuyper. These efforts included Christian newspapers and periodicals together with political, educational, and economic institutions. While much of J.C. Monsma's writings reflect his Kuyperian perspective, his unfinished autobiography is a more descriptive narrative executed with exceptional skill. —*HJB*

Every schoolboy and -girl in the Netherlands knows that Berlikum in Friesland (the northernmost province) should be spelled with a *k*, and that Berlicum in Brabant (a southern province) requires a *c*. I was born in the town with a *k* — just five miles below the huge serpentine dike that keeps the boisterous North Sea from flooding the beautiful Frisian landscape.

Modern Berlikum is just a small town — only some four thousand inhabitants — but its history matches some of the boldest and weirdest adventure stories. In the early Middle Ages the town's name was Utgong, meaning "exit" (to the sea), and Utgong as a harbor city was of no mean importance. Its ships plied between Friesland and countries all around — England, Germany, Scandinavia, France. The repeated pillaging of the town by the Norsemen, or Vikings, in the ninth and tenth centuries, is a worthwhile story all by itself, replete with thrills and shocks.

At the beginning of the Modern Age — some four hundred years ago — Berlikum lost its importance, due chiefly to the fact that the Frisian and Dutch genius for reclaiming land from the sea gradually pushed back the coastal waters surrounding this old Frisian port. First Berlikum's harbor was filled in. Then a dike was thrown up around a wide expanse of water, and the imprisoned water was pumped out. Next another dike was built, enclosing still another section of father Neptune's territory. When finally the place had been reached where the rugged forebears of the present-day Netherlanders wanted to establish the permanent boundary of

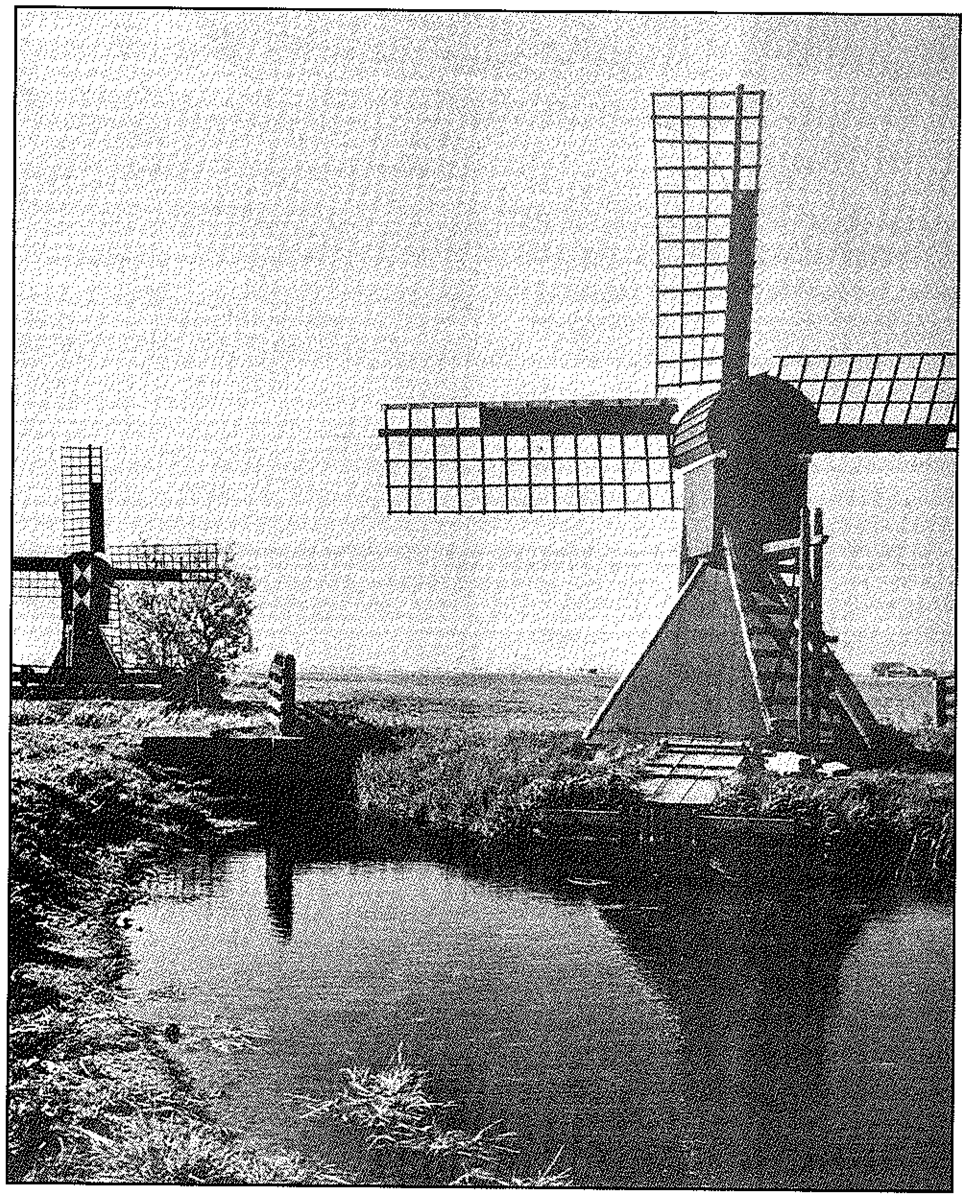


Dike on Frisian coast.

land and sea, a huge permanent dike was constructed. Thereafter the briny water was pumped out down to the last pond and puddle, and the rough, fertile sea-bottom land made habitable. After this immense reclamation project was completed, the Dutch government relieved the population pressure in the province of North Holland by having hundreds of families cross the Zuider Zee and settle on the new land. The new region never became a true part of Friesland, for several reasons. The newcomers, first of all, were not Frisians — and Frisians are proud of their land, their history, their language, and their blood. They are not the most hospitable people on earth. Then, too, the newcomers were Catholic, whereas the Frisians were either Protestant or secular. The names that the newcomers gave to their newly constructed villages — Saint Anna's Parish, Saint Jacob's Parish, Parish of Our Lady, and the like — grated on Frisian ears. Finally, there was the difference in language, the incoming settlers speaking Dutch while their neighbors talked, sang, made love, prayed, and swore in good, guttural, medieval Frisian. Today the "Bildt people," as the Dutch settlers of four hundred years ago are known, speak an odd mixture of Dutch and Frisian. As a boy I didn't like it. But the Bildt people themselves were (as I remember them) very kind, and mostly I liked them.

It was these good Bildt people and their wide, fertile stretches of sea-bottom land that separated my old birthplace from the sea. Yet even now some of its medieval glamour remains. Many strange and heroic stories are being told about the Berlikum of 1600 or thereabouts, stories reminiscent of the Waverley novels of Sir Walter Scott and especially his *Ivanhoe*. Perhaps the premiere story is the one about a woman of great size, known as Tall Bouk, who lived in Berlikum's only castle and whose exploits were so daring and phantasmically bold that her name in northwestern Friesland was mentioned only with awe and fear. Her castle was demolished long ago, and a beautiful villa now stands in its place, which in turn has become hoary with age. I remember the gorgeous flower garden fronting this villa, so colorful and so redolent with delightful, exotic scents. The ancient castle's gate is still standing. That gate is really a building about three stories high made of coarse, solid, red-brick masonry, rounding into a peak. In its old, dreary rooms and hallways some of the town's social outcasts — or, at least, socially downtrodden — make their miserable home. I played in front of that castle gate hundreds of times, never realizing in my youthful innocence and boisterousness that the ghosts of ancient seafarers, of rough-hewn soldiers that fought against Charlemagne, of sturdy Frisian noblemen and their equally sturdy lieges all hovered around me.

Berlikum's outstanding landmark,



Water mills in Friesland.

Berlikum village center.

The churchyard was separated from the rest of the town by a very heavy and very high circular wall. Everything about this church was laid out on the circular plan — the church itself in all its architectural features, the cemetery, and the wall surrounding it. The cemetery wall very effectively shut out thoughts of death and eternity during week-days. But on Sundays it was different. When the faithful went to church, they first encountered an ornamental iron gate fixed in the circular wall, and on the gate in gilded lettering were the words "MEMENTO MORI." It was the only Latin to be seen in the whole town, perhaps in that whole section of Friesland, and knowledge of the classics was scant and scarce, but even the lowliest ragamuffin could tell you that those words meant "Remember that you must die!" Church-going people would often stare at them with awe. Having passed through the gate, people would follow the long walk to the church door, with graves and tombstones and Bible texts on either side of them. The entrance to the church building was a rather lugubrious affair, and inside, the dark-colored furnishings, the poor lighting, and the somewhat musty, moldy smell were enough to make anybody feel and look sepulchral.

I was born almost in the shadow of the old dome church but attended its services only a very few times. That church happened to be part of the State Church (supported by and under indirect control of the national government); ours was the Free Church, which had a more modest and more modern structure at the

however, is not the castle gate, but its marvelous old dome church. High above the red tiled roofs of the town's houses and other buildings this great edifice rises, circular in shape, with a dome roof of gray slate and above that the rounded clock tower with its old-fashioned huge bell and hammer and its cavernous sound holes, from which a troop of sparrows comes flying every time the clock strikes the hour. I know that bell is huge and those sound holes cavernous because I have seen them close up. Just once, in the company of an older relative, I fought my way through labyrinthian passageways and spiderwebs that must date back to Methuselah, up creaking stairway after stairway, to the lofty, mysterious clock tower. That's when I had Friesland at my feet! The old dome church is like a gray-bearded grandfather among his children and grandchildren — the slender church steeples of the two dozen, more or less, neighboring villages. "Bim! — Bim! — Bam! — Bam!" say the younger ones all around when the moment comes to strike the hour. "Boom! — Boom!" says old grandpa when they're all through, with the sedateness and steadfastness of age, as though he wants to chide them for their eager-ness and forwardness.

In the churchyard that encircles the old dome church my paternal grand-parents lie buried. For lack of space in that densely populated land people are often buried two in a grave. A little girl was buried right on top of Grandfa-ther. Many of the graves receive bodies every fifteen years or so. That is about the length of time it takes a body to decompose and molder to dust in that soil and climate. Some of the larger bones may be left at the end of that period, but if they are and if the "bodily remains" of some other burgher have to be stowed away in the same grave, the grave digger simply collects the old bones and dumps them in the charnel house back of the church building. I took a peek in that charnel house once upon a time — and shuddered. A veritable hillock of bones! The skulls, femurs, and hip-bones of a thousand or more Frisians — men, women, and children — must have been collected there.

other end of town. Both were of the Reformed (Protestant) faith, but the Free Church was far more strict both in doctrine and in life. The only other church in Berlikum was a small Mennonite group.

I was reared from my earliest youth in a strictly "churchy" atmosphere. Father and Mother were both active members of the Free Church. My grandfather was the janitor of that church and with my grandmother lived in a small, one-room apartment, part of the church edifice, right off the main entrance.

My recollection of those janitor's quarters is exceptionally clear. I was very fond of my paternal grandparents (my mother's parents had died in her youth, leaving her an orphan), and my visits to them were, I fear, somewhat too frequent. Grandmother was an excellent cook, and grandfather was the kindliest soul that ever lived. I can still see them, she with her long, dark, full skirts (there must have been six or eight of them), tight bodice, and Frisian cap, an all-silver, helmet-like affair edged in lace, covering the entire head so that no hair was visible, he in a tall black cap and visor, a heavy woolen scarf around his neck, with a knot in the front and the ends held down by his vest "to guard against the raw, damp North Sea winds." That black cap was never removed during the day except at meal time when he had to say grace. Then he took it off, held it with both his hands, and covered his eyes with it, his elbows resting on the arms of his chair. When the brief but earnest words of prayer had been said, that cap would go back on his head, and the meal would begin.

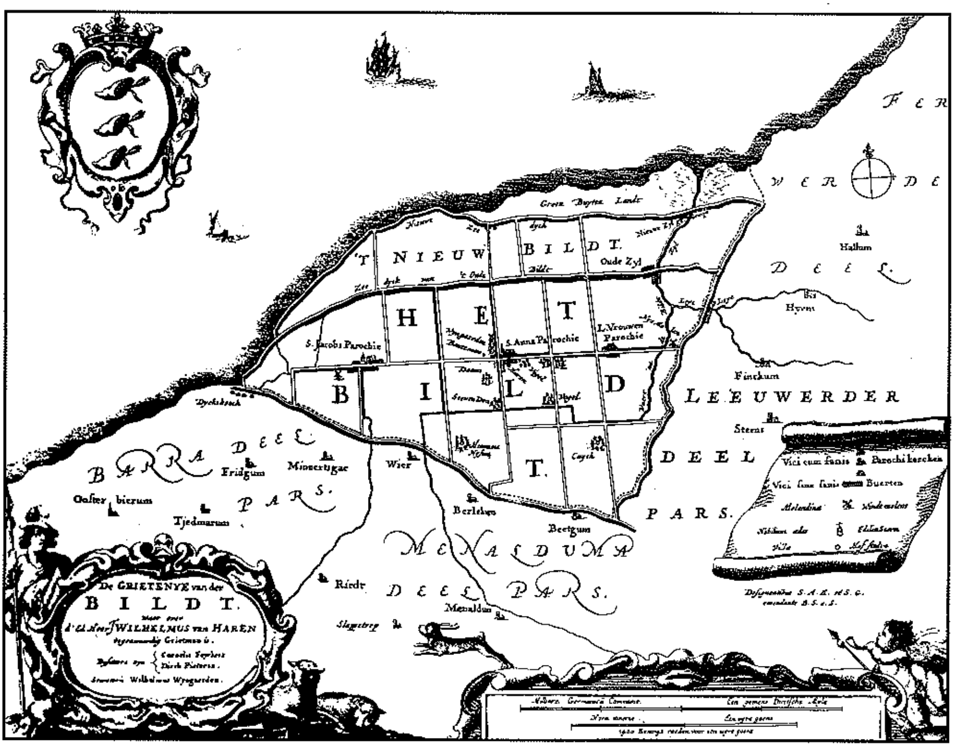
There was no bedroom for the old people, not even an ordinary four-poster bed. Theirs was the typical old-fashioned hole-in-the-wall-style bed found in nearly all Frisian dwellings. At night they would open the double doors of the spooky aperture, place a chair in front of it, kneel by the chair to say their prayers, and then step on the chair to climb into the high and chilly bed, drawing the doors almost shut behind them. Ventilation? What did those good-hearted old Frisians know about oxygen and the like?

My grandparents were busiest in wintertime, especially on Sundays. The church was never heated at all. You can imagine what that meant in that raw climate near the north Frisian dikes. I can still see the white barren stone walls of the auditorium, trickles of moisture called saltpeter running down them. (This, by the way, was a rectangular building;

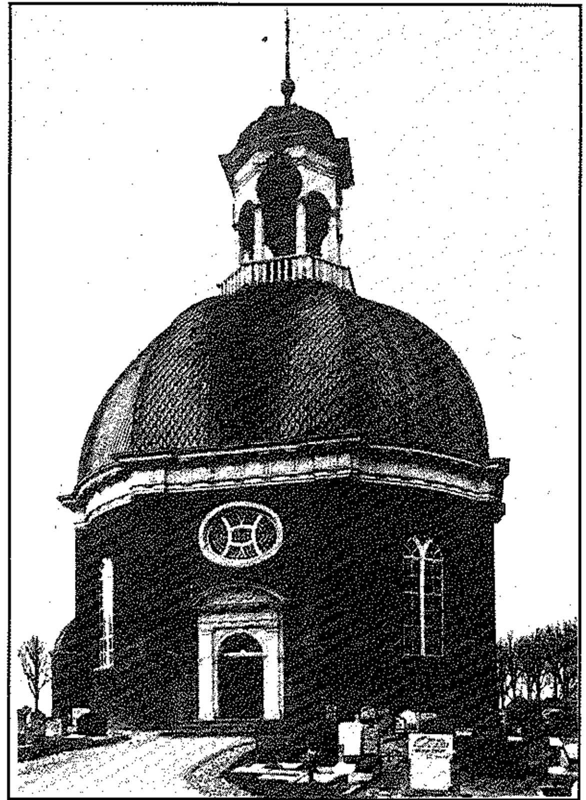
Frisian woman.

altogether different from the State Church). I can still see the white vapory breath arise from hundreds of mouths, little and large, at the beginning of the church services. After the preacher had said his "long prayer" and had shaken off his own chills and shivers by a more or less enthusiastic doctrinal exposition of some Bible text and after the congregation had followed the song leader a few times in a very long and drawn-out singing of some Dutch psalms, the atmosphere would change somewhat. Those little clouds of breath became less visible and eventually disappeared altogether, and thereafter the congregation began to settle down comfortably in its own animal warmth. That was the moment when the women began to distribute their peppermint lozenges. The women, all sat in the middle section of seats, strictly segregated from the men. From the side pews among the men, I often watched the distribution of those lozenges with envious and covetous eyes. The women would have a quantity of peppermints tied in the corners of their handkerchiefs and would pass along as many of them as there were women in their pew. Soon the whole row would be sucking lozenges, a sight that must have inspired the earnest and hard-working preacher no end. But I think the man in the pulpit must have got his supreme inspiration some fifteen minutes later, when the time had arrived for the female part of the audience to pass around their bottles of *eau de cologne*. All that fidgeting, bending, leaning over, adjusting of handkerchiefs, bottle shaking, and sniffing in some twenty or twenty-five pews directly in front of him must have been extremely conducive to a heavenly frame of mind and a Spirit-filled discourse. The men, in the meantime, especially in the back of the church, were diligently engaged in chewing tobacco, and the more careless and boorish among them did not hesitate to adorn the floor of the "sanctuary" with splatters of brownish tobacco spit.

One thing that brought a little comfort to the people on cold winter Sundays was the use of foot warmers. The customary fuel in Friesland is peat, soft peat and hard peat. My grandparents stoked a lot of hard peat



Map of western Friesland including Berlikum and Het Bildt.



Berlikum — Reformed Church, entrance side.

on Sundays and then put a small glowing piece in each of a hundred or more foot warmers, which they rented out to the people as they entered the church door at two cents each. While the lengthy sermon was in progress my grandfather often shoved his foot warmer over to where I was sitting so that I could warm my tootsies, too. Kindhearted, wonderful Gran'pop!

Religion — we had plenty of it! In addition to the two very long church services there were Sunday school, catechism, and Christian day school. The Sunday school was conducted not by several teachers but by the principal of the Christian day school, in his own school building. The best part of Sunday school was the annual Christmas celebration, when we all marched from different parts of the town to the Christian school, each with an empty cup, ready to quaff the hot chocolate milk distributed after the simple program was over. Oh yes, we'd get our presents, too, but somehow the idea of drinking hot chocolate in the school building, under the eerie lights, held a special appeal for me. Perhaps some of the glamour of the Christmas-present distribution was muted by the fact that we ourselves had paid for the presents by bringing a penny to Sunday school every Sunday. We had enough mathematics in our little heads to understand that a penny brought every Sunday in the year would total fifty-two cents and enough general knowledge to realize that fifty-two cents wouldn't buy much of a present. Besides, the teacher always bought his presents from his wife's brother, who ran a little variety store in a nearby town, and that brother's stock was extremely limited, so there was a dreadful sameness about the presents from year to year. The orange that each of us received did make up for a whole lot. It was practically the only orange we saw in the course of an entire year.

There were three day schools in Berlikum — a nonreligious public school, which seemed to lead a rather anemic existence, and two flourishing "Christian" schools. Religion was the dominating factor in the town's life. There were, of course, the usual social classes and distinctions. But the thing that counted most was a person's religion or lack of it. We had really four classes of people: the State Church people, the Free Church people, the small group of Mennonites, and a large number of irreligious or "worldly" people, who were never the objects of local evangelization. These church distinctions became apparent in every sphere of life and on every day of the week. There was very little association between persons of different groups. I remember that the one lone Catholic family we had in town was regarded by us children as a strange curiosity, peculiar people who really did not "belong." Religious conditions being what they were, antipathies and jealousies being rife, and mutual love and forbearance being almost wholly strange to these well-meaning but lopsided Christians, there had to be two Christian day schools — one for the State Church people and the other for the members of the Free Church. Both schools, however, were not official church schools; they were controlled by independent societies of Christian parents.

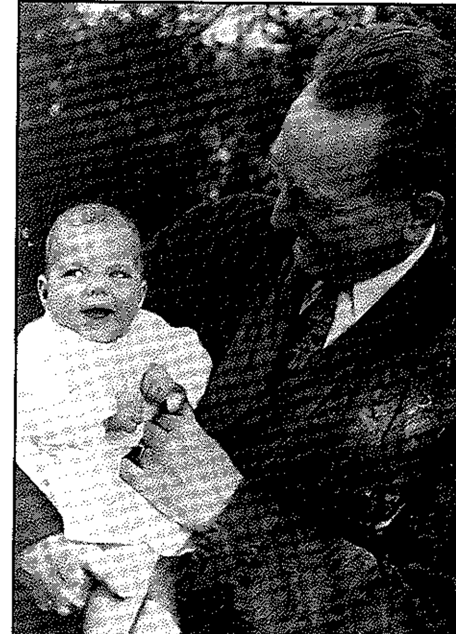
I went to the school of the Free Church people. Ours was a plain yellow brick building in a narrow alley off the main street. In that alley we spent our recess time, which was very short and designed only to meet the urge of nature. First the boys had their five minutes. Then the girls had their turn, with some thirty or forty of them squatting down at once. Some of us boys forgot to re-enter the school building on time, on occasion.

There were two good-size schoolrooms, the principal and his assistant each teaching three grades. Both teachers were male. Women teachers were employed only in kindergartens, the theory being that older children in the hands of female instructors would become effeminate. Typically Frisian!

Our principal was Mr. Klaas Kremer, a man in his early fifties and an able teacher, but more respected and feared than loved. He was not unduly harsh, as some of those Frisian teachers were, just an excellent disciplinarian. I can still see that schoolroom — Mr. Kremer with his long frock coat, unpressed and greenish with age, and his baggy, stovepipe trousers of a lighter hue, long, curving clay pipe in his mouth. Blackboards behind the teacher. To the right of us a huge, well-worn map of Europe, in bright colors — the map that taught me my first love of geography and travel. Back of us, in the same room, near the door, long rows of shelves for our wooden shoes. In school we always sat in our stocking feet, with woolen socks over the stockings. The wooden shoes in rows were all natural wood color, un-

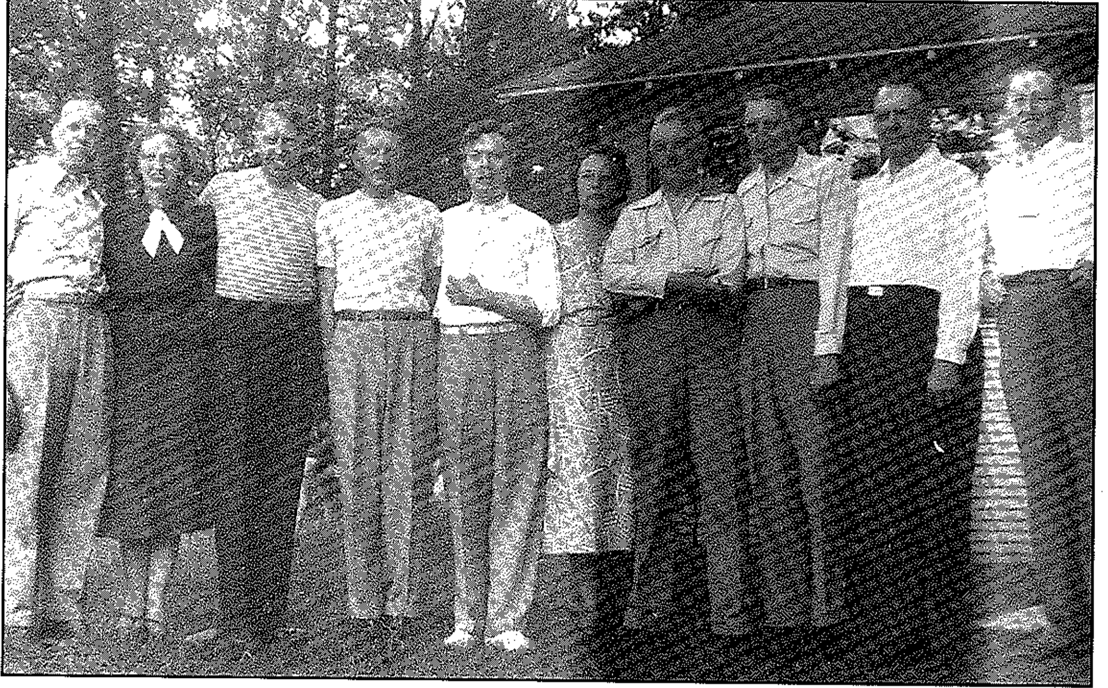
The octagonal church of Sint Annaparochie, built in 1682, rises proudly above "Het Bildt" (originally a part of the bottom of a sea-arm). It is the place of worship of the descendants of those who with pride reclaimed a little part of a former Frisian inland sea. In this place the great painter Rembrandt married his Frisian bride Saskia van Uilenburgh. From Friesland in fotos, *p. 118.*

painted. The boys' shoes had wire across the instep; the girls' didn't. As soon as we boys got a pair of new wooden shoes, our mothers would send us to the blacksmith or carpenter to have that wire nailed on — to prevent the instep from splitting off when we were running. (In the interest of historical truthfulness, however, it should be said that if we wanted to run *very* fast, we kicked the wooden shoes off, contrary to our mothers' earnest instructions, grabbed them up in our hands, and ran in our stocking feet.) On Sundays we had special wooden shoes, nicely painted in black, with gilt or silver figures on them. Those were our "church shoes." In church we had no shelves for shoes, and



you should have seen the grand mixture of painted wooden shoes in the entrance hall and the scramble of boys finding their own shoes, shoving their feet into them, and racing outside! Many of the older people in my day were beginning to wear coarse leather shoes on Sundays, but they were still rather a novelty.

In school and in church we learned Dutch, but we were no sooner on the street, than we were back to the old Frisian, ever and always. In the home, too, never a word of Dutch was spoken except when the Bible, other books, or newspapers were read or the minister or teacher was quoted. Frisian children are bilingual almost from their earliest youth.



(top left) *John Clover Monsma and his bride, Catherine den Hollander.*

(top right) *Grandfather John Clover Monsma with infant Kathryn Helen Post.*

(above) *The Monsma siblings — George, Jeanne, Peter, Bill, Gerald, Etta, Edwin, Martin, Nick, and John.*

Water Before Plumbing — *Not Plentiful — Not Pure — But Free*

by Henry Wierenga

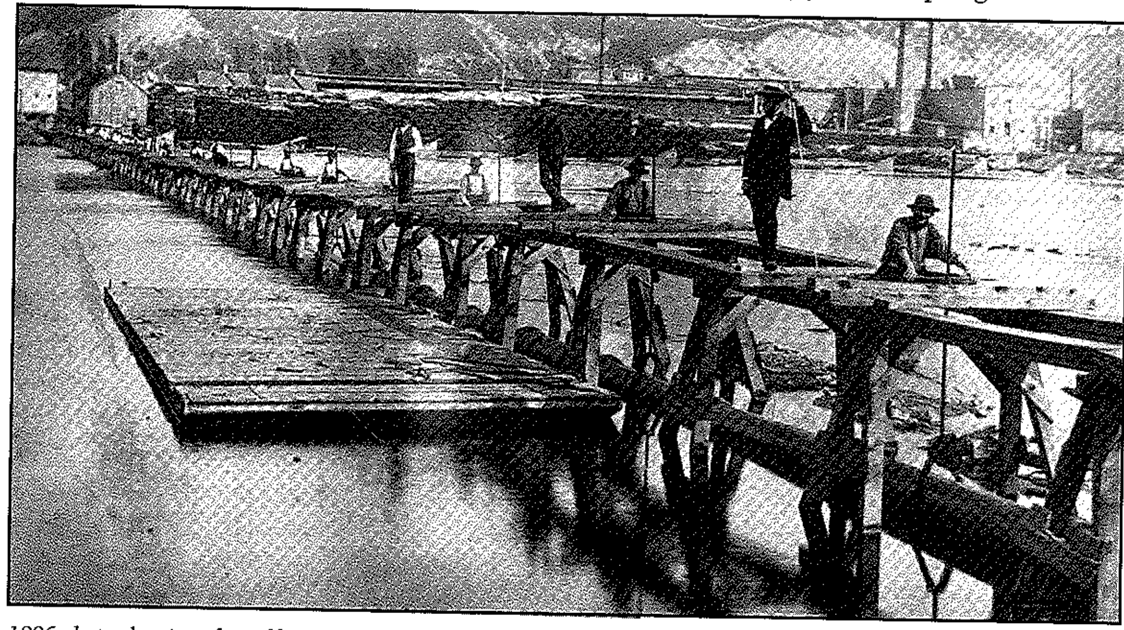
Our source of water during my boyhood on the West Side was not much different than that of the ancients. A well at the rear of our house was a hole dug in the ground to a depth of about fifteen or twenty feet. The walls were lined with brick or stone to prevent cave-ins. At the bottom of the well there was always two or three feet of water fed by springs or seepage through the porous walls. We had no power pump — electricity was unknown. We had no hand pump. Water for drinking and cooking was dipped with a pail from the bottom of the well. A rope was attached to the pail and tightly held. The pail was lowered into the well, tipped from side to side until filled, then it was carefully lifted to the surface. One always had to make sure that the pail stayed free from the walls or the water would spill and the whole process would have to be repeated. If the rope broke there was no way to retrieve the bucket except by means of a ladder let down into the well or it was fished out with a rake to which a rope was attached. The well was covered with a box-like affair about four feet square and four feet high. Except when water was needed the hinged cover was kept closed.

There was always a pail of water in the house. In it was a dipper. You filled the dipper and drank. The excess water was returned to the bucket. The whole family, and whoever else came in, used the same dipper and the same bucket. It was always advisable to let the water settle. The live, wiggly insects always went to the bottom. But it was still a good idea to look carefully into the dipper before drinking.

Drinking water, although adequate, was never plentiful. Not every family possessed a well or a pump but the neighbors' water was free for the taking anytime of the day or night. One place in which we lived had no well. The neighbor to the rear however, had a constantly flowing spring of cold water, this water from the hills bubbled out of the ground. A pipe was driven in to the ground and out of it came a never-ending stream of water. You should know that this was before the day of summer ice and before refrigeration. A hot day's play or work often created an intense desire for a drink of that cold spring water.

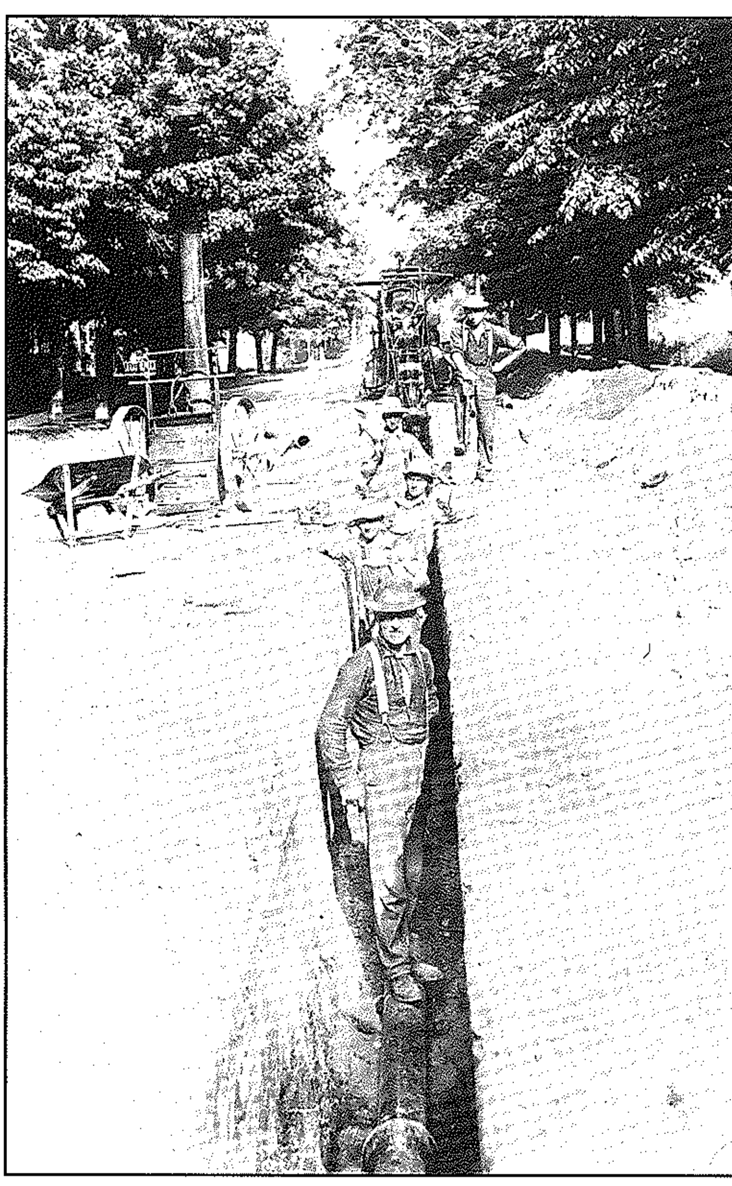
I still recall coming home from the afternoon church service (there were three services each Sunday), anticipating a drink of lemonade made from a fresh supply of that spring water. To this day I think of the story of David's men who risked their lives to bring him a drink of water, when I recall that neighborhood spring.

Thus far I have mentioned only drinking and cooking water. There was also another supply of water that was used only for washing — all washing. It consisted of rain water. Every house had eave-troughs to



1886 photo showing plan of laying water main across Grand River at Grand Rapids, MI. Width of river, 800 feet; ordinary depth of water, 8 feet. Pipe (made of cast-iron, weighing 130 pounds per lineal foot) laid in a trench in bottom of river, blasted out of solid limestone. All work was done without coffering; entire line was put together above water and lowered into place simultaneously.

Written January 1965, by Henry Wierenga, one of several articles to inform his children of bygone days on Grand Rapids' West Side. See Origins, *Volume XIII, No. 2, pp. 35-41, for more about Rev. Henry Wierenga.*



Ca 1910. Public water lines being laid.

catch the water from the roof. Some of these on the older homes were made of wood. Two six-inch boards were nailed together at a ninety degree angle making a trough. A downspout emptied the collected rainwater into a cistern. This was either a huge wooden barrel or a round shaped container built in the ground.

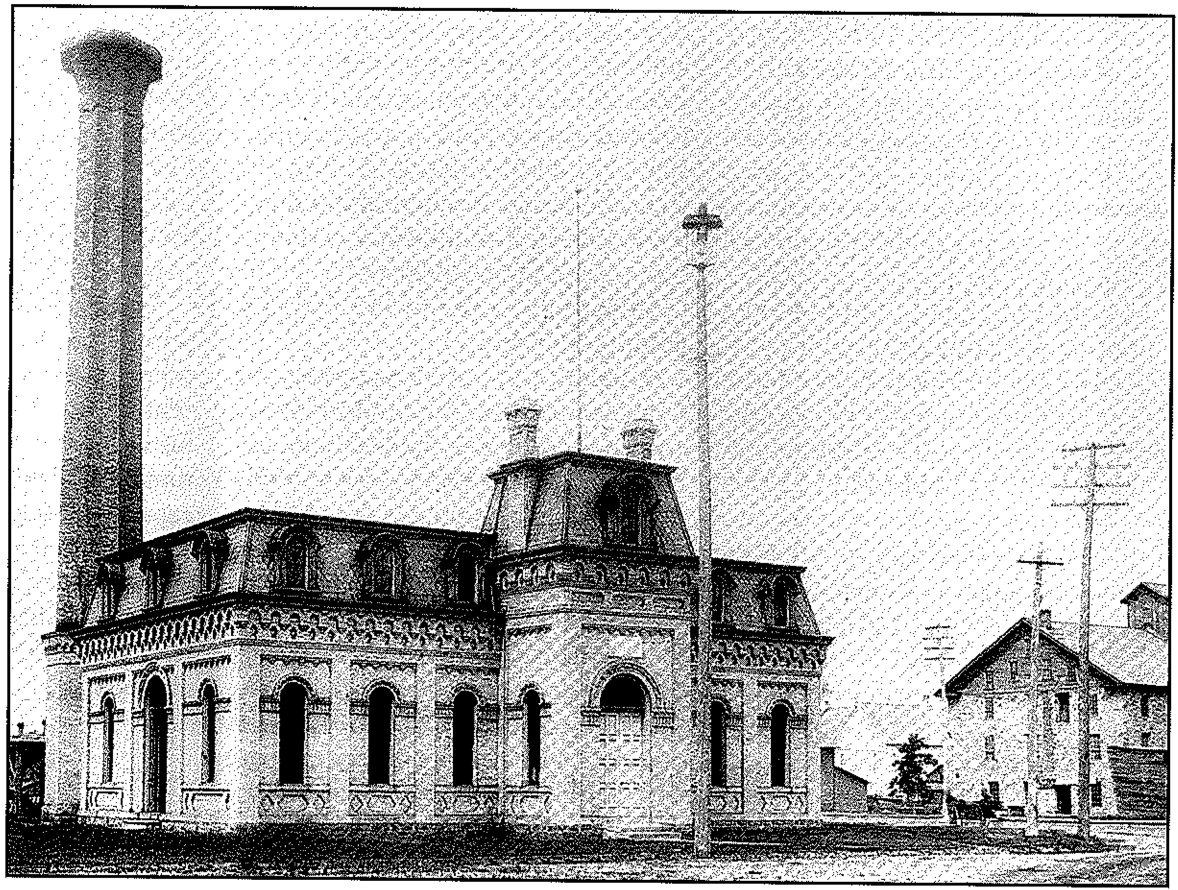
The first cistern I recall was underneath the floor of a large shed built as a lean-to at the rear of the house. This shed was unheated except on wash days when a fire was built in the old wood stove. Winters always seemed unusually cold. Soon the water in the cistern, which was reached through a small trap door, was covered with ice. Each morning ice had to be broken up so a pail could be dipped in. As the winter progressed and the ice thickened the hole through the ice became smaller and smaller. Finally there was hardly room for a two-quart-size tobacco pail. There was never a question of heating the water before washing oneself. The water was not only ice cold, it was ice water — a mixture. After a long rainless spell, either in summer or winter, rainwater became in short supply. In the summer a wash tub — maybe a wooden tub made of staves bound together by metal loops — was placed under the downspout at the corner of the house where it was impossible to run a pipe to the cistern. This water was carefully hoarded and sparingly used. In the winter a tub or wash boiler would be filled with snow and placed on the stove to melt. This water had to be strained through a cloth because of the soot and dirt in the snow. In another house in which we lived we had the luxury of a hand-operated kitchen pump. This pump was attached to the top of a waist-high stand so that cistern water could be pumped into a pail and later thrown out into the back yard.

When we moved into the last house in which I lived before I was married the water problems were still the same. However, water mains and sewer, as well as gas mains, were in the street. Only the gas was piped into the house when we moved in. There was no electricity. Drinking water was carried in from the neighbors out-door pump. Brother Peter, who by that time was a carpenter, built a new lean-to shed in the back of the house. At the same time he built a new cistern of rectangular shape. It was built of cement and lined on the inside with waterproofing. A small cistern pump was installed in the kitchen. There was a sink but since there was no sewer the water had to be collected in a pail underneath. This arrangement lasted a few years. With two sons working, additional money now became available and it was decided to have the city water and sewer brought in from the street. In the house only one faucet was installed and that was in the sink. We didn't need a hot water faucet — there was no hot water tank. No bathtub, only a toilet (water closet it was called). That made a big difference. The cistern was no longer needed. However, although the city water could be used for cooking after it was boiled, it was not fit for drinking. It was water that came directly from the Grand River. There was no filtration plant. I remember that when I worked, in downtown Grand Rapids, bottled drinking water was brought in. Ultimately, the water was filtered, just when, I do not recall.

Our problems were not over. Since

there was no central heating system, not even a basement, only an open cellar, there was always the danger of frozen pipes in those old-fashioned winters. The kitchen and toilet room, even with the doors open, would get as cold as the outdoors. Many a cold winter night I would come home after the folks were asleep and turn on the faucet so there would be a small stream of water — a flowing stream doesn't easily freeze. I also discovered that I could put a matchstick under the valve in the toilet tank and cause a trickle of water to run all night. Even with these precautions a sudden unexpected hard frost would cause the pipes which ran underneath the house to freeze. The next morning it was generally my job to thaw our pipes. This was done by climbing underneath the house and placing rags soaked in hot water around the pipes until the frozen section was reached and thawed out. I soon discovered where the freezing generally occurred and after that it was minor operation.

I should say something about clothes washing. Two galvanized tubs were used in a copper-bottomed boiler. The water was heated in the boiler and the clothes boiled. This was done on a wood-burning stove. The clothes were lifted out of the boiler with a clothes stick (upper two-thirds of a broom handle) and dumped in a tub. A bar of soap (there was no powdered soap or soap flakes) was rubbed into the clothes and the clothes rubbed thoroughly on a rubbing board. They were then wrung out by hand and put in the second tub for rinsing. They were again wrung out by hand and after that, summer or winter, they hung outdoors. Only rain would prevent the hanging out. There was no room to hang clothes in the house. In the cold winter weather the clothes would often freeze even before they were put on the line. Long underwear could be stood up straight on the floor. I still recall seeing my mother come in the house after hanging up clothes, groaning with pain in her almost frozen hands. She would walk through the house wringing her hands, not daring to put them near a fire. But the clothes did get clean and dry. Work it was. Yet Mother was almost eighty when she died.



Grand Rapids Waterworks Coldbrook pumping station, which supplied water to the West Side through pipes laid under the Grand River. 1888.

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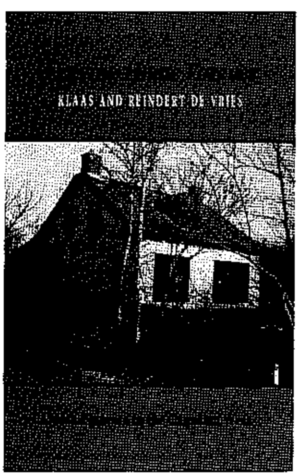
books

Reviews by Conrad J. Bult



Leaving Home Forever

Klaas and Reindert De Vries

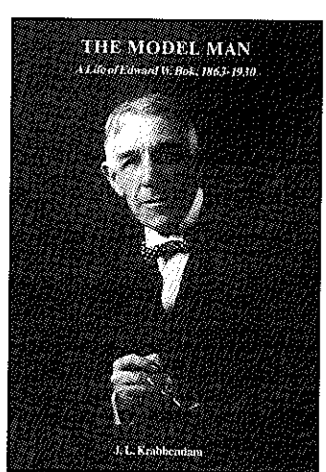
Windsor, ON: Electra Press, 1995.
$14.95 Canadian

Klaas De Vries (1863-1932) and his brother Reindert (1865-1946) arrived in New York on May 28, 1892 after two weeks at sea on the steamer *Didam*. Less than 10 percent of the *Didam's* four hundred third-class passengers were Dutch and among other nationalities were Russian Jews, Poles, Germans, Hungarians, Englishmen and one Italian family. Though meals were provided, the portions were small and featured potatoes with the sprouts still attached. Flimsy furnished mattresses filled with excelsior were disposed of at the end of the voyage and the single blanket provided each passenger did not enhance sleeping comfort. Sunday Bible reading in the ship's common room was difficult since the devout brothers found they were distracted by theatrical performances and the religious rituals of Catholics who were ridiculed by a few fellow passengers.

After a few days on American and Canadian railroads the brothers arrived in Winnipeg about 11 a.m. on June 2, 1892. But Winnipeg was not their final destination and they had no money for the additional ten-dollar-per-person train fare for the trip to Yorkton, Saskatchewan, the end of the line. Finally on borrowed money for the train tickets, Klaas and Reindert arrived in Yorkton about midnight the same day. Still, they were about twenty miles from their goal, the homes of horse rancher Henri Rudolph Roosmale Nepveu and stock raiser Fredrik Robbert Insinger. Journeying on foot and led by a somewhat intoxicated Russian guide who could speak a bit of German, the brothers finally met Nepveu who had set out in horse and wagon to find them. Insinger secured jobs for the brothers who found economic opportunities in western Canada much better than a life of poverty in Jubba-Schurega, Friesland, their ancestral home, located in an area devastated by falling grain prices and a less than thriving peat industry.

Leaving Home Forever is a translation of a rare pamphlet written in Dutch by Klaas and Reindert De Vries. It was discovered by J. Th. Krijff while doing research for his *100 Years Ago; Dutch Immigration to Manitoba in 1893*. Also, Klaas De Vries wrote *A Short Sketch of the Church Community, Elmwood, Winnipeg, Canada*. This four-page document, first published in 1913, is included as "Appendix I."

This illustrated volume of less than seventy pages is an important resource in the area of late nineteenth century Dutch-Canadian immigrant history. What we find here does not romanticize the heart-wrenching experience of leaving one country for another but does help us gain appreciation for the religious fortitude and strength of character exhibited in the lives of these early Dutch-Canadian pioneers.



The Model Man: A Life of Edward W. Bok, 1863 - 1930

Johannes L. Krabbendam. Ph.D.

Diss. Leiden, NL: Rijksuniversiteit, 1995. 277 pages.

J. L. Krabbendam, a native of the Netherlands, has an M.A. in history from Kent State University and in 1995 was awarded a doctorate from the University of Leiden. *The Model Man* is the title of his dissertation and is a study of the business-man-journalist-philanthropist Edward W. Bok (1863-1930) who for three decades, 1889-1919, was the editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, America's leading women's magazine with circulation figures surpassing 1.5 million during many years prior to World War I.

As editor, Bok hoped to influence public opinion and though frequently successful in this endeavor, at times found his cherished notions out of step with the ideas held by the majority of his middle class readers. When confronted with this turn of events, Bok either modified his views or changed his mind. Consequently, the articles in the *Ladies' Home Journal* reflected not only Bok's thinking but also the social values and mores prevalent among Americans with whom he found himself most comfortable.

In 1870 the seven-year-old Bok and his family came to America and settled in Brooklyn, New York. Not the typical Dutch immigrant, Bok's father was a Mennonite and a member of the urban professional class. Other than a common ethnic identity, the somewhat sophisticated Bok family had little in common with the Dutch folk who came to the Midwest. Edward Bok never became a part of the American Dutch community nor did he comprehend what the middle west Dutch settlements were all about. In short, he was a fully Americanized individual who was proud of his Dutch ancestry and counted among his acquaintances Theodore Roosevelt and the well known author Henry Van Dyke. Both were useful as models for *Ladies' Home Journal* readers and also served as intellectual allies very helpful to Bok when he desired support for his vision of American life. Evidence for Bok's deep appreciation for Dutch culture is readily observed in his promotion of a "Great Hollanders" series of biographies written by such scholars as Johan Huizinga who wrote about Erasmus.

Coupled with Bok's fondness for Dutch culture was his desire for warm commercial and diplomatic ties between America and the Netherlands. In the years subsequent to World War I, America and the Netherlands were not the best of friends. To nourish more cordial relationships between the two nations, Bok and a few like-minded businessmen formed the Netherlands-America Foundation.

Bok's career does not exhibit all aspects of the Horatio Alger rags to riches theme. Yet, there are similarities. Young Bok worked hard, idealized self-made men, had a healthy respect for the value of the advertising dollar in journalistic ventures, was very adept at self-promotion, and made the most out of fortuitous circumstances. Bok began his career as an office boy in 1876 and thirteen years later was appointed editor of *Ladies' Home Journal,* quite an achievement for someone a few years away from his thirtieth birthday. In 1896 marriage to Mary Louise Curtis, the daughter of his boss, solidified Bok's position as a key member of the Curtis Publishing Company hierarchy.

After 1895 outlandish patent

medicine advertisements were denied access to the pages of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. This ban was followed by what could be considered Bok's crusade against patent medicines during the years 1902-1906. Though Bok supported women's suffrage, he came to the movement late and cannot be considered one of its ardent champions. For Bok, a woman's home life and widely varied domestic responsibilities had great significance. Bok supported Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations. He sponsored the American Peace Award, worked tirelessly on behalf of the Philadelphia Orchestra and his final project, a Florida nature sanctuary with a singing tower carillon, gave evidence of his desire that the better things of life be enjoyed by all.

At least ten books came from Bok's pen, and of these the most important is *The Americanization of Edward Bok* which came out in 1920. Basically its theme is that financial success gained by hard work is justifiable only when devoted to the public good. Few Reformed or Christian Reformed people read this influential book and Christian Reformed reviewers, as Krabbendam observes ". . . rejected Bok's worship of success and found him lacking in true godliness and respect for fundamental religious issues." p. 171

More broadly, Bok can be considered a barometer for changing times, a reed shaken by the wind of public opinion, or a "model man" who knew how to make money and use it for the cultural benefit and social uplift of those, and there were many, who found his words and deeds worthy of emulation.

Though Bok's personal religious ideas gave little evidence of doubt or thoughtful introspection, he welcomed articles by well known religious leaders of the day such as Henry Ward Beecher, Dr. Thomas De Witt Talmage and Lyman Abbott. Bok, Krabbendam points out,

> . . . felt no hostility against orthodox Christianity, neither did he suffer from a strict Calvinist upbringing nor from intellectual doubts. Religion was a useful instrument that could be adapted to the needs of the times. (p. 74)

Also, Krabbendam writes,

> Not surprisingly, Bok found morality the most important facet of religion, because it connected the inner and the outer person. In his editorial "The Morals of the Bathtub," he presented his former countrymen as shining examples. The Dutch combined the highest per capita ratio of bath tubs with the highest morality, which evidence supported his idea that cleanliness was a potent external aid to a internal moral life. (p. 74)

Bok's views on the Dutch and their bathtubs, Krabbendam observes, were not the result of a rigorous scientific investigation.

Businessman-journalist-philanthropist Bok typified "the model man" and was an example for many Americans who considered themselves on the make. His gospel of success and service has not lost its popular appeal. The Bok who emerges from the pages of this candid and meticulously researched volume will remind readers of financially successful persons they know or have read about at one time or another.

for the future

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

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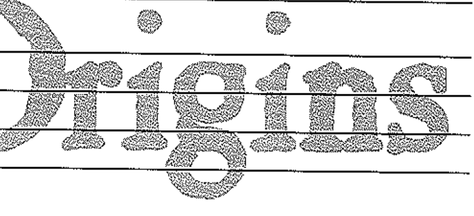

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