

The Early Christian Reformed Church in Her Own Words--Volume 1
Dr. Jan H. Boer, General Editor

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God's Deacon:
An Account of Johannes Van Haitsma
And the Christian Reformed Church



by
Harry H. Boer and Barbara J. Van Haitsma-Boer
2018

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***God's Deacon: An Account of Johannes Van Haitsma
And the Christian Reformed Church***
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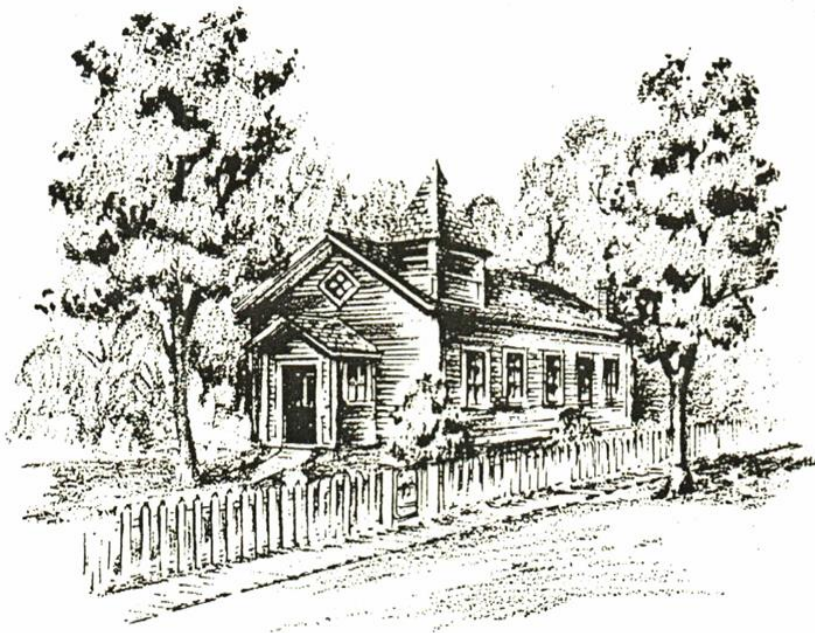
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God's Deacon

An account of Johannes Van Haitsma
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SKETCH OF VRIESLAND CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

Harry Hendrik Boer, M.Div
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Editors: Frances A. Boer-Prins and Jan H. Boer





Dedication Page:

To the Lord of the Church

And to our great-great grandfather Johannes Van Haitsma and all the church members who desired to return to the Lord God, away from State interference and away from all the modernizations that reduced the Forms of Unity and the 1619 Church Order of Dordt to mere historic documents. Johannes emigrated in 1848 from Friesland in the Netherlands to Vriesland in Michigan. He was one of a small group of men who, in 1857, helped form the Christian Reformed Church around that idea of returning to the standards of the Belgic Confessions and Church Order of 1619. In researching his story, we have learned much about his desire to serve God and to faithfully follow the ways of the Lord through years of hardship, discouragement and celebration.

and

With gratitude to the Drenthe Christian Reformed Church for permission to fully access the minutes of the Vriesland CRC and to Carrie Kiekoever for getting us started on the genealogy journey.


Photos from Cyrus Van Haitsma

Preface*¹

For thirty years I have had the pleasure of delving into the Van Haitsma family genealogy. While gathering thousands of pages of information, I developed a growing awareness that the Van Haitsma history is part of a larger story that is intricately connected with the formation and early years of the Christian Reformed Church. The life span of Johannes Van Haitsma began in the Netherlands twelve years before the 1834 secession there and it carried through to 1902, including the first forty years of the CRC. Several of our denominational historians, writing around the fifty year anniversary of the CRC, included a number of names who were just mentioned in passing: Hendrik Dam, Johannes Van Haitsma, Johannes Groen, and Tede Ulberg, men who lived in or near Vriesland, MI. But these men and numerous others left hardly a trace of their existence in church annals, except for incidental mentions especially by Rev. Beets and Rev. G. G. Haan, a grandson of Mr. Gysbert Haan who spent a couple of years in Vriesland, MI before moving to Grand Rapids.

Our ancestor Johannes was invisible also perhaps because the CRC Classical Assembly misspelled his name in recording his presence. Even the original Vriesland CRC minutes have misspellings: Van Halsema and Van Hamsma. One historian of the early CRC history noted in her writing in 1923: “Since the actors in this humble drama were of so little importance in the social scale that they left few traces in the places where they stopped, documentary evidence of their doings is rare.”²

Dr. Henry Beets, a respected historian in the Christian Reformed Church, wrote in the 1907 *Gedenkboek* (the Memorial Book): “But there was a true faithful remnant, the ordinary, common Christians, the soul of the movement that carried on better than they knew. They may have been disturbed by the tumult that sometimes raged around them: but they were a praying people, a sincerely devout people, a people that would get together and discuss Christian experiences, they would meet on Sundays to render homage and service to God; a people that would read the sermons of Brakel or Smijtegeld for edification and encouragement, a people who had faith in the Providence of God whatever their trials and tribulations might be. This is what became the Christian Reformed Church.”³

¹This is not the only edition of *God's Deacon*. This one has undergone an additional editing by Jan H. Boer, brother to author Harry and General Editor to this 2-volume series. A convenience introduced is the appearance of an asterisk (*) after every section date to facilitate finding sections more easily. Another feature is highlighting texts that are of special interest to brother Jan, most of them accompanied by an , again to facilitate locating them. A peculiarity of this book is that it is not divided into chapters but, rather, by years without headings apart from the appropriate year.

The above is an addition to the original footnote 1, which follows here:

Johannes van Haitsma is probably the person most often mentioned in the *Vriesland CRC Minutes*, sometimes three times a meeting (eg. Oct. 14, 1892; Feb. 21, 1893; Apr. 17, 1893; even seven times on March 7, 1866) and at various classis meetings as J. Haitsma; J. van Haitsma; T. Haitsma, deacon, April 5, 1861; J. Hoytzema, deacon, Feb. 3, 1864; J. Ytsma, deacon, Oct. 7, 1863; June 1867 appointed as alternate, but did not attend; and at Synod Sept. 2, 1865, Johannes was selected to be delegate- eacon at the General Assembly.

² Pieters, Aleida J. *A Dutch Settlement in Michigan*, p. 8.

³Van Koevering, A., *Legends of the Dutch*, p. 549; Beets, H., *Fijftigjarig Gedenkboek*, 1907 (my translation).

This is the story I would like to share with you. Both Mr. Dam and Mr. Ulberg left a few pages of their story which are included in the tome by Henry S. Lucas: *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*. But for the rest there are only minor track records of these people during the ten years of the gestation of the CRC and the first forty years of the newly-born church. Even Mr. Gysbert Haan, as talkative as he was, left only a brief paper trail. Yet my perusal of these years and the lives that were lived out in those years convinces me that the story of the birth of the CRC really revolves around these people, courageous immigrants, stalwart believers who wished to continue their worship and honor of God in the style and manner of the “Old Fathers” of the early 1600-1800’s and the confessions embraced by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-19 as well as the Church Order of that time.

(Insert by the General Editor, brother Jan H. Boer: In view of the strong insistence on the Synod of Dordt among the lay people of the early CRC, it is interesting to note that 2018, the year of Harry’s passing, was also the year the CRC Synod encouraged the denomination to celebrate the 400th anniversary of that Synod in 2019. Might I say, restore it to the honour Johannes’s generation wanted to accord it? However, this action should not be construed as a sign of a traditional introvert kind of church. That same Synod was addressed by the Black representative of the Reformed Churches in South Africa, Rev. Tshililo Liphadzi, who commented, “Your ministries truly indicate you are not an inward-looking church but indeed saved to serve.”)

Consequently I am writing a story without judgment as well as I can. I wish to avoid judgment on the need to join the Dutch Reformed Church or on the need for the 1857 separation. I wish to avoid making a judgment of the understanding of being “Reformed” within each group. What I do wish to accomplish is to share why ten percent of the colonists chose their separate way and what they hoped would lead them to live their lives and worship in a way that would be pleasing to the Lord.

I am aware that the result of writing this book is that my own story has been incredibly influenced by that of great-great-grandfather Johannes. What I hear him say are truths that he has taught me through his life. I, of course, have never met him. I have only followed his tracks through the 1834 *Afscheiding* (Secession) in the Netherlands, through a personal spiritual quest, and through the first forty years of the CRC. Having my own immigrant experience a hundred years following his, I see him as a pilgrim in progress and, with his fellow church members, often dubbed “the *Kleine luy*” (the little people; a more common term is “*kleine luyden*”) by the clergy, consciously working to create a church environment that would be to the glory of God.

As an ordained person in the CRC since 1968, I have learned to consider and question issues that did not occur to me until I engaged Johannes. While I am giving voice to an ordinary man, I have to be aware that as one ordained, I am exercising a power over his story that may reflect me as well as Johannes.

Additionally, Johannes Van Haitsma was only one of those *Kleine Luy* who began the CRC. The stories of each of the others would be equally educational, entertaining and worthy of encapsulating in books. But they scarcely left a trace, like the Indians whose territory became theirs. I look forward to meeting them all at the throne of God and thanking them for the riches

that have been poured into my life just because of their faithfulness.⁴ The Scriptures remind us (I Cor. 16:19) “Such men deserve recognition.”

⁴His wish was fulfilled on March 30, 2018, in Honolulu. For an “In Memoriam” see the CRC’s *The Banner*, July/August 2018, p. 38:
www.google.ca/search?q=in+memoriam+rev+harry+hendrik+boer+the+Banner+July%2FAugust+2018&rlz=1C1AVNG_enCA658CA662&oq=in+memoriam+rev+Harry+Hendrik+boer+the+Banner+July%2FAugust+2018&aqs=chrome.0.69i59.21296j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

God's Deacon

1822*

Antje woke up slowly. For just a minute or two she lay in her cozy boxbed and enjoyed the peace and quiet. It was pure delight to her soul. Apparently their two boys were still sleeping. Lovely! The early morning was the only time of the day that she and her husband Tjette could quietly talk together. The happy shouts of those little guys sometimes made them suspicious. Antje never knew what nighttime mischief they could discover now that they were no longer under the watchful eyes of their parents.

"I know, I know," she scolded herself. They were really just happy and active children. Wopke was their firstborn, born on March 16, 1819. He was one and a half years old when his brother Tjalling was born on October 5, 1820. A few weeks ago they had celebrated Tjalling's second birthday. Antje had prepared a nice meal for the occasion and both sets of grandparents had been invited to eat with them. The two boys were so excited it was hard to tell whose birthday it was.

"Time for me to get up," Antje said. As was often the case lately, Tjette was already up. Antje climbed out of the boxbed and noted that he was outside tending to their tiny vegetable garden. "Not much room for a garden on a barge," Tjette had said last spring when Antje brought up the idea of a garden. But Tjette had found some wood and had fashioned a small box for Antje to sow some vegetable seeds. And now he was outside preparing the garden box for the winter months. Antje knew he'd be back inside shortly and would be looking forward to some breakfast. Her husband was a hard-working man. She was proud of him.

One hour later, the boys were up and dressed and all stomachs were satisfied. Tjette had the family Bible on his lap and prepared to read today's Scripture passage. This was the Bible that had been given to them as a wedding present. Antje smiled to see the boys listening so carefully. "It is the sound of his voice," she whispered, and admitted to herself that she had never heard the old stories read in such an interesting way. Antje was as enthralled as her boys and loved this old family tradition. It was a good way to start each day. After the reading and prayer each morning, Tjette had been teaching Wopke and Tjalling to say "Amen."

Before Tjette left his family to go to work with his father, he put his arm around Antje's waist and whispered, "Will you be alright today?" Antje responded, "I'm fine, Tjette. Please don't worry about me. I'll be just fine." He gave her a quick kiss and said, "You know you can always walk over to Ma's any time you need to," and he was out the door.

It had been Tjette's parents' idea to switch living quarters. "Now that your family is growing you need the extra space," *Pake* Van Haitsma said one day last month, and *Beppe* Van Haitsma nodded her head in agreement. "It is only the two of us left in the bigger space, but when the new baby arrives, you are going to need space for the boys. Wopke and Tjalling will be just fine in the second boxbed." And so it happened that the two families had traded living quarters one beautiful October day. Every day Antje was delighted with the extra space and wished she had the words to properly thank Tjette's parents for their kindness. Sometimes she wished she wasn't

so shy. Antje had no problem talking with Tjette and the children, but something happened to her mouth whenever she was with older adults. When she said this to Tjette, he started to laugh and when he tried to stop, he just laughed the more. Finally they were both laughing and then the boys were laughing too. It was a precious moment that Antje would long remember.

Even though her life was more comfortable now in the larger living quarters, Antje realized that another memory, one she truly wished she could forget, had put a shadow over her enjoyment of barge life. Sometimes forgetting isn't all that easy, Antje realized. She remembered again how she had learned about the accident after church service one Sunday. She had approached a few friends to wish them "Good Morning." The conversation quickly turned to another barge family whose young son had somehow fallen off the barge into the canal and had drowned. When Antje heard this news, coming so unexpectedly, she was shocked and devastated. A sharp pain pierced her heart like a bolt of lightning, and for a moment, she could scarcely breathe. Later Tjette told her, "I wanted to be the one to tell you about it. But as soon as I saw you, I knew that someone else had beat me to it."

Antje could still remember the scary feelings of apprehension she began to have about the time that her precious little Wopke was learning to walk. It felt to her like a foreboding of something bad going to happen. As Wopke grew older and his walking became more controlled, he discovered the joy of running. He would run all around their living quarters and sometimes he would run in circles, laughing with pure joy. It was a good thing the stairs to the deck were so steep; it would be a while before Wopke would feel confident enough to climb them. One day while her newborn Tjalling was napping, Antje took Wopke out onto the deck of the barge carrying him on her hip. He began wiggling to be put down, and suddenly Antje experienced the same lightning pain she had felt once before. She recognized the feeling as fear, bone-chilling fear.

Some hours later Tjette found Antje completely worn out from weeping. Tjette was unable to console her and he finally just sat beside her and held her close. Little Wopke came and sat with them and slowly Antje began to recover.

The next day while Tjette and his father were off the barge, *Beppe* came to visit Antje. The two women enjoyed a very open and honest discussion when Antje confessed her fears for Wopke's safety on the barge. *Beppe* was able to suggest some practical ideas that Antje used thereafter to keep Wopke and all her children safe while living on the barge. And from that day forward the two women developed a closer appreciation for each other that helped Antje feel more relaxed.

It was the end of a seemingly endless day and having settled Wopke and Tjalling into their boxbed, Antje could finally sit down in her chair and relax. However, her mind was not on her crocheting project, and she ended up having to unravel and work a section of it over again. No matter how she adjusted her body onto the chair, Antje simply couldn't get comfortable. She looked over to where Tjette was working on a whittling project and found him looking back at her. Tjette said quietly, "Is it time?" And Antje smiled back and said, "Yes, my husband, I do think it is almost time."

The next day, on November 22, 1822, Johannes Van Haitsma was born. ^

1824*

Tjette stepped outside onto the deck of the barge and saw his father already busily preparing for the day's workload. "Morning, Pa. You are out early today."

"We pick up a load of peat today. I figure if we get it loaded up on time, we can unload and be home again at a decent time tomorrow." Pa was working all the while he was talking, and Tjette couldn't help smiling. He knew that his father didn't really like taking overnight trips on Friday. If they should come home later than expected, it would make for a short Saturday night sleep. And Pa firmly believed that his family should get a good night's sleep on Saturday night so that neither he nor any of his offspring would nod off during the long church service on Sunday morning.

"The wheelbarrow and the tarps are all in place, Pa. I did it last night. I'm ready to go when you are." A hand signal from his father told Tjette that he could cast off and he and Pa eased their barge out into the canal.

Conversation on the barge was minimal. Each man knew what to do and when to do it since they had worked and lived together on the barge all these years. *Pake*, whose full name was Wopke Rinses Van Haitsma, had also been born and raised on a barge as had his father before him. "A long tradition of barge men," Tjette mused. Tjette's older brother Rinse Wopkes had worked with them too until he was about seventeen years old. Rinse was a hard worker who had caught the attention of another barge owner. Even Pa could not deny that the decent wages promised to Rinse could not be ignored and Pa had reluctantly given his consent and blessing.

After Rinse left the family barge, *Pake* had figured that Tjette's younger brother Johannes Wopkes was old enough to help with the work. Johannes had worked with *Pake* and Tjette on the barge until Tjette and Antje were married. "Hard to believe that it has been eight years just Pa and I," Tjette said to himself.

Pa was not a big talker. He normally was more of a listener. But he did enjoy being part of dock conversations with the other barge men. These conversations were the primary way Pa learned most of the news, both local news and other events from all over the Netherlands. Through the years Tjette had figured out a few tricks to get Pa to say out loud what he was thinking. Tjette knew that he could not use these sneaky methods too often, figuring that his Pa would sooner or later catch on. Pa might be a quiet man, but he was also very observant and had an excellent memory.

Lately Tjette had some concerns on his mind, and he'd been waiting for the right moment to broach the subject with Pa. Now seemed as good a time as any. "Seems to me like a lot has changed in the barge business since *Pake's* day." Tjette held his breath waiting for Pa to respond.

"Ya (Yes), I think you are right about that," Pa said finally. Tjette waited. "Interesting that you see it too," Pa added.

“Pa, the last time I talked with *Pake*, he was telling me about the changes in the peat business that he noticed already thirty years ago. From what I see, things haven’t been getting much better since then. Maybe getting worse.”

“What did *Pake* have to say about that?” Pa asked.

“Well now, *Pake* told me that when he started helping his Pa in the early 1770s, the peat business was booming. The peat was plentiful and it wasn’t too costly. The barge men were able to make a pretty good living as the middlemen who would buy the peat from the farmers and sell it to the families who needed the peat to warm their houses.”

“Ya,” Pa said, “I think that was true. I remember that as a child my Ma was able to buy oranges sometimes. And even the store cheese! Was that ever a treat for us kids! But later, we only got an orange once a year at Christmas time. And we only got one egg a year, at Easter time. Did he tell you what he thought happened to change things?” Pa asked.

Tjette responded, “*Pake* said that a couple of the big peat-digging companies came to Friesland and they hired people to go to the marshes and dig the peat. And then they signed on some barge owners to ship it to the cities. This put some of the local barge owners out of business.” Putting this history into his own words helped Tjette to better understand the progression of the changes.

Tjette continued, “The thing is, the peat business is seasonal; we can’t work the peat in the winter. So *Pake* saw that more and more of his friends, who used to be barge owners and who had been doing okay financially in the peat distribution business, were having to go to the nearby cities to find work. Some of the barge men signed on with the Dutch whaling boats. Other men found work building or repairing the dikes. Some joined the military.”

“Ya, that is pretty much the way I remember it too,” Pa said. “But our family did not have the bad times that many of those guys faced because my Pa never gave up his barge. And slowly he was able to build up his barge business again and keep his family from going hungry. We didn’t have a lot, but we had enough. After your Ma and I got married, *Pake* was ready to turn the barge over to me and my brother Johannes.”

Pa continued, “I remember that back then your Ma had a little business of her own. She crocheted the beautiful hats that all the ladies wear. Whenever Ma wasn’t busy with other things, she would pick up her needle work.” Both men smiled about that memory. Too bad Ma’s sore hands kept her from her needle work today. Sometimes these days Ma would care for Wopke and Tjalling so that Antje could do the crocheting. Antje was enjoying learning the more difficult patterns that her mother-in-law passed along to her.

Finally, Tjette asked his Pa the question that was on his mind a lot lately. “Pa, what do you think? Will the barge business today revive?”

Pa looked at Tjette and told him the truth, “I don’t know, son. I really don’t know.”

“I see another competition for our barge business,” said Tjette.

“And what would that be, Tjette?”

Tjette responded, “Steam and rail. Railroads are being built all over and many of them end up at the docks. With railroads, products are sent on schedule, and not dependent on the weather. It is more expensive, but more reliable. And boats are turning to steam. And the steamboats are more on a schedule. This means again that products cost a bit more, but they are more reliably on schedule.”

After a bit Pa said, “And what I am seeing is that the result of those changes is that more people are being reduced to poverty. And the wealthy are getting wealthier.”

“So,” asked Tjette, “does that mean we will have to work harder and longer hours and actually make less money?”

“I’m afraid so,” answered Pa. “It is a good thing that the State is helping to even the opportunities for all, but they can only do so much. I think that’s why unions are growing to help us *kleine luy*.”

“Is that,” wondered Tjette, “why the city governors have asked Willem of Orange to pull our little country together?”

“I think so,” said Pa, “Some are saying that last century was a golden century for the Netherlands. But that this century will not be as glorious. I’m just glad to see that Napoleon is no longer a power here and that our country has been set free.”

“But does that also mean,” wondered Tjette, “that the wealthy and powerful are going to make the new realities work for them, maybe without caring for the common man?”

“I can see that we already have more poverty in our country,” Pa said, “and I’m afraid the trend is to greater poverty. I’m hoping the King can help balance the country and keep that poverty under control.”

“I heard,” said Tjette, “that the King is making changes in the Church too. He’s changing the rules about who in the church makes decisions. And he’s even making rules about hymn singing in church.”

“Ya,” interjected Pa, “and he’s welcoming preachers who don’t hold to the Old Confessions. I think maybe it is just the start of changes we are not going to like very much.”

“I think it is hard to keep the world from rotting while we think we’re improving it,” said Tjette. “Hey, here come the three boys. Little Johannes is trying hard to keep up with Wopke and Tjalling. And we can already see the different personalities growing in each.”

“Oh? How do you see them turning out?” asked Pa.

“Well, Wopke seems to have a head for thinking about business things, and Tjalling seems to have a bent toward being a little free, while Johannes is always thinking and asking questions. Even now while he’s just over two.”

“Still it remains as difficult to predict our own children’s future as it is the future of the whole country. It is just as unknowable as tomorrow’s weather,” Pa grinned as he turned to greet his grandsons.

1826*

The barge was draped in black. “Ma,” Wopke asked Antje, “How old was *Pake*?”

Ever ready to do a little educating, Ma said, “Well, he was born in 1756, and now it is 1826. So that makes him seventy years old.”

“That sounds old, Ma,” Johannes surprised his mother by joining the conversation.

“Ya, son. That is pretty old. He worked hard all his life on the barge just like I expect you will. He lived through some tough times. Napoleon, the emperor of France, conquered our country and lots of soldiers were making a nuisance of themselves. They had the freedom to do that. They took what they wanted, and we could do nothing about it. Many times they took for themselves what we had planned to eat.”

“That wasn’t nice, was it, Ma?” Johannes asked.

“No,” she answered. “We were very glad when the other countries got together and beat Napoleon’s army. But that was ten years ago. Now we have a lot more freedom. Life was hard for all of us under Napoleon. But it has been hardest for *Pake*. We are hoping it will get better with King Willem.”

“Is King Willem a good king?” asked Johannes.

“Ya, in some ways. He helped make our many provinces into one country. I think that was good.” Ma added. “But maybe he’s destroying the church.”

“How so, Ma?” Johannes wondered.

“Well, because, instead of the church being something of the people, he’s making it part of the government.”

“So what does that mean?” Johannes wondered.

“Well,” Ma struggled to give answers a curious four-year-old might understand, “The church needs to follow God. And the king also needs to follow the ways of the Lord. That’s what the

church confesses.⁵But now the government decides what is true to the Bible. I think it would have been a good thing if the king had left the church independent as it became under Napoleon.⁶ *Pake* would have been able to explain it better.” Tears were rolling down Ma’s cheeks.

Several months later, Johannes noticed again that Ma’s eyes were all red and teary. “Oh, Ma,” asked Johannes, “Why are you crying so?”

“My son,” she answered, “It’s hard for you to understand. First *Pake* died and now your little sister Sytske died.⁷ I miss them so much. We will never see them again, except in heaven. My son, hold me tight. My heart hurts so much.”

“Ya, Ma,” he said circling his little arms around Antje, “I guess I’ll never play dominoes with *Pake* again, and never hold my baby sister again.”

“No, son, they’ve both gone to be with Jesus.”

“Ma,” Johannes asked, “will heaven ever fill up like the cemetery does?”

“No, Johannes, look up at the stars at night. That space goes on endlessly. There is plenty of space in the universe for all the people who love Jesus. God will never run out of space, and never run out of love for us.”

“That’s a good thing,” said Johannes, “because some day I am going there too.”

Antje said, “But I would like you to wait a long time. I want to go to Jesus before you do. And I don’t want to go soon. I think God has some things for you and me both to do here.”

“What do you think God wants me to do here?” asked Johannes. “I can’t do much for Him.”

“Well,” responded Antje, “it may not seem like a big thing, but Jesus wants us to love each other just like He loves us.”

“That’s easy to do,” spoke up Johannes. “I love you and Pa and my brothers and sisters already.”

“Thank you, my son, I love you too. But there will be times when we will not be so lovable. That’s when our love for Jesus will be tested. Will we love each other then too?”

“I’m sure I will!” said Johannes.

⁵*Belgic Confession*, Art. 36.

⁶Vander Werp, H. *The Outline of the History of the Christian Reformed Church of America*, p. 11.

⁷Wopke Rinses van Haitsma, born 1756, Johannes’ grandfather, died Jan. 31, 1826. Sytske, Johannes’ sister, born Feb. 18, 1825, died Dec. 10, 1826. Personal Geneology files.

1832*

“Tjette,” Antje said, “the women were talking after the service about Widow Van Dyke. They said things are bad at her house, and she doesn’t have any food for her family.”

Tjette responded, “Aren’t the deacons of the church taking care of her as they’re supposed to?”⁸

“No,” answered Antje. “She’s been going to the Separated Church. And the government won’t provide money for their deacons to take care of the poor in that new church.”

“Well, aren’t the deacons of the new church taking care of her?” asked Tjette.

“You know,” said Antje, “Many members of that church are in poverty. Their deacons can’t possibly take care of all the needy people in their congregation.”⁹

“So what are you suggesting, Antje?” Tjette wondered.

“You know how busy I am with the young ones, and all the knitting and cleaning I have to do,” Antje said. “What would you think if we buy the fixings for making bread, which we do anyway, and bring them over to her place, and ask her to bake bread for us? And for every loaf she bakes for us, she can bake one for herself and her family. That way she can actually earn her bread, and we would be helping her feed her family.”

“I think that’s a wonderful suggestion!” admitted Tjette. “We would have bread for us to eat and she would have the possibility of being able and responsible for feeding her own family. And we lighten your load some too. I think that’s a marvelous plan. Will you talk to her about it and make a deal with her? I’ll be glad to buy the supplies so she can become our bread baker.”

“Oh, I’m so glad you agree, Tjette. It will be so good to help our neighbor to feed her family. I will go talk to her this afternoon.”

“Mrs. Van Dyke,” Antje said when the widow opened the door of her home. “Can I ask a favor from you?”

Mrs. Van Dyke answered, “Ya, Mrs. Van Haitsma, come on in and tell me what’s on your mind.”

Antje sat down at the table, and explained, “You know I have a growing family, and we have pretty small quarters on the barge. I’m not complaining, mind you, but with the young ones in the quarters and the knitting I have to do to keep them in clothes, I seem to run out of time.”

⁸Church Order 1619, Art. 25.

⁹ Mulder, A. *Americans from Holland*, p. 116. It was estimated that nearly 1/3 of the population “... had to be given support in one form or another.” Van der Meulen, J., *Hollanders: The Development of their Objectives in Europe and America*, p. 16.

“Ya, those young ones do need attention, don’t they? How can I be of help for you?” Mrs. Van Dyke wondered.

“Well, I thought that if we brought you the supplies for bread baking, would you consider baking bread for us?” Antje requested. “And perhaps we can pay you for your baking by you keeping half the loaves for your family.”

“Well, now,” answered Mrs. Van Dyke, “I would be glad to be your bread baker. And keeping half the loaves for my own family would be such a help to us. How many loaves would you like to have me bake for you?”

Antje, pleased, said, “Thank you so much. I think my family would need three loaves every two days, and we could come to pick up what you have baked.”

“Oh, Mrs. Van Haitsma, you can’t imagine what a wonderful gift that would be for us. I’m so glad you have asked me for help. As soon as I have those baking supplies, I will get some fresh bread going for you.”

Antje responded, “Then I will ask Tjette to bring you a good supply tomorrow. And I will come by a few times in the week to pick up your fresh bread. It will be such a help for me. You know baking in our little quarter sure heats up the place till it’s uncomfortable. Thank you so much for helping us out.”

A few weeks later, Antje spoke to Johannes. “Johannes, you know we’ve been getting lovely fresh bread from Widow Van Dyke.”

“Ya, Ma,” he answered, “I have enjoyed that bread. She is a good baker, isn’t she?”

“Ya, son,” Antje responded. “Now I would like to ask for your help. I think you are old enough to go to her home a few times a week as I have been doing, and you can pick up the loaves for us. Would you do that?”

“Ya, Ma,” Johannes agreed. “She’s a nice person, and I will be glad to do that chore for you. It will mean I get to smell that tasty fresh bread on my way home.”

“Ya, son, she’s truly helping us out, and now you can help me out too,” Antje added. “You do have to help me keep track that she isn’t running out of baking supplies, because we need to keep her supplied with flour and yeast and everything baking requires. So, once in a while, you should ask her if she has enough supplies or if Pa needs to bring more to her.”

The next day Johannes made his first visit to widow Van Dyke. When she answered the door, he said, “Mrs. Van Dyke, I am Johannes Van Haitsma. My Ma asked me to come to pick up the bread that you have been baking for us.”

Widow Van Dyke said, “Welcome, Johannes, come on in. I will get the loaves for you. They are still warm.”

“Oh, that’s good!” exclaimed Johannes, “I love the smell of that bread. You sure bake well.”

The widow gave Johannes a big smile. “Thank you, Johannes. It is good of your mother to ask me to do this for her. It helps me feed my family too.”

When Johannes returned to the barge, he said, “Ma, I think you’re pretty smart. I could see how poor things looked in the widow’s house. I can see that you asked her to help you with the baking so you could help keep food in the house for her family. I think Jesus must be very pleased that you are willing to help her like that.”

“Ya, Johannes,” Ma replied, “When the Lord points out to us that somebody needs some help, it pleases Him if we find a good way to help fill that need. And besides, her baking for us is helping me out too. I can do more knitting and crocheting and I have more time for you children as well. But keep this in mind, son, we want to be of help to her in a way that she does not feel shamed by us. So tell no one why we are helping her.”

“No, ma. I won’t tell anyone,” promised Johannes.

Later Johannes went on deck where his Pa was resting. “Pa, what does it mean when some men put on their hats in church? In our family, we always take hats off when we go into church.”

“They’re making a statement, son,” Tjette responded. “The king and his Royal Church Department want us to sing at least one hymn at every worship service. For years some members have been objecting to singing these hymns in the church. But the Royal Commission has not been listening to these people. So these men finally decided to protest by putting on their hats, or they stand up, or they walk out and come back in when the song is over.”¹⁰

“Does that mean many people in the church are unhappy with the king and his rules?” asked Johannes.

“Ya, son, many people have stopped going to church because of that. Some of our friends have been going to fellowship meetings instead.¹¹They say they’re much happier there,” Pa explained.

“What is different about those meetings?” Johannes queried.

“Besides singing only Psalms, they often read sermons from what they call the ‘Old Fathers.’ Dr. Da Costa is one of the most well-known writers these days,” Pa replied. “I’ve heard a few of those messages and I find them easy to understand and helpful to me.”

“Well, then, should we go to those fellowship meetings more?” considered Johannes.

“Now son, that becomes a little complicated. The State Church really would not be happy if more people deserted the church for those fellowship groups. The church is so connected with

¹⁰Mulder, A., *Americans*, p. 104; Weiler, A.G., etc., *Geschiedenis van de Kerk in Nederland*, p. 674.

¹¹Krominga, J., *In the Mirror*, pp. 13-14.

the government that it would seem traitorous to the king if we would leave the State Church.¹² And we cannot really afford to do things that might hurt our business connections.”

“I guess that’s important, isn’t it?” asked Johannes.

“Ya, son, that’s what keeps food on our table,” concluded Pa.

1833*

Tjette was sitting on the barge deck smoking his long-stemmed pipe and visiting with Mr. Zylstra, a fellow barge captain. A balmy breeze ruffled the water in the canal ever so slightly. It had been a day of hard work again, loading the peat that he would deliver to the dock in Drachten tomorrow. It was good to be at rest while the boys were busy loading the Zylstra’s barge.

Tjette was aware that Zylstra, along with many other folk from the area, was attending a fellowship group that met outside of the church. “What is it,” asked Tjette, “that makes you want to spend some of your precious relaxation time going to extra religious meetings? By the time I’m done working and settling down for the evening, I’m happy just to sit like this. I don’t want to go to extra meetings. I’m pleased with going to church on Sundays.”

Zylstra took a pull on his pipe and thought about that. After a time he said, “You know, when we’ve worked a hard day and we’re away from home with our load on the barge, we sometimes just go to the market and pick up some food that is all prepared. Sometimes that tastes really good. But other times we wish we were sitting at home with the family to eat a good meal that the wife has prepared. She is a great cook; few of these market people can do as well. “That’s kind of like going to our church on Sunday, and hearing a sermon of some kind and leaving with the feeling that that was not a very fulfilling meal. Then I am pleased to be able to go to a fellowship meeting and hear a sermon by one of the Old Fathers. That is so much more satisfying to my heart and mind than how our *Dominee* comes across.”

After another pull on the pipe, Zylstra continued, “There is a preacher in Ulrum that I really like to hear. He speaks from the Bible, and he teaches according to the 1619 Canons of Dordt and speaks true to the Confession of Faith. After I hear him preach, I come away satisfied with my meal. So sometimes I plan my shipping loads so my family and I can be in his church on a Sunday. I realize that many other preachers don’t like how he preaches, but I find it really uplifting.” Zylstra went on, “You remember that Jesus was asked by the Pharisees where He got His authority for His teaching? Well, I kind of feel that *Dominee De Cock*[^] comes across with the authority of the Bible. Most of the other ministers seem to have little sense of authority. It’s like whatever nice thought comes into their head comes out of their mouth. It is like in their thinking and teaching the church is an open door and any ideas that come to mind are welcome, except perhaps the ideas that might come from the Bible.”

¹² Mulder, A., *Americans*, p. 10. Vander Meulen, J., *Hollanders*, p. 22.

Johannes had been quietly sitting near the men, just out of sight. He was curious about this conversation. “What is it about those Old Fathers and Bible authority that seems so important to Mr. Zylstra?” he wondered. “I think church would be nicer if the sermon was a little shorter and we would sing a little more.”

1834*

On Wopke’s birthday, March 16, Pa called the family together. “Come to the bow,” he said, “where we can talk and celebrate Wopke’s birthday. I have a very special gift to give to Wopke today. I wanted to wait until you were fifteen, Wopke, because this gift is a responsibility that you have to be old enough to take care of. You all know that my father, your *Pake*, died eight years ago.¹³ He gave me a gift when I turned fifteen, and specifically told me to pass it on to my oldest son on his fifteenth birthday. So today’s the day.”

Pa pulled a small purple satin bag out of the pocket of his breeches. All eyes were fixed on Pa with eager expectations. Wopke’s eyes were bigger than usual. Everyone was quiet. The moment was too important. Slowly Pa opened up the gold string that held the purple bag closed and reached in with his fingers. Then he held up his hand to show a sparkling ring. He pronounced, “This is a very old ring. It is a very special ring. We have forgotten which of our forefathers first had this ring on his hand. It goes back to the Eighty Year War. And our ancestor was serving the state ruler. Because he served so well and because he saved the ruler’s life on more than one occasion, he was given this ring. It carries the symbol of the Weapon of Barradeel. It was a very special award the ruler gave to very few people.”

“Now, on behalf of all the worthy ancestors, I pass this ring with the Weapon of Barradeel inscribed on it to Wopke. My son, treasure it well. Wear it with pride and keep it safe. When the day comes that your oldest son becomes fifteen, you are to pass it on, a precious heirloom of your family’s history. We might not remember the details, but we remember the honor. So, my son Wopke, this is a special honor for you to keep and pass on at the proper time. And with that I wish you and all the family congratulations on your fifteenth birthday.” Everybody clapped their hands in delight. Rarely had they heard such a long and special speech from Pa. They gathered around Wopke congratulating him and trying to get a closer look at the magnificent ring. Wopke displayed the ring on the purple bag as a cushion. He was careful not to be close to the rail of the barge.

Johannes gazed along with the rest of the family. Wopke put the ring on his finger, but his fifteen-year-old finger was too small for it to fit snugly. Pa said, “My fingers weren’t big enough either so until I was old enough to wear it once in a while, I asked my mother to keep it with her jewelry. Since I have been old enough to wear it, I have put it on for special occasions. I can hardly remember the last time. I was really so scared that I might lose it.”

¹³ Genealogy file, personal collection.

Wopke held it up proudly. Proud of this gift of many generations, proud to be entrusted with this ring, and afraid he too might lose it. He turned to Antje, “Ma, will you keep it safe for me like *Beppe* did for Pa?” Antje said “Certainly I will, son, I’ll be glad to keep it safe with my jewelry. And any time you want to see it, just ask.”

Johannes knew where Ma kept her jewelry, and he began to think about when he might take a better look at that ring. “I’ll have to wait until nobody’s home,” he told himself. It was a week later that he found the opportunity. The family had gone to the market in Minnertsga for the week’s supplies. Ma and Pa trusted him to stay safe by the barge and the dock. “This is the time,” he thought to himself.

Johannes went into the family room and opened up the silver box Ma kept for her special jewelry. He took out the purple bag and went topside. He opened the bag, took out the ring, and held it up for the sun to shine on it. “It is so sparkly,” he said softly. He looked at it from every angle, turning it this way and then that way. “Oh, how beautiful! It sparkles like the ripples on the water.”

Suddenly the ring slipped off his finger. Johannes saw it fall, and he tried to catch it. It hit the water and disappeared. The ring was gone! He thought about diving for it, but he knew the water was not clear enough to find it in the murky deep. “Oh no!” he cried. “Now what?” He got scared. “Pa is going to be so mad at me. And Wopke will never forgive me for this.” He said, “I’m going to have a bottom so sore I won’t be able to sit for a week.”

Johannes looked down at the water, still so sparkly. “It’s gone! And it’s my fault. Why couldn’t I leave it alone? What am I going to do? I’ll put the purple bag back as if the ring is still there.” He figured, “Maybe they won’t think I did it.” So he went down the ladder into the family quarters and put the bag back in Ma’s jewelry box.

After a while the family came home. Their arms were loaded with vegetables and other supplies. Johannes could feel his face burning. “Pa and Ma are going to see I did something wrong,” he whispered. He sat at the bow end, far from the family quarters, hoping to disappear. But he didn’t, of course. He knew that he had to own up to what he had done with Wopke’s family heirloom. “I don’t want to do that. But should I wait until it is discovered?” Thinking this over, another thought began to bother him, “What does God think of what I’ve done? I remember the Bible says ‘your sins will find you out.’ I know He doesn’t like what I’ve done. God, I guess I’ve got to take what I’ve got coming.”

An hour later Johannes was still hiding out at the bow of the barge. “I know I have to face this, Lord. Please forgive me. And give Wopke a kind heart too. I don’t think I could bear it if he got mad at me and never forgave me. And my parents too. I’ve done wrong to them by being so jealous, and sneaking into their private things.” Johannes slowly stood up and made his way to the family quarters.

Sometime later, after a day of sailing the barge back home to Minnertsga, the Van Haitsma men brought the barge to the dock. They could see people were huddled in small groups. Tjette called out to the men who caught the rope to tie up his barge. “Hey what’s going on? What’s the

news?” Zylstra separated himself from one of the groups and reported, “The Provincial Church of Groningen has kicked Rev. De Cock in Ulrum out of his pulpit!”¹⁴ What we were concerned might happen, just did!”

Johannes perked up his ears, “What’s that all about? Why is a preacher being kicked out of his church?” he muttered to himself.

Zylstra went on to say, “There were other people upset with the State Church. They didn’t want the modernist preachers to baptize their children. So they went to Rev. de Cock. He didn’t want to do it either because he didn’t want to overstep his bounds. But they kept asking him and he finally gave in and baptized some of their children. So on Sunday the Classis of Groningen had a bunch of soldiers standing around the pulpit so Rev. de Cock couldn’t get up by it to preach.”

Tjette asked, “What did he do then?”

“Well,” answered Zylstra with a grin, “Rev. de Cock got up on a pew and preached from there! After that service the provincial officials locked the doors of the church. Later that day Rev. de Cock invited his congregation into the parsonage barn and he preached to them there.”¹⁵

“Wow,” Johannes said. “It seems government people can get very riled up about little things!”

After Zylstra went back to the cluster, Johannes asked, “Pa, what is that all about? What is happening in the church? I hear all kinds of talk on the dock. People are all arguing about that preacher in Ulrum. What has he done to get people so upset?”

“I’m not exactly sure, son, but I’ve been hearing about him for years even though he lives thirty-five miles away. Maybe the church squabbles about him will stay over there in Groningen and soon things will settle down here. The news now is that the preacher has been permanently kicked off his pulpit!” I just talked with our friends Zylstra and Roersma, and they seem quite excited by what’s going on over there. I don’t know what to think. But you don’t have to worry about all that; it’s kind of an adult struggle. You’d better turn into your boxbed and get some sleep; tomorrow’s going to be another big day.”

Johannes went quietly down the ladder into the family room of the barge. Little Jetse was already asleep in the boxbed when Johannes silently crawled in beside him. But his mind was still on the events he had heard. “What kind of fuss about the church are these adults making, anyway? Church is supposed to be a happy place, but it won’t be if there’s so much arguing going on.” Slowly Johannes drifted off to sleep.

In the morning, putting his clothes on quickly, Johannes moved to the table where Ma had porridge and bread waiting. Jetse was just stirring and his little sister Sietske was awake in her boxbed. Ma urged him to hurry, “Johan, get with it. The breakfast is warm, and your Pa and brothers are already on deck. We have to line the barge up with the dock and finish getting the

¹⁴ Tuma, J., *De Cock Story*, May 1834.

¹⁵ Pieters, A., *A Dutch Settlement in Michigan*, p. 20; van den Burg, P., 1834 *Afscheiding in Ulrum*: They met in a barrel making shop and in “de kuiperij van de weduwe Geertje Koster-Hulshoff,” among other places.

beets out of the field and loaded. Pa had to fix the wheelbarrow again so we can move the crates.”

Johannes tried to sneak a slice of cheese, and Ma slapped his hand. “Porridge first!” she scolded. His breakfast quickly eaten, Johannes bolted up the stairs to join Pa and his brothers on deck. Soon they were on their way to the field where the beets were ready for harvest. At the beet field Johannes worked with Wopke to pull up the beets and put them in the crates. Eventually he questioned Wopke quietly, “What’s all the fuss about in the church, Wopke? What are Mr. Zylstra and Mr. Roersma so fired up about?”

Wopke answered, “Ah, you don’t have to be bothered about all that. That’s adult stuff. It doesn’t make much sense to me either. But you know, I sure like looking at that Zylstra girl! Now, she’s a beauty!” Johannes teased, “Isn’t she a little too rich for you? Her family owns several barges. Anyway, why are you so interested in girls? They’re too much of a nuisance!” Tjalling had moved a bit closer in his row of turnips, and joined the conversation, “Ya, you’d better not look so high. There are other girls around too, you know? And besides, her family is connected with the group making the noise in the church. Maybe that’s something to stay away from.”

Tjette came alongside with a load of crates on the wheelbarrow. “Enough talking, boys. Keep on topping those beets so we can get the barge loaded and we can get these crates over to Harlingen. Our buyer there is eager to fill his ship with a load for London. And he’s also lined up a load of peat for us to bring to Drachten. We’re going to be busy for a while. That’s good; that will put syrup on your bread. And maybe even buy you some new wooden shoes so you can impress the girls.”

Everyone was quiet again and working at a steady pace. But while Johannes’ hands were busy, his mind was still pondering this church business. “I thought the church was supposed to be a nice quiet place where you could think about God,” he said to Wopke. “What do you make out of all this fuss in the church?”

Wopke slowly responded, “It seems people are angry over a bunch of things. They think the king has corrupted the church. But even before Napoleon took over the country some people were upset because the church decided to use hymns in addition to singing the Psalms in the church. And now the orthodox preacher in Ulrum has started baptizing children of orthodox parents who are not members of his church. The Provincial Synod kicked him off the pulpit.”¹⁶

“I don’t understand,” murmured Johannes, “Who runs the church, the king or the congregation?” “That’s part of the argument, I hear,” said Wopke. “These conservative people seem to think each church should run its own organization.”

Later in October, Johannes again heard the buzz on the dock. He asked Tjette, “Pa, what’s the news? What is all the jabber about? There’s so much loud talk going on.”

¹⁶Pieters, A., *Settlement*, pp. 17, 19.

Pa turned to his son, “People are getting hot under the collar about that Rev. de Cock who got kicked off his pulpit a few months ago. It seems he is going around the country and organizing the like-minded fellowship groups into new churches.”

Johannes wondered out loud, “So what’s going to be the difference between these churches?”

Pa said, “Well, the new church claims to be the old church. That is something to wrap your mind around! They want to have the church be the way it was long before Napoleon came. They want to honor confessions of the past. I’m hearing there are congregations of these people all around the whole country. I didn’t realize that so many people thought that way. I heard that Rev. de Cock has called together many of the preachers and elders of these churches and they are starting a new denomination. I’m afraid that is asking for trouble.”¹⁷

“Do you think,” asked Johannes, “that it’s going to make any difference for our church here?”

“Ya, I think so,” said Pa. “There are people in our church, like the Zylstra family, who have walked out and have now organized their fellowship group into a congregation of their own.”

“How does that happen?” asked Johannes.

“Well, I think that all they need to do is to elect elders and deacons in their group. Then they are a congregation. They would all like to have preachers too, but there are not enough preachers around who think the same way, or who would be willing to step out of the State Church.”

“What would it mean for the preachers if they did step out?” asked Johannes.

Pa answered, “If they stepped out, their salary would no longer be paid by the state. They’d be kind of poor church mice.”

“So,” thought Johannes out loud, “it costs them to step out of their church. It costs them to do what they think Jesus would want them to do.”

“Ya,” responded Pa. “If we want to stand up for Jesus, there is going to be a price to pay. That’s what Jesus said in the Bible, that we’ll suffer just like He did if we walk His walk. But I don’t know where all this will lead.”

It was not long after that talk with Pa that Johannes said to Wopke, “I just heard that the king has decided to put one of Napoleon’s laws back into effect. The one that says that no religious or political group of more than twenty people may gather without permission.”¹⁸

Wopke agreed, “Ya, and I heard that if they are caught, they may be fined or put in prison. The State Church ministers are urging judges and police to give heavy fines. They are also rousing up

¹⁷Beets, H. *The Christian Reformed Church in North America*, p. 20

¹⁸Pieters A., *Settlement*, pp. 22-23.

their church members to throw stones and anything else at the people who are found disobeying this law.”¹⁹

Wopke continued, “And I heard that some of the leading preachers have already been fined and put in jail for gathering with large groups in barns or even fields and preaching to the crowds.²⁰ I was told that our friend Martin Ypma was hauled into court and had to confess and pay hefty fines.”²¹

Wopke added, “But don’t underestimate the sneaky wisdom of the king. He has other ways of shutting people up.”

“Oh?” Johannes wondered.

“Ya, there is a minister by the name of Rev. Molenaar. He published a pamphlet listing the dangers in the State Church. Instead of placing him in prison, the king honored him with a knighthood.²² Now he feels so favored that he keeps quiet about the wrongs in the church.”

“I sure didn’t expect to hear that!” marveled Johannes.

One day Tjalling ducked through the door and down the steep stairs. “What’s for supper tonight, Ma?”

“One of your favorites, son. We’re having mashed potatoes and kale with sausage on the side.”

“Oh, good! Can I have some black bread to keep me till supper?” he asked.

“You are insatiable, Tjalling. You can’t wait till supper?” asked Antje.

“No, Ma, I’m as famished as Esau when he came to beg food from his twin Jacob.”

“Oh, in that case here’s a slice with a little cheese,” offered Antje.

“Thank you, Ma. I know it’s all going to taste delicious,” Tjalling muttered between bites.

“Ma, you know Tjalling exaggerates so. He’s not really so hungry that he can’t wait for supper. Maybe you should give him barley soup instead. Then maybe he won’t be so hungry,” Wopke suggested with a wink.

“Wopke, you know you don’t care much for barley soup yourself, so don’t tease your brother. Maybe he worked harder than you did today,” smiled Pa.

¹⁹ Pieters, A., *Settlement*, p. 24. Beets, H., *The Christian Reformed Church*, p. 25.

²⁰ Pieters, A., *Settlement*, p. 22.

²¹ Ypma, Albert, *In Search for a Family Legend*, p. 1.

²² Vander Werp, H., *History*, p. 14.

“Oh, I doubt that. Can you see Tjalling outwork me?” Wopke asked. “He’s my little brother.”

“All right, boys, quit teasing and get ready for supper,” Antje scolded them with a chuckle.

1835*

Johannes liked the Sunday afternoons when the whole world of people was quiet and only the chirping of birds, the rustling of the trees, and vague distant noises made for a comfortable quiet time. He liked sitting on the sunny side of the family cabin on the barge.

He heard the rustling of skirts and the sound of wooden shoes and he knew his parents had come outside to sit on the deck to rest and talk. He just continued his own contemplation and overheard his folks’ conversation.

Tjette was in a reflective mood as he spoke to Antje, “The boys are growing up. Wopke is now sixteen, Tjalling fourteen, Johannes thirteen, and Jetse is three. It works well to have the four boys sleeping in the boxbed on the worker end of the barge. The older boys are strong enough to be our working crew, so we don’t need to hire any help. And they are responsible enough to watch over little Jetse. He follows them around everywhere anyway.”

Pa continued, “Antje, I like that you and I are enjoying a little more privacy in our family quarters at the stern, even with Sietske and Maaïke sleeping in the boxbed next to us. Ya, Antje, the family is growing.”

“It would be nice,” he said, “if everything in the world was as peaceful as I’m experiencing at this moment.” He stretched out his legs towards the rail and took another puff on his pipe. “But, I know that’s just not the way it is.”

“Lately, Antje, there has been so much unrest in the churches. Our friend Zylstra and others who have organized their own church outside of the State Church are having all kinds of problems. People have been hauled into court to face the judge and pay fines for having more than twenty people in their house for a time of worship.²³ What is this world coming to? Zylstra was telling me the other day that some of his contracts have been cancelled because he is part of the breakaway church. I think we should just stay with the State Church. It may be a bit boring and full of platitudes instead of the Bible, but we can’t really risk losing business with our growing brood.[^] But preacher Van Velzen is a fiery speaker and very convincing. No wonder all the new churches want him to come and do the services in their towns.”

Antje admitted, “It almost makes me want to join them. And they are trying so hard to be recognized. I hear that their classis sent a letter asking the king to allow their existence.”

²³ Ypma, A., *Search*, p. 68.

Tjette sighed, “But so far the king is not bending. I don’t know what he’s afraid of. The members of the breakaway churches are among his most loyal subjects. They aren’t doing any harm. And by taking care of their own poor, paying their own preachers and schools, you would think he could see that they are actually making the tax burden lighter for everyone else.”

“Ya,” responded Antje, “our country used to be such a safe haven for people with new ideas from all over the continent. Even the English Puritans came here two hundred years ago to worship freely. And people can publish all kinds of weird ideas without being punished.”

Johannes, sitting around the corner of the barge cabin, heard all that. He was quietly taking it all in as food for thought. He was still too young to be considered old enough for adult conversation. But he had discovered that quietly listening to adult conversations around him was a great way to learn about the world of ideas.

A few days later Johannes came running home to the barge. “I just heard,” he gasped, “that fellow bargeman Ypma was hauled in front of the judge.”²⁴^

Pa picked up on that and said, “Ya, I heard that too. The Ypmas had a separatist gathering at their house, and someone alerted the police. When the police came they asked if there were twenty people in the house. And Marten Ypma felt he could not tell a lie and in counting them there were twenty-one people, and a few outside by the open windows. So Monday the judge interrogated him, asking about whether there was preaching, whether they had prayer together, and whether they sang songs. And again Marten Ypma confessed the truth. The judge did not fine his mother, whose house was being used by her invitation. The judge fined Marten with a hefty fine. I am concerned that this news is going to make people hesitant to do business with him.”²⁵

“I guess that means,” said Johannes, “if you’re going to stand out and stand up for God, you’d better be sure that it is worth it.”

“Son,” retorted Pa, “you’re thinking thoughts that seem a bit mature for your age.”

After giving Johannes a smile, Pa added, “Today we have to haul this load of peat to Harlingen. There hasn’t been a breath of air to move the sailbarge, so I guess we’ll need to get the neighbor’s horse to pull the barge. I think maybe it’s your turn to lead the horse along the canal. She’s a gentle enough mare, so she should not give you much trouble. And besides, the rest of the family will be on the barge anyway. So, would you please ask the neighbor to rent his horse tomorrow?”

“Sure, Pa,” said Johannes, eager enough to please his father and to be trusted to get and lead the horse. He said to himself, “Leading the horse will be a lot easier than when my brothers and I had to harness ourselves in front of the barge to pull it to the next town.^ Better to let a horse do that hard work.”

²⁴ Ypma, A., *Search*, p. 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68. Pieters, A., *Settlement*, p. 24.

Johannes vividly remembered that day. His mother was at the tiller, his father used the pole to keep the barge away from the bank, and he and his brothers were in the harness, pulling the barge up the canal. He muttered, "It takes a team, and even then it is hard work! I love it when the sail picks up the breeze and does that hard work for us."

The next day the Van Haitsma barge was close to arriving at Harlingen with the shipment of peat bound for England. After the first few hours Johannes had said to the horse, "It would be nice if Wopke or Tjalling would take a turn with you, horse." But it wouldn't do to complain to Pa. Other trips one of them had to do this tedious walking to keep the horse from wandering off to the side for a nice chomp of grass. "No, Pa gave me the responsibility today. And I will keep to it."

Nevertheless it was a relief to see the steeple of the church in Harlingen and to know it would not be long to their destination. There were others his age playing in the fields and ditches. Johannes pulled himself up proud to be doing a man's work with the horse. Coming closer to the city, he saw boys he had met on other trips to Harlingen and he greeted some of them by name.

Finally arriving at the dock and tying up the barge, Johannes was permitted to relax a bit. Pa had to make arrangements for the unloading, so now he had a little free time. He sauntered over to a group of men and boys and heard more conversation. Just standing there nearby he listened and heard the talk about lots of things, but his ears perked up when they raised their voices and argued about the new churches that that minister in Groningen had organized. "Why do we need a new church?" he heard. "What's wrong with the State Church?" was asked. And people were taking sides about the qualities of the preachers.

Later Pa came back to the barge, and said, "We need to go to the dock by that large sailboat. That's where we get to unload directly onto her. So, Johannes, lead the horse a little further, please."

Johannes obediently put the mare back in the harness and got the barge moving again. He admired the tall masts of the ship that would take the load to London. Maybe someday he would take a trip across the sea in such a ship! What a wonder that would be.

After the barge was tied up next to the sailboat, Tjette said, "Johannes, since you've been with the horse all day, maybe you had better take her over to the pasture there. I'm sure the horse would appreciate that, and maybe you would like to get off your feet too."

"Ya, Pa, that would be nice. It has been a long walk today." Off Johannes went with the horse to the nearby pastureland. He left the horse to munch while he stretched out and gazed at the blue sky. He was close enough to the barge to hear the murmured conversation. He chose not to watch his Pa and brothers move barrow after barrow from the barge to the hold of the sailboat. He knew that would take some hours and a lot of sweat.

So Johannes settled down in the field near the horse and thought of all he had heard about this new church. Talking to the horse, he said, "Well, having church squabbles is nothing for you to worry about, horse. You only need to be concerned about getting your food and drink and

following the lead. I guess people don't think I need to be concerned about more than that either."

"But I can't help thinking about God and the church. Why is it that people get so hot under the collar about religion? Why can't people just get along together? What's so important that we all have to think the same way? Why does the king have to make laws that make lives difficult for people who are loyal to him? Why does a man like Mr. Ypma have to pay fines for having more than twenty people in his house?²⁶ Oh, horse, I know you can't answer those questions. I'd just better leave you and me to get a bit of peace and shuteye while we can. Soon we trudge back along the canal home again."

Suddenly Johannes woke with a start. Where was he? Oh, yes, at the dock in Harlingen. Where was the mare? Oh, just a few yards away still enjoying her feast. He looked over to the dock and he could see Pa and the boys still moving barrow after barrow. The barge was lying a lot higher in the water, so he knew it must be just about empty. "Horse, it's time to go back to the barge. I think maybe it's close to supper time. The sun does seem a lot lower than when I laid down in the grass." The mare moved willingly behind him, apparently satisfied with her feast.

A bit later the family sat around the barge deck enjoying the fresh air and Ma's dinner. Pa said, "I will need to go to the pub to see about tomorrow's load back inland. I should be back shortly." Johannes prepared to get ready for bed. It had been another long day. He was just a boy. But he was expected to carry his load with the rest of the men. There was not much time for play on these trips.

The next day, Johannes took the tiller and Tjalling led the mare. This time they carried a load of lumber from Scandinavia, close to Russia. They would be taking the load southeast in the province. The wind was up a bit, so they plied the canal past Minnertsga to bring the horse back home. They would keep on going through the lakes. These lakes were known to be stormy at times, so Tjette had prayed at breakfast for a calm breeze for crossing them.

Once beyond Minnertsga, Ma gathered Johannes and five year old Sietske around the table for some **home schooling**.[^] The sky was dark so she lit the oil. Jetse was part of the circle with a coloring book he had pulled out of the locker box that he sat on. Johannes was learning the geography around the North Sea and Scandinavia since that's where their load of lumber had come from. Sietske was learning numbers and the alphabet. Maaike was sleeping to the tune of ripples on the canal. Wopke and Tjalling were working with Tjette on deck doing some touch up painting and taking turns at the rudder. It was just another day on the canal.

As the day wore on, Johannes stretched out and climbed the ladder onto the deck. He found his older brothers and father huddled by the tiller. He heard Wopke ask, "Say, Pa, this whole business that's happening in the church. What can you tell us about that?"

Quietly Johannes closed in on the conversation. "Ya," responded Tjette, "I've been thinking about that. I think it started in the city of Geneva at the beginning of the century. You know, the

²⁶ Van Koevering, A., *Legends*, pp. 488-489. Vander Werp, H. *History*, p.27. Swierenga, R. & Bruins, E., *Family Quarrels*, p. 27.

same city where father John Calvin was a leader three hundred years ago. There were some students apparently who began to take the Bible and Jesus more seriously.”

“That,” whispered Johannes to himself, “is what seems to be happening in our country now.”

Tjette went on, “I guess they began to involve others and started fellowship groups. Slowly the groups also got started here in the Netherlands. Some of the names I’ve heard bandied about the docks are Bilderdyk and Da Costa. Bilderdyk seemed to move around in the political groups and Da Costa was a Jew who became Christian and became a seminary teacher in Amsterdam.²⁷ I hear they are both brilliant men. It must be about twenty years ago that Pake and I heard Rev. Da Costa preach at our church and I thought then he was a powerful preacher. If I remember right, he was challenging us to take Jesus and the Bible seriously. Come to think of it, I believe that Rev. Scholte, a friend of Rev. de Cock, was also part of such a fellowship group.”[^]

Wopke asked “Are those the groups that are now being gathered into the new denomination that Rev. de Cock is pulling together?”²⁸

“Ya,” replied Tjette, “I am hearing that other ministers who have also been kicked out of the State Church are doing just that. They are going around the country, finding those fellowship groups and organizing them as churches.”²⁹

1836*

Tjette came on to the deck where Johannes was sitting, listening to the boisterous words on the dock. “What’s going on, Pa?” he queried.

“It seems that some young poor boys were taken from their homes during the night by the police,” Pa answered. “People are upset because these boys were taken away to be placed in the Institute in Veenhuizen, Drenthe.”[^]

“Why did the police do that?” asked Johannes. “Did they do something wrong?”

“Not that I can tell,” replied Pa. “It seems their families were running out of money and food and the police wanted these boys taken care of at Veenhuizen.” Johannes was appalled. “They wanted to ship them to the Institute in Drenthe because the government is experimenting with a program to get rid of all poverty in the land. But people don’t want to go there. They are afraid they will be stuck there for life,” Pa said.

“Won’t they be taken care of there?” asked Johannes.

²⁷ Bruyn, W., *Uit de Dagen van Het Reveil*, p. 8.

²⁸ Pieters, A., *Settlement*, p. 22.

²⁹ Weiler, A.G., *Geschiedenis van de Kerk in Nederland*, p. 678.

Pa said, “The word I hear is that they’re never fed enough, and what allowance they get is never enough to help them buy extras, or to ever get out of there again. They owe their souls to Veenhuizen! And they don’t want to be there in the barren peat fields of Drenthe so far away from the cities and their families.”³⁰

“So because they’re poor they get taken from where their family and friends live and they are forced to live in an institution the rest of their lives? Is that any different from being in prison?” Johannes wondered to Pa. “Does the government always interfere in people’s lives like that?”

“Well, just like with the church, sometimes the government or the king gets an idea and whether people like it or not, they impose their will on us,” explained Pa.

“The government just tells people and churches what to do whenever they want to?” Johannes asked.

“It sure looked that way to the crowd of people on the dock. They were angry,” Pa observed. “I guess we’d better not sink into being so poor that they send us to Veenhuizen.”

“Can that happen to us?” asked Johannes.

“Ya, I’m afraid it could,” Pa answered truthfully. “Since the war with Napoleon and with Belgium a lot of people have sunk into poverty.³¹ Even our business has been seriously hurt. We all have to work even harder than before because things have gotten so bad. And with a growing family like ours, we’re in danger of poverty too. Our barge business is definitely on the decline.”

“But Pa,” asked Johannes, “you won’t let that happen, will you?”

“No, son, with God’s help we will survive this poverty cycle and keep our family in food, clothes and home,” responded Tjette.

“I’m scared too,” whimpered Johannes.

“Ya, I can appreciate that. But we will keep looking to the Lord to help us through hard times. God hasn’t failed in His promises to protect us if we follow His Word,” Tjette assured him. Over the next few weeks, Johannes spent a lot of time thinking about the king and the church.

“My,” spoke up Pa as he came around the family cabin. “You look deep in thought. What’s going on in that curious brain of yours?”

“Pa, a few weeks ago you were talking about the king and the church, and I began to wonder about that. Why does the king think he can rule over the church when the church believes his rules are against the Bible?”

“Let me stretch out my tired legs beside you, and light up my pipe while I think about how to explain what’s going on in the country,” responded Tjette. After settling down, he began, “It’s

³⁰ Jansen, S. *Het Pauperparadise*, pp. 42-43, 79.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

been centuries ago that the struggle for power started between the church and kings. For many years the struggle was between the popes and whoever was the emperor or king. The power swung between them. Sometimes the emperor was the top man and sometimes the pope was.”

“In our country it was the governing bodies of the strong cities that ran the whole country. These cities called together the deciding body of the church, a ‘Synod,’ which made all the decisions for the church. **Even the famous Synod of Dordt was convened by the rulers of the country.**³² ^And, of course, Napoleon also set up some rules when he conquered the Netherlands.”

Pa continued, “What I am seeing is that King Willem 1 seems to feel threatened by the turmoil that came from the starting of the Separated Churches. In order to keep the country together, he decided to set up rules so that peace might come over the land. **So he reorganized the ruling Synod of the Church into a Department of State**³³^ which has the power to set up rules for how to worship, just like the Synods have done over the past years. So now, under the king, this State Department of thirteen ministers is making the decisions for how churches should worship. But the Separated Churches feel they cannot worship that way. So they just decided to quietly go their own way. And then the king authorized the State Churches and the police, the army and the courts and even common people in communities to make life difficult for the Separated Churches and their membership. So now the Separated Churches are saying that God, not the king, can decide how a church might worship. I hear that Rev. Van Velzen and other separatist ministers have been asking the king to let them rule themselves.³⁴ That’s been kind of unheard of over the centuries.”

After pausing to relight his pipe, Pa said, “I don’t know where all this is going to lead, but we as a family business are trying to keep ourselves out of the turmoil, even though some of our friends are part of the Separated Churches.”

1837*

Johannes heard the cry of a little baby. “Has the baby been born?” he asked from the deck where he and the rest of the family had been banished while the midwife was down in the family quarters.

“Ya,” answered Tjette as he emerged from the living quarters. “You all have a new little sister.³⁵^ **Her name is Tetje.** Soon you can all take turns visiting briefly with Ma and little Tetje. Ma is really tired so no one can stay long.”

³²Boonstra, H. *The Dutch Equation in the RCA Freemasonry Controversy, 1867-1885*, p.8.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁴Beets, H., *De Chr. Geref. Kerk in N.A.: Zestig Jaren van Strijd en Zegen*, p. 21

³⁵*Tresoar* (West Frisian for “treasure,” which manages digital archives about Friesland), Barradeel birth registration. Birth, April 13, 1837, of Tetje van Haitsma.

1839*

The new year brought another **new baby to the Van Haitsma family. Wiebe was born in February** ^ to a family excited for his arrival. His coming into the world brought a sweet joy to the weary family.

“Seems like the king can’t leave good things alone!” muttered Tjetje while tending the tiller.

Johannes, adjusting the barge sails, looked up and asked “What are you talking about, Pa?”

“The king has decided that he wants more control over the churches. He now requires them all to register and to live under rules that he has put together with the help of the Department of Religion. Some churches just don’t want to be registered by the government. They want to be free to worship where, when and how they choose.³⁶ And the churches that already broke away from the big State Church are arguing about whether or not they will follow the king’s new regulations. Our friends, the Zylstra and Roersma families, who are part of the breakaway church, tell me that their ministers and members are all in a dither about what to do.”

“What difference would it make, Pa, if a church is registered or not?” wondered Johannes.

“I think part of it has to do with how they will be treated by the government. If a church refuses to register, will they will be persecuted more? Life has just started to quiet down a little for them after **five years of hard persecution.**^ I hear that some of the leading ministers have different opinions about what to do now. **There is a group of these churches that is simply refusing to register with the state. They are now calling themselves Churches under the Cross. And so there is division among the Separated Churches.**” ^

“And more reasons for arguments in the churches,” Johannes added.³⁷

“Ya, I’m afraid so,” Pa muttered. “You know, Ma and I have been talking about becoming part of the Separated Churches. But now we’re thinking we will keep our distance for a while longer. Our business is struggling hard enough these days, and joining with them now might turn some of our contracts away. We can just worship with them without being members.”

Johannes considered this, “But if we worship with them, won’t people assume we are part of them and keep their distance from us?”

“Ya, son, that is possible. There just aren’t any easy answers. We need to be in prayer about that.”

Johannes said, “I guess it’s not so easy to follow Jesus, is it?”

³⁶ Krabbendam, H., *Freedom on the Horizon*, Eerdmans, 2009, p. 121.

³⁷ Kromminga, D.H., *The Christian Reformed Church Tradition*, pp. 88, 94.

1840*

“Pa,” Johannes moaned, “Tetje was just getting old enough to play around off the barge.”

“I know, son,” responded Pa. “But life and death are not in our hands.”

“But why would God want to take her from our family?” asked Johannes.

“That’s a hard question,” Pa said, struggling to keep his own tears from running down his face. “Sometimes we just have to let God have His way in our lives, even when we don’t agree and are not happy about it. We know that God is always in control, but sometimes it is very hard to understand that He has good reasons for what happens. Especially when a little child like Tetje dies at three years old.³⁸ She had her whole life in front of her and a big family who loved her.”

Later in the fall Johannes called out to Wopke and Tjalling who were working in the field with him. “Hey, brothers, it’s time for a break.” He could see ten year-old Sietske coming with a basket of food for them. The brothers straightened out their weary backs and wandered to the shade of the willows by the ditch. Johannes asked the big question that was on his mind all morning, “What do you guys think about our king abdicating and giving the throne to Willem II?”³⁹

“That was a big surprise to me,” Tjalling joined in. “I wonder what is behind that decision?”

Wopke suggested, “I think it has something to do with the new political situation with Belgium⁴⁰ and some new rules in the country that the king was not at all happy about.”

“I heard,” added Johannes, “that it may have something to do with his marriage plans too.”

“I think few people are going to lose any sleep over the change. Willem I may have gathered the country together after Napoleon was ousted, but he himself brought in lots of new rules. And no matter what the issue, he was always on the side of the wealthy,” Wopke observed.

“Willem I was responsible for encouraging the troubles that made life difficult for the Separated Church. I hope the next Willem will be more accommodating,” noted Tjalling.

“His rules didn’t make our barge business any easier either,” Wopke shared. “The wealthy businessmen are taking more and more control over the barge business all over the country. And they are also beginning to use trains to get their products to the ports for overseas shipping.”[^]

³⁸ *Tresoar*, Barradeel registry of births, April 13, 1837; registry of deaths, June 28, 1840, p. 17.

³⁹ King Willem I abdicated Oct. 7, 1840. (Wikipedia)

⁴⁰ In 1839 the Treaty of London was accepted by King William for the independence of Belgium.

The way things are going, they may drive us smaller barges out of business. And I'm just getting into a relationship with the Zylstras and may soon have a barge of my own."

"But talking about the Zylstras reminds me," continued Wopke.

"Ya, about that girl you are sweet on," challenged Tjalling.

"Well, actually I was remembering something they told me about the Separated Church," defended Wopke.

"So, what were they saying?" asked Johannes.

"One of the leaders of the *Afscheiding*, a Rev. Scholte, has been ejected out of their church.⁴¹ Too many differences of opinion is the reason, ^ I was told."

"Do you suppose that the four brothers-in-law in the leadership of the Separated Church⁴² had anything to do with that decision?" jeered Tjalling.

"I guess I'd like to think a bit more respectful about them," Wopke noted. "My Annie would not like to hear you say things like that about the ministers of her church, especially not of Rev. Van Velzen who does a lot of preaching in the Separated Churches here in Friesland."

Johannes shared, "Pa was telling me that the Separated Church had a major break off too?"

"Ya," said Wopke. "Some of the Separated Churches refused to register at that cost, and they chose to call themselves by the old name 'Churches under the Cross.'⁴³ ^ And they are definitely getting the brunt of the hardship that the king has encouraged against the breakaway churches."

"So maybe it was time for a new king," observed Tjalling. "Maybe this new Willem will be a kinder soul."⁴⁴

"I do hope so," Wopke spoke up, "I guess we'll never solve all the problems of country and king. But we sure won't solve the challenge of bread on our table if we don't get back to the harvest."

That evening Johannes joined his father outside the barge cabin. "Say, Pa," he began, "Wopke mentioned the name 'Churches under the Cross' again this morning. What do you know about them?"

"Well," responded Pa, "My Pa told me that years ago, before or around the start of the Reformation, there were Christian believers throughout Europe who were stirring out from the

⁴¹ Swierenga, R. *Van Raalte and Scholte: A Soured Relationship and Personal Rivalry*, p. 30. Schaap, J., *Our Family Album*, p. 114. Kromminga, D.H., *Tradition*, p. 97.

⁴² Van Raalte, Van Velzen, Brummelkamp and Carl de Moen; Swierenga, R., 1999 lecture in Graafschap.

⁴³ *Church Order 1619*, art. 4.

⁴⁴ Schaap, J., *Family*, p. 99.

centuries-old church. They were being persecuted and severely punished and some were even burned at the stake.”

“Whoa, what was happening back then sounds like an even harder time than what some people today are having from the State Church,” Johannes suggested.

“I would certainly think so,” responded Pa. “At least today people are not burned at the stake any more for believing differently. But those people were protecting themselves by only meeting in small groups, even less than these days under Napoleon’s old law. And at that time they began to call themselves Churches under the Cross.”⁴⁵

“So,” Johannes reflected, “it’s an old name used by believers who were looking to worship and serve the Lord and protect themselves from persecution and government punishment.”⁴⁶

1841*

Johannes was aware that some of the bargemen were upset. They believed that King Willem II had given in to these religious upstarts. Others seemed to be pleased. “Of course, no one asked me,” Johannes said to himself. “I’m still just a boy to them.” He heard lots of loud voices, and considered, “Is this something to argue about? In Minnertsga there are Catholics, Mennonites, and now two different Reformed churches. We each worship God in our own way, don’t we? Maybe some even worship in Friesian instead of Dutch. Does it matter to God? Is He not pleased by whatever way we worship him?”

Continuing to work and listen at the same time, Johannes could not believe his ears. As soon as he had an opportunity, he asked Wopke, “Does a secession minister have influence with the king?”

“Well,” Wopke said, “that’s what my girlfriend tells me.”

“Wow, that is simply amazing,” said Johannes. “The secession ministers have all been fined, jailed, and had tomatoes thrown at them by all kinds of people. And now one of them has convinced our new king to give them freedom of religion? That has to go into the history books!”⁴⁶

Then he considered again, “I’ve heard that kings tend to claim absolute power and authority. But maybe God is more powerful than the king.”

Wopke said, “Annie tells me that her Secession Church is now going to build their own building.”

⁴⁵Benedict, Philip, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed*, p. 178.

⁴⁶Vander Werp, H. *History*, p.22.

Johannes said, “Then there will be another church building in Minnertsga. I wonder if that will make a difference to Ma and Pa. If the persecution of the separatists will quit now, will we join the Ypmas and the Zylstras at their church? Or will it still be bad for business to be friendly with the separatists? Well, we’ll have to wait and see what the family does.”

Wopke added, “I hear that life will not be easy for the Secession Churches. They will still have to cover their own expenses, including their ministers’ salary, their own building costs and caring for the poor in their congregations.”

“It seems to me,” Johannes said thoughtfully, “that there are a large number of poor people in the Secession Churches, so those burdens will probably be really heavy for them.”

Wopke suggested, “I think one reason why some Secession Churches have decided to register with the state, as required, is that they can avoid paying fines for illegal church services.⁴⁷ But I understand that many of the churches are still resisting registration.”⁴⁸

1844*

Tjette spoke up, “Family, listen to me! You boys are getting interested in girls connected with the Separated Church and Ma and I also are very sympathetic to their ideas. We all want to follow the Lord in our lives. But we still have to be cautious about how we present ourselves.”

Wopke turned to him, “Are you thinking about keeping our business healthy in the face of how people are thinking and talking about the Separated Church?”

“Ya, son, I am still concerned about that. You know what people are saying about them. That they are self-righteous. That they think they are better than others. We know that’s not true, but people are saying that anyway. For the sake of our business, it seems to me that it would be wise to deliberately keep a low profile for a while longer.”

Pa continued, “You all know that Ma and I are seriously considering joining the Separated Church. But we are hesitant because we don’t want to stand out in town or on the dock. So until the violence against the new church dies down, as is beginning to happen, we want to live inconspicuously for a while longer. I expect that the persecution will let up now that the king has allowed the Separated Church to organize and exist.”⁴⁹

“So, Pa, what do you suggest?” Johannes asked.

“Well, we don’t need to get into arguments about which church is better. We have a feeling about which church we like better, but we don’t have to make any noise about that. So, it would be a good idea to just keep quiet especially when people talk religion.”

⁴⁷ Krabbendam, H., *Freedom*, p. 11

⁴⁸ Pieters, A., *Settlement*, p. 22.

Ma added, “Better to be known as good listeners than as good talkers. We just don’t need people to throw stones and break our windows.” ^

Pa went on, “People need somebody to blame for the cholera that has been around the last years, or for the poor market for goods lately. Or even for the bad weather we have had. But we don’t have to provide targets for them.”

“You mean like the pamphlets that Rev. De Cock wrote and people are distributing?” wondered Tjalling.

“Ya, we don’t need to be the ones spreading those pamphlets around. It’s one thing to have them in our house, but we don’t need to take them to our neighbors or leave them around at the market,” observed Tjette. “All things considered, I hope we can continue to live quietly and not draw attention to ourselves. But we do need to keep living for the Lord.”

Ma explained, “Now that the king has made the new church legal, the persecution is already calming down, but in some towns it is still very strong. And we know, from what Wiebe experienced just this year, that there are boys and girls right here in Minnertsga who think nothing of stoning other children and their homes.”⁴⁹

“Pa, may I change the subject and ask for some advice?” asked Wopke. “Annie and I are planning to get married on May 25.⁵⁰ Who should we ask to perform the marriage ceremony?” Tjette thought a bit, “I rather assumed you would ask her pastor to marry you. Or else ours. Of course, the civil service will be in the City Hall anyway. But I would not be too surprised if both preachers turned down your request, just because you are from two different churches.”

“Annie and I have been talking about it, and we have not decided just what we will do, whether or not to ask her preacher to bless our marriage. Neither of us is impressed with the State Church preacher, so we won’t be asking him.”

“Sometimes a preacher will bless a wedding in a home instead of in the church congregation,” Tjette suggested.

Wopke responded, “That’s something Annie and I can discuss and see if that’s okay with her family. They are pretty strong in the Separated Church.”

“Ya,” Antje added, “It is good to start off your marriage with the Lord’s blessing.”

1845*

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁰*Tresoar*, Barradeel records.

When Johannes looked up to see Tjette and Antje, he could see that something was very wrong. “What’s going on, Pa and Ma? You look so sad.”

“Son,” Tjette answered, “My mother just passed away.”⁵¹

“Pa, what do you mean? I just talked to *Beppe* yesterday. How can that be?”

“Son, life and death don’t always warn us. Sometimes death comes quickly. She did have sickness that was draining her strength. We had hopes she would have more time. But now we have to recognize that she has been called home. Now she is with little Sytske and Tetje and *Pake*.”

Antje added, “Death is hard, isn’t it? It was very difficult for me when Sytske and Tetje died. They had so much life ahead for them. And yet the Lord took them home. With *Beppe* it does make more sense, at least to me. She has lived a good life. She outlived *Pake* for many years. We are still going to miss her, but we do know she is with the Lord because He is faithful.”

Johannes asked, “Is she going to be laid out at her care home or will she be brought here somewhere?”

Tjette responded, “She will be in state at her care home, and then we will have a horse drawn wagon to carry her to the cemetery where she will be buried next to *Pake*.”[^]

Some weeks later Pa called a family meeting. “Hey, family,” Tjette greeted his children. “Ma and I have some news for you.”

A chorus responded, “Ya, Pa, what is it?”

“Well, you know,” Tjette began, “that in the past years things have been difficult in our country and church. People have had strong angry feelings against those who joined the Separated Church.”

Pa coughed to hide some of his emotions. “Now that the churches have been allowed to be separate from the State Church, and the persecution has calmed down a lot, we have decided we will make our choice public. Ma and I are planning to make profession of faith at the Separated Church council meeting next week. We are hoping they will accept our statement of faith and welcome us into their church.”

Johannes spoke up softly, “I am very happy for you both. I know for myself, what with *Beppe*’s and Sytske’s and Tetje’s deaths, my mind has been on my relationship with the Lord too. But I’m not ready to join yet, even though I know it would make me very happy if I did. I’m glad she’s patient with me. And I know God isn’t finished with me yet.”

⁵¹*Tresoar*: Tjette’s father, Wopke Rinses, married Maaikje Tietes who was baptized July 27, 1738 and died June 1, 1845. Wopke was born Oct. 31, 1756 and died Jan. 31, 1826.

Six-year old Wiebe chimed in, “What is this idea of joining the church? I thought we all were members of the church already. We go most weeks when we’re home, and we read the Bible, and pray.”

“Well, son,” responded Pa. “We were all baptized in the big church in Minnertsga. You were too. We promised to bring you up to love Jesus.”

“Ya, and I do love Jesus,” said Wiebe.

“We parents always love to hear that from our children,” smiled Ma.

Pa added, “We are glad to know that you love Jesus, and we want to encourage you to love Him more and more as you grow up. Then there comes a time in our lives when we are confronted with challenges. Some of those challenges may test whether we want to follow Jesus with our whole heart and mind and strength.”

Sietske entered into the conversation, “When I was little, I just took it for granted that I loved Jesus. But as I grow older, I find that other feelings come into my life and I sometimes struggle with what or who I love most.”

“One problem we face is that sometimes we don’t even realize that we are being torn between loving Jesus and loving other directions,” confessed Ma. “That is what Pa and I have begun to realize about ourselves. Do we love Jesus enough to stand up for Him whatever may happen?”

Pa said, “So now we are saying we do want to stand up for Jesus and we want to show this by becoming full members of the Separated Church. We are finally making that choice that we were afraid to make before. For us this is an important stepping stone to honor Jesus. I hope that as you grow up you won’t have to face the difficult challenges that we have had to face. But I expect that you will experience your own struggles in how to best honor and serve the Lord.”

1846 – 1*

Johannes and Sjoukje were having a lovely walk along the canal. The evening sky was a gorgeous color worthy of an artist’s brush. The young couple was in the midst of a serious discussion about the recent history of the church in the Netherlands. “The persecution against the Separated Church members seems to be happening less these days,” Johannes said. “Maybe things are coming back to normal again.”

“I surely hope so,” agreed Sjoukje. “But the persecution is not the only issue that people are concerned about. There are a lot of other issues people are talking about now.” Johannes waited quietly for Sjoukje to continue. “It seems like we people of God have a long history of drifting away from the teachings of the Bible.⁵² That is partly why in the 1530s the Belgic Confession

⁵² Swierenga, R., *1834 and 1857 – Church Secessions and the Dutch Emigration*.

was written. And in 1535 or so the Heidelberg Catechism was written in Germany. Then early in the 1600s there was this big international gathering in Dordrecht to discuss some major theological questions. Reformed preachers and professors from England, Scotland, France, Hungary, Switzerland and other European countries came together to discuss important ideas about Reformed theology. They agreed on a bunch of important doctrines in the church. But in these last fifty years these important teachings became more and more ignored in the churches.”⁵³

“But,” said Johannes, “all those teachings are still part of the church’s standards, aren’t they?”

“Ya,” Sjoukje responded, “but no one has to actually believe them. The preachers just preach what they want,⁵³ and nobody objects or questions if their ideas don’t fit with those decisions of 1619.”

“Well,” Johannes said, “the world of ideas has moved on these last two hundred years, haven’t they?”

“And that’s just the trouble, Johannes,” Sjoukje offered. “Those preachers in 1619 agreed that the teachings of the church must to be true to the Bible, so that they are timeless beliefs.”

And Johannes answered, “I thought our church believed that too.”

“Well,” Sjoukje said, “over the last one hundred years people across Europe have found that many churches have slowly, bit by bit, drifted away from those agreed-on teachings. So all over the continent people in the pew have been starting fellowship groups and they are looking at the Bible again. They are calling for us all to return to the Bible. In their groups they read from these preachers. Some of them were part of that 1619 discussion. People want to hear again what the Bible is actually saying.”

“I’m sorry, Johannes, that I’m talking so much, but it is important to me that if we are going to keep on seeing each other, that we kind of agree on some of these things. We would like our church to actively return to the Bible. And I would like very much if you would agree on this too.”

Johannes said, “Well, I do agree with that. But what really bothers me is that I’ve been hearing a lot of nasty talk. Respected preachers are being called by some pretty harsh names.”

“That turns my stomach too. Johannes. I think it is important we all respect each other. But I also think we should be allowed to return to the teachings of the Bible. I know that five years ago Minister Van Velzen convinced King Willem II that our churches ought to be allowed to exist. But people in our town are still calling us names, and refusing to do business with us, and won’t give us jobs.”⁵³

“That has been a big concern for me,” admitted Johannes. “Our family’s barge business is shaky at best. If I join your church, I don’t know how it might affect our family business. And we now

⁵³Vander Werp, H., *History*, pp.12-13.

have two barge boats in the family. That could be taking a big risk. But I love you so much, I am really torn.”

“I know we have to do some more talking about this,” Johannes said. Then he and Sjoukje said goodnight and he went back to the dock where their barge home was tied up. He had a lot to think about. The idea of joining Sjoukje’s church was appealing. They could go to church together. But what about the family business? Weren’t both churches worshipping the same God? Are the differences important enough to consider making life difficult?

For years Johannes had been noticing how the people who walked away from the State Church were being mistreated. They had been put in jail if they persisted in breaking the law about groups of more than twenty people. They had been willing to worship in barns and in people’s homes, knowing the police were keeping an eye on them and the number of people who gathered there. The police were even known to accept bribes not to report on their neighbors. Some families had soldiers placed in their homes to make sure they obeyed the law. Even though the law had changed to tolerate the new church, people were still making the lives of the members of the new church miserable. Still throwing stones, still calling them names, still shunning them in business. Did he really want to place himself and his family as a target of that persecution? ^

And what about the bigger picture of their future family and business? If they married, he would be responsible for both of them and his decisions would impact on even more family members. It was getting too complicated and he needed more time to think it all through. Maybe the gentle rocking of the barge in the breeze would help him sleep.

“Johannes,” said Pa the next day, “today you need to go and help Wopke in the field. We need a good supply of beets to ship over to the beet factory in London. They placed an order in the spring and now the beets are ready for harvesting. Wopke needs your help to gather so large a load. I will send Tjalling too when he’s done helping me with my load.”

Johannes put his field clothes on and picked up his lunch. He slipped into his wooden shoes and put on his cap. Picking up the handles of the wheelbarrow, he started walking to Wopke’s field. Wopke already had lots of crates filled with beets to be loaded on the barge. They would take this load to Harlingen at the Wadden Zee. The merchants of London were waiting for their supply to sell as feed for the pigs.

The men worked hard as the sun rose and the heat of the day beat down on them. It seemed hours before it was time for a mid-morning break. Wopke pulled Johannes aside from the rest of the crew and said, “We have to talk.”

“What’s going on, brother?” Johannes responded.

“Have you heard about the groups in the country who are considering and planning to emigrate to America?” asked Wopke. ^

“Ya, I have heard,” Johannes replied. “I hear many of them are members of the Separatist Church. I guess they probably have more reasons than most to consider uprooting their lives and starting over elsewhere. What does that have to do with us?” he asked.

“Annie and I have been talking about that too. I’m not sure what to do with all that. And now her family is making plans to go to America. They have become part of an emigration group meeting in Leeuwarden. Rev. de Los, a preacher in Marum, suggested that they form a Separatist Church congregation,⁵⁴ elect elders and deacons, and even call a preacher to help with the organization plan and prepare for the trip.”

“Wow!” said Johannes. “I was not expecting that from you. I thought you were getting settled in the new business that you and Annie were building up from her inheritance. You got a barge for the business, and have been raising crops for distribution, like these beets. You have built up accounts to bring peat this fall, and ship grain from farms in Het Bilt. Why now think about emigrating?”

“Let’s talk some more at lunch time,” Wopke suggested. “But think about it meanwhile.”

Johannes’ mind was still whirling about his talk with Sjoukje last night. This news from Wopke was like a bombshell exploding in his head. He couldn’t help but wonder, is God saying something?

Johannes was feeling that his strength was being tested. Cutting the tops, loading the crates, wheeling them down the row to the growing stack, brought sweat over his whole body. He was glad for the respite of lunch time. He and Wopke sat off by themselves while Tjalling was talking with the other crew members.

“So, Wopke, what is your thinking?”

And Wopke got into it. “Well, first of all, I’ve been thinking about the way the barge business is going. You know the peat fields are being bought up by the bigger owners and they control the prices and decide who gets to transport the loads of peat on their barge. Besides, the peat fields in the Friesland area are depleting, so we’ll have to start getting the peat from Groningen or Drenthe. Maybe we could pick up loads in south Friesland, but all those areas already have their favorite barge captains, so it will be hard to cut into their business and still make a living.”

Going on he said, “And it looks like goods are going to be shipped by rail throughout much of the country, even over the whole continent. So more and more I am thinking that the barge business is going down the tubes.”

Johannes thought, and said, “I knew things in the country were changing, but I hadn’t realized how quickly some of that is happening. I heard that rails are being laid to the docks in Harlingen. It would be a real shock if they won’t need our barge transport any more. Do you think we could get enough business moving goods around just within the province?”

⁵⁴*Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction.

“I think,” said Wopke, “that there is going to be a lot of competition between barge owners to get the contracts for the farm crops and for the sugar beets. Some barge owners will have to change their work and that will not be easy.”

Wopke added, “Some barges are actually being converted to steam power. They will be able to schedule their stops and pickups better than we can. Companies will appreciate that regular scheduling. And I hear that bigger barges are being made.”

Thinking quietly, Johannes asked Wopke, “Would things be better for our family and our future over in America? Do you think there will be better opportunity for us all in the new world?”

“That certainly is what the emigration brochures are saying,” responded Wopke. “Letters from America are giving very encouraging pictures of opportunities there. Several of the Separated preachers are joining in on the encouragement. Rev. Brummelkamp from Arnhem has published a booklet with letters from America recommending emigrating there, and he wrote a foreword for a German translation that provides guidelines for immigration.”⁵⁵

“Now why would they be encouraging emigration?” asked Johannes.[^]

Wopke answered, “I think because so many of the members of their churches are poor, and have even less chance for improvement than we have here. I’ve heard that one of them is planning to lead a group over and establish a *Kolonie* where people can own land, make a farm and worship freely the way they want. Rev. Brummelkamp recommends a double reason for emigrating: for material improvement and as a mission to bring the gospel to America.”⁵⁶

“That sounds inviting,” said Johannes. “But we seem to have a good life and a good business now. I just don’t know that emigration would be a good idea for us. Besides I have some plans of my own.”

Wopke’s ears picked up, “What kind of plans do you have, little brother?”

“Well,” answered Johannes, “I am planning to ask Sjoukje to be my wife.⁵⁷ I’m twenty-four years old, and I’ve had my eyes on her for some time. I’m still figuring out when I am going to go and ask her father for permission. My job with Pa and working with you seems pretty secure.”

“Ya, brother, but you and Sjoukje are not of the same church,” Wopke observed, “Won’t that make for problems?”

Johannes said, “We have been talking about our faith quite a lot. I know she would prefer for me to join her church. But I am still a bit worried about what that will do to our family business.”

⁵⁵te Velde, Melis, *Anthony Brummelkamp (1811-1888)*, p. 171.

⁵⁶*ibid.*, p. 174.

⁵⁷ Wedding May 9, 1846, (Registration in Barradeel, Friesland, 1846).

“I understand that,” said Wopke, “Annie and I have that problem too, and I am not ready either to join her church for the same reason. You and I have both chosen girls who would like us to do what we are not ready to do.”

“It gets kind of complicated, doesn’t it?” Johannes thought out loud, “I want to follow Jesus, stand up for Him, but the idea of stepping out of the State Church into the Separated Church scares me. I’m not sure I am mature enough in my faith to make such a big step, and claim my right to join in communion.”

“And I am older than you, and have the same uncertainty in my heart. The Bible says we need to be worthy to take communion, and I don’t feel worthy.”⁵⁸

“Well,” Johannes responded, “I don’t have it all settled, but I am going to ask for Sjoukje’s hand in marriage. I haven’t talked to Ma and Pa either, about living quarters. You have any ideas on that? I don’t have a barge of my own to call home.”

1846 - 2 *

Tjette was enjoying a quiet moment sitting on the bank of the canal. The breeze coming through the willows felt comforting. Then darker shadows passed by and he looked up. His friends Zylstra and Roersma had come strolling along the canal path and sat down with him. “What a delightful day,” spoke Zylstra.

“Ya,” responded Tjette. “But I could use some good news. You have any to offer?”

“Well, good or not,” answered Roersma, “but important.”

“Oh,” Tjette asked, “What’s that all about?”

Zylstra said “You know, we’ve all been hearing about emigration. There are two secession ministers in the south who put out an extensive booklet describing why, where, and how people should emigrate.⁵⁸ They point out that people who have no hope of making a living here can have an opportunity in America to live well. They tell a story about a man who came back from America with a letter. This letter was written by a man both ministers had known. They knew him as a man in deep poverty. But in the letter he’s writing about how good he has it in America. It took hard work, but he’s better off after a few years than he could ever expect to be here at home.”

“My,” Tjette exclaimed. “That sounds unbelievable! But what if it’s true?”

Roersma answered, “They also recommended that those of us in the Separated Church could find the freedom to worship the way we would like, and no one would tell us how we could or

⁵⁸van Raalte, A.C., *Landverhuizing, of waarom bevorderen wij de volksverhuizing en wel naar Noord-Amerika en niet naar Java?* (Amsterdam, 1846).

couldn't worship. I hear there are more and more Separated groups that are organizing to emigrate."

"In fact," Zylstra added, "My son's been part of a group in Leeuwarden who are discussing the possibility. My son is seriously thinking about it for himself and his new family. I'm not sure I want to go, but if he thinks it will be for a better life, I wish him well."

Roersma added, "I'm not sure either, but my son is thinking about it too. I hear that Rev. de Los from Groningen has encouraged them to form a congregation, which they have done. And he suggested that they call a minister to help them in the move."⁵⁹

"And you know," Mr. Zylstra reported, "they decided that was a good idea and they called **Rev. Ypma** ^ who has been one of our group of bargemen in the past. I know you've done business with him in the past."

"He's been the pastor in the Halle Separated Church for a few years now, hasn't he?" Tjette wondered.

"Ya, he and his family are planning for the group, and because he hasn't the money for the trip they will loan the cost to him from the kitty they are gathering. That money will pay for the trip, for provisions, and for buying land in America which is much cheaper than land here, I'm told."

"Well, now, you have certainly given me something to think about, gentlemen," Tjette said.

Meanwhile, Wiebe came running home horrified. He ran up the gangplank and into the family cabin. He crawled into his boxbed and sat there in his corner. Ma looked at him. Sensing his disturbance, she asked, "What's the matter, Wiebe? You look so distraught. What's happened?"

Wiebe stayed quiet. He looked so downcast. "Oh, nothing," he finally mumbled.

Ma said, "You don't look like nothing has happened. Tell me what's happened."

"Oh, Ma," he replied, "It's nothing to worry about." Soon he squirmed his way out of his corner, climbed up the ladder and out to the bow where he continued to mull things over in his mind. He couldn't get over what the boys out on the street did to the neighbor girl.

"Why do people do terrible things to others? How can they be so mean? It's not like she did something to be ashamed of. She just goes to the other church. What's wrong with that?"

When Pa came aboard and saw Wiebe sitting despondent at the bow, he sidled over and joined his youngest son in silence. A few minutes later, he quietly asked, "Wiebe, what's disturbing you so?"

"Nothing." said Wiebe.

⁵⁹Hyma, A., *Albertus C. van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements in the United States*, p. 42.

“Your tear-streaked face tells me something has deeply bothered you, son. Please tell me what happened,” Pa asked gently.

“Oh, Pa,” Wiebe blurted out, “You won’t believe what I saw the boys do to our neighbor girl.”

Tjette sat quietly, not sure what to expect. Then he said “Please tell me about it.”

“Alright,” spoke up Wiebe. “I was walking along the canal by the businesses. I saw a bunch of boys coming down the street, hooting and hollering. They were jeering at the neighbor girl. And then they picked up stones and started throwing them at her. Good thing they were not good marksmen; they didn’t hit her in the face or on the head. She began to run home and they kept pelting her with more stones and jeers, calling her names and said she was no-good because she went to the Separated Church. The whole way home she was crying, getting stoned, and going as fast as she could till she reached the door and rushed inside. Stones kept pelting against the door, and the jeering continued. They gradually became quiet and started drifting away. Pa, how can boys be so mean to a girl just because she goes to another church?” ^

“Ya, son,” he said, “That is terrible. I don’t know what makes people so mean, but I guess it has something to do with what they hear at home.”

“What do you mean by that, Pa?” Wiebe asked.

“Well, son,” responded Tjette, “if parents say hateful things about other people, their children will think that it’s okay and they will say hateful things about others too.”

“That’s terrible!” blurted out Wiebe, “don’t parents know they need to teach their children to love God and their neighbors, like you teach us?”

“Maybe they tell their children to love others, but if they speak about people of other churches with such poison in their voices, that will be giving a stronger message to their children’s hearts, and that’s what the children will copy. On top of that, boys who learn to hate others will group together when they see a person walking alone. Then they cowardly bully the person who can’t defend himself. I’m glad that you have a tender heart towards that girl. Maybe next time you see her, you’d better walk with her so she wouldn’t be alone. And maybe the other boys wouldn’t attack when they see you are with her.”

“Ya, Pa, that sounds like a good idea.” Wiebe buried his face into Tjette’s jacket and whispered, “Thanks, Pa.”

They heard another pair of *klompen* come on board, and Jetse joined them. Jetse asked them, “Hey, what’re you two talking about so seriously?”

Because Pa had listened to him, Wiebe had the courage to tell Jetse what he had seen the boys do to the neighbor girl. Jetse spoke up with indignation, “How mean of those guys. They wouldn’t want others to gang up on them. Why would they hurt her? That makes me want to go and teach those boys a lesson!”

“Now, wait a minute,” cautioned Tjette. “You don’t want to do to them what they did to her. It’s okay to be angry about what they did, but you’d be no better than them if you hurt them. It is more important to help the person who is getting hurt and defend him.”

Pa went on, “I’m sorry, boys. People can sometimes be very mean and hurt others so. We have to stand above that and, as the Bible says, to love our neighbor as ourselves.” Pa got up to go into the family cabin, pondering this event in his heart.

1847*

Through the winter of 1847 Wopke and Johannes spent more time together in the barge business. Wopke asked, “Johannes, have you been thinking any more about going to America? I’ve been hearing from others on the docks that there truly is more opportunity over there. And we both are just starting our families. Tjalling already has two children. It seems to me that we ought to decide if it’s time to talk to Pa.”

Johannes responded, “Ya, Wopke. I agree the signs of our situation here are not encouraging.”

“No, just more and more discouraging,” assented Wopke. “There are all kinds of reasons for thinking about going to a new country with a reputation for freedom. We have wars, compulsory military service, inequality before the law, heavy taxes, persecution, and poverty. There seems to be less of a future here than ever.”[^]

Johannes agreed, “What I hear also tells me this is a good time to make the move to America. I hear that Rev. Ypma with the group that included your brother-in-law has arrived in *De Kolonie*. I think we should go there too. Our family’s future is more likely to be blessed there.”

“Well,” said the older brother, “What about Tjalling? It seems he’s more and more satisfied here, and he has two small children already.”

“I know we’d better talk to him too,” said Johannes. “Pa did say last fall, if we go, we should go together. So either we talk Tjalling into going too, or convince Pa to go anyway.”

It was a cold winter evening when the young men were walking back to Tjette’s barge. Johannes said to Wopke, “My Sjoukje is in agreement to go to America. Some of her church friends have already gone to that *Kolonie* called Vriesland.”

“Ya,” responded Wopke. “My Annie would like to join her brother over there. We do not have any children here, and I guess both my Annie and your Sjoukje agree that they would like to get away from the persecution and troubles here. A fresh start in America makes sense to Annie.”

Johannes added, “I think it will take both of us to convince Ma and Pa to plan on going. So here goes.”

They walked up the gangplank and climbed down the ladder into the family quarters. As usual, Ma had the coffee pot going.

As the oldest, Wopke started the conversation, “Ma and Pa, last fall Johannes and I began to talk about emigrating to America. We agreed with you to let the idea simmer. We also didn’t want to make rash decisions. So now, we want to talk with you two seriously about going to America. Annie and Sjoukje are on board with the idea of going to join the *Kolonie* where Rev Ypma went with the group from Leeuwarden. A few letters from the *Kolonie* have reached family here in Minnertsga. These letters tell about the hardships they suffered; and yet they all encourage people from here to join them in their place in America.”⁶⁰

Ma responded “I read a pamphlet written by Separated Minister Brummelkamp that said ‘Make haste to leave Sodom, with Lot, and go to America, which I consider as a Zoar for the protection of my people.’⁶⁰ Other friends of ours like Zylstras thought that was a good idea. I am not sure I want to make such a big move and uproot my family. We do have a pretty comfortable living here on the barge.”

Wopke responded, “I think that the reality is that our family’s future looks pretty dreary if we stay here in the Netherlands. And we hear reports of good prospects in America from some families who have moved there.”

Johannes chimed in, “It may be a little easier for Wopke and me to think this way. Neither of us has small children, like Tjalling. We would like the whole family to go together, but I’m not sure Tjalling wants to go.”

Antje spoke up loudly. “I don’t want to split our family up. That is really important to me!”

“Antje,” Tjette calmed his wife down, “Tjalling has promised he will come too. He and I have talked about this already. He feels his little family needs more time to get their money together for the move. And those little kids might have problems on board so big a sailboat. Please don’t be upset that they would not be coming right away. I have confidence he will follow us in a few years. And if we need to help make that work, we will do it and help him out.”

Ma calmed down and the atmosphere lightened. Pa said, “I hear that the best time to go is in the late winter or early spring. The first group that went to the *Kolonie* had to overwinter part of the way along and that apparently was not pleasant.”

“So, Pa,” Wopke asked. “What has made you reconsider this idea? You were pretty strongly opposed a year ago.”

Tjette answered, “You convinced me that the barge industry is likely to bottom out. And the last thing I want is to see our family join those in Veenhuizen who have been forcibly moved into that institution like so many other poor folk.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Brummelkamp, A., *Stemmen*, p. 95. Krabbendam, *Freedom*, p. 1.

⁶¹Jansen, S., *Pauperparadise*, p. 63, the “*onvrije*” or forced colony.

“As far as Tjalling is concerned, if he insists on not going now, he already has a job with a barge owner. So he and his family should be fine for now. And when he thinks his finances are good for a move, he can decide when to come and join the family in America.”

When the evening ended, Antje and Tjette were sitting alone in their cabin. Tjette remembered his earlier conversation with Wiebe. “Maybe that’s another good reason for emigrating,” he said after sharing Wiebe’s experience with Antje. “Our Wiebe was exposed to the evil hearts around here when he saw that group of boys ganging up on the neighbor girl. It would be good to get away from such a poisonous atmosphere. I expect that the community the Rev. Ypma has started in America would be a good place for the boys to complete their growing up. There are many reasons for thinking about going to America.”

Antje interrupted him, “It is a good dream to hold on to, but do remember that people are people and that God has been grieved by people everywhere. Don’t overbuild your expectations. We do have to keep reminding our children to follow the ways of the Lord wherever they are. Maybe, it has been a good thing that we did not join the Separated Church any sooner than we did. Perhaps waiting a while has been a good choice. I’m not sure what Jesus would think about our waiting, but if we disappointed Him, I trust He will be as forgiving as the Bible says He is.”

“So now,” Pa said to his sons, “we have to think about selling the barge businesses. Do either of you know of anyone wanting to expand his business? Wopke, is it possible that your in-laws would be looking for some more barges to expand their company? I know that’s the trend these days. Businesses are taking over existing businesses. Smaller independent barges like ours are less viable. So this is hopefully a good time to sell. I think maybe we both better put a tuft of straw by the tiller until we have a buyer, eh?”⁶²

Wopke said, “I will talk to Pa Zylstra to see if he is interested. His business has been going well so far. And expansion may be his dream too. Maybe buying a business like ours can be his way for growing. The economy seems to be ready for such a move. It is either grow or die out there.”

Tjette said, “Then I should talk to our business partner in Harlingen to see about scheduling a boat to take us to an ocean sailing company. And we’d better find out what we need to take along for the journey. I hear the government has created lists of what each family should take along for the ocean trip.”

Johannes suggested, “Those lists have been published in the letters in newspapers, I think maybe we can get one from the *Minnertsga Courant*.”⁶³

Wopke agreed and noted, “There’s a hundred-page guide for immigrants published two years ago and I hear it is recommended by the Rev. Hendrik Scholte for reading and preparing.”⁶⁴

Johannes observed, “Brother, you and I have to talk to our wives about this, and right away. It looks like our preparation has to start immediately.”

⁶²Sailbarge custom of advertising a barge for sale.

⁶³Pieters, A. *Settlement*, p. 39.

⁶⁴Beyer, M., *Het Boek der Landverhuizers: Gids en Raadsman bij de Verhuizing*, p. 120.

Wopke added, “I know that my Annie is already favorable to the idea. She would love to join her brother and family in Vriesland in America.⁶⁵ It also helps that many of the people living there now are also from the Separated Church.”

Pa joined in, “Ma and I know some of the older people who already made the move, so we will soon be among friends over there.”

“Once we get a copy of the supply list, we will know what we need to gather by the time we leave,” Johannes said.

Pa said, “I will begin to check out the connection for the trip. I’ll talk with my contact in Harlingen to find a good ship and captain to take us over the Atlantic Ocean. We’d all better be in prayer about this major move. I would like us to go with God’s blessing and protection.” He paused. “It is hard to think that in six months we will probably be on our way to the new world.”

1848 – 1*

The family gathered around the bow of the barge. Pa raised some issues, “We don’t actually know much about America. The newspapers keep printing letters from emigrants with mixed reports. Some really praise America, while other accounts tell of people who came back penniless. They couldn’t establish themselves successfully.”

Ma added, “But what we do know is that the groups that went with Reverends Van Raalte from Overisel, and Vander Meulen from Zeeland, and Scholte from Utrecht sent back mostly good reports.”

Wopke chuckled, “Annie’s family and friends who were with Rev. Ypma’s group have reported how hard life has been, but they keep on encouraging more people to come.”

Tjalling said, “Although we are not going right away because of the little children, what we hear is also very encouraging. You will just have to be prepared to work hard. I hear the trees are monstrous and many.”

Sietske joined in, “Can we plan on going to the same place where our friends went to? Their reports are encouraging. Do we even know where in the New World they are? I haven’t seen any map yet to show me.”

Tjette informed them, “I don’t know the lay of the land, but when the group from Leeuwarden arrived in America, they informed the ministers in New York that they wanted to go where Van Raalte went and they found their way there. ^ They were able to travel the whole inland journey on water. I think if we go with the idea of joining Ypma, we too will find help in New York to guide us.”

⁶⁵ Rev. De Jong, *Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction.

“And being with friends in the wilderness,” pondered Johannes aloud, “should make the strange land seem a lot more friendly. And besides, that will mean people around us will speak our language, and worship God the same way we do.”

Sietske added, “They would also help us learn what they have already learned. I don’t mind the hard work, but I hear lots of things like doing the laundry are so different. They had a lot to learn from the Indians in the area.”

“I do hope we won’t have to go through the hardships they had to suffer,” said Ma. “I hear that many do not even have stoves to cook on. A lot of cooking is done over an outdoor fire. Ya, I think we will have a lot to learn.”

Young Jetse asked, “What about bears and other wild animals. Will we have to shoot them?”

Wopke responded, “Ya, we may well have to be prepared for that. But maybe we will do more shooting of deer for meat on our tables.”

Wiebe asked, “Will there be kids my age?”

Ma answered, “Ya, I am quite sure that there will be kids your age. The families that were part of the group that left from Leeuwarden last year had people of all ages, including some of our age. Pa and I won’t be the oldest there. I hear that Rev. Ypma’s mother is also going.”⁶⁶

Pa added, “I found out that there will be more people we already know who will be traveling the whole journey with us, all the way to Rev. Ypma’s place.”

Wiebe and Jetse spoke in a breath together, “Who else is going with us?”

Pa responded, “Dirkje de Groot and family, Jan de Groot and his wife Antje Toonstra, and Derk Zylstra with his wife Sjoukje Toonstra. So even on our French ship we’ll have Friesian friends crossing the ocean with us.”⁶⁷

Ma shared, “You might be interested to hear that the harbor at LeHavre, France, where we’ll sail from, was famously painted by Van Gogh, one of the Dutch masters.”

Pa paused a bit, “I think what I’m hearing from you is some fear underlying your interests. We have to know and remember that we are in God’s hands. We are making our way to a land of promise, and He will take care of us. The Bible reminds us, ‘Don’t be afraid, I am with you.’ So we are traveling with the Lord, with family, and with friends. We are looking to the Lord for safety and protection on this journey to our promised land.” He continued, “We are taking the advice from letters to travel earlier rather than later in the season so that there will still be time over there to plant some crops for a fall harvest and have some to store over our first winter.”

“No question about it,” exclaimed Johannes, “We’ll be on one terrific adventure!”

⁶⁶ Brummelkamp, A., *Stemmen*, p. 92. Krabbendam, H., *Freedom*, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Passenger list for the ship *Eduard*.

A few weeks later Pa reported, “Our journey to America has been booked and paid for. We’ll be taking our own barge to Harlingen. Then sail to LeHavre in France.⁶⁸ And there board the ship *Eduard* to sail across the Atlantic, swinging a bit south first towards the Azoran Islands, and then north-west toward New York. I’m told this will likely help avoid the north Atlantic storms that can be really hazardous. Now the most likely storm area we might possibly see will be in the English Channel.”

Ma added, “We can be most thankful to the American government for requiring fifteen square feet for each passenger on any ship arriving at the United States harbor. I understand that last year, during a three month time, ships arrived in New York with two hundred dead passengers.”

Pa concurred, “The group from Zeeland who called Rev. Van der Meulen, actually had to split their company into three groups because there were too many to fit on the two ships they had first contracted with.”⁶⁹

Ma asked, “What kind of stuff do we take along, and what do we not take?”

Wopke had been thinking about that. “Letters from America seem to agree not to take furniture; the trip is too hard for that. Others say to take *willempjes* (Dutch money). But because people are eager to be paid in *willempjes*, they need to be hoarded and kept for important things.”

“I’ve asked our partner in Harlingen,” Pa told them, “to fill barrels according to the food requirements for a family of nine, so that should be ready for us. We each can decide what we want to take along in clothing and pack that in crates. Besides that we take our family Bible, other personal things and a few precious treasures we will want.”

“It’s a good thing we can carry our memories in our hearts and minds,” suggested Ma, “or we would overload the ship’s hold!”

Wopke added, “There will be a crate for each of us delivered tomorrow so we start filling and protecting some of our fragile things.”

A few days before departure, Tjalling *klomped* (walked in his wooden shoes) on to the barge. He didn’t have coveralls on. He had a clean cap on and a big smile on his face. Something was up. “Hey guys,” he hollered, “it’s time for a special treat. Just us boys. Come take a walk with me.”

“Aw, Tjalling” Jetse moaned. “It’s been such a big day finishing things here with Pa. I don’t much feel like going about the town. We’ve pretty much said our goodbyes to everybody.”

“Yeah,” said Tjalling, “but this will be a treat you will long remember.”

Wiebe spoke up, “Am I included, Tjalling? What’s on your mind? You are not dressed for work or for church.”

⁶⁸ Manifest of the ship *Eduard*.

⁶⁹ Lucas, H. *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, p. 186

“Ya,” Wopke chimed in, “what devious thing, little brother, is up your sleeve?”

Tjalling said, “Just wait and see. Trust me, you will enjoy this! Let’s leave the women at home for a bit and let me surprise you.”

Johannes heard all this banter and said, “Okay, big brother. We will go with you. But with all we still have to do, it better be good.”

Pa hollered from the bow of the barge, “All right, boys, go on. Let him give you his surprise, and then come back and finish off the packing and getting everything ready for the barge trip.”

So, off went the five brothers, all adults except Wiebe, and he too was fully grown. They *klomped* down the gang plank, made more noise as they laughed and clicked their heels on the pier. They were curious about what Tjalling had in mind for this last bit of a farewell.

They walked the cobble stone road down the lane where they had played for so many years. They passed the baker shop, the butcher shop, and the shoemaker shop. They saw the spire of the church. Tjalling kept on walking. He seemed to be taking them to the market square in Minnertsga.

There he aimed the brothers toward a fishmonger shop with barrels of delicious-smelling fish. The Van Haitsma boys had always enjoyed that smell, and now it was calling to them.

Tjalling made a little speech. “You will be going to a place that is many miles from the sea.” Tjalling led his brothers to one of the open barrels. “Alright,” he said. “Now each of you pick up a herring out of this barrel. Lift it by the tail. And lift it up over your head. Then when I say ‘Eat!’ let that whole fish slide down into your mouth, and enjoy!”

With no hesitation, each brother picked up his herring and lifted it up, turning his face to greet it. And together they each swallowed their herring down.

They laughed boisterously, and licked their lips. That tasted so good! Tjalling said quietly, “It may be a long time before you can do that again. Enjoy the memory.”

A bit more somber now, the Van Haitsma boys made their way back to the family barge. Soon they would say farewell to this brother who gave them this sweet unexpected memory.

Back on board the barge, Johannes spoke up, “I heard about one family from Sexbierum who wanted to travel with the Rev. Van Raalte. But his ship was full up. They waited in Rotterdam until another brand new sailship was loading with emigrants.” Looking at his Pa, “You remember the De Vree family? Well, while they were waiting, their nine year old son and older sister Anne decided to go exploring in Rotterdam. They were having a good time when they thought they’d better get back to the pier. Looking around, they had no idea how to get back. So Anne suggested each of them take a different street to see if they could get back to the ship. Anne found the ship, but his sister didn’t show up. Was the family worried! Numbers of the passengers started combing the streets. But all came back without the girl. It was getting dark. At

about 9 o'clock they heard a voice alongside the ship calling out, 'Has any one here lost a child?' Oh, they were so glad to hear that voice and claim their daughter. With tears rolling down her face, the daughter told her family, 'If they could not connect me with you and the ship sailed away, they said they would take me into their family. But I'm so glad I'm back with you.'"⁷⁰

All eyes in the family looked at Jetse and Wiebe.

The next morning Annie was having some second thoughts. "Oh, Sjoukje, what are we doing?" lamented Annie. "We're never going to see our friends here again."

"I know," cried Sjoukje, wiping her face once more with the silk handkerchief she had allowed herself to take along. "At least we have each other and our husbands."

The two young wives and their mother-in-law had carefully donned their fine headcaps of gold with the embroidered overlays, stiffly starched. "Oh, mother," Sjoukje sobbed, "I'm not ready for losing all my friends here in Minnertsga. It is going to be so lonely in a strange land. I know we will be seeing friends over there too, but this is so hard."

Mother Antje put her arms around the two young wives, "We do have the Lord with us on this hard journey. I feel a bit like Sarah, leaving so much family here and going to a land we really don't know much about."

Their sailbarge that had been their cozy home for many years was smoothly pulling out from the dock. Friends on land were waving their hankies. The gentle wind moved their barge along the canal.

"We are finally doing it," said Pa. "All the planning and parting is over and we are taking this first step to a new future. I do hope we know what we're doing. I don't like that we are leaving Tjalling and Geertje and the little ones to come later. Those little grandbabies will be so grown by the time we see them again."

Wopke could still see Tjalling's little family waving their white cloths in the distance, dwarfed by the houses and church steeple on the horizon. Tjalling himself was at the tiller steering the barge for this last trip with his parents and family.

"The village has been such a big part of our lives," Wopke mused, thinking again about all the reasons he had used to convince his family to make this break from Friesland. "What will it be like over there?"

Wopke and Annie had received a letter from Annie's brother Eke telling them how life had been for them in America. They had lived in a small branch-and-leaves-shelter with a sheet covering for the first weeks in their new village. And they had worked with their neighbors to put log houses together to live in. They'd had to cook outside over an open fire, like they were on a

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 296.

camping trip. Or like being in the army with tents for shelter and fires for cooking and keeping warm.

The log house, Eke wrote, was nothing like what they were used to, except their space was just as small as it had been on the sailbarge. And the trees are so huge it would take more than six people hand to hand and they would still not be able to complete the circle around the tree. And he wrote that under those trees it stays dark and damp because the sun can't get through to dry up the ground.

And Eke had written them about the church services. The preacher would stand on a stump at least six feet across and everyone would sit on logs around the "pulpit" and sing the Psalms in those woods. What a strange cathedral, Eke wrote, adding that it was strangely beautiful as well.

Pa interrupted the quiet moment, "Family, take a good look around you. Keep this picture in mind as we go to our new land. Drink deep the pictures you see here. Soon we will be on the water with no land in sight. Burn into your minds the places we have loaded up and unloaded our barge. Where we are going to live there may not be any canals or rivers for us to ply on. It looks like we will become landowners and work the land the rest of our lives."

Pa continued, "I have already let Rev. Ypma know that we want to buy land in his neighborhood. It should be good clay land. I'm sure we will have to work hard to bring down the giant trees that Eke wrote about. We're all used to hard work, but this may test our strength severely."

Nine-year-old Wiebe said, "Aw, Pa, it can't be that bad, can it?"

Pa assured him. "Young man, your young muscles are going to be tested in the battle against a forest of giants. Eke wrote they have called the trees 'Sons of Anak.' That has to mean something big and powerful. I think we can be sure that our first years are going to be a challenge that we have never met before."

Johannes quietly whispered to Wopke, "But first there is the ocean that we will cross. It's got a reputation for being stormy and violent. With all our experience of living on the water, will we manage ourselves there?"

Wopke whispered back, "The letters we have seen from Rev. Ypma and Eke tell us that the ocean voyage itself might be a challenge. And we aren't spending money on cabins aboard the ship. We might be herded between decks with very little privacy. And no comfortable mattresses either. I hope the smell of so many people living for weeks in the 'tween decks' won't cause sickness. Some of us are likely to get seasick, even if we have lived and worked on the water."

Jetse spoke up, "We've had our trips on the Zuider Zee to Amsterdam. That can be pretty rough. You think the Atlantic is going to be rougher?"

Ma, listening in, thoughtfully said, "I just hope that we don't get too sick. Sjoukje is in for some testing time; her strength hasn't been all that good lately. I did bring along some medicines to

help us over the worst. In one of the letters there was talk of some things to take along just in case.”

Annie said, “I can’t wait to see my brother and family again. I hope their log house is cozy and comfortable. But I’m afraid from what they wrote, it might be hard to keep warm.”

She wistfully looked over the bold green grass fields they were sliding by. “It’s going to be some time before we will be as comfortable as we have been in our places here. I saw the list of things that we were told we needed to buy before going on the ocean. Hopefully our merchant in Harlingen will have all that together and ready to go on board the ship that will take us to France. That’s one good thing the government has done for us, to put such a list together.”

Johannes mused, “It will be nice that a group of us barge families will travel all the way together and we can give each other a sense of strength and support.”

And Ma added “Some of the Separated Church who did not go with the big group last year will be along. I will enjoy that fellowship a lot. “

Johannes chimed in, “Even though seven years ago the king gave them permission to be a church on their own, they still are being treated badly by people from the State Church.”⁷¹ ^

Wopke added, “All the problems that we Van Haitsmas saw as reasons for emigrating, they have even more. They can’t get work, they get charged too much, they get stoned and spit on, their windows get rocks thrown against them, and the police and judges still fine them just for the sake of fining them. It is good that soldiers are no longer billeted with them. But they still get a lot of bad treatment.”

Johannes thought about this and remarked, “I think that’s one big reason why I have not joined the church with Sjoukje. I just didn’t want to make it harder for the family to do business. I saw how the Zylstras had a hard time with all that. That’s one big reason why so many of the Separated Church are emigrating. And I can’t blame them one little bit!”

“Maybe in America we won’t have that kind of struggle.” Sjoukje sidled up to Johannes and said quietly, “I know you’re thinking hard. Maybe a lot of things will be better when we get settled over there. I hope that land will be good for my health too. I sure would like it if we would bring some kids into the world. Ma and Pa would love to have some grandkids in the new world. Tjalling and Geertje will be bringing theirs when they come, but I would so much like to have some children of our own.”

Johannes reached around her waist and pulled her close. “I would like that too.” He whispered. “We’ll look for the Lord’s blessing on our lives; maybe we too will yet have a quiver full.”

Pa interrupted the pensive mood, “Maybe it’s a good idea for most of us to get to bed. Early tomorrow we’ll get to Harlingen. We’ll meet the sailboat that’ll take us through the coastalwaters

⁷¹ Doskers, H., *Levensschets van Rev. A.D. Van Raalte*, p. 52.

to France. And we'll have to load up the supplies for the ocean journey. Hopefully everyone who has booked to go on this trip will be ready by later tomorrow, and maybe the skipper will set sail if the winds are right."

"For now we men will need to take our turns at the rudder. This will be our last time that we work the barge. I will take the last watch, and so let's take turns from the youngest. Wiebe, your turn first, then wake Jetse in two hours. Johannes and Wopke, you each take three hours and I'll finish off to take us to the harbor. I know you ladies will take care of breakfast and coffee. Say, did you know that coffee came to us from the Americas? "

Out on the dock of Harlingen, Tjette connected with the de Groot family who were travelling with them. Tjette greeted them, "Mr. de Groot, it is good to see you again. Our paths crossed a few times on the canals. I hope you were able to sell your barge at a good price."

"Well, Mr. Van Haitsma, you know that most buyers today are the big businesses that are taking over the shipping. And they don't pay any more than they have to. If we had been in less of a hurry, we probably could have gotten a better price."

Mr. de Groot added "Be glad you took the inland route through Friesland and not the Zuider Zee. Our neighbor went through the sea to Amsterdam to connect with their sailboat by Helder. But they had to anchor for a day because of a storm."

Tjette answered, "Ja (yes), we've taken that route several times too and have had a few struggles in the storms. So we purposely avoided that and went right on to the Wadden Zee to Harlingen. We've heard from some of last year's travelers that it wasn't very comfortable through the English Channel either. Some ships lost their masts in storms there and the passengers had to help repair them to keep on going."

The travelers were glad their passage through the North Sea, the English Channel and along the coast to Le Havre was milder than some of the stories they had heard. Sjoukje admitted to Johannes, "The storm in my heart in saying farewell to our homeland is much more turbulent than any rough weather that we might have encountered. I doubt that we will ever again see our familiar world of people and land."

Their arrival at Le Havre was right on schedule. The ship, the *Eduard*, was huge and ready for them to load on and arrange their cramped travelling space. Sjoukje exclaimed, "This will be our home for the next few weeks."

Some days later, as the ship *Eduard* left the harbor at LeHavre, Johannes observed, "Sjoukje. I don't know if sailing on the Atlantic will be any easier than the North Sea or the English Channel. So far the trip has not been like what we have experienced on Zuider Zee journeys to Amsterdam. I have a hope for you the wind and waves will be relatively gentle."

"I sure hope you are right, Johannes. I don't wish to fall sick again. But I dread much more the sickness of heart over the life we left behind. I look to God to keep us and protect us and to give us the strength to trust Him as we go into the unknown world ahead for us," Sjoukje responded.

“We do have dry biscuits to help keep our stomachs calm,” reminded Ma. “It’s a good thing we can do our own cooking on board. We wouldn’t be comfortable if we had to eat rich French cooking.”

When they clambered to below deck, Ma was horrified. “The whole area looks like boxbeds without walls,” she whispered. “There is absolutely no privacy. And do we have to expect to live like this for a month and a half?”

Pa soothed, “I’m sorry, Antje, but ya (yes), for this piece of the journey we have to put up with it. These ships are outfitted to take loads of many kinds. I notice the leftover smells from spices, animals, grains and fish that have been absorbed into these bare wood frames. Now we will be adding our odors too. Let’s take some blankets and create walls between the open frames.”

Wopke added, “And place our crates so that we have a place to sit right next to these open boxbeds.”

“O, Lord, preserve us! Give us the grace to live through these conditions. And please keep the wind steady and the waters calm,” Ma prayed.

Captain Curet called for attention. “Please have all the men and single women come up on deck. I have some directions to share with you so that we can live together in the best way possible. The crew will pass out water for each family and group every day. Please use your share to stay healthy. You may not always feel like drinking, but do so anyway. Please assign one in your group as cook so that you can sign up for the use of the stove. If a storm comes up, please follow instructions and stay below deck for your safety. Otherwise feel free to wander topside for fresh air as often as you like. The crew and I myself will be available for you whenever you need anything.”

Johannes listened to the babble of voices from all over Europe. He said to Wopke, “I’m glad we have a few countrymen aboard with us so we have some others who speak our language.”

“Ya,” responded Wopke, “And I guess we’ll need to make an effort to learn English as soon as possible too. We don’t know what is facing us.”

Pa said, “Maybe along the way we can find someone to teach us some. Then we can learn enough to get along.”

“I know that in the bigger cities of the Netherlands people were speaking many different languages,” said Johannes. “But in our province of Friesland, we’ve lived pretty much among our own. Even proper Dutch is a bit difficult for me. About the only places we heard high Dutch was in church and school.”^

“Ya,” said Pa, “this learning English is going to be a whole new world for us. I think we are blest that where we are going in America, there will be Dutch spoken. At least we will be able to talk together.”

The routines of onboard living became fairly comfortable after awhile. Johannes said to Sjoukje, “It’s either adjust or be miserable. I know I’d rather adjust and make the most of it. We have been able to take our turns at the galley’s cookstove and have our own kind of food to eat. That is so helpful. Judging from all the different smells that come from the galley, who knows what some of our neighbors are eating!”

“Ya,” agreed Sjoukje. “It is not helpful, is it, to complain about the accommodations. It is what it is. By God’s grace we will make the most of it.”

After a few days on the open sea, Johannes heard some wailing. “I wonder what has happened,” he said to Sjoukje. He heard murmuring, and began to understand that a child had died.

A member of the crew invited all to come on deck. He told them that the captain was going to lead them in a memorial moment. Johannes and the others, except Antje who stayed below with Sjoukje, went on deck. After the funeral service which he couldn’t understand, Johannes returned to Sjoukje and told what he had seen. “The captain was standing at the rail, with a young family at his side cradling a little child. He said a few words. Then the tearful father put his child in a bag, and they put some sandbags in with the child. A board was placed over the rail reaching out over the water. And the father placed his child on the board. It was tilted downward and the little body slid down into the water of the Atlantic and out of sight. Oh, this is so sad, Sjoukje,” he said. “This little family was hoping for a new future. But their tiny child had to be buried at sea.”

1848 – 2*

Johannes decided to go up on deck. “I’m hearing a lot of noise topside,” he said to Sjoukje. “I’m going to check it out. I would love to have a glimpse of land again. And of New York! I’ll be back shortly and tell you what I see.”

“Oh, thank you, Johannes. I just don’t feel up to getting on deck any sooner than I have to. I’ll wait for you.”

Standing by the rail, Johannes and the others could see the outline of a city in the distance. He heard people say that it must be New York. “Finally we see land again!” Johannes said to his neighbor. “The ocean has been so much bigger than I had imagined. I have crossed the Zuider Zee many times, but that was so much smaller. It will feel good to set our feet on land again.”

Johannes went back below deck, “Sjoukje, we see land again. The pilot is coming out to meet us. It will be good to get you off the boat. Do you think you’ll be able to walk?”

“I think so, Johannes. Living so much on the water, you’d think I wouldn’t have been so sick.”

Johannes said, “You have seen enough of the inside of this ship. But what is next?”

Someone struck up a Psalm of thanksgiving and relief. Soon the ship resounded with Dutch voices praising God for taking them safely this far. Johannes said, “The thought of ‘Ebenezer’ is never far from my mind. God had been so good to us!”

“Don’t you wonder what God will bring into our lives in this strange new world? We’ve heard stories from others who had immigrated, and we’ve seen brochures enticing us to come to the land of promise. But in the long run it would be God’s promise we are looking and desiring for in the years ahead.”

“We can thank God that we’ve made this part of the journey in such good time. Others have written it took them weeks longer. **But for us it has only been forty-eight days on this ship.**^ Yes, thank God we have come safely across,” Sjoukje said.

Johannes went back on deck. New York, now so close, was coming closer by the hour. He said to Jetse, “What a wonderful sight to see those familiar houses after the long weeks of water. It sure looks a lot like the houses in Leeuwarden and Harlingen where we’ve delivered so many loads of peat and grain over the years of living on our barge.”

As they neared the harbor they could see crowds of people milling around. Just then they heard the captain’s whistle calling them to gather around. Now what, when they were so close to land?

The captain stood on the upper level in front of the wheelhouse. He called to them to listen. He said, “There is some advice and warning that I want to share with you before you go ashore.”

“First of all, there will be customs agents coming aboard, and a doctor will be checking to see that everyone on ship is healthy and not bringing any diseases into the country. And you are all asked to cooperate with them. That will take a bit of time.”

Then the captain said, “Be aware and cautious with the people on the dock. There are many shysters hanging around the docks ready to offer services of transportation to your destination, or housing for those who want to stay in New York awhile. There will even be people who speak your language who will try to persuade you to accept their help towards accommodations. Be careful; do not be too trusting. Make sure you accept services from legitimate companies and representatives.”

“And,” he reminded them, “the doctor must give approval before anyone steps off the boat. He’ll be waiting when our ship is tied up. He will check with me to determine whether or not any of us can go ashore.”

Johannes went below deck and he, with the help of Wopke, gave support to Sjoukje as she made her way up and onto the deck. “I think that is the doctor coming up the ramp,” he said. “So now we wait for the captain to report our wellbeing.”

The captain and doctor chatted and appeared to be quite satisfied with the health report. The captain announced, “The doctor has given the all-clear, and we are permitted to head to the pier.”

Wopke and Johannes tried to be unobtrusive in supporting Sjoukje. But the doctor's experienced eyes could see them. He nudged the captain, who, speaking a little Dutch, said, "Please come aside. The doctor needs to talk with you."

They stepped out of the moving crowd to the doctor. He asked Sjoukje why she was needing support. Sjoukje said, "I have been weak much of my life. Not sick, but weak. Even now I feel fine, but after four weeks on board tossed about, I welcome a little support in getting off the ship."⁷²

The doctor listened to her, felt her pulse and her temperature, and approved her to go off the ship. The whole family was relieved that they were cleared to go.

The men eagerly went below deck to help unload the crates and barrels and stacked them on the pier where the women sat and watched over them. Wopke reported, "Some of our food barrels have begun to smell moldy. Now that we have them in the fresh air we can smell how bad they are."

Johannes added, "We'll either have to throw it into the water, or maybe use some of it that's not so bad. But it's no good to get sick from food that's spoiled."

Pa soon reported, "Looks like there is very little that is still good enough to eat. We will have to pick up fresh supplies before the next part of the journey. Letters from others who took the journey have recommended that. For sure we do not want to pick up sickness by using moldy food."

Since none of the Van Haitsmas spoke English, they were dependent on the few fellow passengers who did. Someone from their Dutch compatriots reminded them, "There's a committee of people in New York from the **Dutch Reformed Church**[^] who are committed to helping us Dutch immigrants find our way to where we want to go. So let's keep our eyes and ears open for those people."

So they all tuned their ears to listen for Dutch voices on the dock. There were so many people calling out in so many different languages. Ma said that it almost sounded a bit like Pentecost, or maybe more like the confusion of Babel.

After some hesitation, Wopke said, "Ya, I hear the sound of Dutch voices." They turned to see who it might be. They began to focus on the voice, and saw a man dressed as a minister with black coat and white clerical frills.

Then slowly as the other passengers began to move down the pier, the man in black came towards them. "Let's be careful," said Johannes, as hesitantly and a bit suspiciously, they waited for him. "The captain warned us about the shysters. We don't know if he is what he shows himself to be."

⁷² Van Haitsma, J.P., *Legends of the van Haitsma Family*.

When he came closer, the man caught their eye. Yes, he had recognized their distinctive Dutch clothing and headgear, and came towards them with arms out.

“Welcome to the New Land,” he said in Dutch with a bit of a strange accent. He certainly was not from Friesland. It was the sound of Old Dutch, and quite formal. The Van Haitsma family and the other Dutch passengers who were gathered on the dock began to feel relief to be greeted in their own language.

He said, “I am Rev. de Witt from the Dutch Reformed Church here in New York.⁷³ I’m with others of the committee to help you with the disembarking of your families and goods.”

They all began to babble, sharing where they had come from and where they hoped to be going. Rev. de Witt held up his hand and motioned the Dutch group to the side where they could talk and be heard. “Let me explain what’s ahead for you and the choices you will have to make,” he said.

Soon smaller groups began to form among the Dutch group with each group having similar thoughts about their destinations.

Pa told Rev. De Witt, “We want to go to where Rev. Ypma went a year ago. Do you know where that is in this huge country?”[^]

Wopke chimed in and said, “My wife’s family came on that ship with Rev. Ypma and we want to live close by them.”

“Yes,” Rev. De Witt assured them “I know where Rev. Ypma’s congregation has gone and will be glad to get you started on the journey. The first choice you’ll need to make is how to get there. Do you want to go the faster route and go by train? It would cost more, but would get you to *De Kolonie* in Michigan a lot quicker. Or did you want to go by water, which would be slower, but quite a lot cheaper.”

Antje voiced a worry, “How many miles will we have to go over unfamiliar waterways and depending on people of an unfamiliar land?”

The Reverend assured them, “I will also give you letters of introduction to people along the way who can help you make further arrangements and protect you from the shysters.”

Tjette wondered out loud, “What shall we do with those empty crates after we dump the bad food?”

Rev. de Witt suggested, “You may be surprised how useful some of these barrels and crates may become. I hear that others ahead of you have been grateful for that extra wood they have for making tables and chairs. And, you can always use it for firewood.”

⁷³ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 24. De Witt, Thomas, *The Christian Intelligencer*.

While the other families around them were deciding where and how to travel, the Van Haitsma men and women conferred more with Rev. de Witt. “Reverend, we know our money is limited, and we think we will want to travel the most economical way.”

“That I can understand,” answered the Reverend. “But that will also mean the longer journey. And you’ve already had weeks on the sea.”

Wopke spoke up, “We started early in the season so we could immediately start planting when we selected our land. So maybe a few more weeks will still be fine. We are used to traveling on the water. We have been barge merchants.”

Tjette said, “So we have agreed on the water route. We know our money will only stretch so far and we’ll need some at the end of the trip because we still have to buy our land. Back in 1846 Rev. Ypma’s group bought their land ahead of the trip.”⁷⁴

1848 – 3*

The Reverend De Witt said, “One of our committee will take you by horse and wagon to the steamboat dock. I have prepared a few letters and will insert your family name so they will introduce you to preachers in Albany, Buffalo, Detroit, and also to Rev. Van Raalte.”

He again echoed the warning the captain gave them before getting off the sailboat. “People,” he said, “will try to take advantage of you because you don’t speak English, and people will also make harsh comments to you because you are wearing old country clothing, wooden shoes and your gold headgear.⁷⁵ You will seem strange to them. They also will see how clean you keep yourselves, and think you must be rich, especially with the beautiful headcaps you ladies are wearing.⁷⁶ Americans have seen that many of you carry gold *willempjes*. They would be happy to cheat you out of them.” And he added, “People are going to charge you high prices for stuff.”

Tjette interjected, “I read a letter from Rev. Van Raalte that was published last year by Rev. Brummelkamp, and he included a lament that many of the shysters who are ready to cheat us and take advantage of us are actually Dutchmen.”⁷⁷

In farewell, Rev. De Witt offered prayer with them and they sang a Dutch Psalm together. Tjette, speaking for the family, said, “Reverend, we are so thankful for your help. The new country and new language is a challenge for us and you have made us feel so welcome. God bless you for the help you are giving us and so many other people as they arrive here.” They all shook hands in farewell.

⁷⁴*Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction.

⁷⁵ Van Haitsma, J., *Legends*.

⁷⁶ Van Haitsma, Anson, *Legends of the Van Haitsma Family*.

⁷⁷ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 40. De Witt, T., *Intelligencer*.

Soon after the Reverend had left, the Van Haitsma family and all their belongings were loaded and they were on their way to the Hudson River wharf. They passed many people hawking their wares and offering to help. Ma observed, “These must be some of the shysters the Reverend was warning us about.”

“Ya, what a comfort,” said Pa, “to have the help of the Reverend and this committee through the unknown. God had been so good to us! He has even provided these friendly folk to help us to the next part of the journey.”

Travelling through the city, Sjoukje noted, “This city looks a lot like the larger cities back home. But the streets are wider, and there are more houses built of wood rather than brick. I can see some familiar church steeples rising above the trees and rooftops.”

Annie agreed, “Some of the buildings are taller than what we’re used to seeing, but mostly it feels familiar.”

Wopke reminded them, “This city was after all settled by our own countrymen two hundred years ago. It’s like an echo of the city of Amsterdam we have seen on our many barge trips.” And he added, “It was Captain Hudson with the Netherlands Company who used this river to open up the country for the West India Company. He was looking for a way to get even farther west than we want to go. I heard it took Captain Hudson ten days to sail his ship up to Albany where we expect to switch to barges on the Erie Canal.”

Eventually they arrived at the dock. After they paid their fees for the trip to Albany and loaded their belongings, the Van Haitsma family made themselves as comfortable as possible. Johannes said, “It seemed so easy to enter this country. The captain gave the passenger list to customs, and the doctor gave his okay, and here we are.”

“What were you expecting?” asked Wopke.

“For all the time I spent thinking of getting ready to come, I really didn’t think that far ahead,” Johannes answered.

Wopke added, “Isn’t it great that it just so happened that Rev. de Witt was on the pier when we arrived?”

Tjette suggested, “I think maybe it was the Lord who sent the Reverend for just such a time as this!”

The Van Haitsma group settled down and hoped for a journey that would be less stormy than the Atlantic had been. Once again they brought out their cooking equipment and began making their meals. Their supplies had become meager, and one of the crew assured them they could get some fresh potatoes when the ship docked along the way and maybe some fresh flour too. The young people found a way to put a hook on a string and to catch some delicious fish.

Sleeping quarters were no better than they had been on the ship *Eduard*. They had their floor space between the barrels, but little privacy. The men bunked on one side; the women and children on the other. Not much comfort there.

Johannes said to Wopke, “There are plenty of reasons for complaint, but I don’t hear much. I guess we all know this is temporary. Life will improve in this new land. Soon we will buy land and make a life for our families that will be better than was possible back in Holland where the rich and wealthy claimed everything and we were just little guys in the sight of the government.”

So they counted down the days it would take to the next part of the journey.

The captain and crew were considerate, and they helped the Van Haitsmas adjust. Slowly but surely they began to learn a little English. A few times they docked by one of the villages along the Hudson and found someone who could still speak Dutch from long ago. That helped make it possible to buy a few fresh supplies for their meals. “But,” Annie exclaimed, “Rev. de Witt was right! Even the people who speak our language are ready to charge us pretty high prices!”

The entire Van Haitsma family was awestruck by the beauty they saw as their ship sailed further north. Johannes said, “Look at the majesty of this piece of God’s world. Trees look to be over a hundred feet tall. Flowers along the river bank like we’ve never seen. And there are flat lands along the river, but then hills and mountains towering beyond with snow on the tops. What a country we have come to. It takes my breath away! Never have we seen such wonders!”

Day after day God’s creation inspired them to song. These trees were so beyond the cedars of Lebanon they had heard about in the sermons their elders had read in worship. They gained a new appreciation for the Bible’s references to Mount Hermon and its snowy top. They broke out in Psalm again and again. The hills of New York had rarely heard such praise and adoration.

Their joy muted significantly when they debarked from the riverboat ten days later and saw the canal barge they would board next. Tjette and the family had always been so proud of the cleanliness of their home barge, regardless of the load they had carried. Now Antje pulled up her nose and muttered, “What disgusting-looking and smelling barges. Ya, the tickets were cheaper than rail, but now we need to put up with the filth that reeks to high heavens.”

This crew was quite willing to let the Van Haitsma family move their own crates from the river boat to the canal barge. They were too occupied to lend a hand. Even if they were only drinking and smoking on the shore.

Johannes mumbled to himself, “They call this pigsty a canal barge? They should be ashamed of themselves.”

One of the crew called out, “Hurry up, you dumb Dutchmen! We don’t have all day. We want to get to the tavern by nightfall!”

“Why are they in such a hurry?” asked Jetse, “We’ve been told this floating barn is going to take more than a week.”

“I’m afraid they just don’t like us. They want our money, that’s all,” said Tjette. “Let’s hurry and load our crates and claim a little corner for ourselves. It looks like the horses are getting ready to pull this thing.”

“It’s a good thing we’re not going to get seasick on this scow. But we sure could use some good smelling salts!” Antje muttered.

They settled down for the journey. Soon the Van Haitsma men forgot about the stench. Tjette exclaimed “This is so different than the canals we used back home. There the land was flat but here this canal cuts through mountains!”

The captain-owner gave a little speech which was translated by a passenger. “This trip will take eight days, and we will travel fifty-five miles a day. The canal is four feet deep and forty feet wide the whole way. So our barges can comfortably float through the entire three hundred and seventy mile journey. But we have eighty-three locks to go through. Each lock will take time while the water rises or falls to meet our level. Men with shovels took nine years to complete this waterway. Some of the locks will raise or lower the barge as much as forty feet, and part of the way we will have water bridges over ravines. Those of you familiar with barges will stand in awe of this canal which has been called the eighth wonder of the world.”⁷⁸

Johannes said to his brothers, “This is going to be very interesting. Never have we seen water bridges or locks that high!”

The captain continued, “This barge is forty feet long, and we have sixty passengers and all your belongings. You’ll be able to cook your meals, and when we are waiting for a lock, you may be able to buy some fresh food from people living there. **Some of you might also want to walk along on the horse path for a change of pace.**”[^]

Wopke shared, “At least there won’t be waves to rock the barge, and the horses will keep a steady pace. But I think for us bargemen, we will find more of a feast for our eyes than we expected.”

At the first water bridge, Johannes exclaimed, “When Ma taught us early history, I read about how the Romans built overhead waterways to carry water to their cities. But now we see a water bridge so large and high that it can carry all of us in the barge over this ravine. That is mind boggling!”

Then as they continued through the mountains, Jetse spoke in amazement, “Look how high the rock walls are on both sides. How could men with shovels dig through such mountains? Digging through peat was hard enough. But through such mountains?”

The days went on and Wiebe and Jetse got antsy, “Ma, Pa, can we walk along the horse path? It would be nice to feel ground under our feet.”

⁷⁸Erie Canal History, www.eriecanalhistory.com.

Tjette and Antje readily agreed, “But remember we don’t know how long the distance between the locks will be. You will not be able to get back on the barge until it stops for the next lock.”

“Aw, we walked all day sometimes with the horse pulling our barge. We can walk whatever distance we need to.”

Johannes spoke up, “I may want to walk some of this journey too.”

And Sjoukje chimed in, “I think I may want to walk with you too some time. It may be better than sitting on this stinky barge. You think they ever clean it?”

Ma suggested to Jetse and Wiebe, “How about the two of you keeping track of how many locks we’ve gone through and how many water bridges we have crossed over?”

Although the days on this barge seemed to be endless, finally the canal journey was over. Arriving at Buffalo, the Van Haitsma family once more unloaded and reloaded their belongings onto the ship that would take them all the way to Holland, Michigan. And they purchased some fresh food.

“I’m happy to see we are finally as far as the Great Lakes,” Johannes told Sjoukje.

“Me too,” replied Sjoukje. “As dramatic as the canal trip was, it will be wonderful to get back on a ship that doesn’t stink and gives us cover from the weather.”

“It could still take us twenty more days to sail to wherever Rev. Van Raalte’s *Kolonie* has settled,” warned Johannes.

Tjette added, “And we’ll be sailing over lakes like the *Zuider Zee*. The weather could be rough.”

Later when the men were taking an evening walk on deck, one of their fellow passengers asked them, “Did you hear about the accident a ship had on these lakes last year?”

“No,” Tjette responded. “What happened?”

“Well,” the man said, “the ship called the *Phoenix* had made it through this chain of lakes and was only a few miles from its destination. I think that was Milwaukee in the state of Wisconsin. In the night the ship caught on fire. The captain and crew jumped into the two lifeboats and left the passengers to fend for themselves. Many of them perished, including a number of our fellow immigrants.”⁷⁹

“Oh, my,” exclaimed Tjette. “I think I won’t tell my family about that until we are done with this trip on the lakes. I don’t want them to worry. Just facing more of a lake journey has its own concerns. We may be used to lake travel, but when the routes are unfamiliar, sometimes they

⁷⁹ Schooland, M., *De Kolonie*, p. 178. On Nov. 20, 1847, the *Phoenix* burned on Lake Michigan. Schaap, J. *Album*, p. 176.

stretch out too long in our minds. I would like my family to think that in only twenty-one more days we will be on good solid land again.”

Johannes, overhearing this conversation, added, “God has been good to us on this journey. I think we’ll trust Him for this last sail also.”

“Ya,” Pa added, “That confession is better than worrying about worrying.”

Sitting below deck, the ladies found their yarn and thread and continued to occupy their time. Antje asked, “Sietske, have you been practicing those crocheting patterns I was teaching you?”

“Ya, Ma,” Sietske answered, “I want to keep making some nice doilies for my hope chest. Maybe there will be a nice boy where we’re going.”

The lakes were as limitless as the ocean had seemed. There were times the rains lashed at their ship and they all stayed below deck. The ladies spent much of their time preparing some necessary clothing for the boys who wore out their socks and underwear frequently. There were also stops along the way at cities like Detroit between the lakes.

One calm day Tjette took the boys to a wall map near the wheel house. “See, boys,” he said, “This here is Buffalo where we started and over there is *De Stad* where we are going. Now see this great chain of lakes through which we are travelling?”

Jetse said, “I see the name Erie for this first lake we’re on. The next one looks like Superior.”

Not to be outdone, Wiebe pointed, “Then that must be Lake Michigan. We have to travel all three lakes and it’s going to take twenty-one days? They must be huge!”

“Ya, son,” Tjette noted, “They are a lot bigger than the lakes we sometimes sailed with the barge. But the shape of the lakes is what makes for so many miles.”

Day by day, one day at a time for twenty-one days, the Van Haitsma family sailed toward Holland, Michigan. Excitement had built to a fever pitch when they finally approached the mouth of Black Lake. The captain told them, “There are sandbanks at the mouth of this lake, and we can’t get too close or we may get stuck.” He anchored as near as possible and set the crew and the men passengers to unload all the crates into the lifeboats while the women and children watched from the deck.

1848 – 4*

“What we see doesn’t look so good!” agreed Antje, Sjoukje, Annie and Sietske. Their faces expressed dismay and discouragement.

Johannes said, “Ya, but you can’t go by what we see here. The captain told us we’d be met by a greeter.”

“Johannes,” Sjoukje asked, “where are we going to sleep tonight? Oh, look! I think I see something there at the edge of the woods; it looks like a shed. And look. There’s someone coming out of the woods. They see us. They’re waving. You think maybe they were expecting us? I didn’t think anyone knew we were coming.”

“Looks like maybe they did,” said Johannes.

The man walking towards them in his wooden shoes was smiling and waving his arms. And he was singing! When he came close enough to talk, he said, “Welcome, friends. My name is Jacob Vinke. My wife and I have been assigned by Rev. Van Raalte to welcome any new arrivals.⁸⁰ We are taking turns waiting near the shore by these sheds. This is called ‘*de Lake*.’⁸¹ First of all, let’s bring your belongings over to that shed. You can sleep in the shanty tonight to get out of the cool breeze. We don’t have bedding, but you can use what you have available. And we have coffee on the fire to warm you up.”

“Thank God you are here!” Johannes spoke up. Then the Van Haitsma family and the others who arrived with them knelt down on the beach. They joined together in singing a Psalm and prayer, thanking God for His mercy in bringing them through all the days on the water.

Vinke pointed at the crude buildings beyond the dune and near the trees. He said, “That’s your place for the night. I know it does not look like the neat brick houses you lived in back in the Netherlands. It does not have heat, but it does get you out of the wind and the rain.”

Noticing Sjoukje’s face fall in discouragement, he said “It’s only for tonight. Tomorrow a flatboat will come and take you and all your belongings to the City where you will find better accommodations.”

The Van Haitsma family and the de Groot family had quite a pile of belongings stacked on the sand. The menfolk worked together to move the crates and barrels to the sheds away from the edge of Lake Michigan.

“We have finally arrived!” Johannes exclaimed. “It does feel so good to have our feet on solid ground again. The dunes are a familiar sight! But those giant trees back behind the dunes are something else.”

The welcomers had been gathering driftwood and branches and had a nice stockpile of firewood. They had some fires going so the newcomers could warm up a little. Soon they were busily asking the greeters who they were and what villages they had come from. Tjette told them, “We’ve come to join Rev. Ypma and his group.”

⁸⁰ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 486.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

Vinke said, “We know Rev. Ypma. Didn’t he also come from Friesland like you? I think he came with some Frieslanders a year ago. I am sure they will all be happy to see you again.”

Tjette said, “We have done a lot of barge business with Rev. Ypma before he became a minister.”

Vinke affirmed, “I’m sure that your families will be very welcome in the village. There are some folk from Gelderland and Noord Holland who settled in that area too. But because the majority of them are from Friesland, they agreed to name the village ‘Vriesland’ after their home province.”

The Dutch newcomers had many questions about the soil, the weather and business, and the greeters were pleased to tell them all they knew. Vinke reminded them, “We’re new to this land too, and don’t know much about the area where the Friesians have settled. But please be assured that Rev. Van Raalte will have answers to all your questions.”

They talked well into the evening until some sleepy travelers started nodding off. Then they made themselves as comfortable as possible on the sand floor under the rough planking that served as shelter.

Ma observed, “It is comforting to think that hundreds of our fellow immigrants have already spent their first night in *De Kolonie* under these very same driftwood planks. It is not as cozy as our barge beds have been, but soon we can expect to be much more comfortable in our new place.”

Pa added, “It has been a long hard journey. But there have also been many occasions for admiring the majesty of our new land: its vastness, the high mountains, the many miles of straight canals and the long trip through the lakes, the many strangers with strange languages and customs, and some glimpses of American red men. And now finally we are close to our final destination. Now we are all very tired and need to sleep.”

But sleep was difficult that night. The wind gusted off the lake, blowing easily through the porous walls. The waves pounded loudly against the sandbar.

The whole group was up early in the morning. After a scanty breakfast, Tjette suggested, “Jetse and Wiebe, will you go to the inlet to watch for the flatboat to arrive?”

It was not much to look at when they saw it. Jetse said to Wiebe, “That’s a flatboat? It is just some planks lashed together with shallow sides. Nothing like the dressed-up barges we are used to. No sails either. This flatboat will have to be poled along the shore of the lake to bring us anywhere.”

Last night Vinke had told them, “Some newly-arrived folk lost their goods in the big lake before they could get it all to shore.”

“Oh my,” lamented Antje, “And after packing their goods so carefully along the way.”

Vinke had added, “Even now your stuff could fall into the Lake because sometimes the flatboats are not so reliable. Tree branches under the water can break into the boats. The men might have to be prepared to pull the boat ashore and fix it again before you can get back underway.”

This morning Antje and Sjoukje had gathered their belongings together to get ready to load on the raft. Sjoukje could feel tears burning in her eyes, but she was determined to be strong. Johannes was such a strong man. She did not want to disappoint him or embarrass him with her tears.

The flatboat journey took most of the day and they ate what and when they could. Most of the newcomers walked along the lake shore. Wiebe noted, “Back in the old country, we used to have horse power to pull the flatboat along.”

The shore was rugged with fallen trees, broken-off branches, some deep holes, and shallow places filled with water. Several times people on the flatboat had to get off so it could float over the branches and shallow banks. Sometimes they had to push and pull the boat along to assist in the poling.

After some hours of slow going, they saw what looked like a village on the south side. “Who lives there?” Wopke asked.

Klaas, the boatman, replied, “That’s an Indian village.⁸² Most of them have already moved away to the north. There are still a few left. You can see the building they use as a church. There are two congregations. A Catholic priest comes every so often, and there’s a Protestant minister who has been very helpful to us.”

He added, “And the Indians have helped us too[^]. One of them showed Rev. Van Raalte the way to this lake so he could decide if this is where we wanted to settle. They also showed us how to cut these big trees down so each tree would not take as much work to cut. Imagine, they suggested we pick a tree that would line up with a few others, and cut the others half way. Then cut that one we first picked out, and cut it so that it would fall over against the others. Then we might have ten trees fall at once. I’ll bet you will be doing that on your land too.”

“We did have some trouble with the Indians, though,” Klaas continued. “One time some of our men were wandering around looking for land to settle on. And they saw a pig roaming around. So they caught it, and had some good meals of pork from it.” “But,” he went on, “one of the Indians went to Rev. Van Raalte and accused us of stealing his pig. We didn’t know there was anybody in that area. And the Reverend smoothed things over for us. He was able to convince the man that we didn’t know that the pig belonged to anyone. And Rev. Van Raalte had us pay the man for that pig. We did have to give up a nice *Willempje* to the Indian. But he seemed to be satisfied and did not seem to have any bad feelings toward us. So we live and learn.”

Klaas told them, “It’s not far now. We’re getting closer.”

⁸² Swierenga, R., *Old Wing Mission*.

But there wasn't anything the newcomers could see except a few tree stumps that had been cut and a few logs lying scattered in the small clearing. Klaas said, "Now we are all living in log houses here. But there are plans for housing like we were used to at home."

Klaas pointed and said, "That is where Jan Slag⁸³ is living. He was a boat builder back home and is planning to do the same here. Boats are used a lot to bring stuff to Grand Haven, a town that you passed yesterday. Slowly we are making a little money by cutting staves for barrels to take to Chicago which is on the other side of that big lake. And Slag wants to build boats so we can transport some of those things over the lake. And then we can also buy supplies we need. It can take days of walking to Saugatuck south of here for anything we want to buy, so having some boats available would be a great help. Near the end of the lake Mr. Vander Sluis built a windmill to start cutting all this wood."⁸⁴

"Well," said Tjette, "I hope Mr. Slag builds them better than this flatboat. We have done a lot of shipping stuff in Friesland, and a good boat is important."

Klaas agreed, "I'm sure what Mr. Slag will build will be a lot better than this. But this flatboat has helped a lot of people move their goods from the Big Lake to the City (Holland, MI), and even beyond that. Flatboats get across a lot of shallow water, and as you saw, the sandbar between the lakes makes for shallow water a lot of the time. There's been talk of asking the government to develop some sort of harbor there so boats can come into Black Lake and go all the way to the City and beyond. If you are going to where Rev. Ypma is living, you'll be using this kind of flatboat up the little Black River until you can't go any further." Then he continued, "Just around the bend over there we come to the City."

Peering into the woods Sjoukje glimpsed some color among the huge trees. "There," she called out. "I see somebody in a dress." They followed the direction of her pointing and, sure enough, they could see somebody deep in the forest. Then Antje asked, "But where is the City?"

Klaas said, "You are looking at it."

Johannes saw Sjoukje's eyes glisten. He figured she was thinking the same thoughts that he was thinking. He asked himself again, "What have we done? Were things so bad in Friesland that we had to leave our comfortable barge and home to come to this wilderness?"

Klaas assured them that there were big plans for the City. The streets had been plotted out and people were building better houses than the log cabins they were now living in. He said, "Jan Rabbers up the river has already begun cutting up trees into planks to build houses with. We have a little store where a few things are for sale. And people are bringing in the equipment we need from towns around."

He continued, "At least no one here is still living in a booth made of branches. We can get out of the rain and cold now. Last year we couldn't. Last year we crowded into shelters with a dozen or more people on the cold nights. We needed that body warmth to keep us all warm. Now we have

⁸³Jan Slag's boat-building location, (another of our ancestors). Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 115, 409.

⁸⁴ Lucas, H. *Memoirs*, p. 375.

fireplaces in the log cabins and can cook inside on the colder days. Now we can keep a bit dry from the incessant rains we have been having this spring.”⁸⁵

“Look,” he said, “Somebody brought along a *delft blauw* coffee grinder and put it on a tree trunk so that any of us that need to grind our coffee can go there and use it.⁸⁵ We do so much more together than we ever did back in Holland. We help each other get buildings up from the ground. We share what food we have so no one has to go without a meal. Maybe it isn’t as good as it was, but we are not starving. We may have to learn to eat food we never ate before, but we do have food. Our Indian neighbors have shown us how to make coffee out of roasted corn. And the corn we used to feed the chickens and pigs, we now use to make pancakes for ourselves. And they showed us how to make maple syrup out of the sap of the maple trees.” He was talking fast to try to get these newcomers beyond the discouragement showing so plainly on their faces.

Johannes muttered to Sjouke, “He’s going to have to do a lot of talking to get us to feel better about all this!”

“The maple syrup is so good on those Johnny cakes,” Klaas continued. “But even so, we did get a bit tired of eating pancakes three times a day, and seven days a week. It was always a treat when someone killed a bear or a deer and we had some roast meat for a change. But not many of us are able to hunt and shoot anything. Some of us are learning to trap some smaller critters. And we do know how to fish, so we get some trout once in a while.”

1848 - 5 *

They began to hear the sound of familiar Dutch greetings.

Klaas said, “Let’s get the barge unloaded. It’s going to take some work to move your goods a bit back from the edge of the water. And I’ll see if one of the children will run to Rev. Van Raalte’s house to let him know you have arrived.”

“Ya,” added Annie hopefully, “I see some boys and girls running this way. They’re being followed by a few women waving their white kerchiefs.”

Klaas spoke to one of the boys, “Will you run and get the *Dominee*? Tell him another group has arrived.” The boy took off running into the dark woods and soon disappeared.

The newcomers were becoming used to the quiet now that the talking on the boat had stopped. Suddenly Johannes remarked, “I think I hear the noise of axes in the woods.”

“Ya,” said Klaas, “the men are busy cutting down more of the trees. And they’re splitting stumps that are dry enough for shingles. We need more shingles to keep the rain out of our houses.”

⁸⁵*ibid.*, p. 106

Klaas laughed, “But it is so much better than last year. We couldn’t keep any water out! And we couldn’t keep the wind out either. By God’s grace, we are getting there. The Indians and the Americans who lived here first have helped us learn a lot about living here. Thank God for those friends.”

A few more adults drifted over to the bank of the lake, and the Van Haitsmas and De Groot began to recognize the dialects from home. It gave them all a good comforting feeling to hear their own language in this strangely-foreboding darkness in the midday. Someone shouted, “Where are you from?” Wopke called back loudly, “From Minnertsga. Where are you from?” “From Drachten,” said one of the white-capped ladies.

“What a wonderful sound,” remarked Johannes, “an accent so familiar in such a strange place.”

The boy came back with Rev. Van Raalte in tow.⁸⁶ The Reverend, in wooden shoes and puffy butterfly pants, hardly looked like a Reverend. His goatee kind of covered his smile of welcome, but it did not cover his exuberant joy at seeing this group of newcomers.

“Welcome! Welcome!” shouted the Reverend. “I’m so glad you have arrived! I’m sure that you are glad to have the long water trip behind you too. I hope it all wasn’t so terrible for you. So, let’s get to know each other. My name is Reverend Albertus Van Raalte. My former home was in the Utrecht area. Where do you come from?”

As the elder, Tjette spoke up, “Reverend, we are the Van Haitsma family, and come from Minnertsga, Friesland. We are so glad to have finally arrived! But I confess, we expected to see a city like Minnertsga here. This place has been called “the City” ever since we made the decision to come here. But this hardly looks like a city!”

Jan De Groot joined in, “We are the De Groot family. My children and I also hope to settle near Rev. Ypma. So far we’ve been able to travel together with the Van Haitsmas.”

“You have made heroic choices,” Rev. Van Raalte told them. “When our group arrived in the harsh winter of 1846 we stayed over in Detroit. I came alone to check out this area that people had recommended to us. On Dec. 31 ⁸⁶I showed up at Rev. Smith’s door. He has been a missionary in these parts for some years. From there I had help to explore the area and then I went back to Detroit. We talked with people who know the area and they strongly encouraged that we settle here.⁸⁷ So I went to the land office and started buying up available land. And now you can see that slowly we are developing the *Kolonie*. Already there are some one hundred log houses here and some of our families are getting ready to build houses a lot more like we were used to back in the Netherlands.”

Rev. Van Raalte continued. “It may take a divine imagination to see what is going to develop here. I hope you and your family can fit right in with building a future here that will be beyond

⁸⁶ Zwemer and DeBey, *Stemmen*, p. 55. Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 483.

⁸⁷ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 475.

your imagination and expectation. Already in these woods some of the settlers have started businesses and factories. There's a row of homes and businesses along the street in the woods."⁸⁸

The Reverend exuberantly kept on talking, "Six miles down this river, Mr. Fairbanks,⁸⁹ an American, is helping Jan Rabbers put together a water-powered mill for cutting up these giants into the lumber we need to build homes much better than these log cabins. Last fall we built a log building where we hold worship. So we have a church building with a pulpit and benches, rough as they may be. Last year in August there were eight hundred and fifty people here in *deKolonie*, but by November there were two thousand people."⁹⁰[^]

Johannes marveled at the excitement pouring from the Reverend. He spoke up, "We intend to live near Rev. Ypma. Several of our group are related to the people in the congregation he came with. I hope that he isn't too far from here. We have already come so far, we are ready to settle down and make our homes here."

"Ya, soon we will take you to see Rev. Ypma," said Rev. Van Raalte, speaking his southern Dutch dialect instead of high Dutch. "But the day is moving along, and today you need some good food to eat before a good night's rest. We do have a log house for you all to shelter in for the night. Then tomorrow morning I will show you on the map some of the land near Rev. Ypma's that is available to purchase and you can decide what you want to do. Rev Ypma also has land available to purchase. So you will have some choices. He chose a clay land much like where he came from in Friesland. Hopefully you can find something you like over there too."

Meanwhile Antje along with Sjoukje, Annie and Sietske, shepherded the young De Groot children, "Come children, stay with us. Your father will need to be part of the men talk."

One of the Friesian ladies came up to Antje and the girls, "Oh, come into my house. I'll serve you some warm tea. You must be exhausted. I don't have nice chairs yet, but we can sit down around the table and let the men take care of things here."

"Oh," Antje said, "that sounds so good!" The Van Haitsma women, along with the De Groot children, followed her to her cabin.

"Some of our neighbor ladies will want to meet you," the tea lady said. "We live pretty close together. And that feels good. For comfort's sake we like living near each other. We are learning to be afraid of some dangers, but also learning to trust God in the middle of it all. The *Dominee* keeps reminding us every Sunday that God is covering us with His protection."

"And God is showing us how to live here and make this more and more the land that He has promised. But it has been hard work and slow going. A few of our folk have given up here and have moved away to more settled areas."

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 497. Wabeke, B., *Dutch Emigration to North America, 1624-1860*, p. 126.

⁸⁹ Lucas H., *Memoirs*, p. 112.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 24.

Antje asked, “How about *Dominee* Ypma and the group that came from Friesland a year ago?” And Annie added, “My brother Eke was in that group and we finally got a letter months after they left. He wrote that they were grateful to have made the journey, and are seeing the possibilities here.”

“Ya, “spoke up her hostess. “They have taken land a few miles east. They wanted clay land for their farming. We here were happier with our soil. We wanted to be close to the water so things we make can be delivered to Chicago and the East. And we wanted to be able to bring in supplies from the other places by water. Overland to here is still pretty difficult.”^

Sjoukje observed, “We did see some trains along the rivers and lakes we traveled on. But until now our whole journey has been by water.”

After their sociable teatime visit with the new friends, the Van Haitsma ladies and the De Groot children wandered over toward where the men had gathered. One of the men called to the ladies, “Come, we have been invited to Rev. Van Raalte’s home for dinner.”

They walked toward the log cabin that Rev. Van Raalte called home. It was one of the first buildings put up in the new *Kolonie* about one and a half years ago. The Reverend spoke up, “Rev. Ypma has been talking about you. He is looking forward to seeing you come to his new community. He said that some of his church people will help you put up your homes on the land you choose. That has been a strong pattern here. People help each other with such generosity.”

Johannes whispered to Sjoukje, “Imagine that. Going to the Reverend’s for dinner. I never once set foot inside a parsonage in Friesland!”^

They entered the log house and Johannes was shocked. In that moment Johannes gained a deep respect for the Reverend Van Raalte. He said to himself, “If the Reverend is willing to live like this for over a year now, he must be quite a follower of Jesus. But I hope it doesn’t take us this long to make a comfortable home.”

Rev. Van Raalte said a bit more quietly, “I expect you might be disappointed in what you see so far. Try to remember it is temporary. But it has served us for a year now and we have plans for a nice frame house real soon. A lot of the way we now live is only for a time. We keep dreaming about the way things will be, the Lord willing. Already we are getting planking from mills in the *Kolonie* and other places. Already we are shipping wood products to other cities^”. Now the City is still in our dreams. But it won’t be long and it will be a reality.”

He continued, “I’m glad you have come to be part of the *Kolonie*. You will also become part of the future that our Lord God has in His mind for this place. Please come and sit down.”

“These chairs and table were made by Jan Kolvoord in his turning mill in the village of Groningen that you will see tomorrow. Soon he will be making even nicer furniture. The flour that we are using for bread is being milled by his wife in the little mill by the Black River. God is providing power by the water, just as He provided power with the windmills in the Netherlands. God has been good to us.”

Mrs. Van Raalte turned from tending the fireplace, “Welcome to our humble abode,” she said. “We are pleased that you have come to the City for a new home and land. Yes, everything is simple now,” she added, “but it soon will be better than most of us had it back home. And for our children, there is a great and grand future here in America. Please don’t be discouraged by what you see today. Join us in our dream of what can be by God’s will.” It was evident to Johannes that Mrs. Van Raalte had come from a family of some standing, and yet she seemed completely comfortable at her own cookfire.

Listening to the kind words of Reverend and Mrs. Van Raalte, the Van Haitsmas experienced a shift in their hearts and minds. Something of the dream was shaping up in their hearts. “If the Reverend and the Missus can live like this for a time, we can do it too! If the Reverend’s Missus can be a cook in her own home, we can do it also.”

The Rev. Van Raalte took off his cap, and all the men followed suit. He began to pray, “Oh, Lord our God, You have brought these families into this *Kolonie*. ‘Ebenezer,’ Lord, to this point You have helped us. We are so grateful. These folk have been spared through the difficult journey over ocean, rivers and lakes. Now they are here on these shores. Please bless and keep them from sickness, discouragement, and the pestilences they may confront. Bless them with strength for the rebuilding of their lives here in this new land, and strengthen their faith through it all. We ask now for Your blessing on this food that mother has cooked. In Jesus’ name, amen.” All the men returned their caps to their heads. Rev. Van Raalte broke out in a Psalm of thanksgiving and praise and the whole group joined him, their strong voices ringing in the little cabin.

The newcomers were thoroughly enjoying the Van Raalte family’s hospitality over the one-pot meal. Before long they began bubbling over with questions. Tjette, the father spokesman, asked, “Is Rev. Ypma’s place far from here?”

Rev. Van Raalte responded, “It is only a few miles away. He chose good clay land for the village he is gathering around him. I will take you there tomorrow and you can begin to lay claim to your land. What you could hardly expect back home in becoming land owners, will become possible for you here. In just this past year many people have been able to start developing the dreams they have for this new land of opportunity. But, I guess I better warn you, it is going to be hard work for a while.”

Tjette and his sons said almost together, “We are not afraid of hard work. We have always carried our share of the load.”

“I’m sure you have,” spoke Rev. Van Raalte, “and I know that your new neighbors will be there to give you a hand. Maybe they will teach you some new skills, like cutting down these mammoth trees. We all had to learn that the hard way. Thankfully, some of God’s children, our Indian neighbors, have been very helpful in teaching us things we needed to learn. Many of them have sold their land and moved north where they could live their own way. Some of them have stayed and are friendly and helpful neighbors. You may find that they are also quite curious about us too.”^

Rev. Van Raalte continued, "Tomorrow I will lay out a map for you and show you possible land that you can buy. Some is in my care and some is in Rev. Ypma's care and some is owned by American speculators. It is too dark to see things on the map now. And it is getting late. We do have a log house available for you to sleep in tonight. Many of our neighbors have also slept there their first night in the *Kolonie*. Sleeping is on the floor, but it is out of the weather, and protected from the animals." He turned to his son Benjamin, "Ben, would you bring these folk to the log cabin for the night? I expect that they are tired out and would be glad to retire."

They stood up and, after thanking the Van Raalte's for their hospitality, they followed Ben out to the log cabin available for newcomers. This would be their second night in their new country and already it somehow was beginning to feel a bit like home.

In the morning the Van Haitsma family began to stretch out their backs and shoulders into supple movements. Then they began the task of packing up their bedding and goods back into the crates for moving to their new home.

A knock on the door startled them. A voice calling, "Neighbors, we have some porridge for you for breakfast. It's all ready. Please come and join us." Antje said, "I wondered how we were going to have breakfast here. Well, all, come on. Somebody is taking care of us!" She pushed open the door of the cabin to see the welcoming face. The family stepped out into the forest surrounding them. "Thank you," spoke Antje. "We will be glad to share some food with you."

Mrs. Grootenhuis said, "I expect you are tired enough of the Johnny cake biscuits. We have some oatmeal porridge with very tasty maple syrup."

"That sounds delicious," Tjetje said. "We have not had much variety on the journey. That maple syrup sounds awfully good!"

Mrs. Grootenhuis responded, "It's one of the products the Indians showed us how to make. And just like them we sell it to the stores in Grand Haven and Saugatuck. It has been a good cash crop, especially one that we can make before beginning the spring plantings."

"It sounds like," said Johannes, "the Indians have been very good to the *Kolonie* folk. We had heard stories about them being savages and all."[^]

Wopke asked, "What kind of goods do people here want to get from the towns?"

She replied, "Coffee is one thing. We do prefer to have real coffee instead of the roasted corn coffee. And potatoes. Last season most of our seed potatoes were eaten by squirrels. But come and sit down at the table."

They all sat down to eat. The adults and the girls sat at the table and the boys on benches nearby. After morning devotions, the group enjoyed the tasty meal together.

And Mrs. Grootenhuis continued her story. "When we first came here with the good Reverend, we used a big crate for a table; now we have a real table and chairs. What a big change in a year!"

We have our gardens; farmers have been harvesting early crops. Some have gotten some hay from the grassland along the Black River. A few people have paid their neighbors to clear some acres for oats and rye, corn and potatoes. Most of us have to plant our gardens around the trees.

“Jan Kolvoord built a small water-powered mill and when he is away in Saugatuck making furniture at the lathe, his wife continues the milling. She is providing us with flour and meal. How nice to have it produced here instead of going to Grand Haven. We do have regular boat service along the lake shore, but it is nice to have home-grown food. More and more we grow our own food. Also we now have a blacksmith, a weaver, a general store and more. Even regular weekly mail service. ⁹¹What a difference a year makes!”

Sjoukje said a bit fearfully, “It still looks kind of primitive. Is that firepit outside where you do most of the cooking?” Their hostess said, “We started out that way, with the forked sticks and the strong bar across to hold the pan over the fire. Now many of us have stoves inside, but when the weather is warm enough, I will still do quite a lot outside. When you first have your log cabin, I’m sure you will too. And of course those ashes are helpful in making soap for our washing.”

“Hey,” piped up Wiebe, “I see Rev. Van Raalte coming out of the woods.” Heads turned to see the Reverend striding towards them with papers under his arms.

“Well, good morning,” he said. “I see you’re getting acquainted and being well cared for. That’s so wonderful here; everybody is helpful for their neighbors. What a wonderful Christian community! That’s what our dream really is all about. **Material blessings are a bonus. Spiritual blessing is our prime hope and dream.**”[^]

“Thanks again, Reverend,” spoke up Tjette. “We certainly have been treated royally here from the moment we arrived. We who are strangers have been entertained like angels. It gives us reason to take courage and build hope for what lies ahead for our family.”

Wopke asked, “Reverend, what did you see here to choose this area?”

Van Raalte chuckled, “I have asked that same question myself a few times, so let me tell you as well as I can. In spite of the deep woods and isolation, I could see the rich soil of the woods ready for grass and grain, higher prices elsewhere, nearby resources for factories and waterways, lesser deep frost this side of the lake, and great fruit-growing possibilities; job opportunities for thousands without too much scattering, and lots of land available.”⁹² He ticked them on his fingers one by one. “One more reason,” added the Reverend, “is that this area was close enough to other communities where some Hollanders have already settled. And at the same time it is distant enough that we can be by ourselves to create a supportive community where we can worship God freely, and encourage each other.”

⁹¹ Pieters, A., *Settlement*, p. 90. *The Christian Intelligencer* of Oct. 28, 1847 quotes an estimated population of 7 in Feb., 1847 to 1700 by year’s end. Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 475.

⁹² Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 483-484.

“Now, “said Van Raalte, “I would like to talk with you about your land possibilities. You’ve said you would like to settle near Rev. Ypma. Did you hear that they have named their village after your home province? There really is not much of a village yet, but already there are some twenty families from Friesland who are working their forest and land. Some more from Gelderland and Noord Holland live near them.”

Van Raalte continued, “A few miles this side of Vriesland is the new village named Zeeland. And between Zeeland and Vriesland is a fairly large swamp that makes traveling directly to Vriesland pretty much impossible right now. However, I rather suspect that the section line will become the main road between Zeeland and Vriesland if they can find a way to put a road through that swamp.”

“Let me stretch out this map on the table for you. Back in the 1830s the government had surveyors come into this whole area and map it out into mile square sections.” Pointing to the middle of Section 22, Rev. Van Raalte said, “This area is where Rev. Ypma has built his log house and next to his property is the burial grounds we had to start using because there were so many deaths last year. Now on the northeast corner of Section 22 are forty acres that I was able to buy from the government and they are for sale. That land is less than a half mile from Rev. Ypma’s place. And a little further west in Section 22 is another parcel I have for distribution. I also have some land in the southeast part of that same section. The other land around there is part of what Rev. Ypma purchased from the state. Those lands are for him to distribute for sale.”⁹³

“As you probably know, each group that came as a congregation pooled their money to buy parcels the state had for sale.⁹³ Quite a few immigrants paid into the community treasury as much as they wanted to buy for \$1.25 per acre. However, over the past year a few people sold the land they had bought so they could move into a town, and some land became available that way. So you do have some choices.

“I think,” continued the Reverend, “maybe what we need to do is take a trip over to see Rev. Ypma and find out what lands he has available. I suggest we leave your crates here and have your ladies and children stay here while you adults and I go to see Rev. Ypma. I think we can do that over two days. What do you think of that?”

Pa said to Wopke and Johannes, “Let’s ask the ladies.” The men turned to Antje, Annie, and Sjoukje, and asked, “What do you think? Would it be okay for you ladies to stay here with the children while we men take a two-day trip with the Reverend to Rev. Ypma’s place to decide on land to purchase?”

The ladies spoke up, “Ya, that’s fine with us. We can rest up a bit and maybe even do some of our wash.”

Jetse and Wiebe had mixed feelings about the idea, “Well, we’d like to go along, but staying in the City seems like a fun thing to do. Okay, we’ll stay.”

⁹³Vriesland RCA Minutes, Introduction.

“That’s settled, then,” said Tjette. “We will go with the Reverend and scout out the land to buy where we would like to build our homes and farms, and then we’ll come back to get you.”

Rev. Van Raalte said, “You men need to pack some food and drink and some blankets, for just in case. We will take a flatboat up the Black River as far as we can. We did build a wagon road to Zeeland last winter,⁹⁴ but for our trip to Vriesland it is easier to take the Black River as far as we can and then we walk. Let’s see if anyone is ready to take a load up the river, or to get one.”

Supplies gathered and goodbyes exchanged, the four men walked over to the lake edge to see who might be there. Rev. Van Raalte called out to a boatman on the north side of the lake. “Ho! Are you going up river?”

“Ya,” the boatman called back, recognizing the Reverend. “Do you need a ride?”

“Ya,” Rev. Van Raalte responded, “we’d like to get to Groningen. Can you take us along?”

“Sure,” returned the boatman, “You may have to help with the pole or oars.”

“We are experienced bargemen,” called out Tjette. “We can manage our part.”

“All right,” called back the boatman, “I’ll slip alongside and take you on.”

In just a few minutes he was at the south shore and the men jumped onto the flatboat. Rev. Van Raalte said, “This is the way we will move your crates and family when you are ready to take charge of your land. It will be about five miles to Groningen where about a dozen families have established themselves and are making a little town of the place.”

Wopke said, “This looks a little more like our canals and rivers back home where we plied the waters with all kinds of loads.” The Van Haitsma men took turns poling the flatboat up the river. It was a pleasure to once again do this familiar task.

“This is the quickest way to get to Groningen,” Rev. Van Raalte said, “because walking through the woods is not a straight path and only partly cleared.”

“What a beautiful river,” mused Johannes. “This is a beautiful country. I wonder what it will look like when all the trees are cleared? Back home we had so few trees left. Will all this be spoiled when it is denuded?”

Going up the river these new settlers could occasionally see a little log house here and there amidst the trees. They were more and more in awe of the beauty in this part of God’s creation. Almost reluctantly they arrived at the dock by the landing built by Rev. Van der Meulen and friends the year before. Rev. Van Raalte said, “The Reverend built this as a welcome place for those like you coming up the river and facing the land journey to wherever they might be going. All the people who settled Zeeland, three miles through those woods, came through here. And

⁹⁴ Pieters, *Settlement*, p. 88.

the people who settled Drenthe and Vriesland also came through here. From this spot they had the option of which direction to go. But from here they all had to walk an Indian trace through the woods.

Rev. Van Raalte continued, “Few people can follow those Indian traces. We got lost a few times on our first forage here. If we hadn’t had help from some Indians, we might never have found our way. Jan Rabbers, who pulled this village of Groningen together, has an unusual ability to follow those Indian traces.⁹⁵ Many times he has helped me guide people to where they wanted to go. Last year I was sick and Mr. Rabbers was the guide for Rev. Ypma to get to where Vriesland was founded.

“Mr. Rabbers has started some industries here to provide shingles for roofs, timbers for building houses and barns, wood for furniture, staves for shipping to Chicago, a school for teaching the children and even adults in the English language, and he started a satellite congregation for the church of Zeeland. And Mr. Veneklasen set up a brick-making factory here. All the clay available around here along with the ability to ship on the river makes this an ideal spot for his business.”⁹⁶^

Wopke remarked, “He seems quite an entrepreneur. A good kind of man to have in a village.”

“I’m sure you’ll soon meet him. Many of us use this route like a big road,” said Rev. Van Raalte.

After the flatboat pulled up to the dock and they tied up, Rev. Van Raalte and the Van Haitsmas put their bundles on their backs and started to follow the old Indian trace to Vriesland. Rev. Van Raalte explained, “The trace is not direct. We have to go a bit south to get to where the swamp crossing will allow us to cut through the trees without going all the way through Drenthe.”

“I rather expect,” he added, “that someday there will be a road that cuts through the swamp directly from Zeeland to Vriesland. The section line goes straight to Zeeland from where I suggested you may want to buy. But before thinking about that, we need to visit with Rev. Ypma.”

Tjette remarked, “Reverend, you’ve learned so much this past year. Now you are able to find your way, but I can’t begin to see that there is a path.”

“Ya,” said Rev. Van Raalte, “A year ago I couldn’t begin to follow a trace, not even a line of blazes on the trees.”

Johannes observed, “I haven’t been able to see the blazes either. I would get completely lost out here by myself.”

Rev. Van Raalte chuckled, “There’s a funny story about that. Two men had gone through the woods to go to visit a neighbor. It was a bit late in the day when they started toward home. They found themselves wandering around, not having any idea how to get home. They must have been

⁹⁵ Schooland, M., *De Kolonie*, p. 155. Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 160.

⁹⁶ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 421.

circling around for an hour or more and were getting worried. Then their ears heard some noise; they stopped, and heard someone singing in the woods. Following the sounds, they came to a small clearing and saw a small cabin. They said to each other, 'Hopefully we have found someone who maybe can show us the way home.' And then they realized it was their own cabin!"

'You'll learn," added Rev. Van Raalte, "but it will take a while. You can see we have followed a dry ridge from Groningen. Pretty soon we will go to lower ground and we'll follow a strip of firm ground across the swamp. Then we'll climb up a dry ridge and at the top we'll follow a trace to Rev. Ypma's place in the middle of Section 22."

"East of where we are now is the settlement of Drenthe, a few miles further south are settlers from Overisel, and a few miles west are people from Graafschap-Bentheim. Zeeland, a bit north and west of here, already has eighty houses. In Drenthe a lot of land has been cleared and they have harvested considerable potatoes and corn that has provided food for many of us in the *Kolonie*. Within one year there's been a lot of development, although that's hard to see from the middle of the forest."

"Well, I'm sure glad we have you as our guide," said Tjette.

Rev. Van Raalte, occasionally checking his compass, said "There is an Indian living near the swamp and Groningen.⁹⁷ He goes about his business and bothers no one. Some have found him hanging around their homes. If you see him, and if you have some food with you, be sure to share it with him. Someday when you need help, he may be the one to return the favor."

He continued, "When I first came to explore this land in the winter of 1846, Rev. Smith, who ministered here many years before we arrived, introduced me to his Indian friends who have been very helpful. I remember that one time, because of the deep snow, an Indian invited me to stand on the back of his snow shoes, and as we moved our arms and feet together, he helped me look over the land for possibilities."⁹⁸^

When the group arrived into lower land, Rev. Van Raalte said, "Be careful to watch where you plant your feet. Use the same spot where my feet land. That way we will get through the swamp safely. It won't take long." Trustingly they followed the Reverend's footsteps. Soon they were going uphill again and enjoying seeing the clay soil, so much like home.

"It's only a little further now," Rev. Van Raalte encouraged them. "We should hear either Rev. Ypma singing to the rhythm of his axe, or see him by his cabin."

Sure enough, a few minutes later they could hear singing and the whack of the axe. Following the sound, they saw Rev. Ypma resting his axe as he looked for them through the trees. "Welcome, friends," the Reverend called out.

⁹⁷ Swierenga, R., *Mission*, p. 46.

⁹⁸ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 483.

Rev. Van Raalte returned the greetings. Tjette added, "Hello, Rev. Ypma, it's good to see you again on this side of the ocean."

"Ya. Welcome to Vriesland in America! I am so glad you have made it safely. Please come to my house, where my wife has some coffee and refreshments ready for you."

Approaching the Reverend's loghouse, Johannes' heart sank. This loghouse was pitiful compared to Rev. Van Raalte's. It had walls of logs set upright. There was no door in the doorway, only a blanket hanging to keep the weather out.⁹⁹

Entering the cabin didn't lift Johannes' spirits. More blankets covered the window holes. Crudely made chairs were around a crate, its side resting on a stump. And a dirt floor. Rev. Ypma noted, "We've been busy cutting down trees to make space for planting. This is a sad-looking place right now, I'm sorry to say. We do have plans to start a frame home soon. But let's have a cup of coffee."

They sat around the table while Mrs. Ypma served the coffee for them. Meanwhile Rev. Van Raalte started the conversation, "As you can guess, we have come to look over the land and see what is available for the Van Haitsmas to purchase. I brought my map along to see the parcels of land that are still available for purchase. Let's compare with your map and they can pick out what they would like to buy."

Tjette said, "Ya, we would like three pieces of land that are close together so we can help each other. With the price at \$1.25 an acre, I am looking for forty acres, Johannes is looking for twenty acres and Wopke for eighty acres."

Rev. Ypma laid his map on the table and pointed to his properties in Sections 22 and 15. Then he said, "Here in the center of Section 22 is the log house we are living in. Right now we are still having our worship services here. We decided to place our cemetery alongside also.¹⁰⁰ Last month Mr. Tede Ulberg claimed the land just north of me at the north edge of the section."¹⁰¹

Wopke asked, "Are there three parcels the sizes we are looking for still available in the neighborhood? We do want to settle in this area with the other Friesians already here."

Rev. Van Raalte pointed out, "On my map I show forty acres available in the north east corner of Section 22, just one quarter mile from here. I think I see that on Rev. Ypma's map, there is a twenty acre piece of land right north of our cemetery, and just west of the forty acres. Then I see that just east of the forty acres in Section 23 and only about a quarter mile south of the section line is an eighty acre piece. These are all nice clay land like in Friesland, and they are all next to each other or quite close."

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹⁰⁰*Vriesland Cemetery Records.*

¹⁰¹US Census, 1850.

Talking about what land to purchase did lighten Johannes' spirits. Tjette made his choice. "The forty acres on the north east corner of Section 22 sounds like what I would like to buy."¹⁰²

"I can only afford twenty acres. So that piece of land on the north section line just west of Pa sounds good to me," Johannes said.¹⁰³

Wopke said, "Those eighty acres on the next section east, touching the forty acres Pa has chosen, would serve me well."¹⁰⁴

Rev. Van Raalte noted, "This land is higher than the swamp we came through, and that should make it quite workable for you."

"Now what we have to do," Rev. Van Raalte said, "is for all of us to go to the land office in Ionia and make the claims and sign the papers for these pieces of land.^ I know you haven't walked the land yet. Maybe you would like to do that before we return to the family in the City."

"Ya, I am eager to see the land before we finalize our purchases. And I'm sure the ladies will want a report and help make a final decision before we make the trip to Ionia," Tjette spoke for them all.

Rev. Van Raalte said, "Let's get back into our wet *klompen* and take a look at these pieces of land; at least what we can see of it under all those trees. I expect you folk will know quality clay soil when you see it. The people in Drenthe were more interested in sandy soil like where they came from."

Johannes considered, "Isn't it amazing how the Lord provides even a variety of soils that allow people to settle on familiar land."

"Ya," Rev. Van Raalte responded, "and for those who want to create businesses or industry, God even supplied for those opportunities. I am glad that through the wisdom of new friends in this land, God provided a direction to this *Kolonie* area that will provide for all us different folk. Some are already shipping the wood and sugar products to Chicago and other places. I had some ideas of what would be needed for our *Kolonie*, but God has provided above and beyond what I expected and hoped."

"Well," said Wopke, all business, "I think it's time we look over our prospective land so we can tell our families all about it."

¹⁰²Swierenga, R., *Real Estate Sales by Albertus C. Van Raalte*. Purchased May 11, 1848 \$50 NE1/4 NE1/4 S22 T5N R14W 40A. Sold on Aug. 23, 1848 to Tiete (Tjette) W. Van Haitsma \$50 NE1/4 NE1/4 S22 T5N R15W 40A. On Aug. 23, 1848 Tiete W. Van Haitsma for \$50 purchased from van Raalte NE1/4 NE1/4 S22 T5N R15W 40A which covers 40 acres in Vriesland. (Van Raalte's sales). This property has been in the Van Haitsma family until nearly 2000 when a garage and restaurant purchased it.

¹⁰³US Census, Zeeland Twp, 1850. Van Haitsma *family legends*.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid*.

Rev. Ypma chuckled, “You may not see much land. As you’ve already noticed, the trees are such a complete covering. But you should be able to tell the good quality of the soil here. It is a lot like Friesland. I think Rev. Van Raalte here knew we Friesians would enjoy a taste of home.”

Tjette said, “I think we’ll appreciate that too. But I rather suspect we might miss our barges, as I’m sure you did, Rev. Ypma.”

“Ya,” agreed Rev. Ypma. “Moving here brought us big surprises. But we have made some good progress in leveling off these trees. Although,” he added, “with doing preaching and visiting my parishioners, I haven’t made as much progress as some of the others here.”

Rev. Van Raalte added, “I expect as time goes on, we will see that the trees are not our biggest challenge. Keeping faith with our God will prove to be a much bigger difficulty, especially when we see the future quality of our lives. Here, in this magnificent country, many of us will become landowners with acreage beyond anything we’ve ever seen or imagined back home. But to get there will be a back breaker.”

He and Rev. Ypma listed off the names of various kinds of trees as they wandered over the acreage. Johannes wondered aloud, “Will we ever get to know all about those trees?”

Rev. Ypma chuckled, “You will get to know more about those trees than you ever would care to learn. When you cut them down with an ax, each tree becomes its own character, and you know you have to beat him.”

Slowly the men moved toward the section corner. Tjette said, “I see a bit of drainage running through the trees.”

Rev. Van Raalte said, “This is part of the drainage area of the Black River that we poled down earlier.”

Every so often one of the men kicked loose some dirt to see what it looked like below the surface. Tjette observed, “This looks like good land. I think I will be very pleased to buy this corner of the section. What do you boys think?”

Wopke and Johannes both agreed. When Rev. Ypma noted that he also had two parcels of land on either side of the one where they were walking, Johannes said, “Ya, the twenty acre piece to the west looks good to me.”

And Wopke agreed, “The eighty acre piece to the east of Pa’s choice will be good for me.”

In the gathering dusk the group of happy men walked back to Rev. Ypma’s place. Rev. Ypma suggested, “We invite you to use the citadel guest cabin tonight.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately it doesn’t keep the rain out very well, so you’ll have to cover your goods. We keep that cabin available for new families. Better take this lantern along.”

¹⁰⁵ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 285.

Rev. Ypma chuckled as he recounted a story. “Not long ago,” he said, “I was visiting one of our families with sick children. Then in the semi-darkness I couldn’t find my way back home. It was a good thing my wife thought to light a lantern. In the shadows I was barely able to see, but I saw the lantern and found my way home. One time our friend Eke had been looking around on his acres and lost track of his home. After a while, he saw a cabin in the shadows and went to it to get directions. Then he found out it was his own home!”¹⁰⁶

“Ya,” agreed Rev. Van Raalte, “Many a person has lost his way, even when they were close to home.”

Rev. Ypma pointed to the trail to their cabin for the night. He explained, “You will want to keep your clothes on during the night to keep warm and a bit protected from the packed dirt floor. We haven’t had the time to line up squared logs for a floor in there.”

In the dusk they found the cabin. Tjette said, “I can hardly believe that Reverend. They have been here a whole year, and he has been busy helping others with land purchases. Helping them build their log homes. Digging around getting some crops in the ground. He hasn’t even taken the time to put a decent door on his home. His wife too must be a gem. They have put up with so much hardship. And then he doctors people back to health and buries those that don’t make it.”

Rev. Van Raalte added, “There’s even more. The community that called Rev. Ypma to be their minister assured him his trip would be paid for, but so far he has hardly been paid anything back. Nor has he received much pay for his ministerial services. The truth is that nobody has much cash.”[^]

“You know,” Johannes broke the silence, “I’ve been thinking about marking this day as something special. Remember when the people of Israel were looking at their promised land. Today we have decided that this is our promised land, right here in the wilds of America. I propose that we read the words from Deuteronomy 8 and 10:12-22. And every year on this day, August 23, we read these same words. God has brought us across the wild ocean, and through the snaking waterways till we found the promised land we now are claiming in His name,” said Johannes.

The men doffed their hats and bowed their heads. Rev. Van Raalte pulled out his pocket Bible and read the suggested scriptures. “That was a very good idea, young man,” Rev. Van Raalte said to Johannes. “This is a momentous event in your journey and also in your faith.”

Soon Rev. Van Raalte and the Van Haitsma men settled down on the bare floor, hoping for a dry night. It didn’t take long to fall asleep after the long walk from the City and looking around to decide on the land purchases. The morning came early, but all were awake early too.

“Trees, trees, trees!” exclaimed Johannes, remembering the land he was expecting to buy from Rev. Ypma’s kitty of land. “I don’t know what kind of trees they all are, but they are huge! It is going to need mighty strong arms and a sharp ax to bring them down. And then somehow we

¹⁰⁶*ibid.*, p. 288.

will need to bring them to where they will be made into usable lumber. That's another thing we'll have to learn. I have no idea how long it will take to clear those acres or how soon we'll have land that we recognize as farmland."

Wopke added, "I'm already thinking that I would like to hire some experienced help to cut down those "sons of Anak." There probably are some neighbors around that are cash poor and would like to make some money."

Johannes chuckled, "I guess you're looking at one of those cash-poor immigrants right here. But I think I'll be working on my own giants."

The men were more than ready for the breakfast Mrs. Ypma was preparing. "We are very grateful for your hospitality," Tjette told her. "You are showing us what good neighbors we will be blessed with here. That will please our wives very much." Turning to Rev. Ypma, Tjette asked, "But what about that business of going to Ionia. How far is that? How long will that take?"

Rev. Ypma responded, "We'll have to set a date to go there together. It will take several days. And maybe there'll be other new arrivals who will also need to record their land purchases. So possibly next week, after Sunday. What do you think, Rev. Van Raalte?"

"Ya, next week sounds good to me. We can come back here on Monday and go on the trace to Grand Rapids and then on to Ionia. It's getting so I know the trails pretty well. We shouldn't have any fear of getting lost unless we are on the trail into the dark evening."

Breakfast finished, Rev. Van Raalte spoke up, "Well, as soon as we can get ourselves together here, we need to be on our way back to the City. Tomorrow your family can move your belongings over here."

Wopke agreed, "Sure thing, our wives will be most excited to see the land we expect to live on."

"And I'm most eager to buy a sharp axe to start bringing down those trees," announced Johannes.

Rev. Van Raalte chuckled, "You'll need a sharpening stone too just to keep that axe sharp. They don't keep their edge for long with these trees to attack."

Later in the day, after hearing occasional Psalms echoing through the woods, they began to smell the smoke from the concentration of houses in the City. "I hope the ladies have something ready for supper," Johannes murmured.

It was Wiebe who first sighted them coming off the flatboat. "What did you find?" he hollered. "Is it good land we are going to?"

“Sure is, little brother!” Wopke shouted back at him. Soon their families gathered around them. “It is wonderful clay land,” Pa exclaimed. “I know we’ll have to cut down those huge trees, but that will expose marvelous land just like back home.”

“When can we go to the land?” asked Jetse.

“Tomorrow, impatient one,” Johannes said. “I will need to buy an axe and a sharpening stone. We already hired a flatboat to take us and our stuff up the Black River, and then an ox team and wagon to take us over to the new village that’s called ‘Vriesland.’ Imagine, we’ll be moving from Friesland to Vriesland!”

“Alright, men,” Antje interrupted. “Now it’s time to eat while we can still see what we’re eating.” The Van Haitsma family settled around the makeshift table in their guest home. Pa offered prayer and they hungrily dug into the potatoes and pork that the ladies had prepared.

In the morning Pa went to the river to make sure the flatboat was ready. Soon he returned to the guest home and announced, “The flatboat is waiting to take us up river,” he said. All family members immediately began hauling their cases and crates to the shore to be loaded on. Pa said, “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I am glad this is the last arm of our journey by water. It has been long and wearisome.”

“Ya, I wholeheartedly agree,” responded Ma. “It will be very good to live on land again.”

Johannes hurried to the group who were impatiently waiting for him. “I found my sharp axe, and some new wooden shoes. Now I’m ready to cut down those trees.”¹⁰⁷

“Oh, Johannes, I hope you get all the trees cut down before you wear out the wooden shoes,” laughed Sjoukje.

“Maybe that’s not so bad,” Johannes joined her laughter. “I just realized that one of our new neighbors is a shoemaker. I won’t have to go back to the City to buy them.”

“Well,” added Wiebe, “there’s plenty of woods here to make more wooden shoes!”

“Now, I don’t know about that,” teased Wopke. “All my wooden shoes were made out of willow, and I didn’t see much willow around these woods. Back in Holland those willow trees grew along the canals. Maybe our neighbor will be making shoes from leather.”

They settled onto the flatboat for poling up the Black River. Upon arriving at Rabber’s village, Pa asked about Popke Steginga, whose ox team he had hired.¹⁰⁸ Mr. Rabbers pointed him to Popke’s loghouse.

¹⁰⁷ Van Haitsma, *Family Legends*.

¹⁰⁸ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 302.

“Mr. Stegenga,” Pa began, “thank you for being willing to help bring us and all our goods to Vriesland village. I believe that you transported the Dam family last year. And they were pleased with your help.”

“Ya,” answered Mr. Stegenga, “my oxen do a pretty good job of pulling a wagon through the woods and around the swamp. Ya, I am glad to be of service.” The men concluded the deal and Mr. Stegenga returned with Pa to transfer their family and belongings to the ox-drawn wagon.

After the wagon was loaded, the women climbed on top. A bit fearfully Antje asked Mr. Stegenga, “Is it safe for us to ride up here?”

“Ya,” he answered. “The oxen seem to have instinctive intelligence and have made these trips many times without any mishap.”

Later in the day, Mr. Stegenga suggested they listen for the sounds of Rev. Ypma chopping at a tree to the tune of a favorite Psalm. The oxen followed the sound toward the home of the minister. It was good to hear his welcome in Friesian. Mrs. Ypma came outside when she heard the voices and happily greeted the family. New people from the homeland were always a welcome sight.

And for the Van Haitsma family, it was wonderful to be expected and welcomed. Mrs. Ypma invited them to come in and join them around the table. Prayer was lifted up in thanksgiving to the Lord for bringing the new family to their neighborhood. And the supper was delicious!

Once again the citadel guesthouse was available to the Van Haitsma family. “This is where you are welcome to stay until our community can help you get your log home erected,” Rev. Ypma assured them. The wagon was unloaded at their temporary shelter. Mr. Stegenga, who made the trip with them, was invited to sleep in the leanto of the manse to give the Van Haitsmas some measure of privacy.

Rev. Ypma announced, “Tomorrow some of our men are prepared to help cut logs for your cabin. I expect you will want to start with the home on your part of the section, Tjette?”

“Ya, that’s what we intended, thank you,” answered Tjette.

“By now,” said the Reverend, “you’ve seen some of our homes and have some idea of what you would like your loghouse to look like.”

“Ya,” said Tjette, “we’d like one with a loft for our boys and Sietske to sleep on. Ma and I will plan to sleep below. Climbing a ladder is getting more difficult for us. We had a hard enough time climbing down into our barge quarters.”

“And in a few years you will want to replace the cabin with a frame house, anyway,” suggested the Reverend. “So we need to think where on your acres you would want that home, and place the log house some other spot, where you might want a barn to stand. Your loghouse is likely to

become your first barn. We also want to plan where you might want to dig the well, and the privy would need to be a ways away. It is not healthy to have them too close together.”

“We would also like a split log floor,” added Tjette. “I think sleeping on a dirt floor would not be healthy for us.”

“Ya, we found that out for ourselves last year,” Rev. Ypma said. “But we did not have all the tools we needed, and time was not on our side either. We needed shelter. So some of us still have dirt floors. That will all change in time to come. But we’ve had to make do.”

“We understand that not everything can be finished off the way we might prefer,” responded Tjette.

Wopke and Johannes were busy discussing what they would need for their temporary homes. Wopke mentioned, “We did buy a pair of windows for each of our homes.”

Johannes added, “We also bought some planks from Mr. Rabbers to put doors together.”

“That was smart,” Rev. Ypma said, “you came prepared. We had a shortage of cash, so buying some of those pieces of lumber was a little more than we could afford. But that will happen soon, I expect. Well, we’ll go on home and leave you to get ready for the night.”

“Thank you so much, Reverend,” Tjette said for the family. “We look forward to what tomorrow will bring.”

“Ya,” Rev. Ypma said, “There will be some of our sturdy Friesians here first thing in the morning, ready to give you a hand. See you all in the morning.”

After Rev. Ypma left, the family spread out their sleeping blankets over a bed of leaves and prepared to get through their first night in Vriesland. How strange these cabins were. “It’s a good thing it isn’t raining, or we’d all get wet. We saw how the rain spoils good clothing and foodstuffs when we were in the City,” said Antje.

Soon it was quiet. Quiet, except for the unexpected noises of the night that kept some of them awake longer than they wanted to be. Pa whispered to Ma, “It was a lot quieter in Minnertsgea at night than here in the woods! It’s hard to know what noises to be afraid of.

“Ya,” Ma whispered back, “I guess we’ll soon learn what each noise means. See you in the morning, Pa.”

After a fitful night, Antje awoke to familiar voices. Looking out she saw Eke and Oeke Zylstra pattering outside by the firepit. Eke saw her and said, “Well, look who has arrived from the distant land of Friesland! Welcome! Coffee’s on and breakfast will soon be ready. We also have the pan heating for making bread.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Beyer, M., *Landverhuizers*, p. 92.

“What a welcome,” Antje exclaimed. “And what a sight for sore eyes! How wonderful to see friends from across the ocean.” She turned back inside, hiding her tears, “Everybody, the Zylstras are blessing us with breakfast and coffee. What a treat!”

The Van Haitsmas began pouring out of the log house to greet Annie’s brother and sister-in-law. What a reunion! Annie’s nieces and nephews came running around her too. They were all so glad to see each other.

Oeke asked, “How was your journey?”

Tjette answered, “Long and tedious.”

Eke asked, “Sjoukje, how did you fare on the ocean?”

Sjoukje responded, “Well, unfortunately, I was sick most of the time. I did not enjoy the rolling of the ocean. And I needed some help getting off the ship in New York. But I have revived. The water journey since was calm and quiet and I have recovered. God has been good.”

Eke said, “I am so glad you decided to come. And for you, I am glad that you came a year later. I know there will be a lot of hard work bringing down the trees. But now this shelter is available for your use. When we arrived, we had to live under the tree boughs for a time without much protection from the rain or the ants. At least you will start with a decent roof.”

His sister Annie agreed, “I am so grateful we do have good shelter. And to have this community help us put our houses together will be such a wonderful and welcome gift.”

Eke turned to Tjette and added, “Soon more of the men will gather and they will pick out the trees that will make the best walls for your house. Then we’ll begin cutting them down, and in a few days we’ll have your house together and you can make yourself at home.”

“That is unbelievable and so wonderful,” responded Tjette. “Rev. Van Raalte suggested that might happen, but it was hard to believe. We’ve never seen such cooperation in our lives. This is obviously a marvelous community that, despite your own hardships, is helping newcomers in such a generous way.”

Soon a babble of Friesian voices came from every direction and old friends recognized and greeted each other. There was also a scattering of dialects from the other groups settled in the area. “Oh, my” said Antje, “all these people coming here to help us?”

Oeke answered her, “We are all so glad to see more faces come. Last winter we lost too many people to illness and death.¹¹⁰ And a few people were so overwhelmed by the mighty forest that they sold out and moved to the City or further. We need you to join us to fill up the community again. Thank you so much for coming.”

¹¹⁰*Origins of Vriesland. Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction, p. 2. Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 487.

Eke's wife added, "But even in those hard days, people rallied together. Rev. Van Raalte, seeing death breaking up families, made plans to build an orphanage. He gathered jewelry from the ladies to help pay for the building. After he invited people to contribute, the Schadelle girls offered him their jewelry. He spoke to their parents and they were not so ready to allow their daughters to be so generous. But the girls persisted and the family gave in.¹¹¹ But then after the orphanage was finally built, no orphans moved in because various families took in those orphans who became part of their families. That was a wonderful response to a terrible situation! That's how the people who came here stick together and help each other."

"After the many horrible experiences of persecution back in Friesland, this sounds like a wonderful community of God's people," Sjoukje gushed.

When the men arrived, they decided who would scout out the straight, same-sized trees for the walls. Others followed them and started cutting down the trees and trimming them. Still others began to pull the trees to the home building site Tjette had picked. Sjoukje said in amazement, "How organized they are and how quick to pitch in." The most experienced men began notching the trees to fit across each other. Others started splitting some of the trees for flooring. Within hours the outline of the floor started to take shape. All the while the Psalms were rising up to heaven.

Mr. Dam stopped to explain to the ladies who were busy helping cook the noon meal. He said, "When we built our home a mile or more south,¹¹² we were in a hurry because my family was waiting to come to the new house. So we built a citadel style place like Rev. Ypma's, with a packed dirt floor. And a part chimney for ventilation. We've had to expand it some since. This house will be better having a floor of smoothed logs."

After some hours of hard work, the men took a break to rest and eat lunch.

Rev. Ypma said, "What a difference a year makes!"

Tjette asked, "What do you mean?"

Rev. Ypma answered, "Last year when we came to this land, our first shelters were a few branches stuck in the ground, a few branches over our heads and a sheet over that to keep out a little of the rain we had. We didn't have a stove to heat our food and coffee; we had to make do with an open fire. We didn't have the flour we were used to back in Friesland; everything we ate was made from wheatbran and cornmeal. Our Indian neighbors helped us learn to clean and make the corn edible. Little did we expect that we ourselves would be eating the same food that we fed our pigs and chickens back in Friesland!"

"I am so sorry," said Johannes, "that you had to endure all of that when you first came. I thought our journey was rough enough to endure. Rev. Van Raalte told us about the many deaths last winter. You've had so much sickness here, and I suspect much of it was because of lack of protection from the weather. We had no idea that waiting a year before coming would mean we

¹¹¹ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 510, 410.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.306.

avoided some of the miserable experiences you folks had. I think I will thank God that it worked out that way for us.”

Wopke joined in, “Getting seasick on the ocean, even after all our years of living on the water, that was bad. And Sjoukje had the worst of it, didn’t she, Johannes? It’s good she is feeling some better these days. We sure didn’t expect to be so uncomfortable on the big sailship. The *Marie Eduard* was a fine ship, but it felt like we were being shipped across the ocean as if we were a bunch of cows and pigs! We didn’t expect that!”

Rev. Ypma mused, “There were a few times that we seriously wondered if it was worth all we went through to get here! There are still times when I’m looking up at one of these giant trees, and sweat is running into my eyes, and my back hurts and my blisters make my hands so tender, and I ask myself, would we have made this trip here if we knew what the going and arriving would be like? At least now, a year later, we can see significant improvements. We now have some small clearings to plant potatoes and corn, even if the animals eat more of it than we get on our table.”

Eke Zylstra, Wopke’s brother-in-law, chimed in, “I remember that last year we each had to make a little tent for ourselves. We all came at the same time. Jan Rabbers walked us around the swamp to our clay land. I think Rev. Van Raalte was expecting to take us, but he was really sick at the time. It’s good that now there’s a whole group of us able and willing to take a little time between the harvest to get a log house up with you. I sometimes wish we had waited another year too.”

Tjette spoke up, “That wasn’t intentional for us. We just didn’t get around to agreeing to emigrate until this past spring. And we had to find buyers for our barges. I’m just glad we could stay on our barge until we got on the ship to take us to the harbor in France. But I hear what you’re saying about the timing. It wasn’t our wisdom; it was the hand of God.”

“And,” chimed in Rev. Ypma’s brother-in-law, Mr. Vander Toll, “we’ve learned to make a few chairs to sit around a table to eat, instead of using stumps. And our crates and barrels came in handy when they were empty to make more places for sitting and storage.”

“I can’t thank God enough,” said Tjette, “for planting us here with all of you from back home. It is so wonderful in this strange place to have familiar faces and people who talk like we do. And some of you, we even knew from back there. On board ship there were people from so many countries. We could hardly understand anybody except a few who came from near home or maybe spoke a little German. We even had a hard time understanding the way Rev. Van Raalte talked, except when we both spoke high Dutch. When we arrived here in the City, most of the people talked in dialects and it was hard to understand them. I even found it a bit difficult to understand Mr. Rabbers with his Drenthe dialect. I’m glad we can talk Friesian together here.”

Rev. Ypma turned the conversation to some immediate concerns. “One of the things we have to do very soon is to carve dowels that we can use to put the door frame and door together. We are really short on nails. A blacksmith in the City is making nails, but he cannot keep up with demand. There have been so many houses going up in the past year and now people are arriving

every day. We do want to make your house as comfortable as possible. I hope you have some sharp knives to whittle with. We have some nice oak wood here for strong plugs. It's a good thing we have good clay in this area that we can use to fill the cracks in the walls. I think in Drenthe, they have to use more grass."

"We also have to make planks for roofing shakes," added another one of the workers.

Johannes muttered to Wopke, "I can see that there are plenty of things to do when it is too dark to work outside with the logs."

Mr. Zylstra chimed in, "Then we also have to split some of the stumps from the trees we cut for the walls. I know Mr. Rabber's mill has been making some shakes, but he can't keep up with the need either. Last year in three months we went from nearly nine hundred people here to over two thousand. Our friend Dam has been working to make shingles over in the pine grove a bit west of Drenthe, but they can't keep up either."¹¹³ And if we have the energy left, some of the wood that we're not needing now, we want to cut up for firewood. Last winter we had some mighty cold days and nights. We could hardly keep warm even with the warmest of our clothing. And just like back home, we stuffed straw into our clogs to keep our feet a bit warmer.

"Back to work, gentlemen."

The next day the men appeared again and after prayer, the log house started to take shape. One good carpenter placed the window and door openings. What took six weeks to accomplish a year ago was accomplished in a few days by the group of the Vriesland community. They had learned so much and now were able to work together and build the log house quickly.

Early evenings were spent by the family making dowels and shakes and other smaller items. Soon the first house was basically completed and clay plastered between the logs. The entire Van Haitsma family and all their belongings were moved into Pa and Ma's new house.

The next week the Revs. Ypma and Van Raalte, joined by the Van Haitsma men and a few other newcomers, took the Indian trace to Ionia to register their properties.¹¹⁴ It took most of the week. They had the comfort of knowing that the boys and ladies had good shelter in their new log houses.

On the journey, many issues were shared. One day, on the return walk, Tjette said to Rev. Van Raalte, "Oh, Reverend, I am so grateful for your help these days. We would never have found the way without your good guidance. Thank you very much for being our guide. Without you, we would have been so lost."

"Ya," answered the Reverend, "being lost is a frightening experience. Let me tell you about a young girl. Last year I received a letter from a Mr. Church in Grand Rapids. He told me about a girl who had come there and didn't know anybody. The Peasley family took her in to work for

¹¹³ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 302, 408.

¹¹⁴ Swierenga, R., "Original Entries" of federal lands at the Ionia Land Office by Albertus C. Van Raalte.

them. Mrs. Peasley became concerned that the girl was so despondent. She tried to find people who might understand her, but she couldn't find anyone who spoke her language.

So Mr. Church sent me a letter explaining the girl's situation. I made a trip to Grand Rapids, and it turned out the girl spoke Dutch. She explained why she was so down. She had come because her lover had written for her to come to Grand Rapids. He forwarded the money for her trip. But she could not find him. After hearing this, Mr. Church suggested maybe the lover had meant Grand Rapids in Wisconsin. So I wrote to Dutch people there and sure enough, her lover was there.¹¹⁵ He soon came and claimed his lost friend. What a joy for this girl after such a terrible sense of being lost and alone! From that young lady I got a powerful feeling of what it might feel like to be lost."

"Oh, my," said Johannes, who also heard the Reverend's story. There were a few tears glistening in his eyes. "What a marvel to experience coming together after being so lost. Just like the shepherd's joy over the lost sheep being found again!"

After the early harvesting was finished, the men came back together to raise log houses for Wopke and Annie and for Johannes and Sjoukje. "I'm so glad," said Pa, "that we can help build each other's houses. We've learned so much. Remember," Pa reminded the men, "make sure that you put the privy as far from the well as possible. We found out from both Rev. Ypma and Rev. Van Raalte, who have studied some medicine, that cholera can spread rapidly if those two are located too close to each other."

Wopke responded, "We had enough problems with cholera in the years before we left Friesland, and we sure want to avoid messing up here."

Later in the fall, Wopke announced to Johannes, "I'm going to help both myself and our neighbors, who need the money, by hiring them to begin cutting the trees on my farm."

"That sounds wonderful," said Johannes. "I know some of our neighbors are really short of cash and would appreciate being able to do that for you. It'll also mean that your farm will be producing more quickly. Maybe even Rev. Ypma might want to work for you. I hear that he hasn't been getting paid for his work in the church."¹¹⁶ That really concerns me. But many of us have little cash left after buying our land and basic supplies."¹¹⁷

Some days later Johannes was out in the woods on his land. Determined to follow the Indians' advice, he lined up a few trees that he figured should come down like dominoes. He began with the tree that would be the last to fall, cut it half through, and went to the next one. It took a lot of cutting to complete the row and it wasn't done in a day. The day did arrive when Johannes decided to fell the line of trees. The first and second trees went down as planned. Although the process didn't work out quite as easily as he thought it would, Johannes was convinced that, with some modifications, this method was preferable to chopping down each tree by itself.

¹¹⁵ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 352.

¹¹⁶ *Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction.

¹¹⁷ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 302.

“It’s kind of amazing, isn’t it,” mused Johannes to his family at the next Sunday dinner, “that us Dutchmen, with long histories of universities and wealthy businesses, should be learning from the American Indian how to efficiently cut down trees? We do have good reason to be grateful to our Indian neighbors who have lived here for many years.”¹¹⁸

Annie interjected, “It’s also a good thing that our Indian neighbors have trails we can follow; it’s a long trek to go to Grand Rapids by foot for supplies for the store.”¹¹⁸

“Ya, we have lots of reasons to be thankful for the Indian culture already in this land. I’m just saddened that some of them feel uncomfortable with us being here. And now some of them are moving to their lands up north.¹¹⁹ I suppose it’s too much to hope for all of us to just live peacefully together?” wondered Johannes.

1848-6*

Johannes said to Sjoukje, “Rev. Ypma told me that the church group is getting too large for his little cabin. And Mr. Kaslander has agreed to have a church building on his property.¹²⁰ He lives a half mile south of the Reverend’s home so that new location will be a lot closer for the people from Drenthe to come for worship. Tomorrow a bunch of men from here and from Drenthe are going to put up a building on Kaslander’s land for a church.”

Sjoukje answered, “I will be glad to go along to help with the cooking. I don’t want to leave Mrs. Kaslander with all the work. Did the Drenthers ask to have joint worship with us?”

“Ya,” said Johannes, “they are feeling the need for a preacher and asked if Rev. Ypma would serve both our congregations. I think there still are some details to be worked out. Rev. Ypma has not been getting much salary and there’s some thought the Drenthers might be willing to share in collecting money for his salary. I guess all that needs more discussion. The plan is that on Sunday after the morning service the men will have a meeting to talk about all that.”¹²¹

“You know, it’s good that we now have such a spacious log cabin for a church,” Johannes said to Sjoukje some weeks later. “I heard from Ulberg that the Vriesland church started out by having their worship services under the oak tree by Rev. Ypma’s cabin.¹²² That sounds rather dramatic, doesn’t it, to have an outdoor cathedral with the tree branches as the ceiling. But when winter came, they moved into the Reverend’s house. It must have been very crowded.”

Sjoukje said, “Ya, all of the log homes are crowded. We have some space only because we don’t have children yet.”

¹¹⁸ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 200, 215.

¹¹⁹ Swierenga, R., *Mission*, p. 46.

¹²⁰ Van Haitsma, J., *Legends*.

¹²¹ Van Haitsma, A., *Legends. Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction. Lucas H. *Memoirs*, p. 263. The joint church broke up again in 1848.

¹²² *Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction.

Sjoukje observed thoughtfully, “I am just glad that it isn’t as far for us to walk to the new church at Kaslanders as it was to walk from the barge to church in Minnertsga.”

“Hopefully we’ll soon have the trace between us and the Kaslanders better defined,” Johannes considered.

“With the Berkompas family and the Haan families and our Van Haitsma families, and all of us from this area, we certainly will start trampling a good path all the way to the new church, I’d think,” suggested Sjoukje hopefully.

Johannes stopped to take a breather and heard someone nearby singing. He looked around and soon caught sight of his neighbor, Tede Ulberg, who was making his way around the tumble of cut trees. “Hello, Mr. Ulberg,” Johannes greeted him. “What a beautiful fall day! Are you out for a stroll?”

“Ya,” Ulberg responded. “The light in my workshop is not that good, so once in a while I need to take a break and rest my eyes.”

“Ya, I can believe the needle work in making shoes and boots can be hard on your eyes. Sit down on a stump and have a sip of coffee with me. It isn’t the best, but for now it tastes just fine.”

Ulberg remarked, “I guess that’s the way with everything here, isn’t it? We have to make do until things get better. But already I see that is exactly what is happening and we’ve only been in this land a short time.”

Johannes noted, “There is one thing that concerns me some. There’s more friction in our church than I care to see. I had hoped that all of us working together here in this new land could also have good relationships with each other in our new church.”¹²³^

“So you notice that too?” Ulberg said. “You know that I lived in Albany for about nine months before I came here. It didn’t take too long here before I could sense that there were some tensions in the church. The worst of it is that our good Reverend seems to be bearing the brunt of it.”

“I’ve been wondering about that too. I don’t really know what that’s all about. Rev. Ypma has been very kind and helpful to me and my whole family,” Johannes said.

“From what I can understand,” recounted Ulberg, “there are some folk who think Rev. Ypma was not properly called as pastor of this church.”¹²³^ Our immigrant group back in Leeuwarden were told it would be a wise idea to have a minister as part of our company traveling to this *Kolonie*. So we organized as a church and voted in elders and deacons. Mr. Dam was one of the elders elected back then. I don’t know exactly why some people are questioning if the call given to Rev. Ypma was properly done. There is suspicion that somehow the leadership group back then

¹²³/bid.

may have done a little conniving to have one of the Separated ministers called. And now some people here are challenging that. It is starting to affect our good relations with the Drenthe group and making some of the Vrieslanders uncomfortable.”

“Is that why Dam was reelected as elder?”¹²⁴ wondered Johannes.

“Ya, his election as elder in Friesland was being questioned, so Dam suggested that the congregation hold new elections. He hoped that would end the conflicts.” After a few moments of silence, Ulberg added sadly, “The Drenthe group and the Vriesland group have been worshipping together at Kaslander’s place because it is somewhat centrally located. But if the conflicts continue, I wouldn’t be at all surprised that the day will come that we stop worshipping together as one group.”¹²⁵

“That would be a real shame,” Johannes responded. “We Vrieslanders are still a small group here, and I find it so comfortable to be part of a larger church.”

“I agree. It would be wonderful to live peacefully together,” Tede offered.

“That is for sure,” agreed Johannes.

A month later, Johannes and Sjoukje were enjoying Sunday evening coffee with Pa and Ma. Pa asked, “Johannes, what happened at the church meeting between services today? I somehow didn’t get into the building for that.”

Johannes said, “It was kind of a harsh meeting. There were arguments about money between the two churches, and about who’s responsible for Rev. Ypma’s salary, and when the services should be held, and maybe having a building in each village. ^ I think our elders are hopeful that the Kaslander building would do for all.”

“So, it was not a peaceful meeting?” asked Sjoukje.

“No,” said Johannes, “one of the strong personalities was Mr. Hulst. He is a rather remarkable person, you know. We traveled over waterways to get here, but he purchased an ox and wagon and took his family overland all the way from the East coast to Drenthe.¹²⁶ My, what a journey that must have been! That strong character also showed up in his discussion. He was a leading voice in discussing arrangements between our two communities. After Hulst questioned the legality of Rev. Ypma’s call, Dam confessed that the Separatist members in the Leeuwarden group had gotten together and convinced the group to call a Separatist minister rather than one in the State Church.”

¹²⁴*Ibid.*

¹²⁵The records of Vriesland Church and the Drenthe church in 1849 seem to have hardly any suggestion of actual worship together and each had agreed to build their own worship building. They did worship at Kaslanders, who was part of the Drenthe community and on the Drenthe side of the section 22 line, now Perry St. Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 263.

¹²⁶ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 246.

Antje spoke up, “I heard that in Drenthe there’s kind of a divide between those living to the east and those living to the west. That’s not a nice feeling in the community. I’m glad we seem to have better relations here between the groups from different provinces.”¹²⁷^

“I am so pleased that in Vriesland we all do get along well together!” exclaimed Johannes. “It seems we’re all okay with using the standard Dutch language in our worship, even if we do break up into dialect groups between services. We all appreciate how nice it is to visit with others who speak the same dialect.”

One day Tjette told his family, “I have been hearing that some people can’t find food to buy here, and so I am thinking about using some of my money to bring in produce from the City so our neighbors can easily buy food supplies. I expect people will appreciate being able to buy some basics at a store closer to home. I really don’t have to make much money from that, just cover my cost and a little. We don’t have to gouge people with higher prices like I heard some merchants did in 1847 when they dribbled their products from their barge into the City.”¹²⁸

Johannes said, “Pa, that sounds like a wonderful way to help the people of Vriesland. I’ve heard my neighbor Ulberg talk about making his money making shoes, and not spending so much time working the land. So he will probably be glad to be one of your customers.”

Then Wopke said to Pa, “Annie and I have been talking about doing the same thing. If you would be willing, we were thinking of setting up a store on the south end of your farm across the road from our house. And we were thinking that maybe the Widow Tanis living right nearby might be better able to feed her family if she would work the store.”¹²⁹ Perhaps we can do this together. What do you think about that?”

Tjette thought for a bit and said, “That sounds like a good partnership. We could take turns bringing local produce to people in the City, or even Grand Haven and Collendoorn and getting needed supplies to sell here again.”

One day Jetse saw a skunk and said to himself, “I’m going to play a trick on my little brother.” He called out, “Hey, Wiebe, I see a kitten in the woods. Let’s see if we can catch it so it can be a mouser around our cabin.”

“Okay,” agreed Wiebe. “I’m faster than you and I’ll catch it first.” And off he ran after the skunk. Jetse held back and waited for Wiebe to catch the skunk. “That’s a beautiful black and white cat,” he hollered spurring Wiebe on. True to Jetse’s plan, Wiebe beat him to catch the skunk. And suddenly there came a loud cry from Wiebe. He had been hit by the skunk’s spray! “Oh, what’s wrong with this animal?” Wiebe shouted.¹³⁰

¹²⁷*Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction.

¹²⁸*Origins of Vriesland. Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction. In contrast, note the comments by Arnold Mulder in *Americans from Holland*, p. 122 that people from one province called those from another province “strangers,” not “Hollanders.”

¹²⁹ Van Haitsma, *Legends*.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*

Wiebe ran home and mother Antje smelled him coming. “Don’t come in the house,” she hollered at him. “Take off all your clothes out in the woods. And wash up at the bucket. I’ll throw you some clean clothes.” Jetse doubled over with laughter. Wiebe saw him and instantly knew he’d been tricked. “I’ll get you back for this one,” he said between tears.

Johannes and Sjoukje were having a serious discussion about money. “I’m sorry our money situation is so tight, Sjoukje,” said Johannes. “I do expect that we will enjoy more blessings as we keep on cutting trees and clearing more land. But right now I feel we have to decide what to do to make some cash. I only have two pennies left after buying this land and supplies.¹³¹ It would be nice to have a bit of black bread, and a little meat with our potatoes. We came too late in the season to plant much garden; that’ll be for spring time. I know all these biscuits are a bit tiring.”¹³²

Sjoukje added, “Maybe I could crotchet doilies and headcaps or knit some socks, and sell them. That’s at least something I could do. Our mothers taught us well to do that hand work.”

“Ya, that is a good idea,” Johannes mused, “and maybe I can learn to trap a few of the animals running around in the woods. There are muskrats and beavers living out in the wet part of our acres. A tanner has set up business in the City to take those skins, but we have to stretch and dry them.”

Ideas for making some needed cash began to flow. Johannes said, “The neighbors who helped us build our loghouse told me that there is a big need for shingles and staves to bring to Groningen for shipment. I can do some of that too.” Johannes added, “Frank Hornstra has a gun. Maybe we can shoot a deer. That could be some good meat for us all to share. If possible, I don’t want to borrow from Pa or Wopke. They also have to make this grand venture work for them.”

“I’m so sad,” murmured Johannes some weeks later. “The whole business between Drenthe and Vriesland worshipping together and sharing the minister seemed like such a great idea. Now, only months into the agreement and after building a large enough building to hold us all, we are going our own separate ways again.”¹³³

“What happened?” wondered Sjoukje. “Did they give any reasons for worshipping apart again?”

“I didn’t hear of any,” Johannes said. “Maybe the people who live east and south of Drenthe feel that the building is too far away. I think maybe differences from the Old Country, rumors, mistrust and strong personalities might all be part of it. At any rate, Drenthe is going back to using their old building near the cemetery east of the village center. And for the time being we Vrieslanders will continue to use the nice spacious building we all put together at the Kaslanders.”¹³⁴

¹³¹ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 385.

¹³² Van Haitsma, *Legends*

¹³³ *Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction.

¹³⁴ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 263.

“Ya, that is terribly sad,” affirmed Sjoukje. “I too had hoped there would be a warm unity between the people in Drenthe and us Vrieslanders.”

“I guess the only good thing about going our separate ways is that there may be less conflict between the two groups,” concluded Johannes.

1849 -1*

Wopke said to Annie, “I think we need to get a span of oxen. We’ve got to move all those logs that were cut down over the winter. And we need their help to get supplies for our store. We’ve been backpacking supplies from Grand Rapids and Grand Haven, but we simply can’t carry enough of what people want to buy.

“That makes good sense to me,” responded Annie. “We certainly want to have a good supply of the basics for people to purchase. And moving those big trees is impossible without oxen. I saw how helpful the oxen were when we moved our family and goods here last year. They seem so strong and yet gentle. They made it through the swamp so easily.”

Johannes stopped to talk with Frank Hornstra. “Say Frank, I knew we were going to be challenged by these huge sons of Anak,” he said pointing to a mammoth tree. “Now I find that we also have to deal with the smaller pesky creatures too. It’s hard to keep ahead of the squirrels, raccoons, chipmunks and rabbits.”¹³⁵

Frank responded, “I’m not very handy with my gun, but it is one way to get rid of these little critters.”

Johannes asked, “Any possibility that you can spend some time here on my acres and get rid of some of them for me?”

“I can try,” said Frank. “At least some of them I can sell for their skins. That would bring in a little cash.”

“And I’ll see if Wopke has some gunpowder in his store that you can use,” suggested Johannes. “Something’s got to be done if we’re going to keep the seed in the ground long enough to get much of a harvest in the fall.”

“And I surely could use a little money in my pocket,” Frank admitted.

Johannes and Sjoukje joined the rest of the Van Haitsma family as they trudged south through the woods, past the cemetery and Rev. Ypma’s house, to Kaslander’s place. They sloshed through the bit of marshland and got their feet wet in spite of the wooden shoes. “Oh, well,” said

¹³⁵*ibid.*, p. 216.

Sjoukje, “we’ll dry out pretty soon.” Getting wet feet was just one more bit of life in this new country.

They arrived at the church building and were glad to go inside to warm up a bit. The benches were ready for them and the table for the Reverend to preach from was at the corner of the room, quite close to the window so he could read the Bible to them. There was a hustle and bustle as people were greeting each other. Mothers and their little ones sat off to one side, the men and boys on the other. ^ The crude fireplace was lit, adding to the cozy atmosphere.

Rev. Ypma stood behind the table and led in prayer, song, Bible reading and began to preach. Johannes had a hard time keeping his eyes open. Sitting still like this after a week of cutting the giants in the land was difficult. Once in a while Sjoukje jabbed him with her elbow. She whispered, “Try to keep awake, please!” Back in Minnertsga they would treat themselves to a sweet peppermint in church. But peppermints weren’t available in Wopke’s store yet.

Two hours later, Mr. Dam walked a little ways with Johannes and Sjoukje till he came to the trail that led to his house. He said, “I’m beginning to be sorry for my part in that meeting in Leeuwarden when a few of us called Rev. Ypma. We really did not want people from the State Church to select a minister. Now it seems to be biting our behind. The Drenthers didn’t like the way Rev. Ypma preaches. And frankly I am not so happy either.” ^

Dam said farewell and turned to the trail on the right. Johannes said to Sjoukje, “Maybe I was expecting too much. Maybe there is no way to escape the bickering in the church. I was hoping that in this new land we would get away from all the arguments. It does not make me want to be part of all that.”

“But let me lighten up a bit and tell you a funny story. I heard Wopke bragging on his business smarts. He had a customer in the store looking at two bins of potatoes. She asked for the price of one. So Wopke told her the price, and then she asked about the other bin. And he quoted a lower price. She said she wanted to buy some of the more expensive potatoes. So he filled her order and she went off home. He told me that both bins of potatoes came from the same cellar and were the same quality.”¹³⁶

Sjoukje chuckled, “We have to watch that scallywag and keep him on the straight and narrow.”

Johannes joined the chuckle, “I think the Widow Tanis^ will keep Wopke honest and in line. She’s a good worker in that store.”

Johannes turned to Sjoukje, “I’m so glad we can now get our extra wood products to markets like Chicago. So many piles of lumber, staves and ashes have been accumulating on the dock in Holland. The small craft just could not keep up getting them to the dune crossing into Lake Michigan.”

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 261. Schooland, M., *Kolonie*, p. 206.

“I’d heard about the government sending people to try to make the harbor work,” responded Sjoukje.

“Ya, apparently Rev. Van Raalte convinced the government to fork out six thousand dollars to find a way to make the harbor open for shipping,”¹³⁷ Johannes responded.

“That sounds wonderful,” exclaimed Sjoukje.

“Except that they abandoned the project before getting it done,” Johannes said. “Then a few men from the City shouldered their shovels and went to work themselves. They found that if they dug a trench, the force of the water between the lakes would push more sand out of the way and so they opened up a wide and deep enough waterway that small ships could get through with their loads.”

“My,” said Sjoukje, “you’re saying that a few Dutchmen were able to create a harbor where the government could not?”¹³⁷

“Ya, just goes to show what can be done if a few people work together,” responded Johannes.

After some time in a discussion, Johannes said to Rev. Ypma, “But I thought when we came here that we would be a community to ourselves. That seemed what Rev. Van Raalte was saying all along: that we would have our own little utopia. We thought we would be able to decide things for ourselves.”

Rev. Ypma responded, “Ya, I think that’s just what we intended. We wanted to return to the 1619 Church Order and the Old Fathers. One of the reasons for isolating from other communities was just that. We wanted to keep our faith pure without interference.”

Rev. Ypma continued, “When Van Raalte was thinking about where to plant our community, he wanted a place off by itself but not too isolated. He wanted some place where we would have possibilities of getting jobs, but not so close that we would lose our way of life. Some place where we could buy things we need and maybe sell stuff that we make.¹³⁸ This location here in Michigan seemed to have those possibilities. Close enough to markets and yet far enough away.”

“But now the churches in the East have invited us to officially join with them. And the big question is how should we respond to this invitation?”¹³⁸ On the one hand, we have received so much help from the Old Dutch church in the East. The people there have been very kind and helpful to us. And on the other hand, we have this desire to just be by ourselves.”

Johannes thought about that for a while and then responded, “We do have six villages and churches now. I would think that’s a good start for a denomination of our own. And then we could be by ourselves.”

¹³⁷ Mulder, A., *Americans*, p. 128.

¹³⁸ Lucas, *Memoirs*, pp. 91, 484.

Then Rev. Ypma added, “You know, the church has always been connected to other churches. In the New Testament times they connected with each other. And the famous Synod of Dordt in the 1600s included scholars from all over Europe. Independence has never been a high ideal of the church.”

“So, you’re saying that it’s natural for churches to be joined to each other,” considered Johannes. “Maybe that’s why I’ve been uncomfortable about not joining the church yet. But at the same time, I have also been uncomfortable, thinking I should join.”

“I think,” said Rev. Ypma, “that it is just like our village needs to be connected to the other villages. Just think if we couldn’t buy things we need and what life would be like if we had to make everything for ourselves. Or think if there was no blacksmith you could buy an axe from. We do need other people in our lives.”

Johannes responded, “I know we need to be connected to God, and we need the fellowship of other Christians. But I remember reading in the newspaper the letter that Rev. Van Raalte wrote to the church in America asking for their support for the immigrants who were making plans to come to America. That letter was delivered to the Rev. Wyckoff before any of us came.¹³⁹ The thought troubling my mind is whether Rev. Van Raalte intended from the beginning to become part of the established Dutch Church in the East.”[^]

Rev. Ypma said, “You should be aware that this is by no means a done deal. We will have more opportunities to discuss this. I was present at the meeting with Rev. Wyckoff and there were people there from all the churches. Rev. Van Raalte told us that he would prepare a paper for each council to discuss the issues involved. He encouraged everyone to take time to think about it and discuss it and not to make any hasty decisions.”

“Hello, Johannes,” Tede Ulberg approached Johannes through the woods. “I had some surprising visitors yesterday.”

“Oh?” asked Johannes. “You must be an important person to be surprised by visitors. Who were they?”

“Well, our own Rev. Ypma led the way to my place and Rev. Van Raalte brought along the Rev. Wyckoff who has come from Albany to visit us in *De Kolonie*.”

“I’ve heard about Rev. Wyckoff and all the help he has given to so many immigrants coming through Albany. He’s a long way from home, isn’t he?”

“Well, I guess! They told me he had come to find out more about our *Kolonie*. The Board of Missions assigned him to make this visit.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹*ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁰ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 449.

“That sounds kind of official. Almost like he’s checking out if the *Kolonie* church is willing to join the Dutch Reformed Church here in America,” Johannes suggested.

“Well,” responded Ulberg, “That is what they came to discuss. I’m sure you already know that Rev. Van Raalte and Rev. Wyckoff had a meeting this past Monday with many of the elders and ministers.¹⁴¹ And now he is visiting more of our congregations.”

“And they came specifically to visit you?” wondered Johannes.

“Well, I did spend nine months in Albany before coming here. Maybe they wanted to check out what I might feel about a union.¹⁴² Rev. Wyckoff did talk about the benefits of a close relationship. And he made a point of assuring me that we could go our own way later if we found something objectionable in belonging with them.”¹⁴³

“On second thought,” Ulberg mused, “maybe he did want me to feel important enough so that I would say positive things about the whole idea.”

“But, as I just mentioned to Rev. Ypma the other day, we have the dream of being the *Kolonie* Church here with the freedom to worship as we think will bless the Lord. That was one of the main reasons why we left the old country,” Johannes said. ^

Ulberg affirmed, “Ya, that is an important hope. And I was not impressed with how well the church order was being followed in Albany. But I’m not sure what to say. I know how easy it is to get lost. Did I tell you when I first came here I was trying to get back to my family from visiting Rev. Ypma, and if my wife had not called out and lit a lantern, I might have been wandering around a long time?”

“Are you suggesting,” Johannes offered, “that just like the church in the Netherlands had lost its way through the years, maybe the church here in America has also lost its way?”

“Ya,” returned Ulberg, “I’m just not very confident that the Dutch Reformed Church has kept to a faithful path. Maybe we can be the lantern to guide it back. Or maybe we just need to follow the light of Jesus and stay by ourselves.”

“Well, that was the dream of the Separated Church back home, and it is one of the main reasons we came to this isolated area,” Johannes responded.

“Ya, I agree,” said Ulberg, “But Rev. Van Raalte made a real effort to paint a picture of how much the church in the East has been of help. There are things we didn’t know about here in the outlying villages.”

“Oh? What kind of things?” wondered Johannes.

¹⁴¹*ibid.*, p. 450.

¹⁴²*ibid.*, p. 286.

¹⁴³*ibid.*, pp. 288, 455.

“For one, people in the church there loaned money for buying up land for us. Like the land your family bought from him. They loaned money for the orphanage building, and other civic projects.¹⁴⁴ And of course all the help they gave so many of us along our journey,” observed Ulberg.

“So, although we in Vriesland never saw much effect of that money,” wondered Johannes, “it was important in the building of the Holland village.”¹⁴⁵

“Ya,” responded Ulberg, “So I think that Rev. Van Raalte certainly feels favorably inclined toward that church out East. Rev. Wyckoff sounded so friendly and encouraging. Rev. Ypma said that many an elder expressed appreciation for that encouraging interest. Everyone seemed impressed with the values of joining with them as a Classis. Rev. Ypma suggested that our people were ready to make that decision right then and there. And he told me that Rev. Van Raalte wisely recommended caution in making a quick decision. He offered sending some questions around to all the congregations for each church to consider what they thought we ought to do.¹⁴⁶ No decision was made to join or not. I think that was wise.”

Johannes considered, “Ya, I agree that was definitely a good decision. There seem to be enough questions floating around as to how faithfully that big church in the East is still actually following and honoring the standards they affirm.¹⁴⁷ A rash decision for or against may turn around to bite us.”

“Ya, that seemed what the ministers were thinking too,” added Ulberg. “Maybe leaving the ideas floating around will help us clarify what the Lord would have us do. I can’t imagine any reason to make a quick decision.”

“That makes sense,” agreed Johannes. “Thank you, neighbor, for sharing all that with me. You know I’ve been slow in making my decision about becoming a member of the church. So you know that I think cautiously, and I believe that’s a good way to live.”

Ulberg got up off the stump. Johannes said, “I’ll see you later. I hear the cow lowing to get rid of her load of milk.” Johannes turned towards his log cabin.

Later that month Johannes said, “You know, Sjoukje, last summer Rev. Van Raalte recommended to the older boys that they need to help their families by going to Allegan or Kalamazoo to find jobs.¹⁴⁸ They could bring home some cash for the family and also learn a little “American talk.” I think maybe I should follow that example too.

“I know we need to cut down the trees and open the land up for farming. We have put in some corn and potatoes, and we bought some piglets to fatten up for winter meat. But now seems like a

¹⁴⁴*Classis Holland*, pp. 39, 41, 51, 63, 69, 93, 101.

¹⁴⁵ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 455, 287. Sheeres, J. *Son of Secession*, p. 111.

¹⁴⁶ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 287. *Vriesland RCA Minutes*, July 30, 1849.

¹⁴⁷ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 71, 256.

¹⁴⁸ Pieters, A., *Settlement*, p. 71.

good time to find a farmer who needs some help for a month or so and maybe I can bring home some cash.”

Sjoukje reluctantly responded, “It will be lonely without you for a whole month. But I know we need to do something to get better established. We don’t have much and others don’t either. The other night Mrs. Ulberg told me that they were at Rev. Ypma’s house and found out that the Reverend did not have any food in the house for his family to eat. Ulberg went to a few neighbors and they gave some of their flour and meat and he brought it to the Ypmas. It has been a long and hard start for those first settlers.”

Johannes nodded and sighed. “That’s why I think it might be a good idea for me to find a farmer who can hire me to do some work. I know cash is hard to come by here.”

“Well,” said Sjoukje reluctantly, “maybe it is a good idea. I think I can take care of things here. And Pa and Ma are right next door and so are Wopke and Annie. I don’t think I’m going to cut down any trees, though.”

“And,” Johannes reminded Sjoukje, “Frank Hornstra has a gun handy, if needed. I will ask him to stop by once in a while.” He said, “My plan is to go to Allegan and find Judge Kellogg. His wife speaks some Old Dutch. Maybe they can point me to a farmer who needs help.”

Sjoukje wondered aloud, “You know, maybe Jetse would like to go along too. He’s big and strong enough for a man’s job.”

“That sounds like a wonderful idea. I’m glad you thought of that. I will go ask Pa for his approval. And if Jetse is interested, we can pack a little clothing and walk over to the Judge’s home in Allegan.”

So Johannes followed the trail to Pa’s house next door. “Pa,” he started, “I have decided that I’m going to talk with Judge Kellogg in Allegan to see if he can line me up with a farmer who needs help with the haying. Sjoukje and I think it would be helpful to see if we can earn a little money. We did put all our cash to work and maybe, if I can get some work for a month or so, we can get a little ahead. We were wondering, too, if Jetse might want to come along. He could earn a bit for your family too. Jetse would be a good worker. And maybe both of us could learn to speak a little ‘American.’”

Tjette thought a bit and said, “If Jetse wants to go with you, that would be okay with me. A change will do him good. Getting away from all this tree cutting and doing some regular farming sounds like a great thing for Jetse. Wiebe is old enough now to help me here. We have a lot to learn about farming in this country.”

Johannes turned to a smiling and willing Jetse, “Pack only enough to carry on your back. It’s going to take us most of the day to get to Allegan and then we have to find Judge Kellogg. That’s if we don’t get lost on the way. I’m not so good at reading trails I haven’t been on before.”

“I’ll be ready to go in the morning,” said Jetse.

When Johannes returned home, he found Sjoukje waiting. “What did Pa say?” she asked. “He said, okay,” said Johannes. “Jetse likes the idea of coming with me and I’ll be glad for his company. I just hope we don’t get lost. I can’t follow a trail as well as Rev. Van Raalte can.”

1849-2 *

Jetse and Johannes got up early and prepared to make the walk to Allegan. “Well,” Johannes asked, “are you ready for another adventure? We’ve had so many unexpected ones this past year. And now we are off to find a farmer who needs two pairs of strong hands.”

They had hugged the parents, and Johannes had said a tearful goodbye to Sjoukje. “This is hard,” he said to Jetse when they were finally on their way. “Leaving Sjoukje in this strange land all by herself. I am glad the folks and the others are close by. They will look after her. Maybe she will even try to cut down a tree,” Johannes joked. “She has been a trooper. It will be only a month, I hope.”

Johannes tried to keep up with Jetse whose younger legs were moving just a bit faster than his. He said to Jetse, “Better conserve some of that energy. It’s going to be a long day’s walk, and maybe more if we lose track of the trace.”

Jetse said, “I’ve been able to see the blazes that others from *de Kolonie* have cut in the trees. But I don’t know if we’re following the right path.”

“Ya,” answered Johannes, “It’s not like following the canals, is it?”

Hours later, after asking a few people for directions in halting “American,” they came to the little town of Allegan. Relieved to finally come to a store in the town, Johannes tried to ask the store clerk, “Can you point us to the house of Judge Kellogg?”¹⁴⁹ The clerk heard “Judge Kellogg” and took them outside and pointed to the home of Judge Kellogg.

Johannes and Jetse walked over to the largest house in Allegan and knocked on the door. It was opened by Mrs. Kellogg who recognized the Dutch clothing and spoke in Dutch to the two farmers. “Hello,” she greeted them. “Please come in.” Sensing they had walked some distance, she called the housekeeper. “Please bring something to eat and drink from the kitchen; these men could use a little food.”

“Have you come to see the Judge?” she asked.

“Ya,” said Johannes, “we would like some help from him to find a farmer who needs a couple of men to work in the field for a while.”

¹⁴⁹ Van Haitsma, *Legends*. Kuiper, R.T., *A Voice from America, About America*, p. 81.

Mrs. Kellogg said, "My husband is still at the courthouse, and will soon come home. Please just rest for a while, and eat and drink something. He will decide what he can do for you." The housekeeper brought a plate of sandwiches and glasses of water. "I'm making some coffee," she told them. "It will take a few minutes."

The Van Haitisma brothers waited with Mrs. Kellogg in the parlor, enjoying the comfort of the lovely home. They shared their stories of immigration and she shared the history of her family that went back two hundred years in America.

Soon Judge Kellogg came home and joined them in the parlor. With Mrs. Kellogg serving as interpreter, Johannes briefly told him who they were and why they had come. The Judge reflected a few moments. He said, "I think I know a farmer not far from here who lost several workers and is in need of getting the haying done. Let me write a letter that you can take to him to ask about a job with him."

Johannes said, "That would be wonderful. Thank you."

The Judge went to his desk and proceeded to write a reference letter. Meanwhile Mrs. Kellogg sent the housekeeper upstairs to prepare a bed for the brothers to use for the night.

While waiting with Mrs. Kellogg, Johannes shared a bit more of their family story and asked some questions about farming in America. He asked, "What is the annual cycle of the general farmer in America? When do they seed their fields and harvest their crops?"

Mrs. Kellogg admitted she knew very little about farming. "I've never lived on a farm. I've always lived in the city or now in a town. I lived in New York State in one of the Dutch communities. We talked Dutch in our home, so I am able to talk the Old Dutch. And that made it possible for us to be helpful for many other immigrants that came with Rev. Van Raalte."

In a few minutes the Judge came back into the parlor. He said, "I think this letter will help you land a job with the farmer. But you know that farm work does not pay very much. In the winter, one of the best jobs for the season is logging. I was thinking I should write another letter if you are interested, this one to Mr. John Ball in Grand Rapids. He is on the committee in Grand Rapids, like I am here, to help Dutch immigrants get settled.¹⁵⁰ He owns a logging company a few miles outside of Grand Rapids. A job with him would give you more cash than most jobs." The Judge added, "So I will write another letter that you can offer Mr. Ball to see about a better job for the winter."

Johannes said, "We can't thank you enough for all your help. We appreciate your putting us up for the night, and will get out to the farmer as early as possible in the morning."

Judge Kellogg said, "You are welcome. And I will have a letter ready for you in the morning."

¹⁵⁰ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 33. Wabeke, B., *Emigration*, p. 124.

The next morning, the housekeeper had breakfast ready for Johannes and Jetse when they were ready to go find the farm. After eating the delicious bacon and eggs, they said, “Thank you, Mrs. Kellogg, for your help and your husband’s help. We are very grateful to you. May the Lord bless you for your kindness.”

Mrs. Kellogg said to them, “I don’t mean to brag, but Judge Kellogg has been a help for many before. He was part of a government committee back in the thirties to improve the relationship between the Indians of Old Wing Mission and the government.¹⁵¹ Now he’s on the area committee designed to help in the settlement of the Dutch immigrants such as you.” She gave them a rough map with directions and the Van Haitsma men went on their way.

The farm was a few miles south of Allegan, and when Johannes and Jetse walked down the farmer’s driveway, they had a good feeling. Johannes prayed, “Lord, incline the farmer’s heart to us. We would like this to be the place where we can work for the month and gain some money for home.”

The farmer came out of his house. “What can I do for you, gentlemen?” he asked. Johannes presented the Judge’s letter. It was a relief to see the farmer’s smile. Yes! He took them into the barn, and showed them the space that would serve as their bunkhouse. He pointed to hooks on the wall where they could hang the bags they had carried. And he indicated the straw bedding which they understood would be their sleeping place. They shook their heads to say “yes” and hung up their bags.

The farmer’s son came out of the house and motioned for them to follow him. He showed them the milk barn and where the hay was stored, and he started forking a bit of hay in front of the first cow. Then he gave the fork to Johannes and signaled that each of the cows needed some. Johannes promptly started forking the hay for each animal. Jetse was taken to the henhouse and given a basket, and he followed directions and started taking the eggs out of the nests. They worked with sign language and seemed to understand each other.

That evening Johannes said to Jetse, “I’m hoping that we will soon know enough of the language to be able to understand.” The last thing Johannes did before turning in that night was to write a letter to Sjoukje telling her that they had found work and would be near Allegan for the month.

In the days following, Johannes and Jetse kept busy with the farmer’s routines of haying and taking care of the animals and all went well. They did not yet know what their salary would be, and Jetse asked, “Johannes, what do you think they will pay us for the work we’re doing?”

“I don’t know,” said Johannes, “but we trusted Judge Kellogg for getting us this job, so I think we will be fairly paid. We don’t know enough of the language yet to discuss this. Let’s just see at the end of the month.”

In the days to follow, Johannes and Jetse had their eyes open to the kind of work, routines, and machines that the farmer had for farmwork. They realized they were learning a lot of what they

¹⁵¹ Swierenga, R. *Mission*, p. 23.

would need to know about farming on their own farms. “What a lot we are learning!” Johannes exclaimed to Jetse one evening as they prepared for the night. “This is valuable for us. And then we get paid for the work too.”

On Sundays they had the day off after tending to the animals. The farmer invited them to come to church with him. They were glad to do so, but did not expect to understand much. Just to join in worship was a wonderful way to thank God for His care and provision. During the week Jetse and Johannes kept time for prayer, Bible reading and song in the room assigned to them in the barn. That became a precious place to sleep, but just as much a place of worship.

Time passed quickly and soon it was the end of the month. Very haltingly they asked the farmer what they would be paid. The farmer said they would get a cow and some chickens to take home if they wished. But he added, “Would you be willing to work for me another month? I will double your earnings to two cows and more chickens. You have done such good work for me and I appreciate it.”

Stumbling over the words, Johannes and Jetse agreed. Then Johannes asked the farmer, “May I have a pen and some paper? I need to send a letter home to tell my wife and our family that we won’t be home for another month.”

The farmer understood what he needed and supplied Johannes with paper, pen, and a stamp so they could send a letter. Johannes penned a letter explaining they would be staying another month, and he sent it off with the local mail delivery.

The farming routines continued. One day they were pulling a load of hay from the fields to the barn. Jetse, who was riding on top of the load, fell off when the wagon hit a rut. He hit the ground, falling on his arm. He cried out in pain. “I think I broke my arm!” he hollered. They all gathered around, and agreed that the arm looked broken. The farmer’s son unhitched a horse and rode off in a hurry for the doctor in Allegan. It took a long time, it seemed, for the son to return with the doctor. He examined Jetse’s arm and said to the farmer and Johannes, “I think I can adjust it here and put a splint on it.”

Johannes kind of understood, and he and Jetse agreed to have the doctor set the arm and put on a splint. “This is going to hurt a bit more,” the doctor said, as he asked the farmer and son to hold Jetse still. He pulled on the arm and let it settle back. Apparently it was a clean break. He took a couple of slats and lined them up and wound bandages around the whole arm. “This should take care of you for now. Maybe no more work for you today.”

“I’m so sorry,” Jetse said to the farmer. “Well,” said the farmer, “let’s make the most of it; there may be things you can do with one arm. You soon can lead the horses around the fields, and we’ll see as time goes on.”

For the rest of the month Jetse was pretty limited, but did what he could do with one arm in a splint. Things slowly got a bit better. Not being able to do much farm work, he spent some time with the younger children and learned a lot of “American” from them. That was one bonus from having a broken arm.

Towards the end of the second month, the farmer's son approached Johannes, "Johannes, I have a pup born a few weeks ago. Would you like to buy it?"

"Oh," said Johannes, thinking the son was offering his father for sale, "you must not sell your Pop." The son explained carefully and slowly, and they had quite a laugh together.¹⁵²

The end of the month finally came. Johannes and Jetse, who was able to use both arms again, made plans to return home with their pay. The farmer offered them two cows, and a number of chickens with a rooster. The brothers decided that was a fair wage. Jetse had been a bit less productive, so that reduced the pay somewhat. It was the custom to pay in kind, bartering between people. Cash was hard to come by. The men were satisfied, and said they would return home in the morning.

Early the next day, the cows were led out of the pasture on their halters, ready for the walk to Vriesland. A couple of boxes with chickens were loaded on the backs of the cows, much to their discomfort. With a supply of food for lunch, the farmer and family wished them well and goodbye.

"Thank you, sir," Johannes said goodbye in halting "American," "you have been God's blessing for us as we return home. Thank you for the cows and chickens. They will help us with milk and eggs that we can sell or trade with our neighbors."

With the goodbyes finished, Jetse and Johannes led the cows away. It wasn't long before Jetse said, "I think it's going to take a little longer getting back home. These cows are in no hurry to go away from their familiar farm."

"Maybe we can urge them a bit," said Johannes. "I would like to get back to Sjoukje by the end of the day,"

Jetse said, "It's kind of a hot day, and they will likely hang back a bit. We have to make sure they don't break away from us; then we will have to try to capture them."

About midday Johannes said, "It's time for us to eat our lunch. And the cows can graze for a while too. I don't want to push them too hard or they may balk."

"That sounds good," said Jetse. "I'm ready to sit awhile. Maybe even get forty winks."

They stopped by a little stream and a small copse. The farmer's wife had given them a bag containing freshly-baked white bread with a good thick layer of butter and honey on it. They bit into the delightful bread, and suddenly heard a rushing of hooves. Johannes turned around and saw that the cows had broken loose and were running away from them. Lunch was over very quickly. They started running after the cows. It was a bit hard as both Jetse and Johannes had put the boxes of chickens on their own backs.

¹⁵² Van Haitsma, A., *Legends*.

The cows just kept on going and the brothers could not catch up to them. The cows were moving a lot faster now that they could set their own pace and they seemed to know where they were going. Johannes called to Jetse, "I think they're taking us back to the farm. And I don't think we are going to catch up to them."

And they didn't. From a distance, they saw the cows leading the way to the barn. The farmer had caught sight of them, and began to laugh. Johannes and Jetse were out of breath as they got to him. They didn't know what to say. The farmer said it for them. "Don't worry boys; just plan to stay one more night, and in the morning we'll send you off again with the cows. This time we'll hobble them so they can't run away from you again. At least the cows know where home is."

The cows were led into the pasture where they mingled with the others. Soon they were trudging to the milk barn to be relieved of their load of milk. Johannes said to Jetse, "I guess those two won't be giving near the amount of milk that they normally do. Oh, well, we'll try again tomorrow." The brothers joined the farmer in a good laugh.

The next morning they got up early again, eager to be on the way home. This time the farmer helped hobble the cows so they would not be able to run very fast. And with a new a bag of lunch they went back on the trail home to Vriesland.

They trudged the whole day, sometimes urging the cows to a faster pace, but those cows had minds of their own and kept on going at their own speed. By the end of the day, they had passed a few log cabins which the brothers recognized belonged to the settlers in Drenthe. So only two miles more.

They began to sing a Psalm at the top of their voices. First they came by Wopke's place, and Annie came out the door to see who was singing so loudly. They kept on singing as they came closer to the farmhouse of the folks. Pa and Ma heard them and came running down the path. Jetse led his cow and the box of chickens to their log cabin. Johannes greeted his parents, "Hey folks, as you can see, we're back. Our pay for the work is these cows and chickens, so soon we will have a few eggs and milk. Won't that be delicious! I'm going on to Sjoukje."

"Ya," said Ma, "she's been looking for you for weeks. She'll be very, very glad to see you."

"So, I will see you tomorrow then," said Johannes, urging his cow to walk faster to his log cabin a quarter mile down the road.

"Hello, Sjoukje," he called out. "I'm home."

What a relief Sjoukje experienced. "Oh, it's so good to see you. I was so worried for you. You've been gone so much longer than we expected!"

Johannes asked, "Didn't you get the letter I sent? I wrote to tell you the farmer wanted us to work another month to get his harvest in."

“No,” said Sjoukje, “I didn’t hear from you at all this summer. We didn’t know if you had arrived there, if you had gotten sick, or if you had died. We were so worried. Every week when I expected Mrs. Notting or Mr. Elisma¹⁵³ to bring the mail to Wopke’s store, I would be there waiting, but nothing ever came.”

“I’m so sorry, Sjoukje. I had no idea that I worried you so.”

“While you were away, we had a lot of cholera illness, and some people died from it. I was so afraid!” sobbed Sjoukje. “I’m so glad you’re back and well.” They held each other tightly for a long time.

Johannes, uncomfortable with the tears, offered, “Sjoukje, I have a little gift for you. Something you’ve been wanting for a while.”

“O, Johannes,” she tried to stop her tears. “What did you bring?”

He handed her a package of store-bought coffee beans. “Oh, Johannes, that’s so thoughtful of you. Let me make some coffee right away, and your gift to me can become a welcome-home gift to you.”

The cow had been tugging on the halter and Johannes finally said to the cow, “All right, I’ll give you some rope so you can drink and eat.” He tethered the cow behind the house where there was some grass and he fed the chickens in the box some grain. Then Johannes went with Sjoukje into their log cabin. Sjoukje started the coffee and looked around for something to feed Johannes.

Johannes explained, “The farmer was about as cash poor as we are. But we can expect to sell some of the milk and eggs for some cash. I’m hoping that will be a help for the long term.”

Sjoukje said, “And that will make up a little for the piglets that were eaten by a bear while you were gone. I heard the squeal and looked out and saw a bear coming out of the pen, holding a piglet in its jaws. Frank came by just then and I called to him to shoot the bear. But somehow he was afraid to use his gun.”¹⁵⁴

“Frank afraid?” said Johannes. “Just think of the bear meat we could have had besides the pork from the growing piglets.”

“When that happened,” Sjoukje went on, “and Tede Ulberg heard about it, he came by to make Frank feel a little better. He said that a few weeks ago some of our neighbors had been concerned about a bear in the area who was snatching piglets. The neighbors got together to trap the bear. They decided to dig a deep hole, and then placed some weak boards over the hole. They put a dead piglet on the middle of the boards and waited for the bear to smell the meat. Soon the bear did come. He went around the hole, sniffing and looking at the piglet. But he didn’t take the bait. He ambled away again. None of the neighbors dared to use their guns to shoot that bear.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 395, 262.

¹⁵⁴ Van Haitsma, *Legends*.

¹⁵⁵ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 285.

Johannes wondered, “Why were they afraid to shoot a bear, do you think?”

Sjoukje said, “I wondered about that too. I asked Frank, and he said that a wounded bear is a very angry and dangerous animal. You’ve got to kill it with one shot. And he wasn’t confident he could do that. Better lose a piglet than endanger ourselves.”

“I’m just so glad you were kept safe,” Johannes said, “and grateful that Frank was around, even if he was afraid that he might only wound the bear.”

The next morning Johannes was out early to make a cage for the chickens. They couldn’t stay in the box for long. He gathered some long slender branches and began to weave them into a cage that he could move around in the grass around the trees. Hopefully that would protect them from the foxes too. He muttered to himself, “I’m sure that foxes would like a taste of tender chicken just as we would.”

Sjoukje called, “Hey, Johannes! Breakfast is ready; come and eat.”

Grateful to be home with Sjoukje again, he readily went back into the loghouse. They were delighted to sit on regular chairs instead of the stumps they had been using since coming to Vriesland. Wopke had brought them on one of his loads from Grand Rapids. Now the whole family had chairs to sit on. Johannes said, “We don’t have much, but already we have a few comforts for ourselves.”

He wondered aloud to Sjoukje, “Do you think the chickens would be safe outside in the cage at night? Or should we take them inside to protect them from the critters?”

Sjoukje thought and said, “Probably we need to take them inside. A cage made from branches may not be strong enough to keep them safe.”

Johannes started to chuckle. “I have to tell you a funny story. The farmer asked me to clean out the cellar, and take the old potatoes to the animals. I later learned that he told me to feed them to the hogs. But I misunderstood. I thought he said ‘horses’ so I fed them all to those horses. I thought it was kind of strange horsefeed, but what do I know about American ways?”

He recollected, “Not everything turned out a misunderstanding. I learned quite a bit of American talk, especially from the son. And I learned some of their farming and gardening ways. I learned they “sow and mow as much as will grow.”¹⁵⁶ I saw that they plant potatoes shallow, but then pull up dirt against them as they hoe out the weeds.”

After a leisurely time around the table telling stories about the summer, he stretched himself and said, “I guess it’s time to attack some of the trees of Anak again. They have got to come down to make space for the farm. I’m glad to have a sharper axe than when we first came. And now I can sharpen it more regularly at the end of the day.”

¹⁵⁶ Krabbendam, *Freedom*, p. 194.

Johannes saw some potato plants he had seeded last spring, and pulled up a few to take in for Sjoukje to cook up. He told her, "I'm glad the critters did not pull out all the potatoes we planted. Now we do have some to eat this winter."

One day Johannes proclaimed, "The grain is ready for harvest, such as it is." He went out with a sickle and cut bundles of the ripe stalks that had not been eaten by the animals. He gathered the bundles and took them back home where he flayed them to separate the seed, and then carefully collected the grains. He scooped them up so the wind could take the chaff while the grain fell on the sheet on the ground.

Johannes said to Sjoukje, "It looks like a storm coming, maybe with lightning and thunder. I'm afraid the cow might get scared and break loose. I don't like the idea, but I think we should take the cow in the house."

"O, Johannes!" Sjoukje exclaimed. "I don't like that at all! I don't like the smell of the cow. I don't like that smell in the house. What if the cow poos on our floor?"

"Well, it would be worse," Johannes exclaimed, "if the cow ran away and we couldn't find her back. We'd be out of milk and we'd be out of my salary for a summer's work. I'm sorry, but until we have a barn, we may have to put up with it."

One fall day Johannes felt eyes on him. He stood straight and looked carefully into the dark woods surrounding him. **Soon he saw the Indian standing quietly by one of the great trees. He greeted the man with upraised hand. The Indian slowly approached him. "Hello, neighbor," Johannes greeted him.** ^

The Indian came with his palms up to show he came as a friend. In broken English he said, "Hello. I have seen you in the woods many times. I have heard you singing. I don't understand. But I know you love Jesus as Rev. Smith taught us in our church."

"I'm sorry," Johannes shared, "I have not noticed you before."

"I saw you," the Indian reported. "I know you went away and left your wife alone. So I came here many times to see that she was okay. I have scared a few bears and wolves away so they don't bother her."

"Thank you very much, friend," Johannes responded. "I am glad you were watching out for her. Do you live near here?" he asked.

"Yes, I live in the woods near the swamp," answered the Indian. "I have loved to hear you and others singing in these woods. It brings joy to my heart. I have also learned to love Jesus."

"Please come and share a little food with me," suggested Johannes.

"Thank you," the Indian said, "I have never had an invitation like that except from Rev. Smith. He's a good man."

Johannes opened his lunch pail, and shared what he had. The Indian responded gratefully. "Thank you," he said again and then he glided back into the woods, out of sight.

At the end of the day he told Sjoukje about his visitor. "He's been watching over you all summer. And we didn't know God had sent him to us as a guardian angel."

Sjoukje suggested, "It is good that you shared your food with him. Rev. Van Raalte gave us all the instructions to treat the Indians as fairly as we would like to be treated and as welcoming as we have enjoyed being welcomed."

A few weeks later, Sjoukje came excitedly out to the forest where Johannes was cutting away at one of the sons of Anak. Breathlessly she blurted, "Johannes, do I have news for you!"

Johannes put his ax down and turned to her, "What is so important that you need to run all the way out here?"

Sjoukje said, "Sietske told me Frank asked for her hand in marriage. He talked to Pa last night and asked for permission to marry her. And of course, Pa said 'Ya.'"

"Well," said Johannes, "I think we both have been expecting that. He's quite an eligible bachelor. He owns his own land and log cabin. He's faithful at church too. I'm sure he will take good care of her."

"He and his sister came a year before us on the *Vesta*, and he's five years older than Sietske.¹⁵⁷ I'm sure he will be a good husband to Sietske. This will be special," said Sjoukje, "the first marriage in the new land for the Van Haitsma family. We have to make this very memorable. Sietske told me they are going to ask to use the church building at Kaslanders for the wedding and the celebration."

Johannes said, "I'm sure Rev. Ypma will do that wedding. We have to ask Wopke to bring some special goodies. Did she say when the wedding will be?"

"I think they will ask Rev. Ypma for two Sundays from now, after the morning service."

Johannes queried, "Who do you think she will ask to be her witness?"

"That I don't know," Sjoukje answered, "but I expect that will be Pa or another family member. Imagine, a wedding in the family. Oh, I'm looking forward to that!" exuded Sjoukje.

Two months later, Rev. Ypma announced at church, "The council has decided this is a good time to have a thanksgiving service. We have been blessed with health; we have a goodly amount of food stock available in Tjette and Wopke's store; our crops have done well and our harvest looks good. It is time to praise the Lord as a congregation. So we will plan to have the service Thursday evening about 6 pm."

¹⁵⁷*The Ottawa County Marriage Directory*, brides, vol. 2, p. 22. Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 117, 493.

Murmurs of assent rose from the congregation. Sjoukje whispered to Johannes, “That is a great idea. God has been so good to us. He deserves the praise, and it is good for our hearts to lift up praise in Psalm and word.”

On the walk home there was talk among the Van Haitisma family about that council decision. Johannes remarked, “I love that it was our own council that made this decision. Back in the old country, the king and his council made the decisions for local congregations and took away our freedom to make our own decisions.” ^ That was one of the reasons why people back in Friesland were so upset with the State Church.”

Tjette reminded his family, “But there were also times that the members of Classis would make decisions that could have and should have been made by each local congregation. Here in our new land we have freedom to make decisions for our own church. That freedom here is another good reason to give thanks to God.”

Johannes realized he could not procrastinate any longer. He must talk with Sjoukje about his plan. “I’m so sorry, Sjoukje,” Johannes said softly. “You know that I have to make some needed cash, and so I plan to go to John Ball’s office to sign up for work in his logging camp.”

“Oh,” Sjoukje muttered, “I don’t like the sound of that. While you were away this past summer, I was so fearful you might succumb to cholera. I worried the whole time.”

“Ya, and especially when you didn’t get my letter telling you I would be gone another month,” Johannes remembered.

“Ya,” Sjoukje agreed, “That was a dreadful time.”

Johannes pondered aloud, “I don’t know what else to do. We sure do need the cash and I do have a good letter of introduction from Judge Kellogg. I will surely make a lot more money at the logging camp than I did at the farm.”

“Husband, I don’t want you to go, but I understand how necessary it is,” Sjoukje said reluctantly.

“I’m going to check with Pa and Ma and ask Jetse if he wants to go with me again,” Johannes said and walked out the door.

The following Monday Johannes and Jetse set out to Grand Rapids to find John Ball’s office. Jetse said, “With some experience now, I’m beginning to be able to follow the trail blazes most of the time. Certainly I’m a lot better at it than a year ago.”

“Ya” agreed Johannes, “Slowly on we are able to recognize the signs of traces and even where we need to cross streams. It is nice to begin feeling a little more comfortable that we know where we are going.”

After hours of trudging, they found their way to Grand Rapids and with their improved English, they were able to find their way to Mr. Ball's office. Johannes gave the letter from Judge Kellogg to the receptionist, and she invited them to sit down.

"Well, gentlemen, welcome," Mr. Ball's welcome was enthusiastic. "Thank you for bringing Judge Kellogg's letter to me. I can use some good hands." He noticed they were puzzled. Mr. Ball called to the back office and a young man came into the room to be a translator with these two obviously-Dutch men.

Mr. Ball told Johannes and Jetse, "We do need some good workers in the camp. But since it is late in the day, you are invited to spend the night in the bunkhouse behind the office. The cook will provide you with dinner tonight and with breakfast in the morning. And then you can go to the camp with the rest of the crew."

Johannes and Jetse were overwhelmed with the welcome they received. They followed the young man to the bunkhouse and prepared to spend the night. Johannes said to Jetse. "Mr. Ball must really like Judge Kellogg to welcome us this way."

In the morning Mr. Ball's assistant gathered the new crew. "This wagon will take you into the woods to the camp, and you'll find some men there who will show you what you need to know. The work is hard, but you will be paid well."

Johannes and Jetse were taken deep into the forest to the logging camp. They found their bunks and pegs in the wall to hang their bags. Then they heard a voice in Dutch inviting them to come outside for instructions.

Jetse said, "It is nice we get to work with other Dutchmen who speak our language."

"Ya," added Johannes. "God is good, isn't He?"

Soon they were part of the work crew clearing the brush. The foreman said, "You will first work on the easy stuff, but keep your eyes open so you can begin to learn the hard work of felling these trees and getting them to fall where you want them. In a few days you will be cutting down the trees for market. Some of you have learned some of this on your farms, but now you'll learn to be efficient and fast. This is big business."

Every day their work became heavier and more demanding. The foreman showed them how to mark the trees and keep track of their output.

A month or so later, Johannes began to notice that some of the best lumber was shunted off to a side road. He wondered about that. He asked the foreman what that was all about. The foreman suggested he need not be concerned about that.

That night Johannes said quietly to Jetse, "I don't know what's going on, but I sense something shady is happening here."

“Oh?” wondered Jetse. “I haven’t noticed anything.”

“But maybe you can keep your ears open for what is being talked about at the table and at break times. You have a better understanding of English than I do.”

“I can do that, big brother.” Jetse agreed.

A week later, Jetse quietly turned to Johannes, “I’m beginning to understand what you were sensing. The camp manager is setting aside some of the best lumber so he can quietly pull those trees to a different landing and sell them for himself. He is cheating Mr. Ball out of some of his hard-earned money.”^

On Friday that week, Johannes asked his foreman, “Can I ride the wagon back to town tonight?”

“Why sure, Johannes,” the foreman replied, “but I did not think you were the carousing type.”

Johannes quietly sat among the loud crew members. He was thinking hard about what to say to Mr. Ball if he had a chance.

The wagon pulled up by the office and he was relieved to find Mr. Ball welcoming the men to town. Johannes felt out of place with the rowdy crew. Mr. Ball must have sensed something. He came over to Johannes, motioned his assistant to come over to translate. Haltingly Johannes began, “Mr. Ball, this is not easy for me to do or say. But I am convinced that your camp manager is cheating you out of some of the best lumber we are cutting down.”

“Now, Mr. Van Haitsma, he’s been working for me for some years and I never noticed any stealing going on. I’ve trusted him. Tell me why you think he’s stealing.”

With the help of the interpreter Johannes shared, “I have been seeing some of the best grades of wood going off on a side trail to another landing and it is not added to the tallylist of the work we do every day. And when I asked the foreman about it, he hushed me up and told me that it’s none of my business.”

John Ball gave this report some thought. He said, “I’ll tell you what I’ll do. Monday I’m going to send one of my trusted young assistants to work in the camp. I’ll ask him to keep his eyes and ears open. Maybe he can confirm what you think is happening. I really appreciate you coming to me with this report.”

Late that night Johannes returned to the camp on the wagon. He apprehensively shared with Jetse, “I told Mr. Ball what I think is happening and he’s going to send one of his assistants to check it out. Don’t tell this to anyone, because I don’t want anyone to know I blew the whistle on the manager.”

The next Friday Johannes again went into town on the crew wagon. The young assistant was there too. John Ball caught their eyes and motioned them aside. “Well, son,” he said to the assistant, “Did you see or hear anything of what Mr. Van Haitsma told me?”

“Yes sir, Mr. Ball, it’s just like he said. Some of your good wood is going to another landing and the manager is putting your money in his own pocket.”

“Why that scoundrel!” uttered Ball. “I wonder how long he’s been stealing my lumber from me?” He was quiet for some time and then he said, “Mr. Van Haitsma, I have a proposition for you. I would like you to take over the management side of the camp.”

“But, Mr. Ball, I don’t know enough English! I can’t manage the camp,” stammered Johannes.

“Well, young man,” he answered, “you know your numbers, you’re learning to know your trees, and I believe I can trust you. You will learn from the foremen what you need to know and your honest and observing eye will help you do a good job. Will you do that for me? I will raise your pay as well.”

Johannes was flabbergasted! “I can’t believe, sir, that you are willing to trust me, an inexperienced Dutchman, for such an important job. Yes, I am willing to try to do a good job for you.”

“Good then.” Mr. Ball put out his hand to firm the deal with Johannes. “You’ll also get to use the manager’s cabin at the camp. Your brother may share that with you if you like. So I expect you to be the camp manager until the logging season is over.”

1850 *

Johannes and Jetse were home earlier than usual this Saturday. Today Johannes did the evening chores to give Sjoukje a much-needed break. When he came back inside, he found Sjoukje sitting near the light of the fireplace. “Sjoukje,” asked Johannes, “What are you busy working on in your little corner?”

“I’m repairing one of your *flap-broeken*.¹⁵⁸ Some buttons have come off and you’ve torn it at the knee,” answered Sjoukje.

“Ya,” said Johannes, “I guess I’m hard on my pants. We work hard cutting the trees. And sometimes I can’t avoid tearing my pants on things. I appreciate your keeping my clothes in good repair.”

“You’re very welcome, my dear Johannes. It provides me with some good time to pray and sing at the same time.”

Johannes responded, “I have found that too. When I’m working hard on those trees, the work seems lighter if I add some prayer and singing to it. I rather expect that the Lord is happy with the praises coming out of our hard work.”

¹⁵⁸Butterfly pants. Van Haitsma, *Legends*.

The next day Hendrik Dam spoke privately to Johannes after most of the congregation had left the church. Johannes could plainly see that something serious was on his mind. “So good to see you, Mr. Dam. How are you?”

“I am glad to see you too, my young friend. My health is pretty good, but my mind is troubled and my heart is sad,” responded Dam. “I have a concern, but I don’t know how to handle it.”

Dam continued, “I’ve been thinking about our congregation a lot lately. We have members scattered over several sections now, and I don’t know everybody by name anymore. And we now have more new people who came from Gelderland and Noord Holland. I just can’t do justice to being an elder over all these people. If I don’t know them, I can’t be responsible to watch over them. I just can’t keep track of what’s happening in the lives of our members.”¹⁵⁹After a few moments of silence, Dam summed up his concerns. “I just do not feel comfortable being an elder anymore.”

“Ya,” Johannes said, “I can imagine that you feel concerned about that. Have you discussed this with Rev. Ypma or the church council?”

“It has been building up inside me for some time, so I decided that I would talk about it at the last council meeting. There were a few responses. One deacon said that growth problems are good problems. And an elder reminded me that we elect elders for life.”

“What did Rev. Ypma say?” Johannes asked.

Dam chuckled. “I don’t think he knew quite what to say! Finally Rev. Ypma said, ‘Maybe it would be good to think about this till our next meeting. Is that okay with you, Mr. Dam?’ So I told him that I can live with that.”

Very early the next morning Johannes was preparing to make the trip back to Grand Rapids. He shared his thoughts with Sjoukje, “The logging season is almost over and soon I will be home again for a long while. I know you are disappointed, Sjoukje, that I promised to work for Mr. Ball again next logging season. But I do need to work for him one more winter because it is such a good way to get some real cash. And Mr. Ball was so good to make both Jetse and me into managers. Being managers means a lot more money for us, and our being honest managers, means more money for him. But I do think that next winter will be the last time I have to go away like this.”

“It will be so good to have you home all year, Johannes. It gets so lonely here being all by myself so much of the time. I’m so glad you have been able to get home most Sundays.”

“Ya, and I am grateful that Mr. Ball lets us ride a horse to go back and forth on the weekends. To walk back and forth was such a long trip, but with the horse to ride, it’s only a few hours each way. One more week of work for Mr. Ball and Jetse and I will be home to stay until next fall. See you soon, Sjoukje.”

¹⁵⁹*Vriesland RCA Church Minutes, March & April, 1851.*

The following Sunday at church was a service of thanksgiving as far as Sjoukje was concerned. Her precious husband was home and would not be leaving again for a long while. Sjoukje was practically beaming with delight. The whole Van Haitsma family was back together again. Life was good.

“Say, listen,” Ulberg spoke up, “We have a new neighbor. He’s the father of Gysbert Haan across the road here.”

“Oh, has he come here to join his family?” asked Johannes.

“Ya,” said Ulberg, “He came to this country a couple of years ago and found work in the East, so stayed there. Now he has decided to live here. Hopefully he’s just as good a man as his son. He sure looks and sounds impressive. He bought a property just north of his son.¹⁶⁰ So he is obviously planning to stay and be close to his children and grandchildren.”

“That’s wonderful!” exclaimed Johannes. “Our family enjoys being together as two generations too. And before long we will be three generations whenever Tjalling and his family arrive.”

“Unfortunately,” Ulberg lamented, “our little family left all the rest behind. Maybe someday more of them will come to join us, too. Hey, I’d better get back to that pair of boots I’ve been working on. Take care.”

The shadows were casting long spikes across the grass when Ulberg came by, “Have you heard about our new neighbor Mr. Haan?”

Johannes replied, “No, what’s going on?”

“I mentioned to you a week or so ago that Mr. Haan Sr. bought land a bit north of us?”

“Ya,” wondered Johannes. “Is there a problem?”

“Ya,” responded Ulberg. “He is accusing Mr. Berkempas and Rev. Ypma of giving him a bad deal.¹⁶¹ And he is being anything but pleasant about it. I had high hopes that he would be such a classy neighbor. He looks so regal with his straight back, piercing eyes, and his white hair. But conflict seems to follow him like a cloud. And,” he continued thoughtfully, “it seemed to leave a bitter taste in Rev. Ypma’s mouth.”

“I hope that you’re being overly sensitive,” Johannes suggested. “It is so nice to live among peaceable neighbors.”

¹⁶⁰ Beets, H., ed. (Haan, G. G., *De Grondleggers*,) *Gedenkboek 1907*, p. 248.4. Census 1850. In 1850 he was enumerated two houses away from Palingdood to one side, son Gysbert Haan on the other, then in sequence van Santen, Berkompas, van Vliet, Y. Ulberg, Johannes van Haitsma (J. T. Hytsma), Tjetje van Haitsma (K. W. Hytsma), van Zoeren, Faber, P. Zylstra, age 52.

¹⁶¹ *Vriesland RCA Minutes*, March & April, 1851.

“You’re right about that, Johannes,” Ulberg offered. “Rev. Ypma has been such a faithful manager of the community funds and so careful and honest in all his dealings. I don’t like to hear anyone bring shadows of doubt into our village. We’ve got enough shadows under all these trees,” he smiled.

Later that week Johannes asked, “Sjoukje, has Jantje Haan come by lately?”

“Ya,” answered Sjoukje. “She came by the other day to have tea. She was concerned because her father-in-law Gysbert Haan Sr. has been having arguments with people about his land. It sounded like the council is upset with him over the way he is talking and making accusations. Jantje said that until Mr. Haan makes amends with Mr. Berkompas and Rev. Ypma, he is not allowed to take communion.”¹⁶²

“Oh, my,” Johannes said. “That seems like a drastic judgment to make. And that with a new neighbor too.”

“Ya,” responded Sjoukje, “I do hope that whole situation gets resolved quickly. We really don’t need such conflicts tearing our neighborhood apart.”

Johannes meditated a bit and said to Sjoukje, “I think that today I’m going to attack that big son of Anak and see if I can bring that tree down. And maybe I can work out some of my frustrations with the axe.”

“Okay, Johannes,” soothed Sjoukje. “Don’t think too much about it all. At least we are only bystanders. I hope it stays that way. You go and chop away at that tree. Make a little more open space for the potatoes we want to plant. In a few hours I will bring you some nice hot coffee and a chunk of fresh bread. It should be baked by then and cool enough to slice. I’m delighted we have a little stove now. It was hard cooking and baking over the open fire. I still can’t imagine how everybody managed a year ago when there was nothing to work with.”

Johannes walked to where the monster tree stood and began to work. He’d learned a lot about chopping down trees from his winter work in John Ball’s woods. There he had also picked up a habit of talking to the tree he worked on. “It is good to keep my mind on chopping you and not on the quarrels among the neighbors. I don’t know about becoming part of the church, friend tree,” he said. “It seems there’s always quarreling going on. Sjoukje would like me to join, but I’m not at all sure I want to. As long as I can remember, there’s been one reason or another for quarreling in the church.”

The Reverend Ypma, walking the trace from his place a bit southwest of Johannes, hailed Johannes to keep him from being surprised. “Hey, Johannes, I heard your chopping and thought I would sit down with you a bit.”

“Well, Reverend,” responded Johannes, “that would be a welcome break from work on this tree. Please come and sit down.”

¹⁶²*ibid.*

“Ya, thank you. It is a challenge, isn’t it, to keep working on the trees day after day?” Rev. Ypma shared.

“Ya,” answered Johannes. “But then you have to deal with the conflicts among the congregation also. That can’t be easy either.”

“No, I confess that **my soul is burdened with all the conflict in the church and community right now.**”

“I remember,” Johannes said, “when I was a lad on the dock, I was hearing so much about that. And I can remember that you and your mother had to deal with hard times having soldiers in your house and having to pay fines.”

“Ya, those were hard times too,” confessed the Reverend. “Unfortunately, when the Separatist Church got started, the conflicts and differences of opinion still continued strong.¹⁶³ You know, Brother van Raalte was sharing the other day how tired he is about all the squabbles in the churches. We thought that life would be more congenial here in *de Kolonie*. But conflict keeps turning up here too. Ever since we joined the Dutch Reformed Church here in America, voices of conflict have been cropping up continuously. Dealing with them seems more tiresome than dealing with these trees.”

“I can appreciate that disappointment,” Johannes observed. “I admit that is one of the reasons I have not wanted to become a full member of the church. People may not always agree on everything, but the loving attitude that Jesus asks from His followers seems missing sometimes.”

Rev. Ypma stretched out his arms and got up. “Well, thank you for the coffee and for sharing with me, Mr. van Haitisma. I must be on my way to a pastoral call.”

Some days later, Pa walked over to bring some good news. He said, “I got word from Tjalling today. He writes that he is still hoping to come to America too. He now has four children, and cannot see any future for his family in Friesland. But he has not been able to save much money. I am beginning to think that we will need to help pay for their journey.”

Johannes answered, “I was wondering how long it would take him to come to that conclusion. But what resources do we have that we can help him financially? We have been living cash poor ourselves.”

“Ya, I’ve been thinking about that too,” spoke up Pa. “I wonder if we can float a loan with anybody here who has a better cash flow than we do. Let’s ask Wopke. He’s always got a good business head and may know someone who has some financial flexibility.”

That afternoon Pa and Johannes walked the trail east a half mile to Wopke’s farm. Pa said to Wopke, “I’ve just heard that Tjalling is ready to emigrate here too. But he doesn’t have much savings to pay for the journey. I did promise your Ma that if he could not do it himself, we would

¹⁶³ Hyma, A., *Van Raalte*, p. 38.

make it possible for him to join us here. I want to keep that promise. So, we are wondering if you know where we might be able to get a loan to cover his trip.”

Wopke turned thoughtful. “I think I know who may be willing to help out. Let me talk to my brother-in-law and see if the Zylstra family business in Minnertska can give him a loan. Then Tjalling can pay it back when he gets settled here. I’ll ask Annie to check with her brother Eke.”

“That sounds good,” said Johannes. “And if that all works out, then we can begin to think about a piece of land for him to clear and farm. But that sounds like a next-year kind of issue. I think he should wait to sail towards the end of the winter, like we did. That plan got us here in time to get started on cutting down those trees to have space to plant spring seeds.”

“So,” Pa said to Wopke, “you let us know if the Zylstras can float a loan, and then I will let Tjalling know. And he can make plans to come next spring.”

1851*

The winter of 1850-1851 was over, and the ground became too soft to move the big trees from the forest. Johannes reorganized the John Ball crew working with him, and they worked hard to slide the logs from the riverside into the river for the downstream ride to Grand Haven. Soon they would all receive their pay and go home for the season.

Payday was always a good day. This was money that Johannes could put to good use for equipment for the farm. Thanks to his logging experience, he knew a lot more about the worth of various trees and what trees on his farm would make a good cash crop. And he was far more experienced in cutting those monstrous trees down. He and Jetse made a good team working the long saw together.

Johannes had learned a lot about logging and now he would be learning more about his farm. He had a few acres cleared of trees and now knew more about how to clean the field for regular farming. Having the right tools would help a lot.

Just before leaving the Grand Rapids area, Johannes and Jetse went to John Ball’s office. He said, “Mr. Ball, you’ve been very good to us. You have paid us fairly and kept us comfortable in the bunkhouse and well fed. Now I have another favor to ask.”

“Sure, John,” said the boss, “You don’t mind if I called you John?”

“No, Mr. Ball, the men called me by that American name also.”

“So what can I do for you, John?”

“Well, Mr. Ball, the season is over, and your horses are tired. They’re going to do nothing for you the whole season till next winter. I wondered if I could buy one for my farm. Our family has

a few oxen to do the really heavy work, but a horse would help with a lot of chores as well as getting around some.”

“Well, John, I think that’s a fine idea! I don’t need idle horses. Yes, for \$5 I will sell you one of these worn-out horses. Maybe out on the farm with lighter work, he will revive and live some years of a useful life. I don’t need to sell them to the butcher. I would rather bless you with one.”

“Mr. Ball, I don’t want to be too forward, but do you think you could sell a second horse to Jetse? I have not talked to him about it, but if he does not want it, I will pay for two. I’m sure my family will be grateful to have two horses around to help with chores and travel.”

“Alright, John, you are persuasive. I will sell you two horses at \$5 each. Now before you go, I want you to know that I have been greatly pleased with the good work you have done for me these two years. If ever you need a job again, I would gladly welcome you back.”

Johannes and Jetse got onto their own horses and began the journey home to Vriesland. Johannes said, “This is like being a king. How long would it have taken me in Friesland to acquire a horse of my own?” In joy and thankfulness he broke into a Psalm celebrating God’s good care for him and his family. Jetse joined in heartily. Instead of taking all day to walk home from the camp, it would only take a few hours.

Johannes spoke to his horse, “I will take it easy on you, old boy. You have worked hard in the woods this winter. Now you will have good pasture to wander in and to gain your strength back. After a while we will see if you can pull something of a load.”

Jetse saw Johannes was in a quiet mood, so he stayed silent a while. But soon he just had to talk. “Johannes,” he said, “it was good of Mr. Ball to sell us these horses, wasn’t it? This has really been a good winter for us. We not only got these horses, we’re also bringing home some good money that will help us all out.”

“Ya, it has been a good winter,” agreed Johannes.

Jetse chuckled, “I just thought of another great thing. During these two winters in the logging camp we have learned a lot more of the “American” talk. Now you and I have a bit on Wiebe. We can say things to each other and he won’t understand. It’s like we have a secret language between us. And when Wiebe hears us talking, he can think we’re talking about him!”

“Ya,” added Johannes, “We had a big advantage over our brothers. I remember when we walked with Rev. Van Raalte to find out where to buy land, he impressed on me that it would be important to learn the “American” language. He had learned some from the captain on board ship, and he said that Rev. Van der Meulen did the same on his journey. He told me that both Holland and Zeeland already hired “American”-speaking teachers for the first school year.”

“I expect,” interjected Jetse, “we won’t forget either our Friesian or our Dutch. So the big challenge will be to learn “American” well enough to get along. But I imagine we’ll keep hearing sermons in Dutch.”

“Hey, Jetse,” Johannes spoke up surprised, “I hear Psalm singing. We must be getting close to someone’s house. And that means we are almost home. Home again!”

Tede Ulberg found Johannes chopping away at the brush. “Hey, Johannes,” he hailed. “I heard you’re back from the winter logging camp for good. Welcome home! How was it?”

“It was easier this past winter than last,” Johannes responded.

“Oh, why was that?” asked Ulberg.

“Mr. Ball gave me a job as manager. Jetse and I both became managers of the camp,” Johannes proudly announced. “Me, a Dutchman who can barely speak ‘American!’”¹⁶⁴

“Mr. Ball must have seen something good in you,” suggested Ulberg.

“Ja, I think so. And it was good to have the extra pay,” Johannes answered. “It will help in buying things we need around the farm. We also brought back a couple of tired-out horses. I expect they’ll be back in good shape before we need to use them for farming. How are things with you?” inquired Johannes.

“Oh, pretty good, I guess. More and more people are coming with requests for shoes and boots. I think they find boots easier to work in than our wooden clogs.”

Johannes responded, “Well, as you can see, I still favor the clogs for working out here.”

Johannes was busy chopping away at another tree and did not notice Hendrik Dam approaching. Dam greeted, shocking him.

“Why, Mr. Dam,” he said, “I didn’t see you coming.”

Dam explained, “I am just returning from visiting at the Classis meeting and saw you working away. I felt the need to talk about what I heard at Classis.”

“That sounds serious,” responded Johannes.

“Ya, I think it is,” admitted Dam, “considering we have been affirming our continued honoring of the 1619 Church Order since the Secession.”

“So what was said at Classis that was so shocking?” wondered Johannes.

“Classis agreed with Rev. Van Raalte that besides the Church Order, the Secession Church accepted all the Synodical rulings for church activities. These rulings were compiled into a book written by Van Raalte himself with his brothers-in-law, Rev. Brummelkamp and Rev. van

¹⁶⁴ Van Haitsma, *Legends*.

Velzen in 1840.¹⁶⁵ So now our church rules include all the decisions from the Synod at Wesel in the early 1500s to all decisions made up to 1840. I have never seen that book and I doubt that any other elder has seen it either.” ^

“Oh, my” exclaimed Johannes, “so there are many church rules besides the Church Order and we live by them all in our churches?”

Dam shared, “I heard that this was already decided at our first Classis in 1848.¹⁶⁶ At least I was told it says so in the minutes of that meeting. I was at that meeting, and I do not remember that decision. I can hardly believe that it slipped by me.”

“So when Classis or the church councils meet, does every one present know what they are honoring when they affirm that our church follows the Church Order?” asked Johannes.

“I wonder that too,” Mr. Dam offered. “But I doubt the elders know what they are affirming. Maybe the ministers do.”

“And none of us knew when we came here that we already had so many rules in addition to the Church Order!” Johannes confessed sadly.

Ma stopped at Sjoukje’s for a visit. She said to Sjoukje, “Something has changed about you. You have a glister over your face. Are you by any chance pregnant?”

Sjoukje responded, “Oh Ma, we wanted to keep it secret a little longer. Ya, I’m carrying. I’m so glad after all these years to finally bring a child into the world.”

“Oh, what a joy!” Ma smiled. “Pa will be so happy too! Has everything gone well so far? Do you know when you will deliver?”

“I think it will be early or middle April.” Sjoukje answered.

“I hope Johannes is taking good care of you?” said Ma.

“Ya, Ma,” assured Sjoukje, “He even takes care of all the hard and heavy work in the house. He sees to it that I have a supply of firewood and that the pail of water is full. He’s very concerned for me; maybe over concerned?”

“Well,” said Ma, “A man can hardly be too concerned. This is his baby too, and he wants it to be born healthy and well.”

“I know,” chimed in Sjoukje. “We are both looking forward to this little gift from God.”

¹⁶⁵Holland Classis RCA, 1851, Art. 6, p. 46. *Kerkelijke Handboekje*, 1840.

¹⁶⁶Holland Classis RCA, April 23, 1848, Art. 10, p. 22.

“So, you make sure you keep warm enough in these days, and don’t strain yourself. If there’s anything you need, I am right next door.”

“And for that,” Sjoukje said, “I’m most thankful!”

“Is there anything at the moment that you need?” asked Ma.

“No, Ma, things are going well and I’m well taken care of; Johannes is a good husband.”

“All right, then,” Ma said her goodbyes, “Pa will be so happy to hear the good news.”

Johannes had been hoeing his small garden in the space between the trees and his house. When he saw Sjoukje, he said, “You must be feeling okay. That’s quite a heavy load you are carrying.”

“Oh, the baby isn’t heavy; it’s ours, you know.”

“You bet, I know. And we plan to take good care of our first-born. Is there anything yet to do before this little one arrives?” he asked.

“No, the little baby crib you made is quite ready for the baby. And Ma is ready to be our midwife to welcome the baby into the world. I wonder if it’ll be a boy or a girl?”

“I guess there are some things we just cannot know. I wonder why God built such mystery into ‘be fruitful and multiply?’ He must have great pleasure in giving us surprises in life,” pondered Johannes. “But I’ve been thinking that maybe we should have a bell ready to ring in case you need help.”

“I thought about that too,” said Sjoukje. “I wonder if there might be one in Wopke’s store.”

“I’ll check it out,” Johannes said. “I know that Wopke has been trying to expand the variety of items he and Annie think might be needed by our community.”

Some days later Johannes heard the bell ring. He ran home and dropped his axe by the door. He could see Ma running as quickly as she could from their home next door.

Sjoukje was walking round and round in the house, and her face showed some distress. “My labor pains have started, Johannes,” she breathed.

“Oh,” he answered, “I saw Ma coming here too. We bought that bell just in the nick of time, didn’t we?”

Ma entered the log house without knocking. She was all business. She hustled Johannes to get some water heating up. “How long have you been having the pains?” she asked Sjoukje.

“A few hours, I think,” Sjoukje responded. “I didn’t realize how uncomfortable this was going to be.”

“Maybe I should warn you that you will have even more pain before the baby comes,” Ma said.

“I’m not sure I like the sound of that,” muttered Sjoukje.

“We just want to hope it doesn’t last too long,” Ma answered, “And I know you can do this; you’ve been pretty strong these days. You know I’ve been here a few times too, and I liked being pregnant, even though I knew about the pains of delivery.”

“I am glad you live nearby. I was depending on your help,” said Sjoukje. “I don’t think my husband is going to be much help.”

“I heard that,” Johannes spoke up. “If I can cut down those giants out there, maybe I can be a little help here too.”

After another pain spasm, Sjoukje said, “Well, I’m glad Ma is here, I know I can count on her.”

Johannes pretended to take offence at this observation.

“I think you’d better step out now, Johannes,” Ma told him a few hours later. He reluctantly obeyed her word. [^]

It seemed a long time before Johannes heard the cry of a little voice in the house. Ma called out, “It’s a boy! Come on in.”¹⁶⁷

Hesitantly, Johannes walked into his log house. Shyly he looked at Sjoukje and the baby lying on her bosom. “You can pick him up, Johannes,” his mother said, and Sjoukje began lifting the baby up to him. He gently gathered the baby and cradled him closely, gazing with wonder.

Looking around for a comfortable seat, he said to Sjoukje, “I think we need to order a nice rocking chair from Mr. Kolvoord in Groningen.¹⁶⁸ That would be so nice and comfortable as you take care of this little one.”

“Oh, that would be wonderful, Johannes,” Sjoukje agreed readily.

Some weeks later Sjoukje, with little Titus in her arms, wandered out to the garden.

Johannes said to her, “Weeds in the garden just seem to keep cropping up. If I don’t deal with them, they will completely take over. And then there are the little animals who like to eat the tender plants.” He told Sjoukje about the men at church who were complaining about all the pesky squirrels! “And the rain has been so heavy this spring, I had to replant some seeds two or three times.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷Birth of Tietes, Johannes’ first-born, April 15, 1851.

¹⁶⁸ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 173.

¹⁶⁹*ibid.*, pp. 261, 33.

Johannes followed the recommended process of pulling hills of dirt over the potatoes. It was supposed to be more effective than digging them into the tough grassy ground around the stumps. “This is different from our farming in Friesland,” he told Sjoukje. “I’ve heard it takes three years here for the old grass and weeds to die down so that we can plant as we would like. But at least now the plow can cut through the tough soil where we have cleared the stumps and those big roots.”

“How many acres do you have cleared?” Sjoukje asked. Johannes said proudly, “I have cleared about five acres and I have three acres completely cleaned of stumps and roots.”¹⁷⁰

Sometime later Hendrik Dam came up the path to Vriesland and came across Johannes working in the woods. Johannes rested his ax, “Hello, Mr. Dam, what’s the news?”

Dam said, “I just heard that the Drenthe Church has received a letter from the Netherlands informing them that Rev. Roelof Smit from Overijsel has accepted the invitation to become their pastor.”¹⁷¹

“I expect that the Drenthers are really pleased with that news. It seems that most people prefer to have a preacher, even though I myself tend to prefer reading services,” admitted Johannes. ^

“And maybe,” responded Dam, “this will help the Drenthers become more comfortable with each other. The east side and the west side continue to have differences that keep cropping up.”

Johannes said, “I’m so glad that we Vrieslanders and the people from Gelderland and Noord Holland who have settled in the Vriesland area seem to get along pretty well together. I think that switching to the Dutch language for church services helped everyone feel comfortable.”

Hendrik Dam changed the subject, “Say, how are your potatoes doing? I hear that around the area, there are lots of chipmunks and squirrels eating them before they can be harvested.”

“Ya,” agreed Johannes, “I am losing too many potatoes to those little rascals. But hopefully we will have enough left to last us through the winter. I like my potatoes a lot better than having Johnny cake every meal. I have been shooting a few of the critters. And my brother Wiebe has been trapping them. Sometimes I wonder if the little rascals can be eaten.”

Dam hesitated, “I don’t know; we have been enjoying deer meat on the table, but we haven’t tried squirrel yet. I do know that some of our fellow immigrants have been so disappointed with the farming that they have moved into the cities to find work. Some properties have changed hands already in the few years we have been here. On the other hand, Mr. Dunnink was able to harvest hay in the fall last year.”

They were quiet for a bit, and Johannes asked, “Mr. Dam, what brings you this way today?”

¹⁷⁰ Brinks, *Dutch American Voices*, p. 33.

¹⁷¹ Haan, R., *History of Drenthe Christian Reformed Church*, Oct. 21, 1851, p. 8. *Classis Holland RCA*, Oct. 14, 1851, Art. 8, p. 62.

Dam said, “Well, you know that I haven’t been too happy with things in the church, especially after the official union with the Reformed Dutch Church took place. There are some others who feel the same way who are planning to meet in the log schoolhouse tonight to discuss things. Maybe you would like to come too?”¹⁷² ^

Johannes thought a bit, “You know, I have never felt ready to join the church. I feel like I am slowly learning more about the Lord; but to talk about what’s going on in the church, I don’t think I am ready for that. I do hear some grumbling but I don’t want to add my voice to that. Once in a while Mr. Ulberg tells me about the time he lived in Albany before moving here. He doesn’t talk much about his experience in the church there either.”

Dam said “I can appreciate your hesitance. I would be more comfortable not saying anything either. But I’m a bit afraid of too many harsh words and hurt feelings. I feel like I might be needed to calm down the hard talk. Now I best be on my way.”

Johannes went back to the tree he had been trying to conquer, thinking about the whole church affair. “Why,” he asked the tree, “can’t we all get along?”

The next day he was back by the trees when his neighbor Ulberg came down the trail. “Hey, Johannes,” he called out as he approached. “I was a bit tired of putting a pair of boots together and heard you chopping away in the woods. I must get at mine too, but I am a shoemaker first of all.”

“I understand,” Johannes said breathlessly. “Being a logger is not my first occupation either, but it must be done before the land will be ready for planting any kind of crop.”

“But it is important to take a breather once in a while,” reminded Ulberg.

“Ya,” said Johannes, “I am happy to stop and relax a bit. I hear there was a meeting at the schoolhouse last night to talk about the union with the American church. How did it go?”

“I was kind of wondering if you might show up,” Ulberg responded. “There was quite a large group who were asking questions and sharing thoughts. There were also some strong feelings expressed. But the meeting ended with no real sense of direction out of it all.”

Johannes confessed, “Part of the reason I didn’t come was to avoid such strong feelings and voices. I would like to think of the church as a community of kindness and graciousness. So what happened at the meeting?”

Ulberg said, “Well, to start with, Elder Dam read a piece of the minutes of last year’s meeting of Classis Holland that expressed the dream of the 1834 Separation. He read that the purpose of the 1834 seceders was ‘To seek to uphold the genuine Reformed church, with its characteristic doctrine, as it is found in the confessional standards, the language of the Reformation, and the articles of the Synod of Dort.’¹⁷³ We all gave a hearty hand of applause to that statement. And as

¹⁷² Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 287.

¹⁷³ *Classis Holland*, 1850, p. 37.

the discussion went on, we could agree that the old Dutch Reformed Church sounded pretty good on paper. Then Rev Vander Meulen read from the report that Rev. Wyckoff gave in New York, especially the part that said ‘perfect agreement of doctrine was found’ between our Holland Classis and the Reformed Church.”¹⁷⁴

“Our new neighbor, Gysbert Haan Sr., then reminded us that the church in the Netherlands had much of that on paper too. He noted that these were principles the church said they honored, but did not keep. And they just went ahead and made adjustments to suit themselves whenever it pleased them. Then Mr. Haan went on to say that during the two years he spent living in the East and attending the churches there, his observations were that the Dutch Reformed Church follows what they want to follow and they just ignore what they don’t like.”¹⁷⁵ ^

“Well,” said Johannes, “certainly principles on paper need to be principles of practice, I think. Or they do not mean much.”

Ulberg said, “I really didn’t want to say much. But I was pressed to speak up because I did live for nine months in Albany before coming to my land here. They asked me to share what I saw of the church in Albany where the Rev. Wyckoff is pastor. They had already heard other reports, and so I affirmed what I experienced over there. I admitted I had not heard any catechism sermons, they did not celebrate the feast days, and I never saw a baptism in the midst of the congregation. They asked me some questions about baptisms, and I shared that apparently baptisms were given either in the council room or in people’s houses. I wanted to avoid making accusations. I only was willing to share my observations.”¹⁷⁶

Johannes noted, “I do not understand much about those issues. But I am aware that we did not come to America to bind ourselves to a big organization that would make decisions for us. I know first-hand that the church of the East has been very helpful in assisting us immigrants on our way here to the *Kolonie*. They have been helpful financially too. There certainly are good reasons to be grateful to them. But I think we all expected to form our own church organization here.”

The men sat quietly until Johannes asked, “Why do you think Rev. Van Raalte and the ministers want this union? I have heard people say that Rev. Van Raalte sold out the *Kolonie* church.”¹⁷⁷ You think there’s anything to that accusation?” ^

“Frankly, no,” Ulberg observed. “I think that this union was first the idea of the church of the East.”¹⁷⁸ And I think Rev. Van Raalte and the other leaders were very impressed with the warm welcome and all the help many of us got from the people and ministers there. They certainly did not want to seem ungrateful. Deep down, I think it was as much an emotional response to new

¹⁷⁴ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 454. Schaap, J., *Album*, p. 155.

¹⁷⁵ Beets, H., *Church*, pp. 42-45: We joined a Church we should not have united with.”

¹⁷⁶ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 287. Beets, H., *Gedenkboek*, p. 16.

¹⁷⁷ Beets, H., *Gedenkboek*, pp. 20, 26. Hemkes, G., *Het Gerechtsbestaan der Holl. Chr. Geref. Kerk*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁸ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 29.

friends as anything. But I also think our leaders failed to investigate thoroughly how the church in the East really treated the Church Order and the Form of Subscription.”¹⁷⁹ ^

“From what little I’ve seen,” suggested Johannes, “most of the financial help from the East benefited the city of Holland more than the rest of the communities.”

“I think you’re right about that, although many of the Eastern churches did send boxes of clothing that were distributed to all our communities,” Ulberg reflected. “I don’t know how all this talk will be resolved. But the truth is that our classis really had not finished our discussion on whether we should or should not become part of the American church.”

Ulberg went on to say, “And what concerns me the most is that, according to a copy of the report Rev. Wyckoff gave in New York, he made it sound like Classis Holland had already agreed to the union.¹⁸⁰ And Elder Yntema shared that the Albany classis has already ‘resolved that the Classis of Holland be received under the care of the General Synod.’¹⁸¹ The way things stand at this time, it seems to me that the union between Classis Holland and the Dutch Reformed Church is an accomplished fact.”

Johannes asked, “I suppose the meeting last night was to convince all of us to live with the union?”

Ulberg said sadly, “Ya. I’m sure that was the purpose. Rev. Vander Meulen came all the way from Zeeland to help settle the waters of conflict. But I’m afraid he stirred up the waters instead. In the heat of the moment, Rev. Vander Meulen blurted out that the people who complained were in the spirit of the devil.¹⁸² I dare say he wishes now he hadn’t spoken that way.”

“Oh?” wondered Johannes. “He has such a good reputation for being gentle and settling disputes.”¹⁸³

“Not this time,” Ulberg said. “He was pretty harsh against those who disagreed with him.” “Ya, and he included everyone who agreed with the complainers,” Ulberg continued.

“Oh, my,” Johannes responded. “That certainly was not a way of winning friends.”

“No,” suggested Ulberg. “And he obviously forgot that we in Vriesland have tried hard to hush the harsh voices against the union.”¹⁸⁴

The men sat quietly until Ulberg continued. “So now, either we leave things as they are or we have to make a strong protest. Our meeting last night ended up being a protest, and I hear there have been other protests. But the protests haven’t changed anything, and Classis Holland has not

¹⁷⁹ Beets, H. *Gedenkboek*, p. 17.

¹⁸⁰ Doskers, *Levenschets*, p. 323. Beets, H., *Gedenkboek*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁸¹ Vander Meulen, J., *Hollanders*, p. 48.

¹⁸² Beets, H., *Gedenkboek*, p. 31.

¹⁸³ Vander Meulen, J., *Hollanders*, p. 48.

¹⁸⁴ *Classis Holland*, April 2, 1856. Van Koeveren, A., *Dutch*, p. 543. Van Hinte, *Van Raalte*, p. 225.

walked away from the union.¹⁸⁵ I would say that as a group we ended up deciding that for now we will just learn to live with it.”

Johannes observed, “I think I was right in not attending. I’m still struggling myself about whether or not to join the church. And after these complications, I just don’t have any sense of what I need to do. I do appreciate your sharing these thoughts with me. There’s one more idea that discourages me.”

“Oh?” Ulberg asked. “What else discourages you?”

Johannes responded, “It seems to me that the whole process of this union has said in effect that we ordinary people do not count. I heard you say that Rev. Van Raalte warned Classis Holland not to move too fast, that people might object. But although some discussion apparently did take place in the congregations, what happened last night suggests to me that we ordinary folk are being discounted. The leaders had already decided what they wanted to do.” ^

“I rather think you hit the nail on the head,” Ulberg observed as he stood up to go back toward his workshop.

It was getting close to milking time, but Johannes first stopped at the house, “Hey, Sjoukje, I’ve just had an interesting conversation with Mr. Ulberg. He was asked last night for his ideas on the Eastern church and he says he just gave a minimal report. He said that the group was divided between those who thought we should leave things as they now are and those who want to protest the decision. By the end of the meeting, the majority was in favor of learning to live with the decision.”

Sjoukje said, “I’m not too surprised that no change came of it. We seem to have a conflict between wanting to have our church the way we dreamed and helplessly watching the way it seems to be drifting. It looks like it could end up becoming a contest between loyalty to Jesus and loyalty to helpful church people in the East.”

Johannes thought a moment. “I hope it doesn’t come to that. I think that has been a lot of my struggle over the years already.”

Later Johannes was checking out the trees on his property near the trail to Zeeland. Seeing Mr. Haan Jr. across the trail, he called, “Hello, Mr. Haan. How are things on your side of the road?”

Haan responded, “Coming along pretty good, I’m thinking. I’m slowly getting more of these trees out of the way and more space for planting.”

“How are your parents doing?” asked Johannes.

¹⁸⁵ Pieters, A., *Settlement*, p. 125.

“Pretty good, I guess,” he answered. “But I’m hoping my father doesn’t get into too many squabbles. He’s kind of known for that, and the meeting in the schoolhouse seems to have stirred up some strong resentment against him.”

Johannes said, “I’m sorry to hear that.”

“My father, like the rest of us, has some strong opinions. I guess that’s not unusual among us folk coming here as immigrants. We all are kind of strong characters,” responded Mr. Haan. “But I am hoping he’ll be a bit quieter in this new community. He told me that he applied to be an elder in our church. He’s been a protégée for years with Rev. Scholte in Hilversum as well as with Rev. Van Velzen in Friesland.”¹⁸⁶

“Well, that would help make him a great addition to our community, wouldn’t it?” Johannes suggested.

“Ya,” and Mr. Haan added, “but the council turned him down.¹⁸⁷ They felt he was too strong in his opinions and not gentle enough with those who disagree with him. As you can imagine, that did not sit well with him. I guess I should have remembered that he had difficulties fitting in back in the Netherlands. In the past two years that he’s been in America, he’s also moved around a lot. He seems to have an issue of some kind no matter where he goes.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Haan,” Johannes consoled. “We all are eager to live at peace with each other. I hope your father can find it in his heart also to be in community with all of us. But disagreements do happen and we do have to ask each other for forgiveness from time to time.”

Rev. Ypma approached Johannes. “I see you are busy with your trees and farm,” he started.

“Ya,” Johannes responded, “those seem to be the prime tasks for the foreseeable future.”

“I hope you don’t get discouraged by that,” the Reverend offered. “I was at the schoolhouse meeting last night and was discouraged by what I heard.”

“I kind of expected it to be contentious,” Johannes suggested, “so I did not want to come. What was your take on it all?” he asked.

“I was disturbed by the contrary voices,” he said. “The strongest voice for was Rev. Van der Meulen and the strongest voice against was the senior Mr. Haan. But I don’t understand the man. At Classis he upbraided us for having two year terms for elders and he maintained that the Church Order states elders are for life.¹⁸⁸ I guess he hasn’t read the Church Order and is just going by traditions followed in his church in Utrecht. He’s not following the Church Order, but he’s criticizing us for keeping two year terms as the Church Order requires.”

¹⁸⁶Beets, H., *Church*, pp. 46, 66.

¹⁸⁷Hyma, A. *Van Raalte*, p. 218. Van Hinte, *Van Raalte*, p. 219.

¹⁸⁸*Classis Holland RCA*, Oct. 14, 1851, Art. 5, p. 58.

“So,” pondered Johannes, “he’s standing firm on what he *believes* the Church Order says, but he doesn’t *know* what the Church Order actually says!”

“No,” lamented Rev. Ypma, “I know that in the Secession Church, a lot of Church Order requirements were ignored or just not followed.¹⁸⁹ Some requirements were felt to be outdated; many worship leaders did not know the rules, and some did not take our new situation into account. Ministers just kind of left those issues alone to avoid even more squabbling than was already at the Synods. That kind of followed the freedom that the fellowship groups had before they became churches.” ^

“You mean to say that various different traditions were tolerated within the churches, even though they maintained they were following the 1619 Church Order?”

“Ya, I guess some rules were considered less important than others, and they accepted that flexibility,” shared the Reverend.

They each turned to go back to their own challenges of the day.

When Johannes returned home, he saw Hendrik Dam coming toward him. After greeting each other, Johannes asked the question on his mind, “What do you make of the meeting at the school house, Mr. Dam?”

“Ya, Mr. Van Haitsma, that’s a good question. I’m not sure what to make of it. Obviously Rev. Ypma and Rev. Van der Meulen are in favor of staying with the Reformed Church, and their comments held a lot of weight. Then Mr. Haan spoke up strongly for going our separate ways. And I thought Mr. Ulberg’s comments on his experience in Albany certainly supported that direction.”

Dam continued, “I remember when the Separated Church opted out of the State Church back in 1834, it meant we lost a significant amount of financial help to pay ministers’ salaries, run the schools, and care for the poor. It’s a bit like that now too. The Reformed Church has helped us financially in many ways and with people resources too. Rev. Ypma told us last night that Classis Holland wrote in their minutes ‘that the union was a source of joy and gratitude.’¹⁹⁰ ” So some people feel we would risk losing that help and support if we decide to stay by ourselves.”

“Do you think that most of the people in the churches would agree with that statement? Is that an accurate understanding of the sentiment in the churches?” wondered Johannes.

“Ya, I do. And I think that means there is not a lot of support at this time for opting out of the union. A copy of Rev. Wyckoff’s report was read that claimed we in Classis Holland have ‘perfect agreement of standards’ with them.¹⁹¹ The union seems almost a snowball effect. Maybe

¹⁸⁹ Te Velde, M., *Brummelkamp*, p. 204.

¹⁹⁰ *Classis Holland Minutes*, April, 1851. Swierenga, R., *True Brothers: The Netherlandic Origins of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, 1857-1880*.

¹⁹¹ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 455.

we have to listen for a while longer before thinking about making any move to go a different way. Certainly, at this time, none of our ministers have any desire to opt out.”

Both men were quiet while they considered the situation.

Dam confessed to Johannes, “Sometimes when I’m listening to Rev. Ypma’s sermons, I hear a spirit that seems so different from that of the Old Fathers. I have been seriously thinking about asking to have my membership transferred to the Drenthe church.¹⁹² You know that I only live a half mile from their building.”

“We would be very disappointed to have you leave our church here,” admitted Johannes. “You always bring such a peaceful spirit.”

“Well,” responded Dam, “I have been thinking. Gysbert Haan Sr. told me that he has been seriously thinking about moving to Grand Rapids. And he said that if he moves, his house will be standing empty and he would welcome us to use it for a fellowship place. Do you think you might be interested in being part of that?”¹⁹³

“Now that sounds like a wonderful idea,” exuded Johannes. “And I’m sure Sjoukje would like that too. Would we be listening to sermons written by the Old Fathers?”

“Oh, yes!” exclaimed Dam, “that would be the main event along with the Scriptures, prayers and singing the old favorite Psalms.”

“I’m sure you can count us in,” Johannes said. “And in the meantime we could gather at my house. Sjoukje would welcome that because, having a new baby, she might not want to travel much yet.”

“Well,” Dam said, “Let’s plan on next Wednesday at your place for our little gathering with the Old Fathers, and let’s pass the word.”

Some weeks later, Pa walked to Johannes to share some good news, “We just got another letter from Tjalling. He and Neeltje and the children are thinking they are ready to make the long trip here.”

“That is good news!” answered Johannes. “Then we will all be together again.”

“Just like we wanted,” added Pa. “That was the biggest grief for Ma and me, that we were not able to come out here all together, and then wondering if Tjalling and family would ever make it. But it isn’t all good news. Tjalling wrote that they are wanting to come, but don’t have the money for the trip.”

“Oh, my,” returned Johannes, “and our money is not so plentiful either. How will we manage that? That’s just why I’ve been working in the logging camp. We needed the money.”

¹⁹²Vriesland RCA Minutes, Jan. 2, 1852.

¹⁹³Vriesland RCA Minutes, Jan. 14, 1853, Art. 2. Boonstra, H., *Lecture Series of the Van Raalte Institute*, No. 6.

“I know that none of us have the money to help bring them over,” explained Pa, “so I was talking with Wopke. We decided we would ask Mr. Zylstra for a loan to cover the trip and he replied that they would be glad to make a loan.”¹⁹⁴

“Well, that is extremely generous of them,” said Johannes. He continued, “I wonder what happened that now Tjalling and family are ready to come?”

Wopke came over the trail just then, and joined the conversation. “Ya, I was wondering that too.”

Pa answered, “I think that Neeltje was not ready to leave her family before. But they are realizing that there is a better future for them here. Ma and I are so glad that they are coming. We haven’t seen those little grandkids for three years. I’m sure that as soon as they hear about the loan, they will book their trip.”

Wopke spoke up, “I just heard that some acres south and east of mine are available.”

Later that week Johannes commented to Sjoukje, “It won’t be all that long before Tjalling and his family will be leaving Friesland and be on their way to Vriesland! I think I’ll talk with Pa to see what we can do to get a loghouse ready for them.”

“But,” Sjoukje asked, “where will that house be built? What land is he going to work on?”

“That’s a question,” said Johannes, “that I’ll have to ask Pa. I think there’s still some acreage in the area for sale at \$1.25 per acre. In fact, Wopke says that on the southeast corner of his farm, there is a forty-acre piece for sale. We probably can’t find anything closer than that. But how we’ll pay for that, I don’t know. I think it’s pretty clear that Tjalling is coming without an extra cent in his pocket.”

Later Johannes spoke to Pa, “Pa, I’m thinking maybe we should get together to talk some more about getting ready for Tjalling and his family. Hopefully we can give him a good start like people gave us in 1848. We were helped so much in this new land. That helped made it easier for us than it was for those who came the first year.”

“Ya, son. I agree that is what we need to do. How about we make that our agenda for Sunday afternoon? We always have so much to talk about. But this time we could discuss what we can do to prepare for Tjalling and family. We don’t know just when they will come, but if everthing goes as quickly as he hopes, it shouldn’t be too long. So, ya, it is time to make some preparations. Better bring your thinking cap.”

Several weeks later, Pa knocked on the door and Sjoukje welcomed him inside. He said excitedly, “I just got a telegram from Allegan. Tjalling has arrived in New York, safe and well. But completely broke.” Johannes heard Pa’s news when he came in from the milking.

¹⁹⁴*Vriesland RCA Minutes*, March 2, 1855.

“What does he need, Pa? Is there anything we can do?” asked Johannes.

“That’s a good question, son. You know your brother. He doesn’t always plan ahead. I hope he has sense enough to connect with the Dutch Immigrant Committee set up in New York. I expect they would help him find work and lodging to pay for food and home for the time being. They have been so helpful to us and many others too. But we do want the family to come here as soon as possible. I talked briefly with Wopke too. Wopke has his money tied up in his new farm equipment, and Ma and I don’t have that kind of cash available either. So we thought maybe to ask his brother-in-law Eke Zylstra for another loan to finance Tjalling’s trip the rest of the way.”

“You certainly have my blessing on asking Mr. Zylstra,” said Johannes. “Sjoukje and I don’t have the money either. I guess the loan from Mr. Zylstra before was not enough to get Tjalling all the way.”

“Ya, it turned out that way,” returned Pa. “Well, with your encouragement and Wopke’s backing, I will go to see Mr. Zylstra about this.” Off he went down the path to Mr. Zylstra’s place.

Sjoukje said, “Isn’t it amazing that we now can send messages over wires? Even though we are still living kind of primitively, I see new possibilities all the time.”

“I agree,” added Johannes. “I expect that as our farms become more productive, we will be buying new-fangled farm machinery too. Wopke now has a threshing machine for his grain crops, and he’s going to rent it out to others to help harvest their grain. I think I can see we need to mix farming with wise business choices.”

The next day Pa hitched the horse bought from John Ball to a light buggy, and he and Ma packed a picnic basket and followed the trails to Allegan. He marveled, “What took Johannes and Jetse all day to walk, we can easily do in half the time. Things are improving so rapidly.” They admired the numerous open acreages flanked by the forest as they cantered along to the telegraph office in Allegan. Their own farm was showing more and more cleared and even cleaned fields. With Jetse and Wiebe working together on the long saw, they could see progress happening almost by the day.

“From what we know, Ma,” Pa said, “it should probably take about a week or two for Tjalling and family to arrive.”

Ma observed, “I guess they will be shocked when they first see the city of Holland. I remember that it didn’t seem much to us when we arrived. Just think of what Rev. Van Raalte’s house looked like then. And now he has a wonderful palatial frame home with many rooms. And that after only four years!” ^

Pa said, “I’m thinking we ought to be planning our frame home too. I know both Wopke and Johannes are dreaming of their homes, and Annie and Sjoukje have done a lot of talking about it. I’m not sure how quickly that will all come about. But it is a good idea to be thinking about what we need and want when the time is right.”

“Who would have thought,” pondered Ma, “that in only three years we would have progressed so much. We are land owners. We have our own horse and buggy to ride in; we even have a stove in our house. And now our family is coming together. God is so good!”

A few days later, the whole Van Haitsma family and brother-in-law Frank got together at the farm purchased for Tjalling and family. They had followed a trail that crossed southeast through Wopke’s farm to Tjalling’s new farm. The men came prepared to start cutting the trees for the loghouse. Johannes, who was now accepted as the logging expert of the family, helped pick out the trees that would be the right size for the walls. Additional trees were cut for the shingles and planks. Johannes said, “I think we should plan this entire house with plank floors.”

Pa agreed, “Ya, I think we should plan this house a bit more advanced than how we started. We should include a stove too for Neeltje’s convenience. She will have the four children to care for and a stove will make housekeeping much easier, don’t you agree, ladies? You three have graciously put up with so few conveniences.”

Ma countered, “And you men have had to put in so many hours of hard work. Much more than if we had stayed in Friesland. But then we would never have become landowners.”

The men first chose a site that would eventually serve Tjalling as the barn space. They picked out the first trees to cut and with the saw and ax they brought the trees down as close to the building site as possible. Next they would start a log frame to receive the flooring. Tjalling’s house would have all the improvements that the family had learned since they had arrived in this new land. And the chopping began!

A few days later other neighbors came to join them in lifting the logs and notching the ends to hold the logs for the walls. Shingles, windows and doors were prepared. This home became the best loghouse in Vriesland. And one of the last. Soon all new buildings would be frame houses and barns.

About two months after they had embarked on the ocean voyage, the newest Van Haitsma family made their first trip on the ox-drawn wagon through the grasses of the Vriesland area towards the property so lovingly prepared for them. The trail had been improved significantly over the past few years and it was now smooth enough that Tjalling’s family could share the wagon with a load of Veneklasen chimney bricks for their new house.

Johannes and Sjoukje followed in their own horse-drawn buggy. Johannes observed to Sjoukje, “When we arrived in 1848 we sheltered with others until our own cabins were ready. Now in 1851 the Van Haitsma family is able to prepare ahead for Tjalling and family so they can move right into a cabin. It is still primitive living, but it is a good shelter that will serve them well until they decide to build a frame home.”

Much later that evening, after the tired newcomers has been settled into their new log home, Johannes and Sjoukje recalled the pleased responses of Tjalling and his family. Suddenly Sjoukje asked, “When will we be building our frame house?”

Johannes could hear the longing in her voice. He said, “We have just cleared enough acres to start raising a crop that will provide us with cash income. Our log home did cost sweat equity, but did not cost much money. I will begin working on the lumber for our new place and I think maybe after the next season we will be able to buy all the other building materials we will need for a fine frame home. Thanks to being able to work in the logging camp, we have had a good beginning here. But I will need to use the money we have left to buy the plow and oxen that I will need to prepare the ground for crops.”

“I will be patient, dear Johannes,” Sjoukje said. “I just want to dream ahead a little.”

Johannes responded, “Our dream has brought us to this place, and after only three years we are already dreaming about building a frame house. Do you have ideas about what our house is going to look like?”

“I would be pleased,” Sjoukje said, “to have a nice kitchen and eating area where we can have Pa and Ma and the whole Van Haitsma family eat a meal together sometimes on Sunday noon. And I dream of having a bedroom just for us. And bedrooms upstairs for our children rather than on the ground floor, one for the boys and one for the girls! But I know that will all happen in God’s time. For now, we have everything we need for ourselves and baby Titus.”

Johannes thoughtfully considered, “We are dreaming for material blessings. We do want to keep our perspective with the Lord being first in our lives. Keeping the Lord foremost will keep us from forgetting that all the things we have are from Him in the first place.”

Sjoukje continued, “And I guess first things first. Tjalling and Neeltje need to get settled with the children. And they have a lot to learn about clearing their farmland. At least now some of the trees that they cut down can be hauled to the mill and sold for lumber and other wood products. Tjalling will have a cash crop right on his own property.”

“Ya,” added Johannes, “We have learned a lot about how to use what’s here to make products that others will want to buy. And the flatboats on the Black River are hauling wood products to sell in Chicago and other places. Jan Rabbers has made New Groningen into quite a little industry place. And we all benefit from that.”

Meanwhile at Wopke and Annie’s house, more plans were being discussed. Wopke said, “Annie, I think we need to do something better with our store. The log cabin across the road has worked out fine for a few years. But I think it’s time to build a frame building, maybe with an upstairs so the person running the store can live up there. What do you think?”

“I agree whole heartedly,” Annie said. “We need something bigger and more open than the cabin. It’s pretty dark in there, just like in here. I’m looking forward to having our own frame house with lots of windows. Ya, I think the store will do better with more openness and some windows. Do you think it should stay across the trail from us, with the widow living next door?”

“I was thinking that this could be the time to buy land at the section corner and build it there,” Wopke said. “The land on the northeast corner, diagonally across from Pa, is for sale. And I

firmly believe that that corner will become the natural center of the village. I'm aware that Rev. Ypma was hoping that the village center would be by his home and the burial grounds. But already we see people traveling along this trail from Beaverdam to Drenthe. And from Vriesland over to Jamestown the trails that are most traveled are likely to help locate the village center at the section corner."

"That makes sense to me," responded Annie. "I agree with you. We do want the store to be helpful to as many people in the community as possible."

"All right, then," Wopke stated, "I will ask the widow what she thinks of moving to a nice home with more space for the children and herself above the store. And I will see who wants the job of building the store."

"Sjoukje," called out Ma from her loghouse door. When Sjoukje showed up in her doorway, Ma said, "Can you come over?"

"Ya," Sjoukje hollered back, "I'll be right over." She grabbed her coat off the hook and, picking up little Titus, went to Ma's home. When she got there, she could see that Sietske was having labor pains. She asked Sietske, "Is everything okay?"

Sietske answered, "I think so, but I haven't been here before."

"Well, *Beppe* here has lots of experience. That's a good thing," Sjoukje smiled at Ma. "So *Beppe*, tell me what I can do to help."

"For now," Ma said, "we best keep water warm and keep Sietske comfortable. And let's keep track of the labor pains. And remind Sietske to breathe. Oh, and be sure to keep on praying."

A noise at the door announced Pa coming home from the woods. "What's going on?" he said, seeing the three women in the house.

Ma answered, "Sietske is having her baby. Would you get Frank, please? Sietske needs him to be close."

"Okay." Pa found Frank behind his house, and told him, "Sietske is having your baby and she is asking for you. Better come with me to the house."

Some hours later a somber silence hung in the air. The darkness of disappointment and pain on Frank's face told the story. "I'm so sorry, Frank," Johannes blurted out. "Did neither Sietske nor the baby survive?"

"No," stuttered Frank. "She tried so hard. And Ma tried everything she knew. She blew on the baby's face, blew into its mouth. Nothing worked."

Sietske Van Haitsma Hornstra and Baby Hornstra were buried in the old Vriesland burial grounds next to Rev. Ypma's house.¹⁹⁵

Elder de Vree, walking home from the Reverend Ypma's home, came past Johannes working his fall crops. He greeted Johannes, "Hey, Mr. Van Haitsma, you are being industrious. How are your crops? Have the varmints eaten up much of what you have planted?"

"Ya, I'm afraid so, Mr. de Vree. They have been bad this year," answered Johannes. "What brings you this way?" he asked.

"I was just visiting the Reverend and discussing the Classis meeting with him," responded the elder.

"Oh?" queried Johannes. "Anything interesting take place at this Classis meeting?"

"Well, ya," Mr. de Vree said. "We were talking about Mr. Haan who showed up at the meeting and raised a bunch of concerns about the Church Order."

"I've heard him talk pretty strongly about the Church Order too," Johannes observed. "He had an issue with our council about being recognized as an elder, he told me some time ago. He wasn't happy about being turned down by the council, was he?"

"Obviously he's made that public knowledge in our community," the Elder noted. "I think that may be why he raised the issue at Classis. He's definitely upset about being turned down by us."

"Do you think," wondered Johannes, "that his moving to Grand Rapids might have anything to do with that too?"

"Probably," suggested Elder de Vree, "But I think it also may have something to do with his preferring to start up the weaving business again instead of working to bring down the big trees here."

"Ya, I'd heard that he was a weaver back in Utrecht before coming to America," considered Johannes. "That would probably be an easier way to make a living than what we're doing here."

"And maybe he's hoping that the church there will recognize his eldership, and he could be of more influence in the church than just being a regular member like here."

"Well, I hope that he would make a more gentle impression there than he has done here in the past two years."

¹⁹⁵*Vriesland Cemetery Records*. Death of Sietske van Haitsma Hornstra and child, died 1851, buried in the Old Vriesland Cemetery under the name Pietje van der Tol, wife of Frank Hornstra. This was the second burial in the Old Cemetery.

“Ya, I agree with you there. But I don’t know if he can change his demeanor enough for that,” Elder de Vree proposed.

1852*

“Sjoukje,” said Johannes, “ever since that meeting last year in our schoolhouse, disagreements keep stirring in the church.”

“Like what, Johannes?” she asked.

“Just on January 12,” Johannes said, “Mr. Dam asked to transfer his membership to Drenthe.”¹⁹⁶

“He wants to transfer?” wondered Sjoukje.

Johannes answered, “He told me it was simply because he felt the preaching in Drenthe was more like the Old Fathers.”

“And he does live so close to Drenthe,” responded Sjoukje.

“Anyway, he told me that the council would not agree to transfer his membership,” said Johannes. “He also mentioned that Elder Smit in Graafschap started up a fellowship group between there and the city of Holland. And Mr. Smit talked student Jacob Schepers into doing the preaching there. Mr. Schepers had been turned down by Classis Holland for ordination. And the biggest news is that Graafschap had heard from Rev. Van der Schuur that he is accepting their invitation to be their minister.”¹⁹⁷

Sjoukje wondered, “Two ministers for one church?”

Johannes said, “I understood that the fellowship wants to be a church on its own. They are breaking from Graafschap. And some members will be coming from Holland City too.”

“It seems like there are so many disturbances happening throughout the churches of the *Kolonie*,” mused Sjoukje. ^

“Ya,” agreed Johannes, “It is hard to know just what will come out of all that. At least when I plant a seed in the ground, I know that either there will be a plant, or some critter will take it out. We know what’s likely to happen. With the *Kolonie* church I’m not so sure what will be the outcome.”

¹⁹⁶ Dam’s request for a membership transfer to Drenthe RCA was denied, Jan. 12, 1852, *Vriesland RCA Minutes*.

¹⁹⁷ Swierenga, R., *Family Quarrels*, p. 68. Harm Jan Smit induced Jacob R Schepers in 1851, who studied under Walter Kok in the Netherlands, under C. Vander Meulen in MI and licensed to “exhort” by Classis Holland to serve the splinter group in South Holland. Schepers had begun his studies under Walter A. Kok (a Cocksian) along with Roelof Smit 1852, Koene van den Bosch, 1856, and Willem H. Frieling. R. Swierenga suggests that “Wolter Kok could be seen as the spiritual father of the CRC.” ^

Mr. De Vree seemed to be loitering after the service. Johannes approached him, “Elder De Vree, I hear you’ve been to the meetings of Classis Holland lately. How do things seem to be going in our churches?”

De Vree responded, “There are always lots of items on the agenda. There’s always some problem to discuss. Some new congregation is wanting to start, or some congregation has a church order issue, or someone is objecting to something. At our last meeting when visitors were invited to speak, Mr. Haan, who used to be part of our church, raised some issues.”¹⁹⁸

“Oh?” wondered Johannes. “He seems to come on pretty strong sometimes.”

“Ya,” agreed the elder. “Even though he was just a visitor, he was quick to speak.”

“What was his issue with the Classis?” asked Johannes.

“Church Order issues,” responded De Vree. “He asked about the terms for elder.”

“I’ve heard him talk about that sometimes,” observed Johannes.

“Ya, that’s been discussed in our council meetings too,” noted De Vree. “But Mr. Haan came on kind of strong. He accused the Reformed Church of pretense. He said that in the Reformed Church ‘the adoption of the Church Order is nothing more than make-believe.’”[^]

“Oh, my!” returned Johannes. “That’s the kind of talk that he did a lot around Vriesland too when he was still here. I don’t suppose he was very warmly received over that?”

“No,” replied the elder, “Rev. Van Raalte gave an extensive response and said that this issue had been thoroughly discussed already. The Reverend got his dander up and spoke rather strongly himself.”

“That is a scene I can just imagine,” smiled Johannes.

“Johannes, I just came from the store. You’ll never guess what’s for sale there!” Sjoukje chuckled.

“Well, with that kind of announcement, I don’t even dare to guess,” answered Johannes. “What is it?”

“Something I never thought of,” Sjoukje teased him.

“That makes me even more curious,” Johannes responded.

“Well, I met Mr. Lambertus Scholten who settled on the south side of Graafschap,” Sjoukje informed him.

¹⁹⁸*Classis Holland Minutes*, Oct. 14, 1851, pp. 56, 58.

“Yes?” Johannes came back, “but what is it? You’re keeping me in the dark.”

“We probably will want to buy one,” Sjoukje suggested.

“Buy one what?” Johannes insisted. “Tell me.”

“Mr. Scholten brought kittens to the store to sell,” Sjoukje finally said.

“I never would have guessed kittens. But I think it might be a good idea to buy one. We have a lot of mice and other little rodents around our place. A good mouser would be a help,” Johannes agreed. “It might take a kitten a bit of time to get big enough to take care of that problem, but it will put the rodents on notice that they will not have free run of the place much longer.”

“Johannes,” asked Sjoukje, “are the potato plants maturing yet?”

“Ya, it won’t be long and we’ll have new potatoes,” assured Johannes. And he added, “That will be a wonderful improvement over having so much navy bean soup and cornmeal.”

“That’s a good thing,” observed Sjoukje, “because we don’t have much left. I stopped at the store today to see if there were potatoes to be had. And they did have a few. So I brought home a bag full. Otherwise we would soon run out, and if we don’t have potatoes, we won’t have much of a meal.”

“Now that would be a problem. We Dutchmen need potatoes for a real meal. I remember that it was pretty bad when we had that potato blight some years ago in the Old Country. I hope it never gets that bad again either here or there,” said Johannes.

“I remember,” offered Sjoukje, “that when our friends first came here in 1847, they had corn for everything, even coffee. We already have it really good compared to that.”¹⁹⁹

1853 *

Johannes exulted, “I’m so excited, Sjoukje! Now you’re about to give birth to our second child. Do you have any idea if it will be a boy or a girl?”

“Ma has her idea based on the strength of this child kicking and squirming inside me,” suggested Sjoukje. “She is convinced it will be another boy.”

“No matter if it is a boy or a girl, the child will come into a loving family. But I guess another boy to eventually help work the farm has some advantages,” Johannes boasted.

¹⁹⁹ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 198.

“Oh, you men! Always thinking about boys to help get the work done,” mocked Sjoukje laughingly. “It’s okay, my man. I will be pleased either way.”

“Have you thought about names?”asked Johannes.

“I think we should do the traditional thing,” answered Sjoukje. “The child should be named after one of my parents if that’s alright with you.”

“Why sure,” responded Johannes. “Our first born was named after my family, so that makes sense.”

“Ma,” Johannes spoke up, “here’s the hot water you asked me to prepare.”

“Thanks, son, now shoo. This is women’s work. You can join the other men outside. You’ll hear soon enough.” Johannes quietly went outside. It seemed like a long time, but he realized it wasn’t when he heard a strong cry from inside.

Pa said, “It must be a boy. Such a strong voice belongs to a future man.”

Just then Ma stuck her head out the door and called Johannes back in. “It’s another boy, another worker for the farm. Listen to him hollering already!”

A bit hesitant, Johannes entered to be with Sjoukje and their new son. “I’m pleased,” Sjoukje uttered, “This is a strong boy. We’ll call him Reinder after my family.²⁰⁰ Just as we talked about.”

“Ya,” Johannes said, “that will please the family. And thank God, this little fellow sounds so healthy. May God’s blessing rest upon him just as God has blessed our first son.”

Sjoukje cuddled her little newborn in her arms as she lay resting on the bed. “My, what a beautiful baby,” she said.

Johannes chuckled, “I remember you saying that when Titus was born too. You think maybe you’re a little prejudiced?”

“Oh, I’m sure I am. But my one regret is that my Pa will not see this new baby named after him,” she said.

Johannes observed, “Unfortunately, that is one consequence of leaving the motherland without your parents. Why do you think they weren’t interested in coming to America?”

“Maybe because there were too many other family members who were not interested in moving. And like your family who mostly came, they wanted to keep their family together. I kind of

²⁰⁰ Reinder, born Aug. 25, 1853, to Sjoukje and Johannes was named after her father, Reinder Roersma.

expect that my brother Peter might still be coming, just like Tjalling came later. But maybe he's waiting till our parents have passed away," Sjoukje mused.

"I'm so glad you and the baby are okay. I have had some fear that something dreadful might happen, like with my sister Sietske."

"I'm glad too. It is so good to finally see our family grow a little. First Titus, and now Reinder. I guess most parents want boys, especially with the hard work we have to do on the farm," said Sjoukje.

"Ya, we have hopes that our boys will grow to work on the farm too. I know I expected to follow Pa on the barge in the Netherlands. Now I rather expect to see our boys grow up to be farmers like me. But I hope they won't have to work quite as hard to cut out their space in life as we did here."

"Well, if things continue to improve as they have been, our boys should be quite well off when they are grown and have their families," responded Sjoukje.

"Look," said Johannes, "our Titus is only two years old and Reinder is newborn and here we are reflecting on what their future might be like. I'm glad we can plan, but God is the One who needs to cast the blessing on all our lives. We can pray that He will bless them as much as He has blessed us. Of course it does make a difference if they follow Him as we are trying to do. We want to give them a good example so they will want to love and serve God all their lives."

"Ya, and maybe every time you cut down another tree, you need to think we are cutting them growing space for the years to come," smiled Sjoukje.

Johannes asked Elder Dam, "Who is the preacher for today?"

Dam answered, "Rev. Seine Bolks from Graafschap. He was assigned by Classis Holland for us today. I think he's a little more moderate than Rev. Ypma was. He's also a friend of Rev. Van Raalte's. They worked together in the Gelderland and Overisel area back in the Old Country."

"I'm kind of glad we have mostly reading services," said Johannes. "I sure appreciate the messages that come from the Old Fathers. I don't know why it is that I prefer them to the preachers that are assigned here once a month." ^

"It is hard to pin down, isn't it?" responded Dam. "But I do share the sense that the Old Fathers have something we like that our *Kolonie* preachers don't seem to manage to bring out in the services."

“The word I hear from people in Overisel is that they are pleased with the preaching in their church. That’s probably a good thing for the church. They really don’t need a break in their church like in Drenthe last year.”²⁰¹

“No, I think you’re right, Johannes. But I’m not sure we can prevent those kinds of happenings. I hear there’s a young man in Noordeloos who is stirring up that congregation. If he continues his ways, there may be a split there too.”²⁰²

“Maybe if we keep going with reading the Old Fathers in our fellowship gathering,” suggested Johannes, “then we can enjoy those sermons there and not have a split here in the Vriesland church.”

Dam added, “With the strong voice of Mr. Haan gone from Vriesland, I’m hoping we may be able to keep a peaceful communion here. That is what was happening in the Netherlands for years. The fellowships were alongside the church, and anyone who wished could participate. It worked out very nicely.”

Johannes admitted to Dam, “It does concern me that Rev. Smit speaks so harshly against Rev. Van Raalte.

Dam considered this quietly. “He does use strong words sometime, doesn’t he? I guess it’s partly because he wasn’t here from the beginning and didn’t experience the difficulties that we did. He can’t comprehend how grateful we were for the generous help and assistance of the Eastern church.”

Johannes reflected, “I will always be very grateful for the kindness and open hearts of those people in Albany who helped us along the way. But I simply cannot believe that they did all those helpful things in order to bribe us into being part of their church. They gave us good advice and they were generous with their time. They treated us like family who were there to help family.”

“Yes,” Dam said, “I think we can give them credit for good hearts in helping us. But I think I can understand they could have had the possibility of union with our group in their minds, too. Somewhere along the line I think there may have been a hope in their hearts that this union would happen.”²⁰³

Johannes thought about this and said, “Back in Friesland I felt that there was so much arguing that I did not even want to be part of the church. I certainly was not ready to join the Separatists. I thought it was important to love each other and I did not see that happening.”

Dam said, “That is so true. Back then our leaders did not talk kindly about the State Church. I can see that it would make it hard to join them. But the State Church ministers did drift away

²⁰¹*Drenthe Church History.*

²⁰² Swierenga, *Brothers*, p. 5.

²⁰³ Pieters, A., *Settlement*, pp. 125, 121. Joldersma, R., *De Grondwet*, Feb. 27, 1912.

from the Old Fathers. And they no longer compared truth to the Bible. Few of them believed any more what the church used to believe.”

He continued, “I think that all of us from the Separated Church really did not want to separate from the State Church. What we really wanted was to return to the old ways. We wanted our worship to be more faithful to the Word. Mr. Haan has seen that the Reformed Church here in America has also played a bit loose with the standards.”

“You mean,” asked Johannes, “that they have the Confessions and Church Order on the books, but do not follow them in their churches?”[^]

“Yes, I think that was the main issue,” Dam said, “and our friend Ulberg says he saw the same pattern in Albany when he spent the winter there before becoming your neighbor.”²⁰⁴

Johannes asked, “Now you and Rev. Smit both are objecting to the union. What I don’t understand is why Rev. Smit is joining the Presbyterian Church. Rev. Smit is simply choosing another denomination and his church will still not have its own authority. And now they will be part of a church that doesn’t speak Dutch.”

“That’s a problem in my mind too,” said Dam. “I know that the Presbyterian Church follows most of the confessions too. But I think you’re right, joining them will not really be a returning either.”

Johannes said, “Mr. Dam, you started the fellowship meetings and I am so thankful that you continue to be a part of them. They are the one time every week when my soul rejoices. Sjoukje has been encouraging me to make a public confession of my faith and be officially part of the church here. I would like to stand up for Jesus by doing that. But I keep being troubled by all the arguments going on.”

“Ya, Johannes,” replied Dam, “Jesus asks us to be loving to each other. Jesus said, ‘Love one another as I have loved you.’ I’m beginning to think that that’s a much more important mark of the church than anything else.”

1854 *

Johannes asked Pa, “What happened last night at church council? Ma told me you’ve been denied communion.”²⁰⁵ ^

“Ya, son,” Pa replied, “They were upset that I had not paid back the loan we got from Mr. Zylstra’s family in 1851. The loan was to bring Tjalling and his family here to America, you remember.”

²⁰⁴ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 287.

²⁰⁵ *Vriesland RCA Minutes*, March 2, 1854,

“Sure I remember, Pa,” returned Johannes, “but why didn’t you pay it back?”

”Well, son,” responded Pa, “we wanted Tjalling to take responsibility for his life. It seems like all along he has been inclined to take so little initiative in his life. I think that’s why he didn’t manage to save for the journey to America in the first place. Ma and I did not see eye to eye on how to handle the situation. But I thought I did the right thing for Tjalling, pushing him to start repaying the loan.”

“So it wouldn’t make any difference if I repaid the loan?” asked Johannes.

“I think that would defeat my goal for Tjalling. I can afford to pay it, but I dearly want Tjalling to pay it himself,” said Pa. “I already talked Wopke out of paying it. I think it is important for Tjalling.”

Pa added, “I’m grateful that your Ma respected my need to resist covering for Tjalling. That was hard for her because she wanted to do the right thing for the Zylstras. But she honored me by allowing me to act on my sense of values.”

“But, Pa,” Johannes said thoughtfully, “if Mr. Zylstra went to the church council with this matter, then maybe he needs the money back.”

Pa responded, “I did have a good talk with Mr. Zylstra the next day, and explained everything to him that I just told you. And I assured him that we will repay the money if my plan doesn’t work out. He accepted that I would not go back on my word and we shook hands.”

Some weeks later Tjalling came wandering to Johannes’ house. “Hey, Johannes, you think maybe Sjoukje has some coffee on the stove? It is a long mile and a half from my house to here.”

Johannes gladly welcomed his older brother. “Tjalling, it is good to see you! We’ve both been so busy clearing our land, we don’t see enough of each other. Maybe someday we’ll get enough land cleared that we can see each other’s homes. But I don’t have a good feel for how level the land is between us. I know there’s a bit of a lowland that takes extra water down to the swamp and Black River. Come on inside; if coffee isn’t on the stove, it soon will be.

“I never expected,” said Tjalling, “what an endless job it would be to cut down these trees. You’ve been at it now for six years and I’ve been at it only three. What a mammoth task we’ve taken on!”

Johannes reminded him, “But look at Wopke’s fields that you have just come through. He started out with a forest just as thick as ours. Of course, he was able to hire some of the neighbors who needed to make some money. That helped him a lot. Now he’s even bought a thresher to help in the harvest, and he rents it out to others for the threshing. He’s quite a business man.”

“Oh, ya,” Tjalling commented, “we saw that in Friesland already, when he bought a barge and started hauling loads around the province. And the decision to pack up and move here was another big business decision. Do you think that was a good decision?”

Johannes answered, “Ya! That was a great decision. He could see the way the Old Country was going and that business was not getting any better, and certainly no better for folks like us. The whole barge business was making a big decline. Quite a few owners had already hired out to the whalers. We needed to come here to make a future for our children. There would be no good future for them over there. Well, come on in.”

He opened the door, and said, “Sjoukje, look who is here. Can you put a pot of coffee on for us?”

Sjoukje said, “It’s on already. I saw Tjalling walk across the fields, so I put a pot on. It will be ready in a few minutes. Please make yourself comfortable, Tjalling.”

Little Reinder made his way to Tjalling who put the little guy on his knee. Sjoukje said, “That boy is just growing so fast. It’s a good thing he can use Titus’ hand-me-downs. And I’m constantly making new clothes for Titus to wear. But you know all about that, I’m sure. How’s Neeltje doing? ”

“Well,” said Tjalling, “with four young ones, she’s keeping busy, of course. She also finds it a constant job to keep them all in clothes. She loves it when she finds time to do her needlework. Our Sytske is quite a little helper with the animals and chickens. He is courageous enough to pull the eggs out from the nests, and he carries a stick in case a rooster gets too bold. Tryntje is a good helper for Neeltje, especially with another little one on the way. Tiete follows Sytse around and soon will take over some of his chores. Antje and Tettje are trying hard to keep up.”

Tjalling took a sip of his coffee. “But I should talk with you about why I’m here. I’m very aware that the church back in Friesland would have been happy for us to make profession of faith and be full members. None of us boys took that step. And so far none of us has done that here either. I am planning to go the next council meeting to ask permission to join the church. I don’t know what they’ll say. I haven’t been so faithful in church. I can’t promise to be an outstanding member either. But I do think the Holy Spirit has been speaking to me about it. As we have been hearing the sermons written by the Old Fathers, I feel myself squirming uncomfortably. So that is what I’m going to do. What do you think?”

Johannes responded, “Tjalling, that is wonderful! I’ve been thinking about that too, but I haven’t quite made up my mind yet.”

Tjalling asked, “What do you think they will want to ask me?”

“I don’t really know,” Johannes said, “but I expect they want to hear your faith story. And they probably want to know if you believe the Catechism and the Canons. I don’t know what’s in the canons; it’s been a long time since I have read those things. For me the questions in my head have been about if I am worthy of being a church member, and whether I’m committed enough to call myself a Christian.” ^

Sjoukje joined in, “Ya, those questions are important, aren’t they? I sometimes wonder if we ever do completely settle them or if we just need to decide to present ourselves as we are. I do know that God’s grace is bigger than all my sins. For that I am so thankful.”

As they drank down their coffee, and nibbled on a cookie, they were silent for a bit. Then Tjalling said, “Thank you so much for listening to me. I’m a bit frightened by the idea. I know it will be another week or so, but I did want to share this with you.”

Johannes responded, “I feel deeply honored that you came to tell us your plan. God be with you, brother.” They parted at the door and Tjalling started his walk down home again.

Ma entered Sjoukje’s kitchen, and noted, “Dear Sjoukje, I see a glory on your face. Are you expecting again?”

“Ya, Ma, I guess I can’t hide anything from you. I haven’t told Johannes yet either,” answered Sjoukje.

“Well the men don’t seem to notice the some things we women do,” Ma responded. “When do you think the child will be born?”

“Probably early August,” Sjoukje suggested. “But I’m a bit concerned, Ma; this baby does not seem nearly as active as the two boys were.”

Ma wondered, “Maybe that’s because it’s a little girl. Often they are somewhat quieter in the womb. Most likely nothing to worry about.”

“I sure hope you are right, Ma. You certainly have a lot more experience with having children,” Sjoukje observed.

A month or so later Johannes said, “Dear wife, you seem to be gaining some weight. Or is it that you are with child again?”

Sjoukje said, “I wondered when you might notice. You men seem more aware when the animals are pregnant than when your wife is.”

“I’m sorry, Sjoukje, you’re right. We get busy farming and don’t always notice the important things in our lives. I have to say, though, I am pleased that you are with child again. When do you expect to give birth?”

“I think early August, husband. So you’d better be thinking about a third child in the family.”

As expected, little Sietske was born August 7, 1854.

For months that conversation with Tjalling about confession of faith disturbed Johannes and he could think of little else. He asked the cows, “Have I been shirking my responsibility in not making a public confession of my faith? ^ I know that the Bible asks us to be prepared to give our faith testimony when it is asked for.”

The cows seemed fine with the conversation, so Johannes continued, “I’ve been listening to both Rev. Ypma’s messages on Sundays and to the sermons of the Old Fathers at the fellowship

meetings. And since Rev. Ypma moved to Graafschap we get to hear more of the Old Fathers on Sundays too. And now I am thinking that God wants me to stand up for him in public, just as Tjalling did. God does not want me to act like I am ashamed to stand up for Him. Besides now we have three children to be baptized.”²⁰⁶

“Sjoukje,” he said to her one beautiful fall morning, “I have decided to do what Tjalling did, and what you’ve been wanting me to do for a long time. I have decided to make profession of my faith in church.”²⁰⁷

“Oh, Johannes,” she threw her arms around him, “I love you so much. And I’ve been praying for years that you would make up your mind and heart. It will make Jesus so happy. He wants us all to make our confession before people. I am so glad you want to do that.”

“I’m going to go to the council meeting tomorrow night and ask them if I may.”

“I’m sure they will be happy to have you do it. You have been part of the church ever since we came here. In Friesland you seemed hesitant to decide. And I had to respect that. I was impatient for you to join our church then. But I loved you so that I wanted to be with you anyway. The minister often pressed me to get you to come. But I knew you would when you were ready. I heard your questions but I didn’t have any answers.”

“I love you too,” answered Johannes. “And I love the Lord. I want to serve Him the best I can. And with our little family growing, I want to be a good father. I want to give them a good example. I know that means standing up for Jesus. Tjalling did that a while ago. So I guess I’m kind of slow.”

“Well, Johannes, you have always taken your time thinking things through. And there has been such strong talk about what direction the church should be going. I can understand why you were hesitating. But it isn’t the same here as it was back home.”

“That’s what I need to remember. There we were torn between the old church and the new church. You and Annie with your families joined the new church, and you had to suffer for it. I was not ready for that. But I wasn’t ready to join the old church either. It seemed to me that the preacher didn’t take the Bible seriously. He talked like they were just nice stories and that no one in his right mind would think they were true.”

Sjoukje countered, “But our visiting preachers here don’t talk like that. And we are still reading the sermons of the Old Fathers. So that’s not a problem here.”

“No,” said Johannes, “I know our preachers point us to following God’s Word. And that’s why I can make my profession. I want to follow Jesus in my life.”

Sjoukje asked, “Do you think that the council will be as hard on you as they were on Tjalling? They did accept him to make his profession. But they had their hesitations.”

²⁰⁶*Vriesland RCA* – typed birth & baptism records have no dates for these baptisms.

²⁰⁷*Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Nov. 10, 1854.

“I don’t know,” said Johannes.”Tjalling didn’t say much about their questions. I hope it will go smoothly for me though. I’ve sure thought about it long enough!”

“I’m afraid little Sietske is going to wake us up early in the morning,” said Sjoukje, “so we better get our sleep while we can. Titus and Reinder will be moving around early too. Good night, Johannes.”

“Good night, Sjoukje. See you in the morning.”

1855 *

“Hello, Pa,” Johannes greeted Tjette. “Sjoukje and I have been wondering when Jetse and Geertje would set the date for their wedding. Even though we knew it would happen soon, we were a little surprised to hear the announcement in church that Jetse will be marrying Geertje next Sunday.²⁰⁸We are so happy for them. Your little family at home is shrinking some more, eh?”

“Ya,” answered Pa, “When boys grow up, they have girls on their brain. You are young enough to remember that, aren’t you?”

“Oh, ya,” responded Johannes, “I don’t regret it one minute. And now that we are having children, there is even more joy in the house.”

“I believe that, Johannes.”

“Does Jetse already know who will be the preacher here to do the wedding?” asked Johannes.

“Well,” Pa said, “I have been leaving that in his hands. My connections to the church are pretty much broken.”

“Oh, ya,” murmured Johannes, “I hadn’t been thinking about that. That still feels bad, doesn’t it?”

“Ya, it still feels bad. I don’t know if that’s ever going to change,” responded Pa. “But it will be wonderful to welcome Geertje and her daughter into our family. Jetse may have to decide to adopt little Margaret, or just take her into the family like Wopke has done with the Strick children and Tjalling’s Titus and the Faber child. Their family has been so blessed with the children they have welcomed into their home.”

Johannes and Sjoukje were out in the yard watching their three children at play. “What a joy,” Johannes shared, “to see our little ones growing up and enjoying their lives here on the farm.”

²⁰⁸*Ottawa Co, MI marriage index* lists them as Gertze Kas and Jetse Hytsma, Vol. 3, p. 119.

“Ya,” agreed Sjoukje, “they have such wonderful space to run around in.” A shadow passed over her face.

Johannes asked, “You seem to be worried about something, dear wife. What’s putting such a cloud over your face?”

“Well, hubby,” she responded, “Look at those children having such a good time. But doesn’t it seem that little Sietske is not learning to walk as well as the older two?”

“Ya,” agreed Johannes, “I have noticed that she is a bit slow in all things, even in crawling she seemed slower than the boys. What do you think is going on?”

“I just don’t know,” Sjoukje pondered. “But I’ve noticed that Ma has also had questions on her face in watching that little girl. She seems to share our sense of concern.”

“I don’t understand,” Johannes confessed. “But if something is not right with our little girl,²⁰⁹ we will love her anyway just as much as the others.”

1856 *

“It’s another girl” Tjette shouted as Johannes came round the corner of the house.

“Oh, my! How wonderful!” Johannes beamed. “Is all well?”

“Ma says the baby and Sjoukje are doing just fine,” Pa answered. “You’ll be able to see them in just a few minutes. Have you considered a name?”

“Ya, if it would be a girl she’d be called Elizabeth.²¹⁰ That’s after Sjoukje’s mother. She would be pleased with that. And it’s a nice name out of the Bible.”

“A prayer meeting?” asked Johannes.

“Ya,” Elder Yntema affirmed, “the meeting of Classis Holland was so full of turmoil that Rev. Klyn proposed a prayer meeting. Classis agreed and set the date for April 10.”²¹¹

“So what was that all about?” queried Johannes. “I know there have been squabbles at the Classis meeting before.”

²⁰⁹Personal communication with Anson Van Haitsma and Erma Van Haitsma suggesting Sietske fell on her head and was never quite able to keep up with others. Johannes’ Last Will and Testament in the Johannes Van Haitsma genealogical file. *Vriesland RCA Minutes*, July 22, 1854.

²¹⁰Born March 13, 1856 in Zeeland MI.

²¹¹*Classis Holland*, April 2, 1856, Art. 12, p. 207.

“Unfortunately this one was stirred up by Mr. Gysbert Haan, Sr. He stirred up troubles here in Vriesland when he came in 1850. And he brought turmoil to the 2nd Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. And now he has stirred up things at Classis.”

“Members of Classis must have been very upset to have a special prayer meeting. I know how important unity and reconciliation have been in our community,” noted Johannes.

“The disagreements have been getting stronger ever since the meeting here at the schoolhouse when Rev. Van der Meulen made a point of saying that those who agreed with the men from Grand Rapids, including Mr. Haan, were possessed by the devil. After that people began increasingly to walk out of the Dutch Reformed Church. Mr. Haan started a fellowship group and fifty people from the Second Reformed Church in Grand Rapids joined him.”[^]

Johannes considered out loud, “So it sounds like harsh words are being spoken by both defenders as well as attackers of the Dutch Reformed Church.”²¹²

“Ya,” responded Yntema. “It is hard to keep peace and unity when both sides explode at each other.”

“Oh, my,” asked Johannes “what are we doing to the church of Jesus?”

1857 *

“Sjoukje,” Johannes started the conversation, “you know that I want to serve the Lord.”

“Ya, Johannes, I know you love the Lord, and I know you want to be responsible for both your faith and your family. So where are you with all that now?”

“I’ve been thinking about that ever since Hendrik Dam and I talked the other day,” Johannes said. “Since he started our fellowship group a few years ago,²¹³ both you and I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of it. We both love the wonderful singing of the Psalms and the reading of the Old Fathers.”[^]

“Just like we love the reading services in church when they read those sermons,” added Sjoukje.

²¹²Beets, H., *Gedenkboek*, pp. 30-31, 48. He reports that shortly after the April 10 meeting, Rev. van der Meulen preached in the Vriesland schoolhouse, and stated “...all those agreeing with the men of Grand Rapids were possessed by the devil.” Beets noted this resulted in several people separating from the Dutch Reformed Church. In January Mrs. H. Dam separated from the Reformed Church in Vriesland; in February Mr. and Mrs. Johannes Groen followed, and Mrs. Johannes Van Haitsma; in March, 1857, Y. Ulberg, G. Haan Jr. and H. Karsten followed. Johannes van Haitsma was part of this exodus in Feb. 1857. To this list can be added that on April 14, 1856, resignations from 2nd Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI were presented to the consistory by John Gelok, G. Grootveld, Gysbert Haan, P. Haan, E. G. J. Ham, and A. Van Hooven. They began to hold separate worship services. Beets, *Church*, p. 48. Bouwman, H., *Schetsen en Herrineringsen*, p. 75.

²¹³Vriesland RCA Minutes of Jan. 14, 1853 recognizes its existence.

Johannes responded, “Well, I think the time has come that I make the same step that Dam made. I have decided to hand in my resignation of membership in the Vriesland Reformed Church. I just heard that at the last meeting of Classis Holland, the Classis decided to do a whole rewrite of the church rules. That means they no longer want to follow the 1619 Church Order.”²¹⁴ ^

“Óh!” exclaimed Sjoukje, “I had not heard a thing about that. And we all have been so insistent on that Church Order!”

“Ya, and the Reformed Church we joined keeps saying that they honor that Church Order. At least now we know that Classis Holland is no longer pretending to do that. And I no longer feel comfortable staying in that church,” lamented Johannes.

“I think I understand how you’re feeling. We’ve lived with the Reformed Church since 1849 knowing the practice doesn’t square with the confessions. It has been a ‘waiting to see’ time,” reflected Sjoukje.

“Well, Sjoukje, I would like to make a break from the Reformed Church,²¹⁵ I do not ask that you do it with me just because I feel ready. If you’re going to do the same, that has to be in your walk with the Lord. Just like you were patient with me in joining the church, I will not push you to make this step with me.”

Sjoukje responded, “Although I haven’t given it as much thought as you, dear husband, I too am ready to make a break from the Reformed Church. I will come with you to the next meeting of the council.”

“Tede Ulberg, so good to see you,” Johannes greeted his neighbor. “What’s new?”

Ulberg answered, “Well, Johannes, I was in Grand Rapids last week to pick up some more shoe leather. And was I surprised!”

“Man, out with it!” pushed Johannes. “Don’t keep me in suspense!”

“Mr. Gysbert Haan has convinced Rev. Klyn to leave the 2nd Reformed Church²¹⁶ and become the pastor of the independent church that Mr. Haan has organized!”

“Oh, I did not expect to hear that!” Johannes exclaimed.

“I don’t know how long Mr. Haan has been courting Rev. Klyn, but I gather they have been doing quite a lot of talking lately,” Ulberg told him.

“Well, I wonder what that will mean among the churches,” Johannes wondered.

²¹⁴*Classis Holland Minutes*, Dec. 17, 1856.

²¹⁵*Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Feb. 1857, #83, p. 16 and #142, pp. 26-27– handwritten membership record.

²¹⁶*Classis Holland*, April 8, 1857, Art. 15, p. 239.

“I confess,” responded Ulberg, “I do not know.”

Sometime later Johannes said to Sjoukje, “It seems to be one thing after the other.”

“Well, husband, now what’s happened?” asked Sjoukje.

“Ya, Sjoukje, Elder Yntema told me what happened is that Mrs. Dam was at the council meeting to terminate her membership.”²¹⁷Johannes shared, “She said she’d been thinking about it quite a while. And she said she’d been so shocked by the news that Classis Holland deliberately deserted the 1619 standards that she just had to break away.”

“I think Classis Holland has absolutely lost the idea of how important the 1619 Standards have been to many of us who emigrated here from the Netherlands,” shared Sjoukje. ^

“No, they don’t seem to remember. But it certainly was the dream of the common folk who formed the 1834 Secession. And it was one of the reasons many of us came here. And it has been the main reason why the Drenthe and South Holland and Noordeloos groups here in the *Kolonie* have broken away from the Reformed Church these last six years.”

Thursday morning after Johannes let the cows out to pasture, he saw Dam and Ulberg coming down the path to his house. “Good morning, fellas,” he called. “You are up and about early this morning.”

“It’s not every day we have news like this,” Ulberg called back.

Sjoukje already had the coffee pot on the stove when the men settled around the kitchen table.

“What’s the news?” Johannes asked.

Dam said to Johannes, “I just happened to see Mr. Den Herder last night after he came home from the Classis meeting. He told me that four letters of separation were presented to Classis yesterday. I am shocked by this breakaway from the Classis and I’ve been thinking all night long about what to do.”

He added, “We want to ask for your help, Johannes. Maybe this is the time to see if we really can return to the kind of worship and church that we have been wanting. Some years ago Rev. Smit and Elder Smit wanted a return also, but they ended up drifting into the Scots Presbyterian Church. Then Rev. Duim wanted to start a return movement in Noordeloos. They only went independent. Last year Mr. Haan in Grand Rapids and his fellowship group went independent.²¹⁸ And just this past March, Graafschap went independent.²¹⁹ I’m afraid that each of our fellowship groups will go independent unless we can think of an alternative way.”

²¹⁷Vriesland RCA Minutes, Jan. 1857 -handwritten membership list.

²¹⁸First CRC Grand Rapids History. Swierenga, R., *Denominational Schism*, p. 51.

²¹⁹Early History of Graafschap Reformed. Kromminga, D., *Tradition*, p. 103.

“I realize,” said Johannes, “that we are all the body of Christ and need to be connected. Is that what you have in mind? Do you think there’s a way to bring these groups together?”

“That is exactly what I have in mind. And I think we have to do something about it quickly. I believe that playing so loosely with the rules, as last winter’s Classis Holland did, was the straw that broke the camel’s back.²²⁰ All these secession letters and actions seem to show the shock felt by many in the *Kolonie*.”

“So, what can we do?” asked Johannes.

Dam said, “I’m thinking we should write a letter to go to each of these groups and invite them to come together to talk.”

“What can I do to help?” inquired Johannes.

“First, I need to write the letter and then I will need you to help me make it just right. Then we need help to copy it and find ways to get them to the elders of Graafschap and Polkton and to Rev. Van den Bosch and Rev. Klyn. They were the signers of the four letters of resignation that came to Classis.”

Johannes thought a bit, “What are you going to write to them? What will bring them together? What are you going to suggest?”

“Basically,” answered Dam, “I’m going to suggest that we consider meeting together to discuss whether or not there is a possibility to organize or be in communion together in some way. I remember that Rev. De Cock, Rev. Scholte, and the brothers-in-law Van Raalte, Brummelkamp, Van Velzen and de Moen did this back in 1834.”

Johannes wondered, “Some years ago we talked about peacefully having the fellowship group alongside the church here in Vriesland. Do you think this is important enough to set that idea aside?”

“Well, I think it might be,” responded Ulberg. “But of course it will make a difference if the other groups will want to join in a new church organization. That remains to be seen.”

Dam said, “I understand two of the letters at Classis Holland indicated their interest in being connected with the Secession Church in the Netherland, without a hint of joining together here.²²¹ I’m hoping we can salvage something of the returning church at this gathering.²²² And I

²²⁰*Classis Holland RCA minutes*, Dec. 17, 1859, Art. 4, p. 230. Kromminga, J, *The Christian Reformed Church*, p. 38: “The leaders [of Classis Holland] were suspected of weakening in their adherence to the cherished principles for the sake of expediency...”

²²¹None of the letters of secession in April 8, 1857 refer to a planned joining together with each other. The Graafschap letter specifically refers to “uniting ourselves with the Separated Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands...” *Graafschap Church History*, p. 20. The Polkton letter also desires “to be in connection with the Church of the Netherlands.” Both Graafschap and Grand Rapids called themselves independent.

²²²Beets, H., *Church*, p. 50. Swierenga R., *Denominational Schism*.

want to say these things in a positive and loving way. I certainly don't want to include anything that accuses the Dutch Reformed Church as a false church."

"I would agree with that!" exclaimed Johannes. "Well, that's some vision! If you get the letter written, Mr. Ulberg and I will come to your place on Monday. Then maybe my wife and your wife can help copy the letters. I know Wopke goes to Grand Rapids regularly on Tuesdays to get supplies for the store. Maybe he will let me ride along and I'll get a copy to Rev. Klyn."

Dam said, "I'll get on my horse and go by Graafschap, Noordeloos and Polkton. We'll ask them to come here to our little worship place which is central for us all. I think the sooner we try to get us all together, the more likely this will be a possibility. We may be here for just such a time as this."²²³

Johannes mused, "I'm thinking that God has been having a hand in my life, too, and maybe this is it." He hesitated a bit and said, "We will be having our fellowship meeting Friday evening. How much of this are you going to share with the group?"

Dam thought for a moment and said, "I think I need to tell them all that I know."

"Hey, Johannes," Sjoukje's voice followed him out the door. "I'd like to get to the fellowship group early tonight, so could you have the cows milked a bit early?"

"Ya," said Johannes, "I can do that. Classis Holland had that shocking meeting the other day and I'm interested to know more! Is Ma coming to babysit? The kids sure enjoy her coming over. I think they are enjoying learning some Friesian. And that will be good for them. Then they will know three languages."

Johannes hummed an old familiar Psalm as he strode towards the barn. He was glad that slowly his pastureland was expanding and his grain crops were doing better every year. His cows increased their calving and the sows produced generous litters. He knew that his cows gave more milk too when they heard him hum. "God has so blessed us," he told them. "Already in these nine years we are so much better off than we were in Holland. Who would have thought that we Van Haitsmas would account for several hundred acres of farmland by now?"

Johannes took the pail and hitched down onto the milkstool to start milking. "It is good to be serving God on this farm and growing our little family. Praise the Lord!" and he broke into another Psalm. The cow got an earful, and Johannes got a pailfull. Johannes observed, "You cows seem to enjoy the Psalms as much as I do!"

He spoke again to the cow, "Is that how God works in each of us? We had been hoping for a little one in the family, and we waited for years. Then suddenly it happened and nothing has been the same again. But only a few of us take notice. How can major events in our lives seem so inconsequential to the world around us?"

²²³ Esther 4:14.

When Johannes and Sjoukje arrived at the fellowship hall, they were encouraged by the good turnout. Dam welcomed all and opened the meeting with prayer. Groen started the singing which lifted their hearts into the spirit of worship. Mr. Dam shared some thoughts out of John 17, the prayer of unity, and read a wonderful sermon on the subject.

Then Mr. Dam began to introduce the business of the evening. “We are part of the work of the Lord always, but this is a special time in our lives that needs some significant decisions from each of us. You may have already heard that there were four letters of separation presented at Classis Holland meeting. And a few of us Vrieslanders who are sympathetic to their concerns began to consider the possibility of these groups joining together in a Classis of our own. We just want to freely worship the way we dreamed about when we came to America.”

Dam took a deep breath and went on, “So this is what we are thinking to do. Ulberg and Van Haitsma and I plan to meet on Monday to compose a letter inviting all those letter writers to a meeting to discuss possible ways to proceed. As things stand right now, each group is making that decision for themselves. We would like to see them consider, at the least, whether we can be together in some way. And we have tentatively set the date for this meeting for Thursday, April 23.”

“Our fellowship group has been happy and content to be a group that meets each week in addition to worship on Sundays. As you know, several of these groups were also fellowship groups until they organized as churches. It is with considerable hesitation that we ask this group if now is the time our Vriesland fellowship should also consider organizing into a church. If the consensus of this group is ‘No,’ then we will continue to be the wonderful fellowship group that we always have been. But if we prayerfully consider the answer is ‘Yes,’ then we propose to you that the best time to do that is now. This is not a decision I want to make. The whole group is encouraged to give your thoughts and feelings on the matter.”

It was very quiet in the room. Dam continued, “Please share your thoughts with each other while I sit down and listen quietly. After a little while I will call us back to have a discussion and listen to each other. Perhaps a consensus will come out and we can make a prayerful decision.” And Dam sat down.

The group sat quietly while they digested some of the implications of what they were asked to consider. One gentleman stood up and asked Dam a question, “If we become a church instead of being a fellowship alongside the church like we have been, will that mean we will need to withdraw from our Vriesland Reformed Church? And what will happen to those who decide to remain in the Reformed Church?”

Dam said, “I believe that you have just identified one of the most difficult areas of our consideration tonight. Becoming a church will undoubtedly mean that we would gather on Sundays to worship. The question of our becoming a church will mean that for most of you, you will end up having to decide where you would be a member. Up until now, the Vriesland Reformed Church is where we have all worshipped since arriving in our new country. If we decide to start a new church in the Vriesland area, people will need to choose where they want to belong.”

Mr. Dam paused a moment to let this idea register with the group. “Some of us have already decided to discontinue our membership in the Reformed Church. But the question of our fellowship group becoming a church would mean more of us would face the decision of which church we would identify with. We can continue to be a fellowship group, and leave individuals to work out the church membership issue for themselves. Each of you will need to resolve this issue for your own family.” And Dam sat down again.

Soon the hall buzzed with conversations, some quiet, some loud. Gradually everyone seemed to be talked out and Dam reconvened the group. “What direction do you wish to take?” he asked. Several voices spoke up and their tone suggested they favored forming their own church. Other people admitted they were not ready to make a choice. People developed a list of advantages for being an organized church and another list of the cautions and concerns.

Finally Dam suggested, “I think this significant discussion needs time to be considered. Let us all think and pray about this proposal. It is not a small matter and deserves our serious consideration. Please continue to pray for God’s guidance in this.”

After the fellowship meeting was over, the on-going discussion kept people from leaving quickly. Sjoukje said, “Johannes, I’m going home, okay? I know Ma would like to get to bed herself.”

Johannes stood talking with Dam who admitted to Johannes, “I have been racking my brain trying to figure this out. It strikes me as terribly unusual that four such letters would arrive at the same Classis meeting. I’ve been thinking about it all day, wondering if that was just a coincidence or what?”

Just then Elder den Herder joined them. “We were discussing what happened at the meeting of Classis Holland. Can you tell us what was in those letters?” Dam asked.

“Well, I do remember,” responded Den Herder, “that they were making some pretty strong accusations. Rev. van den Bosch wrote that he could not consider anyone who joined the Dutch Reformed Church as being of the true church. The others were less harsh, but pointed out the flaws they saw in the Reformed Church.”

“That does sound kind of radical. And so what was Rev. Van Raalte’s response to those letters of leaving?”

“I can answer that in two words,” the elder replied. “He used nice words to basically say, ‘good riddance!’ He was glad to have the nagging presence of strong objectors out of the church.”²²⁴

Dam responded incredulously, “That’s hard to fathom. He’s been so patient, helpful and kind to us all. And besides, wasn’t he accused back in the 1830s of being so difficult in the State Church that they kind of said the same thing about him?”

²²⁴*Classis Holland RCA Minutes*, pp. 240, 245.

“Well,” den Herder said, “I really don’t know anything about that, but I do know he was not welcomed as a minister in the State Church. If I remember correctly, he applied three times to become a minister in the *Herformde Kerk* in the Netherlands and each time he was denied. So, I guess that amounts to about the same thing.”

“So, I suppose then,” wondered Dam, “he could not hear or accept the observations that some of us have seen in the Dutch Reformed Church.”

“You mean that the church we joined in 1849 makes claim to follow the 1618 and 1619 Standards, but doesn’t practice them?” suggested den Herder. As he began to walk away, he said, “I guess I have learned to live with it.”

Johannes bent towards Dam and said, “You know, I remember a conversation I had with Rev. Ypma back in 1851. He told me that in the early years of the Separated Church in the Netherlands, there was so much conflict among the leaders that Rev. Van Raalte despaired over the church. Things were so bad in 1840 that Rev. Van Raalte walked out of the same Synod that rejected Rev. Scholte, and he never again went back to the Synod meetings.”²²⁵ ^

Dam responded, “We all had too much of that conflict. Maybe I should not be so surprised that Rev. Van Raalte might be ready to accept a small breakaway from *de Kolonie* church if that would finally bring a bit of peace to his life and the life of the church.”

Ulberg joined them as Dam began to reminisce, “I was at the unofficial meeting all day on June 4, 1849 when the ministers and elders from our churches got together with Rev. Wyckoff to talk about a possible union. We discussed several questions he had brought along, including the one about the possibility of our joining his church.²²⁶ And Rev. Wyckoff sweetened the pot by offering a way out if we found we couldn’t honor God by staying in that church. It was obvious some of our group were ready to join right away, but Rev. Van Raalte wisely counseled us not to be too hasty.”²²⁷

Dam continued, “At the end of that meeting Rev. Van Raalte suggested that he summarize our discussion and gather us again on July 10 to consider putting together a formal proposal for each of our church councils to think about. I was one of the signers²²⁸ of that proposed discussion paper.

Ulberg wondered, “Were you okay with that proposal back then?”

“Ya,” Dam said, “it was all in general terms of what kind of church we would be comfortable with. I remember that we hashed it over in our Vriesland Church council meeting on July 30,

²²⁵Doskers, H., *Levenskets*, pp. 12, 53.

²²⁶*Vriesland RCA Minutes*, May 5, 1856.

²²⁷ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 286-287.

²²⁸Zwemer, H., & DeBey, B., *Stemmen Uit de Hollandsch-Gereformeerde Kerk*, p. 67; July 10, 1849. Kromminga, D., *Tradition*, p. 104. Beets, H., *Gedenkboek*, p. 16 places this signing on June 4. Van Koevering, A., *Dutch*, p. 508 ff. dated it on July 10. Zwemer, A. & DeBey, B., *Stemmen*, p. 67, also dated it July 10.

1849.²²⁹ But the surprise I got was that the position paper was not exactly the same as the one I had signed on July 10. Rev. Van Raalte had reworked it one more time. After our council discussion, we didn't hear any more about it until the April Classis meeting in 1850. And it just so happened that the minutes for that meeting were lost. Rev. Bolks provided, as best he could remember, a summary of the discussion including the authorizing of Rev. Van Raalte to represent our Classis at the Particular Synod meeting that was held near Albany."²³⁰

Johannes wondered, "What did the Rev. Wyckoff say about his church when our preferred church position was described?"

"The report we heard at council," answered Dam, "was that his church and ours were in perfect agreement on all that we wanted."

"That 'perfect agreement' seems to be the big question raised over the past seven years," Johannes said.

"Ya," Ulberg responded, "I saw that the actions in those churches in Albany were far from what I had expected."²³¹

Dam spoke up strongly, "Ulberg, if I had known about your observations back then, I would never have signed that union proposal! We covered our minds with wishful thinking."

"I know I have been kind of quiet about it all," confessed Ulberg. "But I sure wish that we had remained as a church by ourselves. Although the whole union process took a couple of years, it just didn't seem to involve many of us. That meeting should have been a major warning for us all. But maybe adjusting to our new country blinded us to some long-term consequences that we'll probably regret for years to come."

"Even when our Vriesland Church council discussed the proposal in 1849," suggested Dam, "the warning bells did not ring in my head. The whole statement seemed to express our desire so well. But it turns out that what Rev. Wyckoff called a 'perfect agreement' in doctrine and polity was more of a 'perfect cover-up' of the real situation in that church."[^]

"It's too bad we can't go back in history, and choose the direction that brought us to this land in the first place," mused Johannes. "Now I must say 'Goodbye' and get on home. Good night."

"I'll be off the farm for a few hours again tomorrow morning, Sjoukje," Johannes said on Sunday evening. "Mr. Dam suggested that we get this letter together quickly, and get it to the churches and the ministers. Maybe it will open them up to organizing our own church denomination that actually will return to the dreams and standards of 1619. There are already four possible groups, and I'm wondering what our fellowship group might decide at our next meeting. Already there are about as many groups as the whole *Kolonie* started with ten years ago when we came to America."

²²⁹Vriesland RCA Minutes, July 30, 1849.

²³⁰Classis Holland RCA Minutes, p. 36.

²³¹ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 454, 287.

“So,” wondered Sjoukje, “There really is some urgency here?”

“I agree with Mr. Dam,” answered Johannes. “Things have been happening pretty quickly. This started with Mr. Gysbert Haan taking a fellowship group out of the 2nd Reformed Church in Grand Rapids.²³² Then in January and February Mrs. Dam and I left the Vriesland Reformed Church²³³ and Rev. Klyn left the Grand Rapids Church.²³⁴ Johannes and Magdalena Groen left the Vriesland church in February the same as you did.²³⁵ In March Rev. Van den Bosch left the Zeeland Church which was holding his credentials for Noordeloos.²³⁶ And all four letters presented to Classis were accepted by that Assembly. It all seemed to snowball. This just might be a clear sign by the Lord that, **yes, it’s time to plan to return to the dream of living by the Standards of 1619.”** ^

“When you put it all together like that, it does suggest the momentum is leading us that way. You think the other groups will want to form a church with such standards rather than scattering in different directions?” asked Sjoukje.

“I’m afraid I do not have any idea about how any of them will respond. We in Vriesland have been pretty low key during the years since the union took effect. But I agree with Dam for the need to try,” said Johannes.

On Monday morning, true to form, Sjoukje woke up early and discovered that Titus was already at his father’s heels in the barn.

“Hey little man,” said Johannes to his six-year old, “watch out for the cow’s tail.” The flies were already a nuisance this spring and the tails were wagging furiously.

“Ma is making pancakes for breakfast,” Johannes said to Titus. “That will taste good. I’m going to really enjoy that. Do you like pancakes, Titus?”

“Ya, Pa, you know I like pancakes. Do we have some maple syrup to spread over the pancakes?” Titus asked.

“Ya, little man, we have collected enough sap this spring that we have plenty of syrup to last the whole year,” Johannes explained. “Next year you can help tap the maple trees and make sure we have enough for the year. And maybe we can collect more and sell some of the syrup just like our Indian neighbors do to make some money.”

When Johannes and Ulberg arrived at Dam’s place, Hendrik Dam said, “I’m hoping we can encourage all four letter writers to come to this meeting. It won’t be like a classis meeting with official delegations; just an opportunity for a meeting of the minds. I’ve been counting the people I know who have been attending these four groups. The Vriesland fellowship group may well

²³²First CRC Grand Rapids Histor. Beets, H., *Church*, p. 48.

²³³Vriesland RCA Minutes, Jan. & Feb., 1857.

²³⁴ January 25, 1857. Beets, H., *Gedenkboek*, p. 31.

²³⁵Vriesland RCA Minutes, Feb., 1857.

²³⁶Classis Holland RCA, April 8, 1857.

want to be the fifth group. There must be well over two hundred people or more between us all. Vriesland would probably be the smallest group.”

Ulberg spoke up, “A joint meeting would be a good time to worship together and pray so that we can discern what God would have us do. I, for one, certainly want to follow His will, and the last thing I want is to start something new without His blessing.”

Johannes added, “I am one of those who is concerned that being part of the Dutch Reformed Church just did not seem right. We came to this country wanting to worship God without some larger organization telling us how to do it. And we wanted to return to the Old Fathers. But is that enough reason to start our own denomination?”

Then Ulberg suggested, “I would love to be part of a church that is true to its commitment to the God of the Bible.”

Johannes added, “I think that the union with the Reformed Dutch Church has pushed us to a place where either we fail to return as we’d dreamed or we have to opt out of the existing union. I don’t like being in the spot of having to make such choices.”

“You know,” Ulberg continued, “I remember that back in 1834 when Rev. de Cock in Ulrum helped organize the Separated Church. The preachers had all kinds of conflicting opinions about church order and government registration. But the one thing they agreed on is that they could not be faithful to the Standards of 1619 and stay in the State Church.²³⁷ They felt forced to opt out.”[^]

Dam remembered his own experience of opting out. “I told the council seven years ago that I thought Rev. Ypma needed to be more God-centered in his preaching. They didn’t much like that I said that. And later when I asked for a membership transfer to Drenthe where they were still having reading services from the Old Fathers, the council denied my request. So I finally gave my resignation from membership.”²³⁸

Dam continued, “So, gentlemen, I did write a first draft of a letter, and I would like your input as to how it sounds and if it says what we would like it to say.”

Johannes asked, “Would you read it out loud, Mr. Dam? That way our ears can measure the way it comes across.”

So Dam read the letter inviting the other fellowship groups and pastors to join them at the Vriesland fellowship hall on April 23 at 2 pm to worship and talk together about whether there might be advantages to them all to combine with each other.

Both Ulberg and Johannes said, “That sounds good.” Johannes added, “It seems to say all that we’ve been thinking about.”

²³⁷ Beets, H., *Church*, p. 37: “The Secession of 1834, for that matter, while strong as to dogmatic principles, did not excel in clear insight into Reformed Church polity.”

²³⁸ *Vriesland RCA Minutes*, January 2, 1852 and March, 1856.

Dam said, “We need the fellowship of like-minded believers who stay close to the Bible and encourage us all in our faith.”

Ulberg joined in “We sure needed such strong spiritual food to deal with the struggles and discouragements that we’ve all had coming to this land. I know I have become stronger in the faith because we’ve suffered hardships.”

Johannes added thoughtfully, “I for one have been struggling for years how I’m to serve the Lord. First I resisted being part of the new church in Friesland, even though Sjoukje encouraged me, and my parents had joined them.²³⁹ Then I finally joined the church here in Vriesland and now I’ve left that one. And here I am thinking about being part of a new church again. I hardly know what it’s been all about!”

Dam reminded them, “God does work in mysterious ways, doesn’t He? I went through being an elder; then I gave that up, and now I too am thinking about helping a new start in the church. I pray that God will use the meeting that we are planning to bring something good into our lives and into the world.”

“Well,” said Johannes, “It’s time to bring this letter to our wives, and have them make nice readable copies. We farmers want to make a good impression, don’t we? I hope the ladies can make sense of the chicken scratches that we’ve put on paper here.”

Since Johannes and Ulberg lived next door to each other, they were able to ride side by side up the trail toward their homes. “So what do you think, Johannes? Will the other groups accept our invitation and come for an informational gathering?”

“I think some of them will come, but I’m not very confident that Rev. Van den Bosch will be fully comfortable with our invitation.²⁴⁰ I suspect he might think he should be in charge.²⁴¹ But Mr. Dam is a respected and experienced elder, and has been leading the fellowship meeting for five years already.²⁴² I expect he can handle it.”

Ulberg added, “I think we have a simple enough proposition. We can simply agree to return to the three Confessions, the Catechism and the 1619 Church Order. It is what we’ve been wanting to do ever since 1834. We don’t need to make it more complicated. Just set our foundations and go on from there.”

“Why have some of our friends been so harsh and strong in their talk against Rev. Van Raalte and Rev. Ypma? ^ Why can’t our differences be peacefully discussed?” he lamented.

²³⁹ Tjette and Antje joined the Vriesland Church by attestation in July 1848, indicating they had joined the *Afgescheiden* Church in the Netherlands. *Vriesland RCA Member Register*, p. 16.

²⁴⁰ An alternative idea was suggested by Janet Sheeres in *Son of Secession*, p. 116, shared by R. Swierenga, that at some time there was a “majority” vote by “members of four congregations (Noordeloos, Polkton, Grand Rapids and Graafschap)” that formed the CRC. Their statement is not documented. ^

²⁴¹ Krabbendam, H., *Freedom*, p. 2, the elite fear of the “influence of too many lower-class elements.”

²⁴² *Vriesland RCA Minutes*, January 18, 1853,

His neighbor responded, “Well, I think it has to do with trying to build our own identity. We came here to continue to live and worship as we believe we should. And the way I see it, this is a land of freedom. If you want to be a Catholic or a Quaker, you can be. We want to be free to continue with the Old Standards and style of worship too. And if I feel that way, others may feel the same. That’s the freedom we have here in this new country. We know that not everyone in *de Kolonie* will want to go this way.”

“I hope that if we do form a church group together, we can live together peacefully and the rancor we hear too much of will quiet down,” observed Johannes.

The men dismounted at Johannes’ place. Mrs. Ulberg was there with Sjoukje, who had prepared coffee to welcome them. Now they were ready to sit at the table to copy over the letter. “A funny picture just came to mind,” chuckled Sjoukje. “We are doing the same thing that monks have been doing for years. We are copying out writings!”

The next morning Johannes and Wopke prepared to take the wagon trail to Grand Rapids. “My,” said Johannes, “it is a lot quicker today than some years ago when we had to backpack our products and supplies both ways.”

“Ya,” responded Wopke, “I usually make this trip once a week and it is beginning to feel shorter all the time. I’m sure as the wagon roads improve, the time between places will become even shorter. But we still have to go the long way because the direct way is not that good yet. But it goes faster with the horse than it did with the oxen, for sure. Maybe someday we can use the train between the City and Grand Rapids.”²⁴³

After a bit of silence Wopke asked, “Why did you want to go along today? You said something about delivering a letter. It must be something important that you can’t wait for the weekly mail delivery.”

“Well, yes,” responded Johannes, “You know that Classis Holland had a meeting April 8, and you’ve probably heard that there were four letters presented. The ministers Van den Bosch and Klyn and the councils in Graafschap and Polkton wrote that they were leaving the Classis.”

“Ya, of course I’m aware that there’s been unhappiness about the Classis being part of the Dutch Reformed Church,” said Wopke. “I know that, just like in the old country, there are fellowship meetings outside the churches.”

Johannes continued, “Well, a few years ago Rev. Smit in Drenthe, Elder Smit in Graafschap, and Rev. Duim in Noordeloos convinced quite a few members to walk away with them. The two Smit groups joined the Scots church and Rev. Duim’s group became independent. Actually, the group in Grand Rapids that Haan started over there has also gone independent.”²⁴⁴ Rev. Klyn was convinced by Mr. Haan to join them as their pastor.”²⁴⁵

²⁴³*Ottawa History*, p. 71. www.ottawahistory.com.

²⁴⁴*First CRC Grand Rapids*, March 19, 1857, www.doskers.com, H., *Levensschets*, p. 259.

²⁴⁵Beets, H., *De Chr. Geref. Kerk in N.A.: Zestig Jaren van Strijd en Zegen*, 1918. Beets, H., *Gedenkboek*, pp. 31, 253.

“Ya,” Wopke responded, “I heard about that too.”

Johannes went on, “Mr. Dam, Mr. Ulberg and I were talking about this. We thought it might be the right time to suggest those four come together with us in Vriesland. We need to discuss if we can form a fellowship or establish a Classis that would embrace the basic principles of 1619 and 1834.” ^

“Wow,” said Wopke, “that sounds like the start of a new church organization.”

“Well,” said Johannes, “I guess it does look that way. I think we all had hoped that we would be together in *de Kolonie* with our own churches the way we would like them to be. When I joined the church a few years ago, I did not expect to walk out again like I did this past February. It took me long enough to decide to join the church.”

“Well, it took me even longer. What does Sjoukje think about all this?” asked Wopke.

“She seems okay with it,” Johannes responded. “She was glad when I joined the church, and she is still glad that I want to follow the Lord and honor him with my life.”

“I agree with that,” Wopke said, “I want to do that too, but I don’t really see a need to make a drastic change like that. Hey, let’s stop a minute, I’m sure the horse would like a drink from that stream, and so would I. A few minutes longer isn’t going to hurt.”

They stopped to let the horse relax and drink a bit. Wopke wondered, “I’ve heard Mr. Haan talk and others too. Sometimes there’s some pretty harsh talk about the church in the East and about our ministers.”

“I know,” said Johannes, “and it bothers me the way some of the conversations have flown around. I’m concerned that we don’t sound very loving the way Christ would like.”

“So maybe,” he went on, “if we do go our separate way, we can live a bit more at peace and not accuse each other of things we might regret later. So I am carrying a letter to Rev. Klyn to ask him to join us for a discussion about being together in this new group.”

Wopke asked, “But do I understand that the letters came to Classis just two weeks ago? It seems soon to make a decision to try to form a new group so quickly. Wouldn’t it be better to let things calm down a bit and maybe cooler heads will prevail?”

“You know,” Johannes reflected, “that makes sense. I don’t like making quick decisions. I like to take my time to think things through. But Mr. Ulberg made sense the other night too. He reflected on what happened with the church separation in 1834. Once Rev. De Cock was suspended, it took a year before he gathered like-minded conservative church people together. And by then they already had differences that almost broke the group apart before it even got started. We kind of agreed that if we begin our group on a simple basis, returning to the Confessions and Church Order of 1619, this might be basic enough to form a constitution for this new church group.”

The men rode along quietly for a while and then Johannes admitted, “But I have to tell you, I really don’t understand what is happening in my faith. I hope I’m listening to the Spirit of God.”

Johannes found the home of Rev. Klyn and knocked on the door. He heard a voice calling from somewhere around the side of the house, and followed the sound to find the Reverend in overalls and wooden shoes in the garden. “Hello Mr. Van Haitsma,” Rev. Klyn greeted him. “Good to see you again. Come in and I will repay the hospitality you have shown me many a Sunday at the Vriesland Church.” He called into the back door, “Wife, would you kindly put on some coffee and maybe find a bite to serve Mr. Van Haitsma and your thirsty husband?”

From the kitchen Johannes heard a voice, “Yes, please, Mr. Van Haitsma, come in and sit.”

“Well, thank you,” responded Johannes. “I won’t interrupt your life very long. My brother drove me here on his supply wagon and it won’t be long before he’ll be back for me. We do want to go home before dark.”

“It must be important,” said Rev. Klyn, “for you to make a quick visit like this in one day. What’s on your mind?”

Johannes coughed to clear his throat, “Well, Mr. Dam, Mr. Ulberg and I heard you had sent a letter to Classis Holland, separating yourself from the Classis because of the union with the Reformed Church of the East. We decided to circulate an invitation to you and the others whose separation letters were read at Classis. We would like to invite you, and whoever else from your independent church might want to come, to a meeting in our Vriesland fellowship hall. This letter will explain the invitation. We thought that it might be a good thing for us all to discuss the possibility of being a church support group for each other.”

Rev. Klyn showed the surprise on his face. “Well, that is an interesting idea. Mr. Haan formed our fellowship group some months ago. Then he convinced me to become their pastor. But we are a self-standing group with no connections to any other. We were organized as a congregation last March 19, 1857.²⁴⁶ At that time we discussed what Rev. Roelof Smit did and also Elder Smit in 1853²⁴⁷ and wondered if we might follow their lead, or if we should stay independent like Rev. Duim did in Noordeloos.²⁴⁸ Maybe this is another direction to consider.”

“We were hoping for a response like that,” said Johannes. “We were talking about possibly organizing around the simple principles of returning to the Confessions and to the Church Order of 1619. And we felt that it was important to bring us all together quickly before too many decisions are made to perhaps connect elsewhere as Rev. Roelof Smit did in Drenthe.”²⁴⁹

“Well,” responded Rev. Klyn, “That seems like clear thinking. Now I have something about this to share with you. Maybe you are aware that last December, Classis Holland was considering a new rule book for the Classis. Rev. Van den Bosch and I looked at each other when the

²⁴⁶First Grand Rapids CRC e-history.

²⁴⁷Classis Holland, May 25, 1853, p. 138; Sept. 1, 1852, Art. 2, p. 101.

²⁴⁸ Swierenga, R., *Brothers*, p. 5.

²⁴⁹Drenthe CRC History, www.drenthecrc.org.

discussion was going on. After the meeting we came together and shared our shock. Rev. Van Raalte was actually encouraging a departure from the 1619 Church Order!²⁵⁰ Oh, he wouldn't put it like that but that's what we heard. ^ We snagged Delegate Strabbing from Graafschap and we said to each other, 'What are we going to do about this? This is so against what we have said we stand for.' Rev. Van den Bosch said, 'I've been to three Classis meetings here now. And I don't like what I see and hear. There seems to be only token respect for the standards we honor. I for one am ready to take a stand. I'm going to prepare a letter of resignation from Zeeland, my calling church.'”

Rev. Klyn continued, “Well, I confess that took my breath away! Is that the only way Classis will take note of our position? Mr. Strabbing said that his church was already talking about separating too.²⁵¹ Rev. Van den Bosch said that the Polkton Church had mentioned something about that too when he was last there. I was dumfounded! Of course I knew that the group in Grand Rapids had separated.²⁵² So we stood there looking at each other. Rev. Van den Bosch then suggested we consider creating our own shock effect. He suggested we each write a letter of separation, send it around to each one of us, and then before the April Classis session, we get together at his place and compare letters. But he said he'd tender his letter at the Zeeland council meeting in March. So we exchanged our mailing addresses and agreed to circulate our letters to each other. And then on April 5²⁵³ we would compare and plan for the letters to be presented at Classis on April 8. You can imagine my head was spinning!”

“Ya, Reverend, that sounds as shocking as my coming here to you with this invitation,” responded Johannes.

The Reverend continued, “When I got home, Mr. Haan was waiting to hear my comments on Classis. I shared this with him and my wife. Then Mr. Haan said, ‘If you feel so inclined, why don't you break away from your congregation and become the preacher in our church. We can afford to pay you a decent salary.’ I had hardly begun digesting writing a letter of separation, but my wife nodded her head ever so slightly, and I knew she would support my breaking away.”

“Ya,” agreed Mrs. Klyn, “I knew how my husband felt and I was in total agreement with his stand. We discussed this some more and decided that we'd keep it to ourselves until after the feast days.”

“So that's what we did, and in January I resigned from 2nd Dutch Reformed Church and became the pastor of the independent church²⁵⁴ that Mr. Haan and a large group had formed.” ^

“Did that meeting work out on April 5?”²⁵⁵ asked Johannes.

²⁵⁰*Classis Holland*, Dec. 17, 1856, Art. 4.

²⁵¹*Graafschap History*.

²⁵²*Classis Holland*, October, 1856, Art. 4.

²⁵³*Memorable Events in the CRC*, *www.CRC News*, April 20, 2016, *www*.

²⁵⁴ On March 19, 1856, the congregation that left 2nd Dutch Reformed Church was organized under Gysbert Haan's influence. Van Koeveren, A., *Dutch*, p. 450 ff. ^

²⁵⁵ April 5, 1857 was listed as the probable birthday of the CRC by *CRC News*, April 20, 2016; my suggestion is that it was a meeting to compare secession letters between the two elders and the two ministers.

“Ya,” responded Rev. Klyn. “We shared our draft letters and touched them up a bit. Then Elder Strabbing and Elder Vander Werp of Polkton agreed to ask their councils to discuss them and sign them before the Classis meeting. Which they did and we all made sure our letters were in the hands of the clerk of Classis by April 8. Each of us knew what the others had written, so our letters were different and avoided saying the same things.”²⁵⁶

“That sure became a shocker throughout the *Kolonie*,” uttered Johannes. “But I hear that those letters were just received for information and did not change a thing.”

“I’m afraid you are right. So now we have to consider this invitation from you and Mr. Dam in Vriesland. I am glad you came so quickly. I will share this letter and ideas with the brothers on Sunday, and if they agree to such a meeting we will let your group in Vriesland know. And then plan to be there on April 23. Hopefully the other groups will be interested also.”

The men clinked their coffee cups in agreement. Johannes said hopefully, “Ya, I am hoping that something really good will come of this. From what I know and remember, this would be quite a parallel with the Separation of 1834. That’s only twenty-three years ago and think of how large that church has grown. We are hoping God will do something like that in this land too.” ^

Rev. Klyn said, “You know, we really need to pray about this. If this is the direction we might go, we want to be sure it is God’s will. Let me lead us in prayer for God’s blessing.” And they bowed their heads.

Johannes heard the clipclop of the horse hooves and recognized that Wopke had completed loading his wagon with supplies and was coming to start the return trip. So he thanked Mrs. Klyn for her hospitality and bade *adieu* to the Reverend. His heart felt lightened by the positive response given by the Reverend Klyn. He hopped on the wagon with Wopke and they waved goodbye to the Klyns. It would still be quite a journey to get back before dark.

“I hope,” he said to Wopke, “that Mr. Dam has as good a reception at the other homes as I got here. Rev. Klyn seems quite taken by the idea of forming a church together. You remember they were talking about that more than twenty years ago in the Netherlands. Looking back that seems to have worked out well enough over the years. Maybe God will bless this also as a new birth in His kingdom.”

Wopke did not respond. Finally he said, “I don’t know about all this. I can’t see the need for creating a new church. But you seem so sincere in this thing. For the time being, I will just leave things as they are in my life. We are brothers, brothers we will be. We’ve been good brothers. We’ve helped each other. We’ve had our disagreements. We have worked things out. We have each gone our way as we think the Lord is calling us. Our wives are good friends too. I’m a good merchant and you will continue to be a good farmer. We will both do well.”

After some more silence, Wopke continued, “To be honest, I don’t feel the need for this difference in the church to come between us brothers. You feel this is important. I can accept

²⁵⁶*Classis Holland*, April 8, 1857, Art. 16. The Polkton letter indicates they had seen each other’s letters.

that. At this time I do not feel it is important, and I hope you can accept that. We do not have to let these issues hinder our relationship.”

“Ya, brother, I agree. We do not have to think the same on all things. Mostly what’s important is that we serve the Lord where we are and as we are able,” answered Johannes. “I think that’s what we need to think about this church business too. Those who are okay with the union with the Reformed Church can faithfully serve the Lord. Those of us who want to serve the Lord by returning to earlier standards can also faithfully serve the Lord.”

“Well said, brother. And look,” said Wopke, “we are not far from home. The cows will be waiting at the barn door to be milked!”

The next day Dam came to Johannes’s place and said, “Let’s go next door to Ulberg’s and compare notes.” He tied up his horse at a post where the horse could graze and they walked the trail.²⁵⁷ Tede saw them coming and invited them to a stump clump and they sat comfortably together. He said, “So what did the brothers say when you visited them? How did they respond?”

When Johannes was a bit slow to respond, Dam spoke up and said, “Well, Elder Vander Werp of Polkton and Elder Anrooy of Graafschap both said they would be taking it to their councils on Sunday. And they will plan to meet with us on April 23 if the other council members were okay with such a discussion. Rev. Van den Bosch could speak for himself as he had seceded from the Zeeland Church and had already been dismissed from the Noordeloos church.²⁵⁸ He said he would be glad to be part of such a meeting because, at this time, he is without a church to serve. So, we can make the announcement in our fellowship group on Friday and invite any of them who would like to be part of the discussion to come to the meeting.”

Ulberg responded with relief, “That sounds wonderful! I hope each of the groups agrees to come and I hope we can all agree to be together. It concerns me more than a little to even think about everyone going their separate ways. And if that does happen, there are always a number of people that will end up dropping out all together because they don’t know where they belong.”

Johannes spoke slowly, “Ya, that does sound wonderful. Certainly Rev. Klyn was very positive in his response. He was optimistic that the congregation in Grand Rapids would be glad to be part of this discussion. I think that if we can just keep to those simple principles and stand on them together, we will be blessed by the Lord and this will become a church that will honor the Lord in its work and worship. I do hope we can reach an agreement in peace and love.”

Dam agreed, “Ya, that is important. Maybe more important than all the doctrines and church order issues. I think I will begin the meeting by reading a portion of Philippians to help set a Biblical tone. We do not need to get into any discussion about Classis Holland and the union. That’s all been said already. Now we want to move forward if we can agree on the basic stand. We will need to be in prayer for that peace and love. When I talked to Mr. Den Herder, he told me that the tone of the letters read at Classis was rather harsh.²⁵⁹ It certainly would not set a good

²⁵⁷*Census 1850.*

²⁵⁸*Classis Holland, April 8, 1857, Art. 16. Classis Holland, Art. 17, p. 249.*

²⁵⁹*Classis Holland, 1857, Art. 17, p. 249.*

tone if any of us spoke in that attitude. It would not bless the Lord for us to start in such an angry spirit.”

Johannes hesitantly suggested, “It would be nice if regular common people like us ‘*Kleine Luy*’ would be the ones to make the decision instead of having ministers or the spiritually elite do that for us. I think that’s kind of what happened back in 1849. It was the ministers talking with each other more than it was regular members. And then it became an accomplished fact, and the rest of us were presented with that decision.”²⁶⁰ ^

Dam added, “And now we’re hoping that in this meeting, we ordinary folk can help to decide the future for our congregations and fellowship groups. Then hopefully we can be ‘by ourselves again,’ just like we’re told Rev. Wyckoff offered as an option.”²⁶¹ But there is one task we must accomplish before that meeting.”

“Oh?” asked Ulberg.

“Ya,” continued Dam, “We Vrieslanders need to finish our discussion about whether or not our fellowship group will become a church together.”

Johannes asked, “What’s really the difference between what we’ve been doing and being a church?”

Hendrik thought a bit, “I think it is a frame of thought. When we build a house, we first put the basic pattern together. Then we add comforts and details that help to make it a home. We have been okay with all the Standards, but the Church Order is just that, a way of being the church together.”

“Haven’t we been doing that in our fellowship group without imposing the Church Order on our ways?” wondered Ulberg.

Johannes added, “Might it be better to be an organization of fellowship groups without following the requirements of the Church Order?”

“I think,” offered Dam, “that the Church Order may be a guide to the healthy organization of a worshipping group. It makes sure that all the parts and pieces are in place. Both the Graafschap group and the Grand Rapids group organized as churches because they thought it best. But they didn’t form an umbrella organization to serve like a Classis.”

“So when does our group need to make that choice?” asked Johannes.

“If we want to be an equal partner in the discussions on April 23, I think it must be done at our next fellowship meeting,” said Dam. “If we agree to be a church, then at our meeting this Friday we need to organize ourselves as a church with elders and deacons.”

²⁶⁰*Graafschp Church History*, p. 20.

²⁶¹ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 454.

Walking back to Dam's tethered horse, Johannes said, "More decisions to make and we don't know what consequences may come out of any of them. We surely need the guidance of the Spirit. Mr. Dam, thank you so much for your leadership in all this. I can hardly believe that I am somehow a part of these discussions."

Dam responded, "Only the Lord knows how many people will be affected by what we do at this time. He knows the consequences; we need to listen to the Word and the Spirit, make our choices and let Him do the work that He is so good at doing. It's His church, after all."

Guiding his horse onto the trail, Dam said, "We need to keep in prayer on this. Thank you, Johannes, for being with me on this. None of us can do this alone."

In the week of April 12, members of the Vriesland fellowship group were abuzz with the idea of becoming an organized church. Johannes said to Sjoukje, "It seems a step forward. Yet think about all the years the fellowship meetings have happily existed alongside the churches."

Sjoukje responded, "Ya, that's how I remember it. But I also remember that when Rev. De Cock was kicked out of the State Church, his congregation largely followed him out, and they also decided to elect elders and deacons to become an organized church of their own."²⁶²

"So," suggested Johannes, "maybe we are repeating church history. We are again considering changing our fellowship group into a church. I would like to think our gathering would blossom as much as that in 1834. I think they had a hundred congregations within the year!"

"Now, Johannes dear, don't build up your expectations too high! Maybe just like making a farm out of this forest, it's going to take time and faithful hard work to grow a church. But it's all in God's hands, isn't it?" Sjoukje pondered.

On April 17, Ulberg estimated the turnout at the Vriesland fellowship meeting was the largest one ever. In their normal pattern, the meeting proceeded with prayer and music, Bible reading and the reading of a wonderful sermon.

Then Dam began his presentation, "Brothers and sisters, we gather to worship our Lord and feast on His word. Tonight we also need to make a decision. I trust you have been in earnest prayer about this matter. Next Wednesday on April 23 we will, the Lord willing, host a meeting of the groups and pastors who gave letters of separation to Classis Holland on April 8. We will ask them whether they would be interested in forming a new church denomination that would return to the Confessions and Church Order of the Synod of Dordrecht."²⁶³ ^

²⁶² In Oct., 1834, they signed the "Act of Secession or Return."

²⁶³ The position to which H. De Cock in 1834 wanted to return (Keizer, G., *De Afscheiding van 1834*, p. 575); the position on which the church formed in Holland, MI in 1848 (*Classis Holland Minutes*, April 23, 1848, Art. 10); the position which the Dutch Reformed Church in America claims, (Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 454, 457).

“Tonight we are facing a similar question together. We have been a fellowship group for six years.²⁶⁴ Now we are facing the choice of whether or not to become a congregation, a church together, and be prepared to send delegates to a classis meeting in Holland on April 28.”²⁶⁵

Dam continued, “Before we can make that decision, we need to turn again to the Lord and ask for His guidance. I, for one, don’t know all the consequences of making such a decision. We have been meeting as a fellowship for all this time. Now all five groups are needing to make big decisions. Mr. Ulberg, would you please lead us in prayer?”

After prayer, Dam suggested, “At our last gathering, we talked for some time about whether or not to become an organized church. Does anyone have questions to ask or something you wish to say to the group?”

Receiving no response to his question, Dam asked, “Are you ready to take a formal vote on that question?” Heads nodded yes.

If your vote is in favor of organizing as a congregation, please show your vote by a show of hands.” There was no hesitation. Many hands were raised. ^

“Nay votes, please raise your hands.” After noting there were no negative votes, Dam said with a smile, “The ayes have the vote.” And a sound of happy rejoicing filled the room.

Dam then asked, “Are you ready to make the decision to elect elders and deacons?” A sound of assent rose from those present. “Please use these ballots to make nominations. I will ask Mr. and Mrs. Johannes Van Haitsma to count them in our presence.”

After some shuffling and gathering the ballots, Johannes and Sjoukje took the ballots to the lectern and counted them. Then Johannes said, “The votes reflect that Mr. Tede Ulberg and Mr. Hendrik Dam are elected elders and Mr. Gijsbert Haan Jr. is elected deacon.”

Mr. Dam faced the circle and said, “I am humbled that you entrust me to be your elder. With your agreement, we will ask Rev. Van den Bosch to do the installation of this new council when he can come to our worship service.”²⁶⁶

Enjoying a late conversation with Sjoukje that evening, Johannes shared, “I was struggling with an awareness at the meeting tonight. It just didn’t come together for me.”

“What was that about Johannes?” Sjoukje encouraged him on.

²⁶⁴Vriesland RCA Minutes, Jan. 18, 1853.

²⁶⁵The date just before the letter by Revs. Van den Bosch and Klyn asking for recognition by the *Afgescheiden* Church in the Netherlands. Henry Beets, mistakenly dated that letter April 24 but does connect it with the first Classis of the CRC denomination of which the minutes were lost. (Beets, H., *Church*, p. 49). These conditions were not met by John Kromminga in his designation of Oct. 7, 1858 (*Tradition*, p. 34).

²⁶⁶Vriesland CRC Council Minutes, May 21, 1857, Art. 3. On the 17th of April, I.J. Ulberg and H.W. Dam were elected as elders and G. Haan Jr. as deacon. They were installed into their offices on May 7 by Rev. K. van den Bosch.

“Well, you know that the fellowship group made a unified decision about becoming a church. There was no dissenting vote. But something in the corner of my mind keeps bugging me,” answered Johannes.

“Ya?” Sjoukje waited for him to continue.

“I think, ya, I think it was Elder Den Herder. I noticed that he did not vote. He just quietly sat there. So I’m beginning to realize that in his kindness to us, he chose to keep his feelings to himself. He had really made it clear in our little cluster after the meeting last week how he felt. So I have no reason to be surprised, except that he was quiet about it and didn’t raise a fuss. I am really sorry that he won’t be part of the new church.”

Sjoukje observed, “He would have been a good man in our new church, wouldn’t he?”

“Ya,” shared Johannes, “and we obviously would have been blessed if he had been in agreement with us.”

On the morning of April 23, 1857, the yard by the Vriesland Fellowship Hall was filled with horses and buggies. The hall itself was filled with men who responded to the invitation to consider forming a new church denomination. ^

“Thank you all for coming today,” welcomed Mr. Dam as he stood up in the gathered circle. “It seemed important to us in our fellowship group to invite you here. By now we have all heard what took place in Classis Holland two weeks ago. There currently are three congregations, two fellowship groups and two ministers who have decided they can no longer be part of the church that joined with the Reformed Dutch Church.

“And so very simply put, we have come together to discuss our options, whether to go our own separate ways, or join another denomination, or decide to be a church together. Before we continue, it seems best to begin our meeting by joining together in prayer to ask for God’s blessing and wisdom today. I’ll begin and please feel free to offer your own prayers. And then I’d like to read from the book of Philippians.”

Dam paused, and then started praying, “Lord God of all the earth. You have created us to bring You glory and honor in our work and in our worship. You have accepted the sacrifice of Your Son Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. We know they are many. We lean on your grace for renewal. Please be present in this gathering with Your Spirit of peace and the love of Jesus to guide our words. May the words of our mouths be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord.”

After a time of group prayer, Dam concluded and opened his Bible. “We turn to Philippians 1 and 2 for guidance. Hear the Word of the Lord: ‘I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus....And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.....Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.’”

“I’d like to ask Mr. Groen to lead us in singing Psalm 133:1 before we begin our discussions.”²⁶⁷

After the Psalm resounded, Dam spoke, “We came to this new land with the idea of freedom of worship. We desired freedom to return to the principles of faith and order expressed in Dordrecht in 1619.

“It seems to me today that we need to briefly remember the 1834 *Afscheiding*. Many of us were meeting in fellowship groups outside the church, and we were okay with that. After several ministers were kicked out of the State Church, those ministers went around the country and organized the fellowship groups into congregations and then called a classis meeting. That seemed to drastically change the dynamics of each fellowship group, and gave formal leadership roles to ministers and elders. I for one don’t really begin to understand what the consequences of those choices were. Just like we had little idea when we immigrated to *de Kolonie* what our lives were going to be like here in the vast forest.”

“Now that we once again have the opportunity to make choices for our way to worship, we invite you to consider whether or not to organize our groups together in some way. The other choice is for each of us to go whichever direction we choose. So please, let’s discuss freely among ourselves what direction to take. Do we travel in faith together or do we go in separate directions? Please listen to each other and to the Spirit as we chat. In a while I will call us back together to see if we have come to any consensus.”

The discussion began to buzz. Elder Anrooy reported, “What we decided in Graafschap was to reach out and connect with the Separated Church in the Netherlands. So we already made a decision what direction we want to take.”

Elder van der Werp chimed in and reported, “In our letter to Classis Holland we said the same thing. We would also connect with the Netherlands Church. We had no idea of becoming part of a group here in America.”

Rev. Klyn added, “Ya, the group in Grand Rapids already is independent and has not even considered joining with others.”

Rev. Van den Bosch admitted, “I broke my relationship with the church, and a few people have followed me out, but up until now, we haven’t given much thought beyond that.”

Mr. Ulberg confessed, “We in the Vriesland group only began to consider organizing as a congregation two weeks ago. We wanted to be organized before this meeting and ready with elders and deacons for delegates.”

“It would be a drastic change of direction to join together rather than connecting with the old home church,” wondered Rev. Klyn.

²⁶⁷ The Psalm version compiled in 1773 by the State Church of the Netherlands was used; this was still in use in the *Gereformeerde Kerk* in my childhood in the Netherlands. ^

Anrooy agreed, “I don’t know what our church will think about this. I know we want to return to the Standards as you have suggested, but to form a Classis here among ourselves is a big change from what we have seen as our vision.”

Dam noted, “So it sounds that the decision to return to the Old Standards is a common interest. Another important choice is whether we want to make a commitment to each other and the Lord right here in America, or to join with the church back in the Netherlands.”

After about two hours of discussion, Dam asked, “Have we in any way come to a consensus? Would you be agreeable to present to your group the option of forming a new denomination in West Michigan, committing ourselves to the principles of the Church Order of 1619 and the three Forms of Unity?” ^

Rev. Klyn responded, “I think we all seem to agree we want to live by the Forms of Unity and the 1619 Church Order. That appears settled. I for one will be pleased to ask our council what direction they would like to go.”

Rev. Vanden Bosch responded, “I certainly will be willing to bring these ideas to the little group who broke away from Noordeloos and ask them for their opinion.”

Elder Jan Vander Werp spoke up, “This is a real surprising event I did not see coming. I haven’t the slightest idea what my brothers in Polkton will do with this, but I will be pleased to present it for their consideration.”

Elder Anrooy confessed, “I have a question about whether our group will affirm this choice, but I will be pleased to offer it.”

Mr. Dam wrapped up the discussion, “Thank you for being willing to share this idea with your respective councils. If your groups affirm this proposal, let us agree to meet again on April 28 for the constitution of our new Classis. We can meet in Holland²⁶⁸ at Jan Slag’s boat place. Are all of you comfortable with this idea?” Every face gleamed with the excitement of this new concept and all heads nodded a definite yes.

Dam concluded the meeting, “Let’s bring this gathering to a close by singing the doxology, ‘Praise God from whom all blessings flow.’”

Over the next ten days word drifted back to Dam that most of the groups and preachers who had attended the planning meeting had made the decision to join together as a church in America. Only Graafschap did not respond.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸Based on the date of the letter written by van den Bosch and Klyn requesting recognition of their credentials and the new denomination. Beets, H., *Church*, pp. 347, 49.

²⁶⁹ Graafschap History noted the first classis meeting was in May 1857. A letter, dated April 29, 1857, written by Klyn and Van den Bosch apparently was an official request from the new church organization to be recognized by the Separated Church in the Netherlands. An article in the Graafschap Church newsletter noted the first classis meeting was Oct., 1857. ^

On Thursday, April 28, the representatives of each group gathered in Holland to form their new Classis.²⁷⁰ The group elected Rev. Klyn to be the president of their first official meeting. Rev. Klyn welcomed all who were present and then said, “We thank you, Mr. Slagh, for making this space available for this event of birthing a new church. Mr. Dam, I’m so glad you invited us to that planning meeting. Now we can truly be by ourselves again. It will be good for us to have our own church home.”

Rev. Klyn continued, “Well, our intent is to return to the standards of the old fathers, and now that’s exactly what we are going to do together. We’re gathering to commit ourselves to forming a church that fulfills the dream that brought us to this land.

Mr. Jan Slagh spoke up, “I’m very glad to be part of this momentous decision. I have felt since 1849 that we had gone away from the dream by accepting a union with the Dutch Reformed Church. But I did not know what could be done about that. I did not want to join the groups of the other dissenters. Now I am excited to be part of this new beginning. Thank you for accepting my invitation to have the first gathering of the new Classis here in my establishment. I wish there were more here today who have been part of the church here in Holland. I was hoping that members of the fellowship group that Mr. Krabshuis started might show up too.”

Rev. Klyn agreed, “We hope that all those who came here in 1847 with the idea of following the old fathers will find their way with us on this journey. Mr. Slagh, as host of this gathering, would you please lead us in prayer for God’s blessing on this assembly?”

The churches represented responded “Present” when the chairman did a formal roll call. A noticeable silence followed the request for the presence of delegates from Graafschap. None had come.

As the chairman, Rev. Klyn said, “I request the delegates to voice their affirmation to the Confession, the Canons of Dordt, the Heidelberg Catechism and the 1619 Church Order.” The responses were loud and strong. All day the discussions went on. ^

After the meeting was over, Dam stopped by Johannes’ house on his way home from the City. “Hey, Mr. Dam,” Johannes called out seeing him in his yard. “Is the first Classis meeting over?”

“Ya, friend,” said Dam. “We settled a number of organizational questions. Now we are officially a denomination, I guess.” ^

“Still not very certain, eh?” asked Johannes. “Please come in, I’m sure Sjoukje will soon have coffee for us and maybe a bite.”

“That coffee sounds good after driving my buggy this far. I thought you might like to hear what happened since you weren’t there.”

²⁷⁰ Beets, H., *Church*, p. 49 notes the first Classis was in April, 1857. The same book, p. 97, placed that meeting in May, 1857. Hoezee, S., *150 CRC Review* placed it on April 29, 1857. Zwaanstra, H., *Catholicity and Secession*, p. 8, placed the first Classis in May, 1857. *Classis Minutes CRC* introduction placed the meeting in April, 1857, with Rev. Klyn as president.

“That was okay with me,” chuckled Johannes. “I’m glad not to be an elder. I think I never want to be an elder. It needs a better man than me.”

“Oh, now, Johannes,” Dam responded, “Don’t be down on yourself. You’ve got a good head on your shoulders, and a good heart in your chest, and a great faith in your spirit. You would make a fine officer in any church.”

“That’s a little hard for me to accept,” said Johannes. “Anyway, what’s the news?”

“Well,” Dam began, “Jan Slagh opened with prayer. Then the biggest disappointment of the day was that there was no one from the Graafschap congregation. They are the biggest group among us. I hope that we find out soon what they intend to do about being part of us.”

“I wonder,” mused Johannes, “why Graafschap did not respond?”

Dam suggested, “They had indicated that they wanted to reconnect with the Separated Church in the Netherlands. Perhaps they had already sent a letter with that request and are now waiting for a response from them.”²⁷¹

Dam continued, “The group elected Rev. Klyn as chair and Rev. Van den Bosch as clerk. As expected, the chairman asked us all to affirm our commitment to the Standards of 1619. As for the rest, we set the pattern of our meetings, and the pattern of these Classis meetings. We asked Rev. Van den Bosch to be our itinerant minister and he will come to each of our churches on a rotating basis. He was also assigned to baptize and bring communion every quarter of the year. And the churches each agreed to pay him for his services. But he will still have to work his farm to keep food on his table, just like the rest of us, you know.”[^]

“It sounds like a good beginning,” said Johannes.

“Ya, we also set the schedule for church visitations. And we took a count of how many members are part of each congregation. And we discussed how to follow the Church Order concerning the feast days. But you know, there are things we did not discuss, like how the minutes will be kept and stored, or the way to bring issues to the next meetings.”

“I suppose,” said Johannes, “some of those things will just kind of develop. Just how many people were counted in each church? Do you remember?”

“Ya, I did keep some of my own notes. In Noorderloos Rev. Van den Bosch reported eighteen or nineteen followers; in Grand Rapids ninety-four members; for Polkton, we didn’t get a count; and in our own, about twenty. Then of course, children and other baptized members. I think in all about one hundred forty members.”²⁷² [^] The biggest disappointment was that Graafschap delegates never did show up.”

²⁷¹Classis Holland, 1857, p. 242.

²⁷² Beets, H., *Church*, p. 49.

Johannes reflected, “That’s not a big number; but, for a start, that’s not bad. Was there any discussion about finding more ministers for our churches?”

“We really did not get into that subject. I suspect as small as we are, we might have to continue to be satisfied with reading sermons from the Old Fathers,” smiled Dam.

“Well, that sounds good to me.” Johannes smiled and added, “I wasn’t always happy with the preaching we heard over the last years. Somehow the spirit of those Old Fathers sounded much better to my heart.”

“And with Mr. Groen leading us in singing the Psalms, it will feel just right for worship of the Lord,” Dam added.

“Mr. Dam,” Johannes asked, “If I may ask, what was it that really made you decide to leave the congregation under Rev. Ypma?”

“You know,” Dam pondered a bit, “I’ve thought about that some. It hasn’t really been easy to identify.”

“I can appreciate that,” suggested Johannes. “Sometimes we make decisions, and then we don’t really understand why.”

“Ya, I think that about says it,” Mr. Dam responded. “But some things do stand out in my mind. It’s true, as I said to the council, I wanted out of being an elder because I don’t know all the people.²⁷³ There are a good number from other provinces in the Vriesland Reformed Church and I really don’t know them. I see them on Sundays, but that’s not good enough. But the council thought that was a poor reason. I guess it was. But I was trying not to cause upset.”

“Another time I told them that I preferred Rev. Smit’s preaching in Drenthe.²⁷⁴ This was to avoid repeating my complaint that Rev. Ypma sounded too man-centered. But really behind all of those reasons was that I did not want to be judging if Rev. Ypma’s sermons were Reformed, as the Church Order requires elders to do. Nor did I want to appear to the congregation that I was okay with his preaching.

“Then I also wanted our church to live by the two year term limits that the Church Order requires.²⁷⁵ But I think I just did not want any longer to be responsible as an elder. I could see the church drifting into the ways of the Dutch Reformed Church in America. But I don’t want to speak about this to other people. I don’t want to sound like a complainer. So please keep that between us, okay?”

“Ya, of course we will,” Sjoukje and Johannes said almost together. “We will honor that, and thank you for honoring us with your reasons. It makes a lot of sense,” Johannes added.

²⁷³*Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Feb. 19, 1850, Art. 2.

²⁷⁴*Ibid.*, Jan. 2, 1852, Art. 2.

²⁷⁵*1619 Church Order*, Art. 23 and Art. 27.

“Well,” Dam concluded, “I think it best to get home to my Lummigje. She will be eager to hear what happened too.”

“Ya, I expect so,” said Johannes. “Please give her our regards. And thanks so much for stopping by and sharing.”

“You’re welcome, Johannes. Goodbye.”

On Sunday May 7, 1857, Rev. Van den Bosch came to the little fellowship hall in Vriesland where the newly formed church had gathered. Following a lengthy sermon he installed the elders and deacon as requested.²⁷⁶ The congregation enjoyed a picnic lunch, together after which Rev. Van den Bosch preached again. All in all, it was a most satisfying day of worship. ^

Rev. Van den Bosch was preparing to return home when Johannes interrupted him. “Reverend,” Johannes began, “what made you decide to step away from the Dutch Reformed Church? I think as a minister you had a bigger stake than us regular members would have.”²⁷⁷

“I expect you’re right, Mr. Van Haitsma,” the Reverend responded. “I confess that Elder Van der Werp of the Polkton church had been corresponding with me for some time. That correspondence had been happening already when he spent time in New York,²⁷⁸ and he shared many observations with me. So when I came to pastor the Noordeloos church, I saw for myself the choices the Classis was making. The big shock for me was when the Rev. Van Raalte brought out the new ‘church regulations’ prepared for our consideration.²⁷⁹ That of course was just another word for Church Order. And I realized immediately that Classis Holland was making a decision on what Church Order they wanted to follow. I remembered that just like the Separated Church in the Netherlands, so here, the church was marching to another drum than the one they had just affirmed at the beginning of the meeting!”

“My!” exclaimed Johannes. “That would be a shocker! To hear affirmation of honoring the Dordt Church Order and then moments later to hear of a new set of rules. What a conflict! That’s just what we were concerned about: the inconsistency and the lack of integrity.”

“Ya, Van Haitsma. That is a serious breach of loyalty. Who and what we pledge allegiance to is important. And saying one thing and doing another is not walking honestly,” answered Rev. Van den Bosch. “The Lord reminds us to let our ‘yes’ be ‘yes.’”

“That seems to sum up what we have been feeling too,” agreed Johannes. “Thank you, Rev. Van den Bosch, for sharing these thoughts with me. I am hoping that in our new church the Lord will find us to be honest and filled with integrity before Him and the world.”

“Ya, I hope so too,” the Reverend spoke as he started down the trace to Noordeloos and his farm.

²⁷⁶Vriesland CRC Minutes, May 21, 1857, Art. 3.

²⁷⁷ Rev. Van den Bosch gave up his ministerial credentials and his salary subsidy was cut off by letter to the RCA Board of Domestic Mission. Swierenga, R., *Family Quarrels*, p. 84.

²⁷⁸ Sheeres, J., *The Son of Secession*, p. 114.

²⁷⁹Classis Holland, Dec., 17, 1856, Art. 4.

Six months later, after the next Classis meeting on October 7, Dam found Johannes sitting against a huge tree. “Well, Van Haitsma, has that tree got you discouraged?”

“No, not really, Mr. Dam. I just wanted to rest my back before tackling this giant.”

“Ya,” Dam observed, “God sure has made them big, hasn’t He?”

“Actually, I was partly sitting here hoping you’d stop by after the Classis meeting. I am curious. What’s the news?” Johannes asked.

“I guess,” Dam reflected, “I guess it was about as routine as one might expect. We don’t have much business to discuss yet. The most interesting thing that happened, though, was the shifting of who wants to be part of our little group. Rev. Klyn has decided to return to the Dutch Reformed Church. So the Grand Rapids church was represented by Elders Haan and Gezon. Polkton did not show up, but Graafschap was there this time. And also seeing Delegate Nijssse from Grand Haven gave encouragement to us all.”²⁸⁰

“Delegate Spijkerman from Noordeloos made a request. Their congregation is spread out between Noordeloos and Zeeland. His group asked advice about what they should do. Should they worship as one or, because of distance, worship in two separate groups? Obviously each group would be rather small. After some discussion, we suggested that they worship in both locations and plan to celebrate communion at each place in turn.”

“Are they one congregation or two?” wondered Johannes.

“I think they’re not exactly sure themselves right now,” suggested Dam. “So, we started with four groups, lost one, and then gained three groups. Well, I guess it may take time for the organizational dust to settle. I’ve never helped start a denomination. This is all new.”

“Maybe it is just like cutting down this big tree one chop at a time. One meeting at a time to shape a new church; we should not be expecting too much,” thought Johannes out loud.

1858 *

“How are you feeling, Sjoukje?” Johannes asked. “I hope you’re keeping warm enough.”

“Really, just barely,” Sjoukje responded. “With this child kicking in my belly, all of it adds to some discomfort. I know it won’t be long before this one will be born. I have already told Ma and our sisters that it’s only a matter of days now. So they’re ready to come over.”

²⁸⁰*Classical Assembly CRC, Oct. 7, 1857.*

“Sometimes,” Johannes confessed, “I remember how many children died in childbirth, including some of my brothers and sisters and I worry about that for us.”

Sjoukje admitted, “I occasionally think about that too, my husband. But we need to trust in the Lord, don’t we?”

A few days later the men were hustled out of the house and the women took care of Sjoukje in her birth pangs. A shout of joy rose from the house, “It’s another boy! And all is well!”²⁸¹

“Oh, thank you, Lord!” Johannes breathed as the men slapped each others’ backs in congratulations. Johannes impatiently waited to be invited back into the house to join Sjoukje in celebration.

Hendrik Dam began to chuckle. “What’s getting at your funny bone, Mr. Dam?” Johannes wondered.

“Well, I don’t know a lot about church government. But it seemed strange to me when Rev. van den Bosch proclaimed that any classis or council or congregational meeting was illegal if he was not there. I guess I’m wondering what dictionary he’s working with.”

“Is that why he had to install our council last year?” asked Johannes.

“Well, I guess. It just seemed a bit preposterous to place Church Order regulations on a parallel with a nation’s laws. Surely the Church Order is at a level of principles rather than laws and legalities, I would think,” Dam observed.

Dam continued, “Sometimes I just don’t know what gets into a minister’s head.”[^] Rev. van den Bosch walked away from his official calling church, so he himself doesn’t even have an official standing outside of what we recognize in our own little circle of congregations. I do appreciate his willingness to serve all of our congregations, but the idea of his presence making some action of our council legal or otherwise seems very far-reaching to me.”

“But do you think we ought to live with his idea of his authority for the sake of peace?” wondered Johannes.

“I think maybe that’s worth it,” Dam agreed.

1859

²⁸¹*Census Records of 1860.*

On Feb 3 Dam came by. “Hey, Mr. Van Haitsma,” he greeted cheerfully. “I thought you might be interested in some of the decisions made at Classis yesterday.”

“You’re right, Mr. Dam. I’d love to hear the news. So what kind of things were talked about?”

“For one,” Dam replied, “we decided on a name for the new church.”

“Oh? What was the choice?”

Dam answered, “We decided to call ourselves the ‘Holland Reformed Church.’”²⁸² ^

“Now,” asked Johannes, “What is behind that choice?”

Dam said, “First of all we wanted to state that we consider ourselves ‘Reformed.’ That’s what we’ve been thinking all along. Already with the Secession back in 1834 and even before, we felt that the State Church in the Netherlands had lost that sense. That church had kept the Reformed doctrinal statements from 1619, but long ago had lost the practice, and in our opinion, the right to call themselves ‘Reformed.’” They would have been better off calling themselves ‘the Enlightened Church’ because that’s what they thought they were.”

Mr. Dam continued, “Then we also chose ‘Holland’ as part of the name.”

Johannes observed, “That seems to emphasize our ethnic character without placing ourselves on the American scene.”

“Ya,” answered Dam, “It seems very little different; however, using that as the distinctiveness from the ‘Dutch Reformed Church in America,’ it pretty much seemed to say what we wanted to say about ourselves without surrendering anything in our identification.”

Johannes noted, “That distinction must have seemed important, since you say it was decided unanimously.”

“We did have one little surprise at the meeting, though,” Dam added.

“Oh?” wondered Johannes.

“Ya,” Mr. Dam continued, “Rev. Van den Bosch was not feeling well and did not attend the meeting. So we had to choose someone to be president for the day.”

“So, who was elected?” asked Johannes.

“Of all people, the group elected Mr. Haan,²⁸³ whose voice we in Vriesland tried to quiet down. I think the elders from Vriesland all rolled their eyes. But I have to say that Mr. Haan did a fine job. Much better than we expected.”

²⁸²CRC *Classical Minutes* (General Assembly) Feb. 2, 1859, Art. 4. Beets, H., *Church*, p. 58.

“Mr. Haan really is a good man and quite a deep thinker too, I have found,” Johannes reflected. “But when he has ideas that are important to him, he seems to have a big need to get everyone else’s agreement. We can be thankful that the Classis experienced his softer side,” chuckled Johannes.

That night Johannes tossed and turned on the bed. Sjoukje woke up, “What’s the matter, Johannes? Can’t you sleep?”

“Aw, Sjoukje, I’m troubled over what Dam told me about the Classis meeting on Feb. 2. I am glad that I’m not in the council and that I don’t have to attend those meetings.”²⁸⁴

“Well, Johannes,” Sjoukje responded, “We do have a lot of strong personalities in this new church. Everything is still new and they have strong opinions.”²⁸⁵

“I know that, dear,” said Johannes, “but it sounds too much like what I’ve heard about the Separatist Church in the Netherlands. Within the first year of organizing, those leaders had all kinds of differences of opinion, and that never let up. Even when they formed a seminary for new preachers, they kept on arguing about all kinds of differences. I had hopes and expectations that this would not happen here.”[^]

Johannes reflected, “One of the things that happened is that Rev. Klyn has already quit and gone back to the Reformed Church.²⁸⁶ Just as surprising to me is that the Polkton group also went back to the Reformed Church.”²⁸⁷

“That sounds so disappointing, doesn’t it?” responded Sjoukje. “I would think people who had serious enough objections to the ways of the Reformed Dutch Church to make an official break with her, would have thought things through before taking that step in the first place. Why, do you think he returned to Classis Holland?”

“Well,” pondered Johannes, “I don’t think it was because of financial reasons. Rev. Klyn told me himself that he had been assured the church he joined in January would be able to afford him an adequate salary. But I do think he reconsidered being part of a church in which the powerful personality of Mr. Haan would overshadow him. I’m thinking any minister would not be comfortable under those circumstances.”

Sjoukje suggested, “That makes sense. If Rev. Van Raalte was uncomfortable with Mr. Haan’s powerful argumentation, surely Rev. Klyn might be even more so. But you’d think he would have considered that in the few months he was part of the church that Mr. Haan convened.”

²⁸³Classis CRC Minutes, Feb. 3, 1858, Art. 3.

²⁸⁴ Boonstra, H., *Equation*, p. 13: “Reading the early ‘Minutes of the True Dutch Reformed Church’ is not an uplifting experience.”[^]

²⁸⁵ Krabbendam, H., *Freedom*, p. xxiii: “Even the virtue of freedom could produce internal tensions in communities that wanted to continue their own lifestyles as much as possible.”

²⁸⁶CRC Classical Minutes, Introduction.

²⁸⁷Memorable Events.

“Ya,” spoke up Johannes. “It certainly took me time to decide what to do. I know I made the right decision for me, and I hope for you.”

“Ya, I agree. I am happy to be part of this new church with you,” Sjoukje assured him.

“It is good to hear you say that. I’m glad we have a common opinion about where and how we want to worship. See you in the morning, Sjoukje.”

“Ya, Johannes, see you in the morning.”

Later in the week Johannes stopped by Wopke’s place down the trail. “How’s everything?” he asked as he entered their log cabin.

Annie quickly got a pot of coffee going. Wopke was pleased to see Johannes and drew up a chair. “We have been wanting to talk with you privately. It is good you have stopped in. Please sit down and relax.”

Johannes answered, “Thanks. I know you have been busy lately with both the farm and the store. I hope the **Widow Tanis** ^ continues to be a great help? She seems quite a capable woman. So, what’s on your mind?”

“Well,” said Wopke, “Annie and I have decided to make profession of our faith at our church on Feb. 27.²⁸⁸ It is actually a surprise to us to think of finally becoming members.”

“Ya, that was a hard decision for me too,” said Johannes. “I thought it was just my own spiritual journey, but I am aware that each of us brothers has followed the same pattern. I am very happy for you both that you have made that decision.”

Wopke speculated, “I think I can serve Jesus better if I make a decision to stand up for Him and not delay any longer.”

“That’s how I felt too,” Johannes shared. “But I tell you, I surprised myself when I made the decision to be part of the new church. And even though I am happy with that decision, **I am disappointed at the loud voices I keep hearing about at the classical meetings. Why can’t we all be nicer to each other?**” ^

Wopke changed the topic, “Something else we’ve just heard at the church.”

Johannes’ ears picked up, “What’s the news?”

Wopke answered, “The Vriesland Reformed Church has decided to build a new church building on the corner in Vriesland, right across from Pa’s house.”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸Vriesland RCA Membership Records.

²⁸⁹Vriesland RCA Minutes, Jan. 1, 1858, p. 80.

“Wow,” Johannes’ thoughts turned to the implications of this news. “That will mean that the intersection will definitely become the center of the Vriesland village. And,” he continued excitedly, “that’s right between all our properties. How great is that?”

“Ya,” said Wopke, “it was not what we expected either. But I would not be surprised that Rev. Van Raalte expected that intersection to be the more important one. After all, he bought land both here and at the south of Section 22. **What he sold to us, may turn out to be prime real estate.**”²⁹⁰ ^

Johannes said, “I have a feeling that it is not going to make much difference to my family. I’m going to farm my acres and raise my family. It may become more important to Pa, Wiebe and you, as your store and they are right at that intersection.”

“Ya, you may be right about that,” answered Wopke. “My store has been on that corner for several years already. And I am developing my farm too.”

“With all your acres of land you will be kept occupied, and before long you’ll need to have larger equipment to farm the land. And I hear that you have recently become part of the Harbor Board for the State of Michigan. It seems there is no end to your activities.”²⁹¹

“Well, yes, **there are opportunities to be involved and make a difference, both in the church and in the state,**” Wopke responded. ^

“You might be interested to hear,” offered Johannes, “that our little church is building too, just about right across from my house.”²⁹²

“Ya” remarked Wopke. “I have been seeing some activity over there near Gysbert Jr’s place.”

“With all the trees in the way, I wondered if anyone had noticed,” Johannes returned.

“Well, word has a way of spreading even if the trees may still dominate the country,” observed Wopke.

“Ya,” continued Johannes, “the windows and doors are about to go in. Soon we can move the little pulpit we’ve been using since the fellowship group was started. Then I guess we’ll feel like we have a real church building, even if it is small.”

“I guess church is church whether small or large!” noted Wopke.

Tede Ulberg walked over to Johannes’ house. “I needed a break,” he said. “My eyes were getting tired of the close needle work on the shoes.”

²⁹⁰Swierenga, R., *Property Sales by van Raalte*.

²⁹¹ Versteeg, A., *De Pelgrim-Vaders van het Westen*, p. 163. Van Haitsma, J., *Legends*, identifies him as William. Van Haitsma, A., *Legends* identifies him as Wopke. Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 222.

²⁹²*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Oct. 22, 1857, Art. 2.

“I can imagine,” responded Johannes. “The light in our places is not so good either. It’s hard sometimes to even read the Bible.”

“Ya, isn’t that the truth?” muttered Ulberg.

“Candles can only lighten up the room some, and the fireplace isn’t all that bright either,” added Johannes.

“Ya, it is good to take a break once in a while, isn’t it?” Tede shared, “I went into the City last week to pick up some more leather for the shoes people have ordered. I ran into Rev. Van Raalte riding his horse through the town.”

“I suppose he’s keeping busy with all the concerns of the *Kolonie*,” suggested Johannes.

“I’m sure he is,” Ulberg said. “We just talked about the weather. But he looked kind of out of place,” he added “in his white overalls on his horse!”²⁹³

“Now that must have been a sight to behold with almost all of us wearing black or dark blue overalls in our work,” reflected Johannes.

“Ya, I would say that was a bit unusual,” smiled Ulberg.

A few months later, Tjalling came to Pa’s home with heavy heart and tears in his eyes. “Neeltje is not doing well. She has been too weak lately to do any household work. It’s a good thing we have a live-in maid. Now the baby is coming and I don’t know if she is going to make it.”

Ma said, “I’ll walk back with you.”

“I’m sure she would like to have you beside her.”

Ma slipped into her *klompen* and put her hand into Tjalling’s arm and off they went across Wopke’s farm. “I know she’s been weak,” Ma said, “but I didn’t know how weak.”

Tjalling said, “Let’s see if Annie can come along too.” They stopped at Annie’s door and Annie was ready to join them. Tjalling gave her the same dire report. “Neeltje has the feeling that she is not going to survive this birth. I hope that our child will survive.”

“Oh, Lord,” prayed Annie, “please let both survive this ordeal. Neeltje has children that need her. Lord, please! Amen.”

They tromped over the field with heavy hearts. All three were in quiet prayer for Neeltje and her baby. Tjalling murmured, “We’ve already had two children die since coming here.” He pointed to the picket fence between the trees. “Two children in that plot are more than enough. The births

²⁹³ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 371.

of the children have been hard on Neeltje. That's partly why we delayed coming here. But we realized that there or here probably wouldn't make any difference."

"It is hard to know," said Ma. "She has been fairly strong here and has been keeping up with the children, it seems to me. Living here in these pioneer times has not been easy on any of us. But God has blessed us. I pray that God's blessing will be on her and her baby now too. But God's will be done."

They entered the log house, and gathered around Neeltje lying on her bed. She greeted them weakly and said, "Thank you for coming. I think I am going to meet my Maker soon. Please surround me with your prayers to have the strength I need to bring our baby into the world." Ma took one of the warm cloths and laid it over Neeltje's brow.

Ma said, "We need to heat up some more water. We will help make Neeltje as comfortable as possible, and be prepared for that little baby to come into the world." She put her arms around the children and wrapped them close to her bosom. "Come close, children. We all need each other. Your Mom is having a difficult time bringing one more into our family."

"Oh," Tjalling groaned, "this is so hard. We came to this land with high hopes and big dreams. But now to bury Neeltje alongside of Jestje and Tetje is so hard."²⁹⁴

Ma said, "I am so sorry, Tjalling. It hurts to lose anyone we love. But especially a mate."

"Neeltje and I put a picket fence around the graves. Now that little fence will have to be made a little bigger," lamented Tjalling.²⁹⁵

Later, walking away from the little burial plot, Tjalling said to Annie, "Now we have another little Titus, and no mother. Neeltje and I have talked about this that if she should die in childbirth, we are wondering if you would be so kind as to help raise baby Titus. My other children are too young for that responsibility. And as you have no child of your own, would you be mother to our tiny Titus?"

"Oh, Tjalling," Annie exclaimed, "I would be so pleased to raise little Titus for you and Neeltje. He would be such a blessing in our household. But what about Jacoba? She's still too young to be much help around the farm and house. Would you like me to take her in too? Roelof and Seitje Strik are old enough to help Wopke work on the farm, so having little children in our home would be so wonderful again."²⁹⁶

"Well, actually we wondered if Ma would take her in and she would be family with them and Wiebe. What do you think, Ma? Would you like a little girl wandering around your house following after you?"

²⁹⁴ Jestje and Tetje, born in the Netherlands, died between 1851 and 1859; no records of burial.

²⁹⁵ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 497.

²⁹⁶ *Census Records of 1860*.

“Of course, Tjalling, we would be glad to take Jacoba into our family. She will bring a nice cheer to our home.”

“As hard as losing Neeltje is, it is a comfort to know the little ones will be getting good care. I could never do for them what the two of you can do. I know the older girls think they can take care of these little ones, but that’s just not realistic. If things change and my little family can be all together again, that’ll have to be seen.”

Wopke, hearing the conversation, chimed in, “Tjalling, we’d be glad to take Titus into our family. I promise that we will pour our love into him. And it’ll bring such a joy to Annie to be a mother for that little fellow. We would love to have children of our own, but so far the Lord does not have that in His plans. We will gladly raise Titus for you. Thank you for entrusting him to us.”

Pa added, “And I will be glad to have cheerful little Jacoba on my knee and teach her the little ditties that we taught you many years ago. I certainly would not want her to go an orphanage like Veenhuizen.”

Johannes and Sjoukje looked at each other, and Johannes said quietly, “That sounds like a wonderful idea for both children. Tjalling is brave to share his children with the family. It would be difficult for him to take care of Titus, and little Jacoba is too active for the other children to be responsible for her.”

Sjoukje answered, “I probably could have helped also, but this seems like such a great solution.”

“Thank you all,” spoke up Tjalling. “That takes a big load off my mind. Now I can help my other children deal with the loss of their mother.”

As they traipsed through the woods toward the house, Johannes quietly started singing Psalm 23 and the rest soon joined in. They were glad for the warmth of their family.

1860 *

Johannes brought Sjoukje the good news. “The community is going to build a frame school house. How nice for Titus and Reinder to be able to go to school in a frame building. The loghouse has served nicely but this will be so much better.”

“Ya, Johannes,” she answered. “It is wonderful that more and more of our homes and buildings are frame buildings. This winter has been so cold. Even our thick log walls could not keep our place warm. And there must be some way to keep the cold from seeping in through the floor.”

She added, "I hope our new teacher will appreciate better surroundings."²⁹⁷

When the school year got underway, Johannes heard **the teacher was being sued.**²⁹⁸ ^ "What's going on?" he asked.

A member of the Vriesland school board told him, "The teacher asked the students to address him as 'sir.' All the students followed the request, except one. He refused to honor the teacher with that title. The teacher asked him several times, and he kept refusing. Finally the teacher told him to go home."

"How did the parents respond?" Johannes asked.

"The father was upset and sent his son back to school. But the teacher stood firm and sent the boy home again."

"Did the father support the teacher?" he asked.

"No," said the board member. "Instead he decided to sue the teacher."

"That's terrible!" spoke up Johannes. "What can we do?" he asked.

The board member said, "The father is pretty rich and the teacher is, of course, poor."

"So the teacher needs financial support to fight the suit," wondered Johannes.

"Yes," the board member said, "he will need quite a lot of support."

"Well," offered Johannes, "I'll gladly pitch in to help. We can't have the rich bully the poor, and we need to support the teacher. Let me offer \$10 to help the teacher hire a lawyer."

"Thank you, Mr. Van Haitsma; your gift is greatly appreciated. Maybe it will inspire more people to help out."

Johannes and Sjoukje had gone to Holland City on a rainy day for some needed equipment shopping. Mr. van Loo, who kept abreast of much of the political news in the nation, stopped Johannes. "Have you heard, Johannes? Mr. Lincoln of Illinois has been nominated by the Republicans for President."

"No, Mr. van Loo, I haven't seen the newspaper much lately what with getting my trees cut and crops in the ground."

²⁹⁷ **This 2-room brick school building continued in use until Barb went into grade 6 in the 3-room school house in 1952.** ^

²⁹⁸ Van Haitsma, J., *Family Legends*.

“You’ll be interested to know that Rev. Scholte of Pella was one of the delegates to the convention.²⁹⁹ Someone overheard Mr. Lincoln call Rev. Scholte his Dutch friend.”³⁰⁰

“So does that mean Rev. Scholte played a significant role in that convention?” asked Johannes.

“Ya, and the Reverend was invited by Lincoln to attend his inaugural celebration. The Reverend has been making statewide news in Iowa since he changed from being a Democrat to becoming a Republican. ^ He and Mr. Quintus, the publisher in Sheboygan,³⁰¹ have begun pushing the anti-slavery message of the Republicans. More and more of our Dutch immigrant citizens are joining them against slavery,” Van Loo replied.

“That makes sense,” Johannes responded, “After all, we came here for freedom, and that would mean freedom for all.”

Wopke looked weary. Johannes saw him coming by and called out, “Hey, brother, you look so tired. What’s going on?”

Wopke turned from the road into Johannes’ place, and said, “I’ve spent the last few days in Zeeland. The church council appointed me to the committee to assist Zeeland in any way I can. The fire destroyed homes and some other buildings and ten families have lost everything.”³⁰²

“O, my!” exclaimed Johannes. “I knew it was bad, but I didn’t know how bad. Is there anything we can do to help?”

“I’m sure they can use some money and clothes,” Wopke answered. “That’s a sure thing. Other than that I guess the people of Zeeland are working together to help each other. None of us have much, but it is so good to see people sharing so generously. I think the need for my help is done over there too, so I am ready to take care of my farm and store.”

“And we are all just really starting to get on our feet and have working farms and businesses. And then this fire. What a set-back for them!” exclaimed Johannes. “Well, let me know if there’s anything more that we can do. We need to be at the front in helping when there are needs.”

“Sjoukje, I’m so sorry,” Johannes wept as he comforted Sjoukje. “This is as close as death³⁰³ has touched our lives. Oh, God this hurts. We so looked forward to this little guy being a new part of our family. Till now we have been so blessed by the Lord. I am confident that our little Pieter is with the Lord.”

²⁹⁹Van der Zee, J., *The Hollanders of Iowa*, p. 229.

³⁰⁰Mulder, A., *Americans from Holland*, p. 187.

³⁰¹Swierenga, R., *Rivalry*, p. 38.

³⁰²Van Haitsma, *Family Legends*.

³⁰³Van Haitsma, *Family Legends. Vriesland Cemetery Records*.

“Ya, Johannes,” Sjoukje’s tears flowed, “This little guy was to be named after my father.”

Ma sat quietly by, holding Sjoukje’s hand. “This is now the fifth death in the family since we came to the new land. ^ I am so glad the Lord did not take you with him as He did with Sietske, Neeltje and her children. Now we need the restoring of the soul that the Lord promised.”

“Pa,” Johannes turned to Tjette, “would you make the little casket for Pieter? I hope there’s a grave plot open next to Sietske where we can place him with family. I know that the important thing is that he is with Jesus. But it seems a bit of an earthly comfort to have family close by each other in death too.”

“Ya, Johannes, it will be an honor to make a casket for this little fellow. I’ll have it done later this afternoon.”

“Thanks, Pa,” responded Johannes. “It will be a loving thing to do for him and for us. Sjoukje, do you think you will feel up to having a service and burial tomorrow afternoon?”

“Ya, Johannes, I think so. I’m kind of weak right now. But tomorrow should be better. It will give time to spread the word for our neighbors to join with us.”

Johannes said, “I will ask the boys to dig the grave in the burial grounds. I will also ask the assessor for permission for the burial.”

Annie came in the door and, with tears flowing, knelt down by Sjoukje, “Oh, I’m so sorry, Sjoukje. This is not how it’s supposed to happen. Oh, what a disappointment! I’m so sorry.”

“Thank you, Annie. No, it’s not supposed to happen this way. It certainly was not what we were expecting. I don’t understand,” sobbed Sjoukje.

Johannes said, “I’m going to ask Mr. Dam to say some words and lift us up in prayer, and ask Mr. Groen to lead us in singing a Psalm or two.”

Annie suggested, “I will ask a few of the ladies to bake some goodies, and we’ll make coffee for all who come.”

Johannes thoughtfully said, “Let’s ask Wiebe to carry the little casket and lead the way to the burial grounds. Oh my. What a sad day!”

The next day, family and friends began gathering in the early afternoon. Quietly they came to Sjoukje and Johannes to offer condolences. On this September day it was still warm enough to be outdoors.

Mr. and Mrs. Dam drove their carriage onto the yard. He took the role of presiding elder. Asking for silence, he prayed, “Oh dear Lord and Father of us and our children, we ask that You comfort the Van Haitsma family in their loss of little Pieter. Be with the children as they sorrow over the loss of a little brother. Dear God, we don’t understand why little Pieter’s life has been snuffed

out even before he began to live. But we lift up our trust to You, knowing he and we are all in Your hands. Hear our prayers and see our tears as we surrender this tiny soul into Your hands and his tiny body into Your earth. In Jesus' name. Amen."

The group formed a column with Wiebe, holding the little casket, up front, Johannes carrying little Pieter, Sjoukje hand-in-hand with Sietske and Elizabeth, and Reinder and Titus following behind them. The rest of the family and neighbors formed up as Johannes Groen lifted up his clear voice in a Psalm that signaled Wiebe to start down the trace to the cemetery just south of the farm. Muffled sobs filled in the whispering of the trees as the procession followed the trace.

It was less than a half mile to the cemetery where Jetse and Wiebe had dug the grave. Now Pa and Ma would have another reason to make their occasional memorial visit to the cemetery.

The family and neighbors gradually followed onto the burial grounds. Johannes gently placed Pieter's body in the coffin and Tjette nailed the lid down.

Elder Dam opened up his Bible and read Psalm 23 for comfort and hope. Mr. Groen lifted up the familiar Psalm and all joined in. Dam spoke of the disappointment of death and raised their hope with the warm words of I Corinthians 15. Then he invited all to join in saying the Lord's Prayer. Wiebe and Jetse picked up their shovels and began shoveling the dirt over the casket. After a while they turned the shovels over to Titus and Reinder to finish filling the grave. Hendrik Dam led the way in speaking a private word of condolence to Johannes and Sjoukje.

They lifted their memories up to the Lord and slowly began the walk back to the log house. Among the last to leave were Sjoukje and Johannes and their children. Tears were shed as they returned down the trace and joined the gathering outside their house.

"Oh, Johannes," Sjoukje whispered, "this is so much like the hurt and fear I felt during the cholera summer of 1851. I thought you also had died when you stayed away so long. Death is such a heart breaker."

"*Ách, ya,*" said Johannes. "No words can really say what we feel, can they?"

"No," answered Sjoukje, "So we better treasure these children we do have in this life and trust the Lord to take good care of those we cannot keep."

Gradually neighbors and family began to go back home, most men to the milk barns, and wives to their kitchens. Dam said, "In the presence of death, life does go on. The Lord gives, the Lord takes, blessed be the name of the Lord."

"My, oh my," Johannes exclaimed to Sjoukje when the census enumerator left. "It did not occur to me to count the blessings of the Lord. You remember when we bought this land back in 1848?"

Sjoukje countered, “Oh, ya, how little we had! Wopke could easily buy eighty acres, Pa could buy forty acres directly from Rev. Van Raalte,³⁰⁴ and we could hardly afford to pay for our twenty acres, right next to Pa’s.”

“And,” Johannes added, “after buying the land, an ax handle and a pair of new wooden shoes, all I had left were two cents.³⁰⁵ And now? I estimated to the census enumerator that our farm is now worth one thousand dollars, and our personal wealth is one hundred twenty-five dollars.³⁰⁶ How the Lord has blessed us these twelve years! He’s given us strength to clear much of the land, and successful crops and animals.” ^

Sjoukje continued, “And children, and a nice frame house. And more family surrounding us, and a church where we can worship the Lord freely. Oh, yes, how the Lord has showered us with His blessings!”

Johannes assented, “And don’t forget all the friends who came here from Minnertsga and are so much a part of our lives now.”

“And I am so thankful when I think about how good I am feeling these days. Do you remember how you had to practically carry me off the boat when we arrived?” remembered Sjoukje.³⁰⁷

1861 *

After the New Year’s service, Johannes and Sjoukje walked home. Johannes said, “I was not prepared for today’s meeting.”

“Oh?” asked Sjoukje.

“No,” responded Johannes. “I was elected deacon. I did not expect that.³⁰⁸ Deacons are usually chosen from the mature members. I’ve only been a member of the church for seven years, counting the time since I made profession of faith in the Reformed Church.”

“Well, I guess that means the men of the church see more maturity in you than you do yourself,” Sjoukje smiled at him.

“I’m more like thinking that there were not many men to choose from,” returned Johannes. “Our church has remained kind of small. We have not been considered strong enough to call a minister for ourselves. I can see why the Dutch Reformed Church elected Wopke as deacon; he’s so ready to help other people with whatever problems they might have.”

³⁰⁴ Swierenga, R., *Property*.

³⁰⁵ Van Haitsma, *Family Legends*.

³⁰⁶ *Census 1860*.

³⁰⁷ Van Haitsma, *Family Legends*.

³⁰⁸ *Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Jan. 10, 1861, Art. 4.

Sjoukje observed, “Johannes, I think you don’t realize how kind and gentle a heart you have. And you are so grounded in the teachings of the Bible and the church. I’m more surprised that you weren’t elected sooner.”

“Aw, Sjoukje, you’re being too kind.”

“No, I don’t think so; I see how you show care for members of the church, and I see how gentle you are with our children.”

Johannes responded, “It’s easy to be gentle with our children. They are such a gift of God to us. Well, being a deacon, at least I won’t have to attend Classis meetings. ”

“Well, I guess I was wrong about not having to attend Classis,”³⁰⁹ Johannes said later.

“Sjoukje!” called out Johannes. “Did you see what was in the paper?”

“No, Johannes, I haven’t taken the time to look at the paper yet. What did you see?”

“The unthinkable has happened!” added Johannes.

“What are you talking about husband?” asked Sjoukje.

“The militia of the State of Carolina has fired on a federal supply ship on its way to resupply Fort Sumter.³¹⁰ I knew that the South was not happy with the North on slavery, but I did not think it would come to actually fighting each other. I thought it would just be a lot of political talk and arguments. But to start shooting at each other! I did not expect that.”

“I guess,” answered Sjoukje, “we probably don’t know the strength of feelings in this country. Just like thirty years ago the country of Belgium wanted independence from the Netherlands and were willing to fight over that. We were not expecting that either.”

“So what’s going to happen in America? You think it might divide in two?” wondered Johannes.

“Well, I don’t know,” said Sjoukje. “Will the North fight to keep the country together? Or will the South fight to gain independence and keep their slavery? I think we don’t know our new country well enough to know what the feelings are.”

“No, I guess not. It just doesn’t seem right for countrymen to start shooting at each other; if they could only all talk through their differences instead.”

“There has already been lot of talk in the country about that, hasn’t there?” suggested Sjoukje.

³⁰⁹*Classical Assembly CRC*: April 5, 1861, Feb. 3, 1862, Oct. 7, 1863, Sept. 3, 1864. Each time his name was spelled differently.

³¹⁰*Wikipedia*.

“Well ya,” conceded Johannes. “But I wonder if the political posturing of the Presidential candidates has added a lot of fuel to the fires of discussion. They seem to talk in such strong language against each other. That surely hasn’t helped a sane discussion of slavery.”

“I think you’re right about that!” agreed Sjoukje.

The maid came running to the house carrying a very wet Reinder. “Reinder fell into the well!”

“What?” cried Sjoukje. “Is he okay?”

“Ya,” the maid said, trembling. “I saw him fall and ran to get him out. He couldn’t get out by himself; the hole was too deep.”

Reinder, wet with tears, as well as shivering from the cold well water, cried in shock, “I couldn’t get out; I was scared!”

Sjoukje, recovering from the scary moment, soothed, “It’s okay, little Reinder. You’re okay. Jantje got you safely out of the hole. You will dry up.”

Johannes heard the noise of the crying and came to the house. “What’s going on?” he asked.

The maid said, “The help dug a hole for the well and when they weren’t looking, Reinder thought he’d help himself to some fresh water that had seeped in. He reached down with the ladle and lost his footing and fell into the well. I happened to see him fall in and knew he couldn’t get out, so I ran and reached down for him.”

“Thank you so much for your vigilance,” breathed Johannes. “That hole should not have been unattended. We have to make sure to cover the hole when no adult is around. I’ll speak to the men about that!”

Sjoukje added, “Thank you so much for rescuing the lad.” She gave the maid a big hug and took her inside for a rewarding cup of tea.

“Hey, Mr. Dam, what brings you out here on this cold day? I’d expect you to put up your feet by the fireside or else cut down another tree on your farm like I am.”

“I’m glad to see you too, Mr. Van Haitsma,” responded Dam with a smile. “I thought I would come to entertain you with stories from our last Classis meeting.”

Johannes took the bait, “So what’s so entertaining about a Classis meeting, Mr. Dam?”

“It appears,” continued Dam, “that Brother Haan was in kind of a pickle in the Grand Rapids congregation.”

“Oh, how so?” asked Johannes.

“Well, he had served his two year term and was ready to become inactive as an elder. The council wanted to nominate him for another term, but some in the church agitated to not renominate him. That was fine with Mr. Haan. But some other members preferred to have him continue in office. So the council decided to keep him in office for another term, against Mr. Haan’s preference. Those agitators brought a letter to classis asking Classis to side with them, but Classis ended up deciding that the council knew what they were doing and they approved keeping Mr. Haan in office. It was quite a discussion.”³¹¹

“I can just imagine,” answered Johannes.

“It was kind of funny, but yet serious,” concluded Dam.

“Any other news from the Assembly?” wondered Johannes.

“Well, another thing was a new decision on the name of our church.”

“Another change of name?” asked Johannes. “We’ve only had the name for two years.”

“Two years ago,” Dam responded, “Classis decided on the name ‘Holland Reformed Church.’ Now we decided to call ourselves the ‘True Dutch Reformed Church,’³¹² because we believe we have truly returned to those Standards of 1619, ^ while the State Church in the Netherlands and the Dutch Reformed Church have lost their claim to the name.”

Johannes countered, “That is the claim we *began* with. But if those churches have had the Reformed standards as their guide and confession, and have wandered away from that foundation, is there any way that we can have confidence that our new church will keep to the standards?”

“Unfortunately,” lamented Dam, “there is no way we can assure ourselves of that. The human heart, the Bible says, is deceitful above all things.³¹³ The most we can do is to keep reminding ourselves of the foundation on which we are building our church. So Classis decided that in every council and assembly of Classis, we will ask for an affirmation, just as the Old Standards recommended. We will ask every elder, deacon and minister to sign a written agreement with those standards.”³¹⁴ ^

“But don’t the other churches do that same thing?” wondered Johannes.

³¹¹CRC Classical Assembly Minutes, June, 1861. In the *Reformed Journal* of March, 1964, p. 13, George Stob noted that Haan returned to the RCA in Grand Rapids after this exchange.

³¹²CRC Classical Assembly Minutes, Feb., 1861, Art. 9, p. 31. Note that the minutes of Feb. 1861 identifies the new name as “Free Dutch Reformed” but in July 22, 1863, p. 60, in the minutes of the Classical Assembly, the name is identified by Rev. Van den Bosch as “True Dutch Reformed,” the same name as the 1822 dissenters in New Jersey held.

³¹³ Jeremiah 17:9.

³¹⁴CRC Classical Assembly Minutes, June 1861.

“It is true in the Netherlands,” answered Dam, “that a little word was slipped into the form of subscription that allowed them a lot of leeway in how much their faith was reflecting the standards. Here in America the Old Dutch Church has held to the words, but giving themselves the same leeway in honoring the standards they say they are following.”

“So,” opined Johannes, “there’s really no way to expect that in the future our church won’t do that same thing and play loose with the standards.”

“No, I’m afraid not,” commented Dam. “There we have to trust the Spirit, because the human heart isn’t very trustworthy.”

“You think in times to come,” wondered Johannes, “that generations from now there will again be people like us in the pew who will need to call the church back to the standards?”³¹⁵

“I’m afraid that’s to be expected,” reluctantly responded Dam. “There’ve been countless faithful in the past who’ve called the church back to its roots in Christ. Let’s hope and pray that the Lord will keep our church faithful to His Word and the Reformed standards for many years and generations.”

“You know, Mr. Dam, I’ve been wanting to talk to you about something that’s been bothering me.”

“Oh,” Dam responded, “What’s been going through your mind?”

“Well, I know that the Bible asks us to be loving and kind to each other,” continued Johannes. “But from the time I have been a deacon and participated in the council discussions, it seems to me that there are many times we have to challenge each other and convince each other to forgive and forget the things we are doing and saying to and about each other.”[^]

After a quiet moment, Johannes added, “I think I was expecting a lot more congenial atmosphere among ourselves, especially those of us who are part of the council.”

“Ya, I can appreciate that,” answered Dam. “I know we’re far from perfect, and we do our share of grumbling. The Bible reminds us with the examples of Peter and Paul and their squabbles, that leaders are not exempt from Satan’s wiles. So we have to lead the way in our congregation too in being ready to admonish each other and to confess our sins to each other so the Lord can continue to heal our bodies and our church.”³¹⁶

“I guess,” murmured Johannes, “that’s a bit like at home in the family. We do sin against each other. And we have to be sure we confess those sins and forgive each other many times along the way.”

³¹⁵ Cox, H., *The Seduction of the Spirit*, p. 317. Pieters, A., *Settlement*, p. 17. Swierenga, R., *1834 and 1857 – Church Secessions and the Dutch Emigration*, p. 1. Bratt, J., *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, p. 27.

³¹⁶ *Vriesland CRC Minutes, 1861 ff.* Schaap, J., *Album*, p. 100. Mulder, A., *Americans*, p. 105.

“Ya,” Dam agreed, “and that doesn’t get any less or any easier as the years go by. I’ve got a few years on you and I can testify to that!”

Johannes came into the house with a handful of feathers. “What’re you doing with those feathers?” asked Sjoukje.

“I found them in the pig pen,” Johannes said.

“You think a bear came and ate some of the chickens?” wondered Sjoukje.

“I guess that’s possible,” Johannes said. “But I think maybe there’s a less dramatic explanation.”

“Oh?” Sjoukje suspected what he might say.

“Ya, I think I need to talk with Titus,” Johannes responded.

“He’s out back of the house,” noted Sjoukje. “I think maybe he’s trying to be invisible.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” Johannes observed. He called out, “Titus, can you come here?”

“Sure Pa,” Titus answered. “What you got in mind?”

Johannes showed Titus the feathers. “Do you know of any reason that these feathers would be in the pig pen?”

“Maybe one of the chickens flew into the pen and the pigs figured it would make a good dinner?” suggested Titus.

“That makes me think you have a pretty good imagination,” Johannes responded. “Do you think maybe you could imagine a better reason?”

Titus reluctantly hung his head. “Well, Pa, you know that rooster has been after me every time I go to get the eggs. I always carry a stick with me to keep him from attacking me. But today I think maybe I hit him a bit harder than usual. And when he just lay like he was dead, I thought maybe the pigs would like him for dinner. I just didn’t think they would be so fussy as to not eat the feathers too.”

“I can understand that, son, but you know, we might have had that rooster for our own Sunday dinner. He would have made a good meal.”

“Awe, Pa, I was scared you would be unhappy with me, so I tried to hide killing the rooster by feeding him to the pigs,” admitted Titus.

“Son, I’m glad you didn’t try too hard to hide what happened. But if it happens again, just bring it to Ma and she would make a delicious dinner out of it,” Johannes concluded.

It was a warm day in July. Dam came looking for some help with his harvest. He found Johannes out in the field and hailed him, “Hey, Johannes,” he called out, “I’m interested in your help for my harvesting.”

Johannes responded, “Ya, I’ll be glad to be of service. I was hoping requests for jobbing out would help me pay for this new machinery. When do you want to have me come?”

“My grain is drying out, so in a day or two will work for me. How about you?”

“I have a job tomorrow, but the day after should work out fine. If that’s good for you?” answered Johannes.

“Ya, that’ll work for me,” Dam answered.

Johannes said, “That’ll be good then.”

The September of 1861 was especially beautiful and Sjoukje found delight in watching the leaves begin to change to brilliant colors. Their four older children had already started back to school and three-year-old Wopke was a delight to care for. These days the Van Haitsma men were making plans for the corn harvest coming up soon. Sjoukje moved a bit slower than usual, and decided to rest out in the fresh fall air. That is where Johannes found her when he came home for lunch. It only took one look at her face, and Johannes asked Sjoukje, “Is it time for Ma and Annie to come?”

“Ya, husband, it is time,” Sjoukje smiled at Johannes. A baby boy was born to the Van Haitsma family in late September, 1861. Johannes and Sjoukje took their time to choose a name for him. They chose the name Pieter. Remembering a year or more ago, Johannes rejoiced with Sjoukje and the family and prayed “Thank you, Lord, for our new son with such a lusty voice.”³¹⁷

“Amen to that!” Sjoukje added while their children crowded around to see this new wonder in the family.

“What’s his name?” asked Titus, the oldest.

Sjoukje replied, “We’ll name him Pieter after my father too, just as we did the baby last year. We want to honor my father, just as your name honored your grandfather here in Vriesland.”

³¹⁷ Sept. 27, 1861. Geneology file for Peter Van Haitsma.

“Why didn’t your parents come over to this land, too?” asked Reinder.

“They didn’t want to leave all my brothers and sisters in the Netherlands,” Sjoukje responded. “I would have loved to have my family here too. Your aunt Annie was so pleased that her family had come over a year before she did, so they are all here. But not all families were in the same financial situation to need to leave the Old Country.”

Sietske added, “Do we have a lot of family back there in Friesland?”

“Oh, ya,” Johannes shared. “Probably too many to count. Maybe some more of them will come here yet when things are bad there again. They have certainly received letters from us sharing how good things turned out for us.”

1862 *

Wopke turned to Johannes, “Brother, did you hear that **Roelof Strick³¹⁸ volunteered for the war and is part of the 25th Michigan Infantry Regiment?** ^

“No,” answered Johannes. “He was the lad you had working for you a few years ago, wasn’t he?”

“Ya,” responded Wopke, “he was a good worker, like his sister. I hope and pray that he comes back alive. Don’t really want to hear about people from here becoming casualties. But I guess we can expect some.”

“Unfortunately,” said Johannes, “that is part of going to war; some don’t come back. **But I can understand that our boys are volunteering for the sake of freedom. That’s one of the big reasons we came to this country. Even if the freedom we wanted most was freedom for how we worship.**”

“A few more men from Vriesland have volunteered too, I hear,” added Wopke. ^

“Ya, Mr. Ulberg’s son went, and Maarten de Groot, and Stoffel Kaslander too. Brother Jetse married his step sister.³¹⁹

“And Cornelius den Herder went. He’s the son of Mr. Den Herder who, with Mr. Wiersma, bought my store,”³²⁰ added Wopke.

“This is an awful lot of people from just our little Vriesland community,” observed Johannes.

³¹⁸Census 1850.

³¹⁹ Geneology file for Jetse Van Haitsma in my private collection.

³²⁰ Masselink, E.J., *Holland Michigan Residents in the Civil War #1*.

Wopke continued, “Then I heard that two sons of Rev. Van Raalte also went.”³²¹

“My,” responded Johannes, “we have a long and growing list of people to pray for.”

After a long church council meeting, Johannes came home chuckling to himself and shaking his head. “Now I’ve heard it all, Sjoukje,” he said.

“Oh?” Sjoukje responded, waiting.

“Well, without mentioning names,” he answered, “I was asked to investigate a complaint that one of our members had against his brother. He had heard that that brother had a feather bed given him by an elder of the church. And he was sure that the bed was made up of feathers that belonged to him. So he was accusing the elder of stealing the feathers and then giving a stuffed mattress to his brother.”

“That seems a bit complicated,” Sjoukje suggested.

“Ya, and then when one of the elders and I went to check it out, we found out that there was no feather bed or stolen feathers. But obviously the accuser had a feather up his bonnet!”

“So what did you all do?” wondered Sjoukje.

“The church council told the accuser to apologize to the elder and then also to the whole council. Meanwhile another member put in his two-cents worth and suggested our investigation was not thorough enough. The council also asked that member to join in the apologies.”³²²

“So was that the end of the matter?” Sjoukje wondered.

“No, not quite.” Johannes added. “Two council members were assigned to accompany the accuser to the house of the accused and apologize to him also. All of this over some suspicion of stolen feathers. Can you imagine?”

1863*

Early in the spring of 1863, Wopke came to Johannes and said, “Johannes, I have a proposition for you. You have twenty acres on the road at the north of Section 22. And you have a large part of it cleared and cleaned. But you also have a large family with six children. You could use a

³²¹*Holland City News*, May 13, 1909, “Holland Volunteers, from Michigan, during the Civil War, 1861-1865”: Cornelius Den Herder, Jan Dunnink, Benjamin Van Raalte, Dirk B.K. Van Raalte in the Twenty-Fifth Regiment, Michigan Infantry; Stoffel Kaslander, Roelof Strick, Johannes Unberg (Ulberg?), Hermanus Gezon in the Ninth Regiment, Michigan Cavalry.

³²²*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Nov. 11, 1861.

larger farm. Now you know that I have eighty acres just a half mile east of here. I propose that you and I switch properties. I am not interested in farming any more than I have to. I want to expand my business activities. And I have fewer children than you. What do you think? Shall we switch? My farm already has more cleaned acres than yours does. My old log house works nicely as a barn. And my frame house can be expanded for your family.”³²³

Johannes didn't trust himself to answer too quickly. He instantly remembered a conversation he'd had with Sjoukje recently. She had said to him, “What are we going to do with our growing family? Titus and Reinder are getting to be young men already, and the girls are getting big too. The two little guys, Wopke and our little Peter, are growing like weeds and **will soon need a bedroom of their own.** ^ We are so short of space that it is starting to feel like the close quarters we had on the barge! We should have a minimum of three bedrooms, preferably four, and now we only have two small ones.”

Johannes also recalled what his response had been to her observations. “And then,” Johannes had said, “we also need considerably more barn space. The log cabin is hardly big enough for the cows alone. The chicken coop needs to be larger and so does the pig pen. The poor horse needs more room and I have no good place to shelter my farm equipment. And I really need a bigger grainery and storage bin for the corn.”

Wopke waited patiently for Johannes to respond. Finally Johannes spoke, “That is a magnificent and extremely generous proposition. It certainly would solve a lot of the growing problems we are facing on our land. I am tempted to say “It's a deal,” but you know I do need to discuss it with Sjoukje first. And you and I will need to figure out the financial side, since it is not a fair trade. I will need some time to talk to Sjoukje.”

Later, after Johannes had explained the whole situation to Sjoukje and answered her questions as best as he could, he said to Sjoukje, “Hasn't the Lord blessed us? We would never have had this 'problem' if we had stayed in Friesland.”³²⁴

“You're right,” she answered. “We would not have had this 'problem', but we probably would have had just as many children!”

After Johannes and Sjoukje prayed about this wonderful possibility and talked it up one side and down the other, Johannes returned to Wopke. “Brother,” he said, “you have made an offer I cannot turn down. We knew we were in need of more space, more farm, more of everything. God has been blessing us so wonderfully. This is truly an unexpected answer to prayer. I don't have to think about it any longer. But maybe you have to think twice about making this offer.”

³²³ Van Haitsma, J., *Family Legends*.

³²⁴ *Zeeland Township Early History*, www: “The prosperity of the Dutch colonies at Zeeland, Vriesland, etc., has been almost unexampled; and taking into consideration all the circumstances, it is a marvel; commencing with those whose early life had given them no apprenticeship fitting them for pioneer enterprises – the humble peasantry of Holland, having with them but few men of property or leading intelligence--people, poor and unskilled. Twenty-five years changed the wilderness into a region of noble farms and thriving villages; and a community of poor emigrants into one noted for their wealth and independence.”

Wopke's eyes twinkled when he reassured Johannes, "My Annie and I have thought this through for some time already. In fact we had been making plans to actually sell the place and move to Holland. But then we got to thinking that maybe we might bless you with an exchange of farms because we can see that you really do need the extra space. And I will be living closer to Zeeland where I do a lot of my business. So you need not worry, because we have been thinking and praying about this for a while."

"Wopke," said Johannes, "Thank you so much. Sjoukje and I gladly accept your offer. We have enjoyed visiting at your house and wished to have space for our family like that. And you have so many more acres cleaned of stumps. With the extra clean acreage, I can buy better equipment for the farm and cultivate more land and grow more crops. Brother, I really don't know how to thank you."³²⁵

Two frame houses were built in Vriesland. Sjoukje's dream house went up on 64th Avenue about a half mile south of the Vriesland corner. Meanwhile Annie's dream house was built on Byron Road about a half mile west of the intersection. And the day finally arrived that belongings were packed up in preparation for the big move. What a job that was! The children were as excited as the adults. That night the children fell asleep at the supper table, but Johannes and Sjoukje had difficulty falling asleep.

"Sjoukje, this is so wonderful. All this space for us and the children. And so much of the hard work on the land has been done already. What a change from our little acreage to this! One thing we need to do is to give thanks to God. I've been thinking how we can express our thanks to Him. It is obvious to me that our church building is also running out of space,³²⁶ and we truly need a bigger sanctuary."

Johannes continued, "What I would like to do is to give to the church some land on the south side of our new property. If the church council approves this idea, it would become a lot easier for the people from Overisel and Drenthe to come to church. We could build a church building and a manse. Maybe that would help to attract a preacher of our own. We can't really expect to find a preacher who would like to preach in a tiny little church building."

"Oh, Johannes," gushed Sjoukje, "that is a wonderful idea. And maybe others in the church would be willing to pitch in to help with both building and money. That's a wonderful way to say thanks to God for all His gifts to us. More people seem to be immigrating to the area and if we have more space in church, they may well help fill up a larger building."

Johannes agreed, "This could well become a new chapter for our little Vriesland church. Well, I guess it's time to make a proposal to the church council. Maybe it's time to move beyond the little church."

At the next church council meeting Johannes asked to speak. This was something he rarely did. As a deacon he took good care of those members under his care, but he had the habit of a quiet presence in the council meetings. "Mr. Chairman," he asked, "May I speak a word?"

³²⁵*Ottawa County Deed Registry* (files on van Haisma's legal statements in the Calvin Archives).

³²⁶*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, May 25, 1865, Art. 7.

“Well certainly, Mr. Van Haitsma,” spoke Mr. Dam, who was usually the chairperson. “What do you have in mind?”

“Mr. Dam, I would like to make a proposition. For six years now we have had our worship services in the building on land bought from Mr. Haan Jr. across from where I used to live.³²⁷ I suggest that it is time for us to think about moving beyond a small frame building with a cook stove for heat, and to bless the Lord with a nicer and larger house. Maybe a little like David had in mind when he wanted to build a home for the Lord. Sjoukje and I would like to donate a piece of our farm for the building of a bigger frame church.”³²⁸

“Mr. Van Haitsma,” Elder Dam said following a lengthy discussion, “that is a wonderful proposition. The old little building has served well, but it is not as comfortable as a larger frame building would be with pews and a pulpit and with more windows for light to enter. Brothers of the council, what do you think of this proposal?”

A murmur of consent rose among the men. Dam asked, “Could we please have a motion on the table to consider this offer of donated land for a new larger frame church building?”

Ulberg spoke up, “I move that we consider the offer of the land. I know this means we will have to raise the money for building the church, but that is a separate issue. ”

The vote was in favor of considering Johannes’ offer. Several of the men chimed in with offers of money and offers to help build the church building. Old Mr. Jacob Schepers said, “I will help pay for a new building.” Mr. Jan Roek and Mr. Jan Van Rhee chimed in with agreement.

Mr. Bouma offered, “My farm is across the road from Mr. Van Haitsma’s land, as you all know, and I would like to offer an acre of it for a cemetery, so that we can have a cemetery right near the church building.”³²⁹

“It’s a shame,” Johannes said to Sjoukje a few weeks later, “that out of calamity should come prosperity. I guess that sounds a bit like the Samson riddles.”

“What do you mean, Johannes?” Sjoukje asked.

³²⁷*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Oct. 22, 1857, Art. 2. *Census 1850*.

³²⁸*Census 1850 & 1860, Michigan, Zeeland Township*. Van Haitsma, A., *Family Legends*. According to Anson (7-11-1992) and Erma, Johannes donated the land for the Vriesland CRC after he moved to the farm on 64th Ave in 1865. Before 1863, the church was located on Byron Rd, west of the intersection about where the new RCA building stands presently.

³²⁹Douma R. Bouma purchased the land of the SE quarter of the SE quarter of Section 22 on May 5, 1848, possibly on a trip which van Raalte took in that week to Ionia, MI. He appeared to mortgage it to Simon Broersma in Aug. 22, 1867, with the exception of the piece that became the cemetery. The first burial was in 1864 according to the Vriesland Cemetery records of Michigan historic sites. The only tombstone visible in the cemetery in the late 1940s was Jeltje, wife of Arjen Weslerhuis, who died Aug. 15, 1864, age 54. The stones were no longer evident in 2015, and had been relocated before Barb, in 1959, left her home across from that little cemetery where she used to play.

“This country is at war with itself, the North against the South. Thousands are being killed on both sides and many more are maimed, some for life. Yet, because of the war, we farmers are getting high prices for our crops because they are badly needed for food for the armies. And we are becoming wealthy. I know the Lord intends good to come out of troubles, but this is enough to make me feel guilty. We never expected to have it this good. And, because of that, we can be extra generous with the church.”

“We can also be thankful that our little family is between wars. Our brothers have exemptions because they are all needed on the farms and our children are too young to be conscripted.”³³⁰ Sjoukje observed. “We still want to do our part for the sake of the Union, but I’m thankful none of our family will be carrying guns.”

“But there are lots of other families that are torn over this war,” noted Johannes. “I’m very sorry about that. Many men in both the North and the South joined as volunteers, and some went because they hoped to gain homestead land. But war is dreadful. I remember hearing painful stories in the Belgian War years. I was only eight years old but the docks were full of those war stories.”

“And this too is a dreadful war. I wonder how soon it will be over, and how many people will die because of it.” Sjoukje shuddered at the thought.

Seeing that Johannes was taking a break from chopping down another mammoth tree, Mr. Haan Jr. followed the trace. “Hey, Van Haitsma,” he called out to alert Johannes of his approach.

“Well, good day, Mr. Haan,” Johannes returned, leaning his ax against the tree. “I hope things are going well at your house.”

“Ya, thanks, we are all well,” Haan responded. “I have some news that I thought would be of interest to you.”

“Whatever it is, I probably am interested. We get so little news these days that every tidbit is a savory item worth thinking over,” affirmed Johannes. “So what is that bit of news?”

“I know that all the churches in our group are eager to gain a pastor. Now Grand Rapids has been successful in attracting a pastor for their congregation. My father just sent a note informing me,” Mr. Haan eagerly shared.

“Why, that is wonderful news,” Johannes observed. “What’s his name and where is he from?”

“His name is Rev. Van Leeuwen and his last church was in Werkendam in the province of North Brabant.”

³³⁰Brinks, H., *Voices*, pp. 42-43, 50. Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 42-43. Jacobs, C., *Origins, Avoiding the War*.

“Isn’t that the area of the Netherlands that Rev. Van Raalte spent much of his ministry time?” wondered Johannes.

“Could be,” replied Mr. Haan, “but Rev. Scholte may have been more familiar in that area. Anyway, Rev. Van Leeuwen was part of the Church Under the Cross³³¹ before they joined with the *Gereformeerde* Church.”

“So that suggests he would likely be quite conservative, like us,” considered Johannes. “It certainly will be wonderful to have another minister in our group. And it will free up more time for Rev. Van den Bosch to spend with the rest of us.”

“Ya,” responded Haan, “I’m glad for them in Grand Rapids, but I hoped we would have a minister of our own by now.”

“I agree.” shared Johannes. “But, you know, we are still so small in numbers, we couldn’t support a minister and family right now.”

“Ya,” agreed Haan, “that does keep us from extending a call, doesn’t it? Well, at least we can celebrate with the Grand Rapids church, and be patient for our own time.” And he ambled back to his home.

“Ma, it’s such a beautiful day. May I go out to pick berries in the woods?”

“Why, Sietske, it is a beautiful day for picking some berries. But don’t wander too far from the house now.”

“No, Ma, I won’t. I know where there’s a nice patch of strawberries. That’s where I’ll be.”

Sjoukje thought just a bit and warned her daughter, “You know that the Fabers saw a big old bear in the woods just last week. So keep your ears and eyes open.”

“Aw, Ma, we haven’t seen a bear near our place for a whole year now. And the more the woods are cleared, the fewer the bears that are around.”

Sjoukje bent over and took Sietske by the chin, wagging it for attention. She could vividly remember her first sight of a bear eating her little piglet. She spoke louder than she intended, “Now listen to me! I am scared of those bears and I’ve seen one eat one of our piglets! I want you to be very careful. This is the time of the year for bears to come looking for berries too, remember? And I want you to be scared enough to come running home if you hear any rustling noise by the berry patch.”

“Yes, mother,” trembled Sietske, “I will watch and listen very carefully.”

³³¹CRC *Classical Minutes*, July 22, 1863, Art. 7, p. 59.

Johannes was sitting in his soft chair by the window, finishing a cup of coffee. He suddenly remembered the Lord's command, "Listen to me." "I wonder," he said to Sjoukje, "how often we need that reminder, and not let our independence get into the way of our obedience to the Lord?"

Later Johannes came in from the field, covered with the dust from cultivating the fields. Sjoukje met him at the door. "I have news for you, Johannes," she said.

"Oh," Johannes answered, "what's going on?"

She responded, "Rev. Ypma has died, and his body is being brought back here to Vriesland.³³² I guess he left his heart here even though he moved on to Chicago and then to Wisconsin."

Johannes said, "I'm not surprised. This is where he first settled and where he had to work so hard to clear his land, as well as to settle all our disputes. So much of his energy went into this place. It will be an honor for the village to have his burial here. Perhaps this is where he left his most obvious mark in life."

Sjoukje added, "And his children continue to make their lives in this area."

"So, again," Johannes said, "in the midst of our blessings we also have our share of grief."

"Johannes," said Dam when the two men looked over the property where the new church would eventually be built. "That is wonderful. This location is much closer to where all the members live. Members from Overisel and Drenthe will enjoy a shorter ride to church. And it will be only a little further for our members who live north and east. Not to mention it will also make my family's ride to church much shorter too. It occurs to me that a nice church building might also attract a preacher to accept our calls."

Johannes added, "And maybe we need to consider the next step too, a manse for a preacher to live in next to the church building."

"Now that," responded Mr. Dam, "would help to attract a pastor even more. Johannes, you have greatly blessed us with your offer."

Johannes shared, "The Lord has blessed us so much that we wanted to share the blessings."

³³²*Vriesland Cemeteries*. Marten Ypma died on May 1, 1863 in Alto, WI. He was buried in the Old Vriesland Cemetery located on Roger St., about a half mile west of 64th Ave in Zeeland Township. *Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction.

Some weeks later Dam came knocking at the back door. “Hello, Brother Dam,” Johannes answered. “Please come in. Are you just on your way home from the Classis meeting at Zeeland?”

“Ya, Johannes, and what a meeting it was! I think the best was that Rev. Van Leeuwen has been installed in the Grand Rapids congregation. He was so welcomed at his first meeting with us that we elected him as President of the Assembly. He was placed on the book-approval committee, and we accepted his offer to train future ministers. And then he was asked to compose a letter affirming our position of staying with the principles of the Dordrecht Church Order, to be sent to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Seceding Church in the Netherlands.”

Johannes exclaimed, “My, what a welcome to give to a new minister. Put him right to work on all kinds of tasks! Sjoukje,” he called out, “did you hear that the new minister has arrived in our Grand Rapids church?”

Sjoukje responded from the kitchen, “I’ve got coffee going. A new minister, you say?”

Dam added, “Ya, he will be a welcome addition to our congregations. He did have some questions about where we were on a number of things. He heard the argument about staying by ourselves or joining the Old School Presbyterians. Voices were raised by Rev. Van den Bosch and by Jan Krabshuis. But our friend Johannes Groen made a passionate plea to stay by ourselves and not ‘crave for the flesh pots of Egypt.’”

“So,” Johannes wondered, “What did our new Minister Van Leeuwen have to say about that?”

Dam noted, “He made clear his support for our staying by ourselves when he accepted the request to write a letter to the Christian Reformed Seceding Church in the Netherlands reporting our position.”³³³

“Well, that’s a relief,” said Sjoukje as she poured a cup of coffee for Mr. Dam. “I hope we will soon have a chance to have him on our pulpit.”

Hesitating a bit, Johannes asked Dam, “What do you think about all the arguments that keep cropping up at the Classis meetings? It seems we are constantly hearing our outspoken members having to confess their sins to each other.”³³⁴ ^

Dam responded, “Ya, that’s been on my mind a lot. I’ve been a regular delegate to our Classical Assemblies since we began, and have heard so much harsh language and accusations and counter accusations. I wonder if we can survive ourselves. I’m afraid we are sorely testing the grace and patience of our Lord. But then I remember that I have contributed to that too. I’ve had my times to ask forgiveness. I try so hard to keep quiet. But sometimes the decisions we make just do not make sense.”

³³³CRC Classis Minutes, July 22, 1863, Art.13, p. 60 and Art. 9, p. 59.

³³⁴ Hoezee, S. *Grace Through Every Generation*, p. 24.

Months later Johannes was a deacon delegate with Dam as the elder delegate to the Classis meeting.³³⁵ Dam spoke up as soon as they were in the buggy together. “I don’t know if you’ve heard, but last Sunday the Graafschap congregation installed their new minister.”

“My,” answered Johannes. “No, I hadn’t heard. Who did they get?”

“His name is Rev. Douwe Van der Werp. ^ I’ve heard a bit about him. He, like Rev. Van Leeuwen, was part of the Churches Under the Cross in the old country. Perhaps more significantly, he was a friend of the Rev. De Cock of Ulrum who was the first minister to be defrocked in the Separation of 1834. He was thought of highly enough to become a trustee of the Kampen Seminary.”³³⁶

“It sounds like he comes pretty highly recommended,” observed Johannes.

“And he’s probably just as conservative as our Rev. van den Bosch,” suggested Mr. Dam. “His brother Hendrik Van der Werp was one of the signers of the separation letters at Classis Holland in 1857.”

“Oh? I guess then he knows Rev. Van Den Bosch very well. I understand that Hendrik Van der Werp and Rev. Van Den Bosch were good friends even before they migrated here,” added Johannes.

“I imagine we’ll soon find out a lot more about Rev. Van Der Werp now that he’s part of our small denomination. I hope we’ll be glad he’s come to be part of us,” Dam said over the clatter of the horses’ hooves on the dirt road.

During the lunch break, Johannes happened to sit next to the Rev. Van Leeuwen. He said, “Rev. Van Leeuwen, I am happy to welcome you to the *Kolonie*.”

“Ya, Mr. Van Haitzma,” he responded, “I am glad to be here and join this classis and denomination. We’ve been hearing so much about this church in the Netherlands. It is good to see the work here and become familiar with all that’s going on.”

“I kind of expect,” returned Johannes, “there’s a lot to be learned, and I hope that it will all seem good to you. We sorely have needed another minister. I’m sure you’ve kept quite busy with the Grand Rapids congregation as well as having to serve as an occasional supply-preacher for the two congregations without a pastor.”

“Ya, but that will give me an opportunity to get to know all of you better. I was a little surprised that the Classis discouraged the wearing of clerical garb, though.” ^

³³⁵CRC Classis Minutes, Oct. 7, 1863. Johannes’ last name is listed as Ytsma on p. 65.

³³⁶ Sheeres, J., *Secession*.

“I think,” said Johannes, “that may be because the preachers here have had to work their farms and clear their woods just as much as everyone else. The clerical garb may take away the common humanity among us.”³³⁷

“And I have been thinking that one of the gifts I can bring here is to provide training for those who might be interested in entering the ministry.”

“With several of the churches without pastors, I expect that that will fill a significant need,” Johannes shared. “I guess I had wondered why no one has asked our itinerant minister, Rev. Van den Bosch to provide such training. But maybe I know the answer to that question.”

“Well,” answered the Reverend, “not all of us are gifted to teach and train. Doing such training will soon mean student preachers available to fill pulpits, and incidentally would free up some time for me to indulge in writing and publishing.”

Johannes observed, “I hope that works out.” Johannes noted, “The bell has sounded for our return to the meeting. Thank you. I hope you will enjoy working among us. I look forward to welcoming you to our home for dinner when you come to the Vriesland church for pulpit supply.”

For a while Johannes and Dam enjoyed the quiet of the journey home after all the talk at the Classis meeting. The clip-clop of the horse’s hooves was somehow comforting and reassuring to both men. Both needed some time just to reflect on all the happenings of the day.

Eventually Johannes broke the silence, “I have to say that I feel a whole lot better tonight than I did after the last Classis meeting I attended. I think I was more discouraged after that meeting than I have ever been in my whole life.”

“You never said a word, so I had no idea. What was it that was discouraging to you?” Dam said after thinking about this unusual confession from his quiet friend.

“It has been six years since we separated from the Reformed Church and started new on our own. Sometimes it seems like we haven’t made any progress at all since those days. No, let me correct myself. Sometimes it seems like we are going backward, like we are losing our way, like nothing much has changed; and then even worse, sometimes I can’t see that anything is going to change in the future.” Johannes stopped and again there was silence as both men mulled over this statement.

“What was it about the last Classis meeting that touched you so?”

Johannes slowly began to put into words some of the things he’d spent weeks thinking about since that last Classis meeting. “The thing that shocked me most was the recommendation to join with the Old School Presbyterians.”³³⁸ I never realized how much other people were becoming

³³⁷*CRC Classis Minutes*, July 22, 1863, Art. 9, p. 59.

³³⁸*CRC Classis Minutes*, April 5, 1865, Art. 17, p. 121.

discouraged too. We spent a lot of time on that proposal, and I guess it probably was a good thing that everybody could think about all the things involved, but I hated it.”

The horse continued to clip clop along and just the sound of it was relaxing. Johannes continued, “I’m not sure what I hated most, the whole idea that some people seemed willing to just quit on our new church, or the constant squabbling about this and that. Our people can squabble and argue like a bunch of school boys. No, worse than school boys. Adults who act worse than children. Part of what I was feeling was just pure shame.” ^

“Ohhhh,” said Dam. “Ohhh, I see.” The horse clip clopped another two miles before Dam spoke again. “Don’t ever tell anyone I said this, but sometimes I too am ashamed of how mean we can be to each other. I teach my children not to be mean to each other, but we adults often don’t practice what we preach.”

Eventually Dam remembered that Johannes had also said he was feeling better now because of today’s Classis meeting. “What encouraged you about today’s meeting?” he asked Johannes.

“Mostly it was the news that the groups in Milwaukee and South Holland are expressing interest in joining with us. And that means we could be growing as a denomination. Also it looks possible that the group in Grand Haven is interested. To me, this is very encouraging.”

Dam responded, “And not to be forgotten, the brand new church building that has gone up for our Vriesland congregation. And a new minister for our churches after all these years with only Rev. Van den Bosch coming once a month.”

“And when I think of all the blessings that God has given us at the Vriesland Holland Reformed Church, I am always aware that He is still the same God who guided the great men of the Bible,” Johannes added. “One of my favorite Bible characters is Joseph. I have learned so much about God from this story. Our situations are different, but God is the same.”

“I love the Joseph story, but Moses is my favorite guy,” Dam said.

They were getting closer to home now. Suddenly, Dam started to laugh. His laugh was contagious. Soon Johannes could not help himself and he began to laugh too. Neighbors must have wondered about the two men who were laughing hilariously on the way home from Classis meeting. When questioned about it the next day, each man just smiled.

Johannes and Sjoukje rode over to their old property. “Hello, Annie,” they said when they reached the home, “how are things going?”

“Really good,” Annie responded, “and with you?”

“Very well, thanks. We are still so happy with the extra space we now have for the children. We have Peter along with us, but the rest are old enough to take care of each other. It is so nice to get out a bit and enjoy a little outside air and light.”

“Ya,” agreed Annie, “it does get a little closed in, doesn’t it? But we do enjoy the space of your old house here. We have enough space for Titus of Tjalling and Klaas of the Fabers. We are blessed to have them in our home.”

“It is so nice that you were willing to take the boys into your home. And now they are getting old enough to be a bit of help for you too. What age are they again?”

Annie thought a bit, “Klaas is 13, and Titus is 4. Klaas is being very helpful and Titus loves following him around. I just love that finally we have children in the house. And we still have Seitje working for us. Ralph of course has enlisted in the army.”

“I’m sure they are a great help,” agreed Johannes. “I see that more of the trees are coming down. Is Wopke on the road for supplies for the store?”

“Ya,” said Annie, “Wopke has just decided to sell the store to the De Groots. Do you remember them from the trip over? They were with us on the ship *Eduard*. And now they will be moving near here too.”

“Yes, I do remember them,” said Johannes. “It will be good to see them again. So Wopke is still doing the buying. How long will that go on?”

“Probably only this month. Mr. de Groot has not yet been able to put all his time and effort into the store, but that’ll change shortly. Wopke is also making connections for his other business concerns.”

Sjoukje said, “He’s always had a head for business, from the first time I met him in Minnertsga.”

“He taught me a lot about keeping up with modern equipment too,” chimed in Johannes. “There’s now a growing cooperation between us farmers with up-to-date equipment. I have a reaper, and just like Wopke with his machinery, when my field is done I help out others. It helps me pay for the machine and helps them get the harvest in faster. So much quicker than the old sickle, flail and winnow.”

“Johannes,” said Sjoukje, “I think it’s time to get little Peter home and start on the home chores. Annie, it has been so nice to visit. We don’t do it often enough.”

“Sjoukje,” Johannes shared as he came in the back door of their house, “Another surprise!”

“Well, my husband,” Sjoukje responded, “you seem to have quite a few of them when you come home from a council meeting. What’s the surprise this time?”

“Ya, I often seem to be surprised, don’t I?” Johannes said. “Do you remember that back in 1853 Rev. Roelof Smit stirred up a lot of church dust and started the Scots church?”

“Sure, that was a big thing to happen in Drenthe. That really broke up the church there. I guess that was the first visible break in *De Kolonie* Church. Or was the first breakaway in Graafschap with the fellowship there joining the Scots church?³³⁹ That was a long time ago. That dust was settled, wasn’t it?”

“Ya, I think so,” answered Johannes. “But tonight at the council meeting we had two visitors from Drenthe. Mr. Schepers and Mr. Van Rhee came and asked to join our church. Apparently they have had a fellowship group out of the Scots church in Drenthe and now the fellowship group wants a formal connection with us.”

“I wonder,” mused Sjoukje, “why did they feel the need for a fellowship group in West Drenthe?”

“I would guess it would be the same kind of reason we joined Dam in the fellowship group in Vriesland back in the early 1850s. Either because the people did not feel right about the preaching or about the preacher. I expect that Rev. Smit has mellowed a bit over the last fifteen years, but maybe some of his outspoken tendencies have been showing up again. I have to say these gentlemen did not say a bad word about Rev. Smit. They just said that they felt a need to go by themselves and now to join up with our church. They certainly will be welcomed as leaders in our church.”³⁴⁰

Johannes said, “I well remember that in the early years Mr. Schepers and his son used to walk all the way from West Drenthe to join us in our fellowship group.³⁴¹ Road conditions have improved considerably, but even now they realize that coming here to worship will be quite an arduous journey,³⁴² especially for some of the frail members of their fellowship group.”

“Didn’t I hear something about the possibility of union between our church and the Scots Church some years ago?” asked Sjoukje.

“Ya, that discussion was going on for a while,” offered Johannes.

“You didn’t tell me much about that,” Sjoukje murmured.

“No, there area lot of things in Classis and council that is just private talk. You hear from me when I am shocked or surprised over something that will be public anyway,” responded Johannes. “For a while Classis gave some reports of their meetings in the newspaper. But after the ministers started coming from the Old Country, they recommended we no longer publish our actions.”

³³⁹*Classis Holland RCA Minutes*, April 27, 1853, Art. 10, p. 117 and Oct. 14, 1851, Art. 7, p. 62.

³⁴⁰*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Dec. 9, 1863, Art.3 and Art. 4.

³⁴¹ Beets, H., *Gedenkboek*, p. 246.

³⁴²*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Dec. 9, 1863, Art. 3.

“So what happened about that union possibility?” queried Sjoukje.

“Back in 1859,” Johannes began, “before I was elected a deacon, the Reverends Smit and Schepers from the Scots Presbyterian Church attended several meetings of our Classis to explore joining together.³⁴³ For a while the question was whether they were going to join us, or we were going to join them.

“In 1864 we were discouraged because we weren’t getting any preachers and we just felt so small. We were planning to send a delegation to their Classis to talk about joining them, but they prevented our delegates from attending.

Earlier this year Krabshuis tried again to convince us to join with them. Then Brother Groen spoke up so eloquently for our staying the course that we were convinced to remain by ourselves. And by then Rev. Van Leeuwen had accepted a call to the Grand Rapids church. So we had two preachers between the five congregations. We began to feel more hopeful. And now in the middle of all that, a part of the Drenthe Scots Presbyterian Church wants to join with us.”

“Oh, my,” exuded Sjoukje, “all that was happening and I wasn’t aware of it at all! You even attended some of those Classis meetings, didn’t you?”

“Ya, I did, but I was only allowed by exception,” observed Johannes. ^

“Oh, ya,” noted Sjoukje, “only ministers and elders vote, don’t they?”

“Ya,” retorted Johannes, “that’s what the ministers told us the Church Order stipulated.” He added, “The end of my story is that we decided that both Mr. Schepers and Mr. Van Rhee will be installed as elders in our church next Sunday.”³⁴⁴

1864 *

Andrew Van Haitsma was born Jan 20, 1864.³⁴⁵

”My, oh my!” Johannes exclaimed. “Another boy. Judging by his loud voice, I think he protests too much about coming out of his comfort zone into the world. He’s the sixth boy accompanying his two sisters. What a family we have. Sjoukje, I’m so proud of you bringing all these children into the world. How are you feeling now?”

“I’m tired, Johannes. God has blessed us again, but it is a lot of work and pain on my part. I’m so glad Ma was here to help me through it again.”

³⁴³CRC *Classical Assembly*, Oct. 5, 1859, Art.6, June 5, 1861, Art.3, Feb. 4, 1863, Art.7, Feb. 3, 1864, Art. 4.

³⁴⁴*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Dec. 9, 1863, Art. 4.

³⁴⁵Genealogy File for Andrew Van Haitsma.

“Ya, her life and midwife experience has been a big blessing to us,” agreed Johannes.

“Oh, and not just us. Ma has helped deliver so many babies in Vriesland over the years. I wonder if she has kept track of them all,” wondered Sjoukje.

“I think that would not be like her to keep track of how many people and babies she has helped. She knows the Lord knows and that is good enough for her,” Johannes suggested.

“Maybe just like you,” Sjoukje said thoughtfully. “I think you haven’t kept track either of the many people you have visited as a deacon and where you left a bag of flour or a pair of shoes.”

One Sunday evening after the children were all snug in their beds, Johannes and Sjoukje were sitting quietly together. Sjoukje’s foot was gently rocking little Andrew in his cradle.

Johannes said, “At the last meeting of Classis the delegates decided to order a printing of the Dordt Church Order. I have never seen a copy. But it is one of our basic documents, so I was delighted about that decision. This meeting was the first Classis meeting that Rev. Van der Werp attended since arriving in the area. He suggested that we print a *commentary* for elders instead of the Church Order, and his idea was approved.”³⁴⁶ ^

“Why is it that ministers have so much influence in the church? Why not encourage reading the 1619 Church Order? We covenanted in 1857 to build our new denomination on the basis of that Church Order. I know we all want ministers in our congregations. But two new ministers have come from Kampen, and they are already bringing into our church here the changes that the Separated Church in the Netherlands has adopted since 1834. Is that what we want? Sometimes I think the ministers we call bring more baggage in their hearts and minds than in their crates.”

“My, Johannes,” Sjoukje murmured, “I know that ideas change over the years. And I think our congregations have not always followed that Church Order either. But I agree this is an important question. Who is going to determine what changes are acceptable in our churches?”

Johannes added, “And then Rev. Vanden Bosch, of all people, recommended the use of a shorter catechism by a Borstius.”³⁴⁷ “What’s with getting away from our Heidelberg Catechism? I just don’t know why the preachers are leading us away from our agreed-on principles and confessions. And Van den Bosch was even one of the authors of the secession letters in 1857.”

Johannes continued, “The way that happened so fast made me wonder if Rev. Van der Werp was deliberately trying to move us regular members away from seeing the original Church Order. I think maybe he thought we might be upset if we saw the original.”

Johannes went on, “We do need an anchor for our denomination or we will have little reason to be ‘by ourselves’ as Rev. Wyckoff offered back in 1849. Why is it so hard to live out the dream that brought us here to begin with? Why is it so hard to maintain what we thought was our distinctiveness?”

³⁴⁶CRC Classical Assembly, June 1, 1864, Art. 19 and Oct. 12, 1864, Art. 6, p. 93.

³⁴⁷CRC Classical Assembly, June 5, 1861, Art. 2, p. 11.

“We thought that our churches needed to have ministers. But I’m starting to wonder if they are leading us down the slippery slope a lot faster than we would do ourselves,” considered Johannes.

Sitting in their living room on 64th Avenue, Johannes observed, “Sjoukje, this was the third time that I attended a Classis meeting. I was again allowed to be a voting member even though I am only a deacon. One thing I was really surprised by,” said Johannes, “was the question of which church Rev. Van den Bosch was the minister of. No one could give an easy answer.”

“What did they decide, Johannes?” asked Sjoukje.

“It is so strange. We listened to Rev. Van den Bosch, we listened to Zeeland where his father is elder, and didn’t know what to decide. Finally what was decided was to provide a committee to go to Zeeland and organize the congregation formally. I’m not sure if the question of Van den Bosch was actually resolved.”

“He has been part of us from the beginning, hasn’t he? And we don’t know just how he belongs?” reflected Sjoukje.

“Ya,” ruminated Johannes, “I guess when he sent his letter of resignation to the church in Zeeland in 1857, that letter cancelled his ordination. But all of us just assumed he would continue to function as a minister in our group. No one thought about his need for a new call and for installation. He preached in all our churches for all these years. Maybe having two new ministers among us has pushed him to getting it all straightened out.”

“I hope,” responded Sjoukje, “someone can figure it out. He may not be the most gentle person, but he deserves the proper honor as a minister of God’s church.”

“I agree!” uttered Johannes.

“Oh,” Sjoukje exclaimed as Johannes shucked his wooden shoes by the door, “I just heard the news that Albert de Groot was captured by the South, put in Andersonville prison and died there.”³⁴⁸

“Oh, no! That really is tragic, isn’t it? Come to this land, fight for freedom for the slaves, and lose your life in a miserable prison,” reflected Johannes.

³⁴⁸Lucas H., *Memoirs*, p. 259: “We moved upon Rome, Georgia, where we found the enemy under General James Longstreet strongly entrenched and ready for battle. Our rations at this time for the most part consisted of large sweet potatoes. Two Hollanders were taken prisoner; one of them, Albert de Groot of Vriesland, Michigan, died in Andersonville prison.” “Find a Grave” reports his death as May 24, 1864 and buried in the Andersonville National Cemetery.

“Ya, and what makes it more tragic,” added Sjoukje, “is that many of our soldiers in that prison lost their lives through disease. I heard the conditions are really bad there.”

“Ya, that makes it so much more sad. So unnecessary!” exclaimed Johannes. “I’m glad that Marten de Groot and the other volunteers survived. Some of them can take advantage of the offer to homestead land the country is offering to the volunteers. But that will mean some will move a lot further west than here.”

“We better continue to pray for peace in this country,” Sjoukje said. “The papers have published a prayer by President Lincoln that we can echo: ‘Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said ‘the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.’”³⁴⁹

“And we better pray for the De Groot family as they grieve this loss. I wonder if they will get to have a funeral for him here,” wondered Johannes.

“We sure do have a mixture of good news and bad news, don’t we, Mr. Ulberg?” wondered Johannes.

His friend, the shoemaker, agreed. “Ya, a death in the community and the first burial in our church cemetery.³⁵⁰ And we also have a good problem, because after only a year or so in our new building, we are already outgrowing it.”

Johannes agreed, “More people seem to want to be in our church these days. It’s obviously a good problem. We have to make it sixteen feet longer. And now we finally have permission from the other churches to call a minister because we have been growing.”

“Ya,” wondered Ulberg, “hopefully Rev. Van den Bosch will accept the call we delivered to him.”

Johannes said, “If he does, it will settle the question of whose minister he is. I know that has been a bothersome question for him. I wonder sometimes if we did things according to our Church Order when we constituted our little denomination in 1857.” ^

“I guess most of us didn’t know much about the official Church Order, did we?” Ulberg suggested.

“No, I think we didn’t. We did what we thought was true to the Church Order. Nobody told us any different,” responded Johannes.

³⁴⁹ Abraham Lincoln, 2nd Inaugural Address.

³⁵⁰ *Vriesland Cemetery Records*.

Ulberg rejoined, “It’s something to think about, how we have affirmed our honoring of the Church Order while we knew so little about what was in it. By the way, Johannes, I hear you are on the committee to plan the building of a manse next to the church?”³⁵¹ ^

Johannes affirmed, “Ya, we think it might encourage a preacher to come to us if we have a parsonage for him to live in.”³⁵²

It was a cool fall day when Elders Van Maaren and Dam wandered over to where Johannes was working the corn harvest. “Good morning, men,” Johannes called to them, “what brings you out here in my field? I’m sure I have an extra hoe to help me cut these stalks down!”

“Oh,” began Dam, “we just wanted to talk over a recent Classis meeting with you. We’re kind of confused by what happened. Since you were there too, maybe together we can understand just what happened.”

“Well, I share that confused feeling,” admitted Johannes.

“The striking thing for me was that Graafschap’s new minister made himself very visible at his first Classis meeting,” shared Van Maaren.

“Aha,” noted Johannes, “do I hear something negative nagging behind your words?”

“I know,” said Dam, “we have been praying for the Lord to send us more ministers to work among us. And we should wholeheartedly rejoice that the Lord is hearing and answering our prayers. But something seems not quite so wonderful about it after all.”

Van Maaren added, “He did give a wonderful sermon at the beginning of the meeting, and he did suggest that we avoid giving an appearance of ‘importing innovations’ and he agreed that we should not change the way we celebrate feast days. He also volunteered to take over the training of future ministers in our churches.”

Mr. Dam said, “But then he introduced and supported the idea of publishing the instructions for elders that the church in the Netherlands had adopted. He convinced us to not ask for a reprint of the 1619 Church Order as our classis decided last year. I guess that just gave me a sense of foreboding.” ^

“That certainly made me squirm,” admitted Johannes. “I know we have to learn new ways of farming in this country, but do we need to follow church rules from over there?”

³⁵¹Vriesland CRC Minutes, Oct. 1, 1864, Art.1, March 31, 1865, Art. 4, and May 16, 1865, Art. 2.

³⁵²Beets, H., *Church*, p. 64. Perhaps Rev. Beets did not realize the quality of homes that were provided for the preachers. A. Zwemer describes the Vriesland RCA parsonage of 1859; Hattie van Haitsma described for me the parsonage of the Vriesland CRC. Then there’s the parsonage of Grand Rapids described. He may be thinking back to 1849 when Rev. Seine Bolks arrived in Graafschap and turned down their call because of the shabby lean-to they offered him. Or Rev. van Raalte’s famous log cabin.

Van Maaren continued, “And then we spent a great deal of time trying to settle things between Rev. Van den Bosch and the churches in Zeeland and Noordeloos. And although a major reconciliation did take place between them, things just keep festering.”

“Ya,” Johannes suggested, “That’s been going on for some time, hasn’t it?”

Dam agreed, “And I don’t think we have it settled now. I was assigned to be part of the committee with the new Reverend to help settle it before the next meeting of Classis. But I confess, I don’t hold out a great deal of hope for that. I think it will be an issue for Classis for some time to come. Especially since harsh words have crossed between the brothers. And maybe having so much family involved has complicated the settling of the issues.”

“And the whole issue of Rev. Van den Bosch’s salary and payment to cover his journey here has never been fully dealt with either,” observed Johannes.

“No,” responded Van Maaren, “both issues have gotten muddled. At this time, the churches that do have pastors have been released from any responsibility for his salary, and the Dutch Reformed Church is being held responsible for their part of covering his travel expenses.³⁵³ After eight years since his arrival in *de Kolonie*, it is high time to get that issue settled.”

1865 *

“Only a week after New Year’s!” said Johannes. “At least Pa got his wish to see in the New Year.”³⁵⁴

Wiebe said, “I thought you should know right away. Ma and Annie are now getting him ready for viewing. We knew that he had been failing some, but we were surprised anyway. Whatever suffering he went through, he is now with his Lord Jesus. What a blessing to know where we’re going!”

Johannes called into the house, “Sjoukje, Wiebe came to tell us that Pa has died. We need to go over there. I’ll help get Peter ready; the others can get themselves ready to go.”

“I’m going to tell Jetse and Tjalling too. Wopke knows already,” said Wiebe as he mounted his horse.

The family rode the buggy to the homestead and Johannes said, “He was a good father. He always provided for our needs. He was brave to leave the homeland and come to this wilderness. He gave us support and help when we needed it and he was open to receiving our help when he needed it.”

³⁵³CRC Classical Assembly, Oct. 12, 1864, Art.22 and Art. 26.

³⁵⁴Vriesland Cemetery Records, January 7, 1865.

“Ma loved him so,” said Sjoukje. “Together they braved this world with all its challenges.”

“What did *Pake* do in the old country?” asked eight year old Lizzie.

“He was a barge captain,” said her older brother Titus, “and he bought and sold stuff like Uncle Wopke does here.”

“What a change that must have been for him,” added Reinder, “from working on the water to cutting down trees and farming.”

“And what a change from living in a tiny boat cabin the first half of his life and then here in a log cabin,” said Sietske who hardly remembered her own log cabin days.

“Ya, you’re right. He lived through many changes and contrasts in his life. But he was a bold spirit and worked hard to provide for his family and his church,” said Johannes.

“Because he was willing to risk coming to this new world,” pointed out Sjoukje, “none of you are ever likely to see poverty. Pretty much since Titus was born, we have been living very comfortably and even in wealth.”

“But what was it like crossing the ocean?” asked Lizzie.

“Now that was not a nice experience for me,” said Sjoukje. “*Pake* and *Beppe* did fine, but I was sick the whole way. Pa had to practically carry me off the boat in New York.”

Johannes added his memory, “Living on that sailboat was like living in an open-walled crate on a wooden floor. We were so glad it only took forty-eight days. Many others traveled over sixty days to get to this country. It has been a long time since we’ve talked about that trip. Maybe *Beppe* will be happy to answer your questions. She remembers a lot about the old days.”

Sjoukje said, “We were so happy to see land again that the whole bunch of Dutchmen we travelled with burst out singing a Psalm. The people from other lands looked at us in amazement. Never had they heard such a sound. And it was all in praise to God.”

“I remember that when we arrived in New York we joined the many others who exulted, ‘Ebenezer. Till now the Lord has helped us!’” affirmed Johannes. “And now *Pake* can say that to God directly, ‘You have helped me all this time.’”

When the family walked into *Pake’s* house, they felt the silence. Their own curiosity was subdued when they saw the tears on *Beppe’s* face. She was waiting for their embrace as they all gathered around her.

She told them, “*Pake* is on the table in the parlor. I think the girls have him ready for you to see, if you like. Your Uncle Wopke is nailing a coffin together so we can bury *Pake* tomorrow.”

Titus and Reinder tried to be brave as they shuffled toward the parlor. On normal visits the parlor was a bit daunting. Now it was even more so. Sjoukje said, “It’s okay to cry. You only have to stay as long as you feel okay.”

Johannes and Sjoukje then led the way into the parlor. Their faces too were streaked with tears. “Saying ‘goodbye’ is hard,” Johannes muttered. The children crowded around them, hardly daring to look death in the eye.

Lizzie said, “He looks so waxy.”

Johannes agreed, “I guess that’s because his life has left his body and he is not here; only his body is left behind. He has gone to be with God.”

Sietske added, “I wish God didn’t need him. I wanted him to keep living here with us forever.”

“Me too,” said Johannes. “But he is better with God than suffering like he did these last days. He has outlived this life. And now God can say to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the presence of God.’”

It was difficult to stay in the parlor very long. Quietly the boys led the way back to the kitchen.

The next day on their way home after the burial service, Johannes said to the children, “I am reminded of a lesson that *Pake* taught me when I was ten. I will remember it my whole life. I was just a bit younger than you, Wopke.”

Wopke said eagerly, “Tell, us, Pa.”

Johannes continued. “*Pake* gave your Uncle Wopke a very special ring that had been passed down in our family for generations. Your uncle gave it to *Beppe* to keep it safe. When I was all alone on the barge, I snuck into your *Beppe*’s jewelry box. I took the ring to see it in the light and went outside. On deck it fell out of my hand into the water. It was gone and I had lost it. A few weeks later your Uncle Wopke wanted to see it again, and he found it was missing. Oh, my, was my heart heavy! It took a little while for me to have the courage to own up to my sin. And *Pake* talked to me then about respecting what belongs to others, and also about needing to own up to my sin. I have often thought about my lack of respect and integrity.”

After the children were off to bed, Sjoukje said, “Johannes, I don’t think that I have ever heard that story about the ring. Sounds like that made a deep impression on your soul.”

“Ya,” responded Johannes, “it comes to mind occasionally. But it definitely cut the idea of integrity deep into my heart. I guess that’s why when the issues of integrity in church or farming come to mind, it becomes important to me.”

“I can see that it would,” said Sjoukje. “Sometimes the events of our childhood make such a strong impression, don’t they?”

“Ya, and they can come to the surface when a significant event happens, like my father’s dying,” mullered Johannes. “I don’t often think about those childhood years. But today certainly brought them to mind.”

“Your father was so important in your life, wasn’t he? And, of course, your mother is too. I regret that my parents did not come across the ocean too. But that was their wish. And I wanted to be with you.”

“I’m so glad about that,” said Johannes. “I would not have come here if you were not willing to come with me. I understand why *Pake* wanted the whole family to come, or none. It tugged at his heart that Tjalling and family did not come along at first. I find that it is wonderful that we can all live so close together in this new land.”

A few days after the Feb. 11, 1865 council meeting, Johannes made his way to Ulberg’s place. Entering the cobbler’s workshop, he greeted his friend, and said, “It was so good to have you come to the council meeting last night.”

“Ya, it was high time I did that,” Ulberg replied. “It has been over five years since I was barred from taking communion.”

Johannes thought and said, “I didn’t come onto the council until 1861. So I was not aware of what was going on.”

“Well, the council was unhappy with me because I gave my children freedom to attend a German church. Since I was on the council, that decision did not sit well with the rest of the men.”³⁵⁵

“So for those five years you did not take the Lord’s Supper in our church?” asked Johannes.

“No,” answered Ulberg. “But now I’m glad to be back in full communion with the church.”³⁵⁵

“And we are very glad to have you back,” affirmed Johannes.

April 5, 1865 was the date of the next Classis meeting of the True Dutch Reformed Church. It was held in the little church building on Byron Road in Vriesland. Rev. Van Leeuwen presided over the assembly. Late in the day the Vriesland delegation requested attention. “What is on your mind, brothers?” asked Rev. Van Leeuwen.

Elder Schepers stood up and shared a question, “We’ve been hearing about those letters from other areas about calling ministers and organizing themselves as a congregation.³⁵⁶ And that is so very encouraging. It is the best news that we could hear after all these years since our formation. What is the status of our denomination?”

³⁵⁵Vriesland CRC Minutes, Nov. 3, 1859 and February 11, 1865.

³⁵⁶ Swierenga, R., *Brothers*. Kromminga, D., *Tradition*, p. 116.

Brother Van Leeuwen looked at the group, “Well, we have started the process by asking our church visitors to find out just how our denomination began and what happened at the first Classis meeting. We have no records of that first Classis meeting and no report from the church visitors at this time. Is there anyone here who can tell the Assembly what happened back in April 1857?” ^

Mr. Schepers sat down and nudged Mr. Dam. Finally Mr. Dam stood up to say, “Mr. Chairman, I believe I can give as clear and complete a report as anyone else. Ya, I was there. If you all have the patience to listen to me, I will be glad to enlighten you. Others here who were part of those years can corroborate my account.”

Rev. Van Leeuwen said, “Please go on, Brother Dam. I for one will be very grateful to hear what happened in those days.” ^

Hendrik Dam cleared his throat, “Well, Mr. Chairman, in the days after the Holland Classis of the Dutch Reformed Church reported the four separation letters in 1857, those of us at Vriesland who were prepared to return to the Standards of 1619 decided to offer an alternative. Having seen how earlier groups turned to the Scots Presbyterian for their new church home, we felt some urgency because we realized that if there was truly going to be a return, it had to be in the momentum caused by the four secession letters.”

“We invited the signers of the four resignation letters, including the Rev. Van den Bosch who was then without a charge. We all gathered at the Vriesland Fellowship Hall and discussed whether we wanted to unite around the principles and Standards of 1619. Each group agreed to go back and discuss it with their church community. Then if they wanted to unite around those principles, they were invited to an official meeting on April 23, 1857 to state their agreement.

“On April 23, 1857, Rev. Van den Bosch and the church representatives from the Grand Rapids, Graafschap, Polkton, Noordeloos and Vriesland groups came together again at the Vriesland Fellowship Hall for the organizational meeting. At that April 23 meeting, we were all in agreement about returning to the 1619 Standards, and we all assumed that each group was a properly-organized church. The group also determined to hold Classical Assembly meetings, with the first assembly to be held in Holland at Jan Slagh’s place on April 28, 1857. All the groups, except Graafschap, sent delegates to that first Classis meeting on April 28, 1857.”

When Dam sat down, the chairman spoke up, “Brothers of the Assembly, we have been blessed with this account of our early days.”

Elder Heyboer stood up, “Mr. Chairman, I was present with the group from Noordeloos at the organizational meeting held in Vriesland. And I can attest that Brother Dam’s account is accurate. We are pleased to move that we recognize Zeeland today just as we have recognized Noordeloos in meetings past. From our beginning we have recognized the four congregations that gathered for those meetings, while Polkton returned to Classis Holland. I so move.”

Chairman Van Leeuwen asked, “Is there any discussion of the issue?”

Rev. Van den Bosch spoke up, “Mr. Chairman, I would just like to add my voice to second the motion and state that I too attended both the organizational meeting in Vriesland and the first Classical Assembly in Holland, and I attest that the brother’s account is accurate.”

No other voice was raised, so the chair asked, “All those in favor of the motion, please say ‘Aye.’” All voiced in unison, “Aye.”

After the Classis meeting, Johannes and Ulberg walked out together. “What do you make of all this?” asked Johannes.

Ulberg answered, “Things seem so different from what I expected, or hoped, I guess.”

“What things?” asked Johannes.

“What bothers me,” began Mr. Ulberg, “is how the new clergy seem to ignore us ordinary mortals. ^ When they wanted to know the details of how our church began, they first decided to ask Rev. Klyn, who was part of us for only about six months and then returned to Holland Classis.³⁵⁷ Rev. Klyn didn’t have the minutes of that first meeting. Then they assigned the church visitors, the ministers themselves, to question each of the consistories at church visitations as to the whereabouts of those early minutes, and again no one knew where the minutes were.”

“Now they did come to our Vriesland council, didn’t they? We certainly had the information they wanted,” queried Johannes.

“Ya,” responded Ulberg, “but they didn’t ask for information, they only asked for the minutes.³⁵⁸ And our council members agreed they didn’t know anything about the location of those minutes. They were too intimidated to freely give information. It took real courage for Mr. Dam to stand up at Classis today and share the story. You may have noticed that even Rev. Van den Bosch did not volunteer any general accounting of our beginnings. They didn’t even ask the obvious question of who were there in 1857. And of course we all were there.”

“So, because the minutes of the first Classical meeting are missing, there is no written account about any of this history. Do ^ you think there might be a report on Brother Dam’s account in the next Classis meeting’s reading of today’s minutes?”³⁵⁹

“I think I won’t hold my breath till then,” retorted Ulberg.

“You know,” suggested Johannes, “a few days ago I was reading the book of Ezra in my Bible. It strikes me that the story in chapters 4 to 7 about the requests for information and the different letters from the Kings in Babylon show the same dilemma. Each king only looked up the information that was requested and each gave only a partial answer as a result.”

³⁵⁷*Classis Holland*, Sept. 9, 1857, Art. 3, p. 292.

³⁵⁸*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, May 21, 1857, Art. 3, p. 1.

³⁵⁹*General Assembly*, Oct. 4, 1865. There was no report; just a decision that the clergy were going to create an account.

The Civil War was still raging in the country, and news of the devastation of the war made its way to the settlers in Michigan. “Sjoukje, I’ve been thinking about this war,” Johannes said. “You know the Word says that ‘God works all things for good to those who love him’?³⁶⁰ Well, I am having a hard time understanding how anything good can come out of this war. I am more and more aware of the tragedy of this Civil War that is ravaging our country. I don’t know of anyone in our family who is part of it, but I know that Rev. Van Raalte’s son came back severely wounded. Others, like Albert de Groot, suffered and died.”

Sjoukje thought out loud, “I am surprised at how many of the people of the *Kolonie* did volunteer. ^ I know some of them did because they thought it would be a good way to receive a homestead from the government. But many joined just because of a sense of the need for freedom for the slaves. Maybe they heard stories from their parents about the miserable conditions in the Netherlands that we escaped by coming here?”

“Ya, I think so,” answered Johannes. “And our people here have learned high standards from the Lord. Perhaps the fact that Rev. Van den Bosch strongly pushed enlisting from the pulpit had an influence too. I’m not sure I appreciated that side of his preaching.”

“The elders always remember to lift up concerns for our soldiers in the prayers at church. And they pray for protection for our country,” said Sjoukje. “I’m sure glad the war is finally over. And I’m so sad that a good president had to lose his life for the cause.”

“Ya,” spoke Johannes, “so much lead was shot throughout the war. And finally, just on April 9, the war has officially ended. We were just beginning to dare to breathe again in peace and quiet when one more tragedy has devastated our nation. Some madman assassinated President Lincoln. April 15, 1865 is a day that we will never forget. May God give him eternal rest.”

Johannes had been smoking his long pipe in the May 16, 1865 council meeting. He began to chuckle when the minutes were read. As the reading progressed, he began to laugh out loud. The chairman spoke up, “Mr. Van Haitsma, what’s going on? Why can you not restrain yourself from disturbing this meeting and laughing so loud?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Mr. Schepers, but my funny bone has been tickled. I’ll try to keep myself under control.” Johannes covered his mouth with his hand.

Dam, the clerk, continued reading and Johannes chuckled some more and broke into laughter again. The chairman was perturbed at Johannes and said, “Please, Mr. Van Haitsma. This is a serious meeting. Please act accordingly!”

“Ya, Mr. Chairman, I’ll try, but this is too funny,” Johannes answered.

³⁶⁰Romans 8.

“Well, man, come out with it. What’s so funny? Just share the joke so we can all laugh,” Mr. Schepers added.

“Mr. Chairman, I’m so sorry, but I distinctly heard Dam, in the reading of the minutes, refer to me as the ‘old Johannes.’³⁶¹ I think I’m fifteen years younger than Dam here, and probably more than twenty years younger than you, sir. Then to hear me being called ‘old’ seems amusing to me. I’ve never thought of myself as ‘old.’ I may be a bit old to be a deacon, but I think I am far from really being old.”

“Perhaps I should retire,” Johannes continued. “Some younger man can take my place and I can go sit in my rocking chair. Oh, to think of it, I’d better order a rocker from the catalogue store.” Johannes’ obvious inability to stop his chuckling was contagious. Soon the whole council had broken out in laughter with him.

A week later, Johannes was chuckling again. “It amazes me,” Johannes said to Sjoukje, “what kind of issues we have to deal with in council!”

“Even after four years in council, you still have surprises, Johannes?” she responded.

“Ya, and from such unexpected sources,” added Johannes.

“Now you have me curious,” wondered Sjoukje.

“Well, you know that Rev. Van den Bosch has asked what church he is pastor of?”

“Ya, we’ve talked about that before. So now what?” asked Sjoukje.

“Rev. Van den Bosch asked our council a strange question before making a decision about our call to him to become our pastor. He wanted to know if we were a recognized church in the denomination.³⁶² So we brought the question to Classis and they affirmed that we are indeed a recognized congregation.³⁶³ But that Rev. Van den Bosch would ask that question is just beyond my expectation.”

“I guess you can expect more surprises as time goes on,” considered Sjoukje.

A week later on May 23, 1865, the Vriesland church learned that Rev. Van den Bosch had declined the call to become their pastor.³⁶⁴ Dam and Johannes were discussing the plans to call another minister. “I understand,” said Johannes, “that Rev. Van den Bosch has recommended we call a Rev. Frieling from the Netherlands.”

³⁶¹*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, May 16, 1865, Art. 2.

³⁶²*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, March 31, 1865, Art. 6.

³⁶³*CRC Classical Assembly (General Assembly) 1865*, Art. 19.

³⁶⁴*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, May 23, 1865.

“Ya,” Damsaid, “Rev. Van den Bosch knows him because they were both trained for the ministry by a Rev. Walter Kok.³⁶⁵ So he feels good about recommending Rev. Frieling. Rev. Van den Bosch also mentioned that Rev. Roelof Smit of Drenthe and Rev. Scheper in South Holland had also trained under this Rev. Kok. I wonder if Rev. Frieling does accept our call and come here, if maybe he might be an attraction for those two ministers to come out of the Scots Church and back into our church. That would be a pretty nice outcome, wouldn’t it?”

“Ya. That would be a great outcome. But the fact that Rev. Smit and Rev. Schepers have been to our Classis meetings a few times and basically asked us to join the Scots Church with them, does not give me much hope for that. They seem to be pretty well settled in that Scots Church,” answered Johannes.

“I guess maybe we’d better not expect too much,” added Dam.

“Ya,” said Johannes, “having ministers come from the Netherlands hasn’t been a totally-satisfying answer to our needs for ministers, has it?”[^]

Ulberg and Groen sauntered over to the pair in time to hear Johannes ask, “Why has the history of the church burned into our brains that we need a minister up front on the pulpit? Am I the only one who prefers to hear the Old Fathers’ sermons?” There was complete silence in the group. Johannes saw them grinning at each other. Ulberg started laughing.

They all burst into laughter. “Just remember, Johannes, you’re the one who said it out loud!” said Ulberg.

Johannes asked, “So what’s going on? We keep saying we want to return to the Church Order of 1619, but now I find out that back then the leaders of the *Afscheiding* each created their own church orders and argued about whose order to follow.”³⁶⁶

“Do you know what happened to Rev. De Cock in the 1830s?” Mr. Dam wondered. “He had never read the Canons of Dordt until one of his church members suggested the idea to him. And then another of his church members recommended that he read John Calvin.³⁶⁷ And that was what convinced him to preach and teach the conservative doctrines and to follow the people’s desire to have their children baptized by a believing minister. Maybe it’s dangerous to read John Calvin’s works. Look at the hot water Rev. de Cock got into.”

A few days later, Ulberg came to Johannes’ place. “Good morning, Johannes.”

“Good morning, Mr. Ulberg,” Johannes responded. “It is a good day, isn’t it?”

“Ya, it is. We are so blessed. Who’d a thought we’d be living so comfortably now after all the hard work removing trees and then all the shoes and boots I have made here,” Ulberg smiled.

³⁶⁵Van den Bosch, J., *Reformed Journal*, Dec., 1958, p. 20.

³⁶⁶ Kromminga, D., *Tradition*, p. 95.

³⁶⁷ Van Velzen, *Gedenkschrift*, p. 19.

“Ya, we are blessed,” returned Johannes, “and our homes are so much warmer and cleaner.”

“I hear,” said Mr. Ulberg, “that we are considering calling a part-time preacher.³⁶⁸ And I was wondering how we would house a preacher.”

“Plans are being considered to build a manse for him and his family. Of course we don’t know yet whom we will call, or what his family will consist of. But a nice frame home for him will be good. Maybe even as nice as the one the Vriesland Reformed Church built when Rev. Zwemer first arrived here. They built it right next door to the church.”

“I’m sure that will make a difference,” agreed Ulberg. “I certainly wouldn’t expect a preacher today to live the way we did when we first came here. My family and I spent those first nights in the lean-to of Rev. Ypma’s log cabin. It was a shelter of sorts, more from the critters than from the rain.³⁶⁹”

“Ya,” Johannes smiled, “I remember spending a couple nights in that lean-to myself.”

After the next council meeting Johannes turned to Elder Dam, “What do we really mean when at Classis and Synod we affirm that we honor the 1619 Standards and Church Order?”

“That’s a very good question, Johannes,” said Mr. Dam. “I myself have never seen a copy of the 1619 Church Order. I don’t know of anyone who has.”

“Now, Mr. Dam, are you telling me that we keep talking about following the Church Order of 1619, when we don’t really know what it says?”[^]

“Johannes, I would say that is true for every one of us who have not been to seminary. And I suspect that the ministers know that when they are affirming their allegiance to the 1619 Church Order, they are conveniently forgetting about all the changes that have been included over the years.”

“But,” Johannes said, “that would be deceiving ourselves and each other, wouldn’t it? The Bible encourages us to be above deceit and have integrity.”

“Ya, you’re right about that. I guess the truth is that we little guys in the church really don’t know what we need to know to properly make the affirmation that our Classis makes again and again,” Dam said.

“I’m not sure I can live with the implications of that,” pondered Johannes.

“Ya, that is something to seriously pray over and listen to the Lord about,” suggested Dam. “Another thing I have been praying about is that I have some serious regrets in bringing together the other groups in 1857. And now the new ministers are questioning our right to be part of this church? Why, we in Vriesland merely did the same as Rev. De Cock did in 1834. We simply

³⁶⁸Vriesland CRC Minutes, Jan. 5, 1865, Art. 2, p. 38.

³⁶⁹ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 285.

elected elders and deacons and declared ourselves a church. Sometimes our old fellowship group is such a pleasant memory. I miss it a lot.”

“I thought I was the only person who even entertained such thoughts. But to hear you say it, makes me feel less guilty over thinking that way. Well, one thing we Reformed folk know is that we are all sinners. But somehow it’s hard for me to accept that even the church is filled with self-deceit!” said Johannes. “So, Mr. Dam, how do we live with our church, knowing that it may not be any more faithful to its standards than the church we could not stay in?”

Johannes continued, “We cannot stand in judgment of others. But we do have to examine ourselves, as Paul taught us to do in I Corinthians 11:31. We have to know we are honest before the Lord.”

“Ya, Johannes, I always knew you were a deep thinker. Now I also know again that you are committed to your Lord. I think that hearing the sermons of the Old Fathers for twenty-five or so years has made a deep impression on your heart and soul. They have constantly reminded us to live in ways that please the Lord. They have also reminded us that we need to keep listening to the Holy Spirit and to follow the Word of the Lord. The Old Fathers have kept telling us that being a Christian is far more than what we believe, it is more about Who we believe in.”

“I am so glad God provided me with your friendship and wisdom,” said Johannes, “and I’m thankful for a wife who has patiently shown me the way to follow the Lord. I have learned to love the Lord deeply. The land I gave to the church, I really gave to the Lord to show Him my love. Well, my friend, I have a wife awaiting me at home. So God be with you, and bless you.”

“Thanks, Johannes, I really appreciate you. You have been a faithful deacon for the church. God also be with you.”

Some weeks later, after most of the planting was done, Johannes rode his horse over to Mr. Dam’s home near the Drenthe intersection. “Hullo, Mrs. Dam,” he began, “I’ve come to visit Mr. Dam. Do you think he’s up to a visit from me?”

“Ya, Mr. Van Haitsma,” Mrs. Dam answered. “I think he’d be very happy to see you. He’s been feeling a bit alone lately.”

“Then I’m glad I came,” said Johannes. “He’s been so important in my life.”

“Come on in,” Mrs. Dam invited, “and I’ll take you to his sitting room.”

”Thank you, Mrs. Dam,” Johannes said, as he stepped inside. “My, your home is so spacious and airy,” he observed.

“Ya, it’s a lot different from when we first lived in the dark log homes twenty years ago. We all have been so blessed by the Lord.”

“We sure have been!” exclaimed Johannes. “Sjoukje and I have been rejoicing over that too. Hey, Mr. Dam,” he called out as he moved into the sitting room, “It is good to see you.”

“Well, hello, Mr. Van Haitsma,” said Mr. Dam. “I’m so glad you have come by. I know that this is still a busy time getting all the crops in and cultivating, so I am grateful you took out the time to come.”

Johannes asked, “How are you feeling?”

“Pretty good, really, but nothing like my younger years. I am feeling old. I’m now noticeably weaker. I guess the hard work of the immigrant years may be taking its toll now.”

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Dam. I know that our lives here in America did start out being very hard. I’m glad that it has eased up a lot. But I guess farming is always going to be highly labor intensive. Are your sons working with you on the farm these days, or have they gone off on their own?”

“Ya, they have their own farms now, of course,” Dam observed, “but ya, they are helping me on the farm. I think maybe I have to make some decisions about passing on the farm.” Dam continued, “Actually, this has been a concern for me for a number of years. Do you remember that in the early 1850s I asked the Vriesland council to be freed from the calling of elder? I said it was because there were so many people in church that I didn’t know.³⁷⁰ And that was true. What I didn’t tell them was more personal. My health was already declining, but I didn’t want to share that. I felt that was too unmanly. I had visited the doctor to be examined, and he concluded that I had overworked my body in cutting down all those monstrous trees, and now my body was slowing down. He said, ‘just accept that and slow down. Let your boys carry more of the load.’ I confess that’s been very hard, but now I am paying the price for overworking. I didn’t even tell Lummigje. But I’m sure you didn’t come this way just to talk farming.”

“Thank you for your confidence in me, Mr. Dam. Somehow I knew you well enough to realize that there was something more behind that request back then. But I never guessed it might be some health issues that you were dealing with.”

“Well, man, I know you well enough to realize that there is something on your mind today. Our time is too precious to spend inchitchat,” Dam said. “So what’s rummaging around in that deep mind of yours?”

“First of all,” began Johannes, “I want to tell you that you have been most influential in my life. I learned from watching you and hearing you reading the Old Fathers that I need to put Jesus first in my life. That has been a long struggle in my life.”

“Ya,” Dam said, “that struggle is one we all fight with.”

“It was my struggle for some years in Friesland already. Sjoukje was a wonderful influence in my life too, and she began to open my eyes to what God might want of me in life. But with all

³⁷⁰*Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Feb. 19, 1850.

the persecution going on back then, I was scared to sound religious. Of course I did not get much encouragement from the State Church preacher in Minnertsga. You have been a most helpful guide for me. And I thank you for that.”

“Johannes, I am humbled by your statement. I had no idea that you see me that way. I know I want to live to please God, just as you do. I am glad if somehow I was some help in your life.”

“So of course,” continued Johannes, “your opinion and understanding is important to me too. In the last few years I have been privileged to accompany you to several Classis meetings. I never expected to be a delegate, being a deacon. But I saw and heard things we do not often hear around our own church. I am so glad that our primary sermons came from the Old Fathers. We had only Rev. Van den Bosch come to preach in turns in our church. Now we have had Rev. Van Leeuwen fill our pulpit a few times. **I am not sure I like what the ministers sound like today.**”[^]

“I think I can understand that, Johannes,” Dam responded. “Rev. Van Leeuwen is a product of the *Afscheiding* in the Netherlands which has had thirty years of development and change. And he is the product of Kampen seminary. While we are looking toward the same group of ministers when we try to call a new minister, we need to remember that we have not travelled the same path that they have in the Netherlands. Just like things have changed in the Reformed Dutch Church here, so have things changed in the Netherlands. So you can expect that new preachers from the Old Country will not necessarily sound the way we have learned to appreciate in the past.”

“I had not thought about it that way,” observed Johannes, **“It seems to me that Rev. Vander Werp, also from Kampen’s board, has a totally different sense of the importance of returning to 1619. On his first appearance at our Classical Assembly, he persuaded the group not to look for a reprint of the 1619 Church Order, but instead to use a *commentary* on the Church Order written over two hundred years later. Is the Church Order in use today anything like the one of 1619?”**[^]

“I confess,” Mr. Dam admitted, “that I have never seen an official copy of that 1619 Church Order. I’ve often wondered if we have been really honoring that, or if we have been going simply on our traditions.”

The Vriesland CRC Council gathered for their monthly meeting following the June 29 Classical Assembly. Mr. Dam, as the chairman, raised the question, “In the Classical listing of congregations, our church was not mentioned. I don’t know why, but I would suggest we ask the next Assembly to clarify why Zeeland was listed but we were not.”

Elder Schepers looked up from writing the minutes and asked, “How can that be? You were part of the group from the very beginning. And Zeeland was recognized only last October.”³⁷¹

³⁷¹CRC Classical Assembly, April 5, 1865, Art.19, Oct 7, 1863, Feb. 3, 1864, Art. 13.

Chairman Dam said, “I don’t understand it either. I know we are the only ones of the original organizers who do not have a minister yet. And that’s because we have remained so small. But that shouldn’t be a reason to discount us in the Classis.”

Johannes listened carefully as usual, but did not give voice to the questions in his head.

Chairman Dam answered the unspoken questions, “To be sure then, we will need to ask for our church to be declared as a “lawful” congregation. I don’t know why this should even be an issue after the decision about our status on May 21. But with the new voices from the Netherlands, things do seem to be changing. We’d better be sure to write this request on the Classical credentials we now are asked to submit with the names of our delegates.”

Elder Schepers spoke up, “I move we make this request in writing to the next Classical Assembly.”

Chairman Dam looked around, asking for a vote, and all nodded their heads in affirmation. “Well then all have voted in favor, so we will write the request about our credentials.”

“You know,” Schepers suggested, “feeling that our existence even as a denomination is or isn’t legitimate, absolutely has nothing to do with permission from others. Just because Rev. Wyckoff gave us permission to stay or leave is no real consideration. Whether we are following the Lord or not is *the* important issue.”

“That is so true,” said Chairman Dam. “I was at that meeting back in June, 1849 when Rev. Wyckoff invited the *Kolonie* churches into the Dutch Reformed Church. I was thinking then what difference does that ‘permission’ make? If the church is not true to the Lord, there is nothing that binds us to them. If they are without integrity, we don’t need to stay in pretense. We want to stand up for the Lord.”

In a rare moment, Johannes asked quietly, “How in the Lord’s name did we all keep on existing for these eight years with Rev. Van den Bosch as our only preacher? Even though he could be harsh on occasion, yet for all these years his was the only pastoral voice from all our pulpits in rotation. His voice kept on calling us to keep on being faithful to our God.”

“Ya,” responded the Chairman, “He seems to have been the glue that kept us together all these years. And yet all these years we all have merely assumed we are part of this new church. Only Grand Rapids was organized before we were, just before the constitutional gathering. Each Classis minutes have listed each of our churches as existing. There are no records to show that Graafschap or Noordeloos ever were ‘officially organized.’ We have never needed such paper work to prove who we are.”

Elder Van Maren agreed, “We can be very thankful to Rev. Van den Bosch for his faithfully serving us all. He deserves a lot of credit. And the more so because of his hardships in getting no salary. I remember that Rev. Van Raalte made sure at the Classis Holland meeting when the secession letters were read, that it was put into the official record that there would be no more

salary forwarded to Rev. Van den Bosch.³⁷² He's had to live on what he could scrape by on his farm, and the few dollars he receives for each time he conducts one of our worship services. He's even had to ask at our Classis meetings for money to live on.³⁷³ It is amazing to me that he has been so faithful this entire time."

"I understand," Johannes spoke up, "that Classis again had to deal with the question of Rev. Van den Bosch's place in the church."

"Ya," Elder Schepers stated. "This time it was a question of which church, Noordeloos or Zeeland, is his charge. Like last year, it was hard for Classis to decide. Since they couldn't come to agreement, it was decided by majority vote that he was the minister of Noordeloos."

"And" asked Johannes, "was the Reverend okay with that?"

"No, not really," answered the elder. "But he was willing to lay down his objections and abide by the decision."³⁷⁴

When the council meeting concluded for the evening, Johannes said, "On another subject completely, Wiebe told me the other day that after all the government's concern to get greenbacks into circulation, he was given two greenbacks for a down payment on a sale of two head of cattle for the sum of \$32.[^] He had to take a trip to Grand Haven to try to get the rest of the money in silver. The bank would not allow the payment in silver, so he had to take that in greenbacks too."

"Well, that sounds like just a lot of trouble," said Mr. Ulberg. "A lot of merchants don't want to fuss with those greenbacks. What did he do?"

"He finally ended up going to the general store in Vriesland and Mr. Wiersma, who now owns the store, accepted his greenbacks in trade. After going all the way to Grand Haven, he found a helpful store owner right across the street!"³⁷⁵

"Well, my friends," Johannes concluded, "it has been a long day and it will be good to be home to wind down. Have a good night."

"Ya, you too," answered Ulberg.

The summer of 1865 had been a very busy time for the farmers and by early October most of the crops were harvested. Johannes still had a field of late corn to harvest before snowfall. But on October 12 he spent the entire day at the meeting of the Church Synod.

³⁷² Swierenga, R., *Quarrels*, p. 84.

³⁷³ *CRC Classical Assembly*, Oct. 12, 1864, Art.28, Jan. 11, 1865, Art. 26.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Jan. 12, 1865, Art. 12.

³⁷⁵ Van Haitsma, *Family Legends*.

Returning home, Johannes thought more about the happenings and discussions of his busy day. “Sjoukje, there’s just so much that disturbs me about my day at the Synod. I couldn’t talk about that all with Mr. Dam, but I need to talk some of it out.”

“Well, Johannes, you have my ears,” said Sjoukje. “Where do you want to start?”

Johannes began “There were questions again about the status of our congregation as well as the status of Rev. Van den Bosch. Now, all these years after we Vrieslanders had been the hosts for the organizational meeting, it was decided that we are indeed an organized congregation. And they decided that Rev. Van den Bosch was the legitimate minister of Noordeloos.”

“These are old questions. Were they necessary?” asked Sjoukje.

“I don’t think so,” answered Johannes. “And then they made more decisions that will make the Synod Assembly a lot less attractive to our congregations. They decided that decisions of Classis cannot be altered at will; that decisions will no longer be published in the newspapers; and that visitors can only come by invitation. They also set up a censorship committee over books published within the church. All committees ended up having ministers appointed, even though there are only three of them. Ministers will chair the meetings in turns, and they excluded elders from church visiting. Proposal after proposal came from the ministers, even though two of the three have just recently moved here.”

“My,” responded Sjoukje, “all these decisions were driven by the three clergy?” ^

Johannes poured out his pain, “Ya, it seems that just their presence was enough to gain approval of all these changes. Are we common folk so subservient to the clergy? Are we being reduced to mere spectators in the church? Is that what we have learned over the years? Have they firmly established the pecking order in the church?”

Sjoukje hesitated, “I don’t know what to say about all that. It sure sounds discouraging for the future of the life of the church. Was there any good news?”

“Well, ya,” admitted Johannes. “The stirrings of growth include Laage Prairie, Grand Haven, Patterson, Milwaukee, Holland MI, Zeeland, Noordeloos and Pella. These are all good news. The Lord is blessing us in ways we had hoped, but hardly dared to expect. Obviously more congregations want to return to the Old Standards. And it was decided to hold a Day of Thanks for the victory of the nation and the peace, and combine it with our normal Day of Thanks for the harvest.”

“We can be grateful to the Lord for bringing more people into our church. That is exciting!” said Sjoukje.

“Another happy thing I noticed,” said Johannes, “is that it seems the atmosphere at the Assemblies is quieting down.”

“What do you mean, Johannes?” asked Sjoukje.

“Well, for all the years of our existence, at every Classis meeting there would be arguments and reasons for several outspoken people needing to apologize to each other. It almost feels like we are settling down. Maybe it is the presence of the new preachers who have put a damper on the harsh talk.”³⁷⁶

“You think maybe the new preachers have the same effect that parents have on squabbling children?” wondered Sjoukje.

“That may well be what’s happening. If so, that may be a good thing. It may also be a result of settling down in a new country and people finding themselves less stressed. That would also be a good thing. All told, I believe it is a good thing that we all get along better. However, I think the impact that the preachers are having may not be all that healthy for the church.”[^]

“You mean that the ministers are encouraging less integrity about following the Old Standards?” wondered Sjoukje.

“Ya,” said Johannes, “Integrity is so important. The Bible says: ‘Let your yes be yes.’ And we don’t want to lose that. But recently the ministers have encouraged decisions that make our Assemblies less transparent, and even secretive. And the elders just go along with all that wisdom,” added Johannes. “But I guess it’s time to get to bed. Chore time comes early in the morning.”

1866 *

Late in the evening of March 6, 1866, Johannes came home from the council meeting. “Sjoukje, I never expected what happened tonight!”

“Well, Johannes, don’t keep me in suspense,” urged Sjoukje.

“Well, you know how reluctant I was to become a deacon, which I now have been for almost five years,” answered Johannes.

“Ya, ya,” countered Sjoukje. “Tell me, tell me, my quiet husband.”

“The council elected me to be the chairman of the council meeting tonight.”

“Obviously they knew your wisdom and ability, didn’t they?”

“And on top of that,” added Johannes, “they assigned me to go visit Rev. Van den Bosch who is ill.”³⁷⁷ That is always an elder’s job.”

³⁷⁶*CRC Classical Assembly*, Oct., 1865, Art. 16., Jan., 11, 1865, Art. 7 and Art. 8. Art. 2 reaffirms Art. 8 of Oct. 13, 1864, Oct. 7, 1857, Opening, Oct. 20, 1858, Art.4, Feb. 2, 1859, Art.6, June 8, 1859, Art. 5.

³⁷⁷*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, March, 1866.

“Johannes, that does not surprise me. You’re always a good listener, and sick people often prefer to have a listener for a visitor, rather than a talker,” answered Sjoukje. “The council knows what they are doing. You are the right man for the job.”

“Well, last October I was delegated to our church’s first Synod; now I presided over the council meeting and then I’m assigned to pay a sick call on the minister. I didn’t expect any of this! It should be people like Mr. Dam who get asked to do these kinds of tasks.”

Johannes walked the mile along the mud road to Mr. Kaslander’s place. “He called out greetings when he noticed his young friend by the old building they had previously used for a church, and was now being used as a cow barn.

“Well, Mr. Van Haitsma,” Kaslander responded. “I haven’t seen you in a while.”

“I guess we’ve both been busy with the harvest,” Johannes replied.

“So what brings you this way?” asked Stoffel.

“I was talking with Mr. Ulberg the other day, and he told me what you boys did in the Civil War. I hear that you were very significant in the victory at Gettysburg, even though you weren’t there.”

“Ya, I guess we were,” affirmed Kaslander. “We didn’t know about that big battle till later. And only then did we find out that we had been important to the win there.”

“I guess,” suggested Johannes, “just like other soldiers, you probably don’t easily talk about the battle experiences.”^

“No, Mr. Van Haitsma, I don’t know just why; maybe because when we do talk about it, people just can’t understand how horrible it was,” said Stoffel.

“That I can appreciate,” responded Johannes. “I have never been in a battle, and my brother Wiebe was needed on the farm, so he was excused from the conscription. But I wonder if you won’t mind talking about it with me?”

“Well, Mr. Van Haitsma, it was a horrible time for sure. I guess our commanding officers expected that Morgan’s Cavalry was coming north in Kentucky to support the troops at Gettysburg. And they must have guessed which way that famous general was coming. So they put us boys with a hundred and seventy other soldiers to wait for the Cavalry. Our general also out thought General Morgan by placing our artillery just where we could destroy Morgan’s artillery. His plan worked out perfectly and we did destroy them. When Morgan’s Cavalry made its appearance through the narrow gully approaching the river, we were able to pick them off easily as only a few could ride side by side.”

“O my,” exclaimed Johannes. “What happened then?”

“We were so successful in putting down horses and riders that General Morgan realized he had been outmaneuvered and waved a flag for truce. He wanted permission to bring the dead and wounded back to his side. Many of us helped to gather the dead and wounded back to their camp.”[^]

“I think maybe that doesn’t happen too often in wartime,” uttered Johannes. “It must have been a good feeling to help those wounded, even though they were enemies.”

“Ya,” considered Kaslander, “that was the best feeling I had the entire time in the war.”

Johannes said, “That was a significant battle to help the North win at Gettysburg?”³⁷⁸

“That’s what we heard later,” recalled Stoffel.

“I’ve also heard,” Johannes offered, “that nearly seven hundred thousand men died in the war.”

“Ya, I’ve heard that too,” Kaslander affirmed. “Between the North and the South, many were killed in battle, some died of diseases, and some starved to death. I think the number of wounded was terrible too. I didn’t know it would be so bad when I joined with the other *Kolonie* volunteers. Sometimes I still have bad nightmares and I wonder if living through all that was a blessing or a curse.”

“Stoffel, if it helps you in any way just to tell these stories to someone, I want you to know you can share them with me. That just might help keep those nightmares under control.” A long and firm handshake let Johannes understand how much that offer meant to this soldier.

Johannes came back home to see that brother Wopke had come to visit. He joined them around the kitchen table. Picking up a piece of fudge, Johannes said, “Wopke, one little extra surprise I didn’t know about when we traded land was the hickory trees at the east end of the property. Sjoukje has so enjoyed making this candy with the hickory nuts, and I have enjoyed the treat.”

“Ya,” responded Wopke, “sometimes we don’t know all the blessings God has in store for us. Such nice little surprises sometimes.”

Sjoukje suggested, “You know, Wopke, I can prepare more of this fudge and make it available in the store. Do you think people might like to buy a piece of fudge?”

“Why, I think that’s a wonderful idea, Sjoukje,” responded Wopke. “People do like to buy a bit of a treat every so often. You make it, and Mr. Wiersma will likely be glad to have it on the store shelf.”

³⁷⁸ McGeehan, A., *North South Trader*, Sept.-Oct., 1983, p. 28. Letter by Rev. A. Van Raalte, <http://ottawa.migenweb.net/military/dutchew.html>.

1867 *

Mr. Ulberg came rushing over to Johannes' house, leaving his horse standing free in the yard. "My, you seem to be in a hurry," Johannes spoke when he saw him from his barn door. "What's the news?"

"Oh, Johannes," he blurted out, "Dam has died!"³⁷⁹

"What!" shouted Johannes, "I know he's been failing for a year or so, but I didn't know he was that sick."

"Ah, ya, he really could not walk the last few days. He pretty much stayed in bed. But he did not seem to have much pain. The Lord has welcomed him into His bosom."

"Ya, isn't it wonderful to have the comfort of God's grace and promises? Brother Dam has been really important in my life. I probably would never have joined the church if it hadn't been for him. He was my mentor. And without him our church might never have come into existence. He's the one who foresaw after the four secession letters were presented to Classis Holland that we would all drift into different directions. His invitations to each group and Rev. Van den Bosch was the magnet that helped us become the church that returned to the Old Standards."

Ulberg observed, "He was used mightily by God, wasn't he?"

"You know, Sjoukje," said Johannes, "it is interesting to realize what a complicated web we weave. We now have a preacher for our church here. We have felt for years that would be a good thing. But come to think of it, preachers seem to become a mixed blessing[^]. We have been glad to have Rev. Van den Bosch come and preach here often, and yet he seems to stir up some turmoil again and again. We were glad to follow Rev. Ypma to this land; yet we could not agree to stay in the same church with him. Rev. Van Raalte provided great leadership to bring this *Kolonie* into being; yet he connected with a church that pulled us away from our dream of returning to those early church principles."

"Ya, I know, Johannes, good people can bring unintended consequences into our lives. Now that Rev. Frieling has joined us here, do you wonder if his preaching is going to keep us following the ways of the Old Fathers? Rev. Smit took people with him out of the Drenthe Church and took them into a Scottish Church."³⁸⁰

"Ya, Sjoukje, I do a lot of wondering as I follow the horses in the field or milk the cows. We had such big dreams of following the Lord in our lives. How much have we been a blessing and how much have we interfered with the Lord's dreams for us?"

Johannes eyes twinkled, "I think you and I have done some good things though, bringing our children into this world. I hope they become seven more blessings to the Lord."

³⁷⁹ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 300.

³⁸⁰ *Drenthe CRC*. [www](http://www.drenthecrc.org).

“But I do have a concern for the church,” he added.

“Ya, you think a lot about our church. So what bee is in your bonnet now?” Sjoukje asked.

“Well,” Johannes recalled, “I was remembering that our new preacher was in training with Rev. Smit, along with Rev. Schepers and with Rev. Vanden Bosch. And none of them have been the easiest to get along with. Smit and Schepers even tried to get us to join the Old School Presbyterians. I pray that our new pastor will bring a peaceful spirit to our congregation.”

“Ya,” considered Sjoukje. “That is something. Let’s pray that he will be a peaceful man and that he will be a gentle leader.”

The council meeting was over and Johannes slowly trudged his way home. “Sjoukje,” Johannes began, “I guess we often don’t consider the consequences of our decisions. They can bite our butts where we least expect it.”

“Ya, Johannes, we don’t have foresight that helps us see the future. What came up at the meeting tonight?” she asked.

“Well, you know that four years ago a group of the members of Rev. Smit’s church asked to join our church, and we immediately elected two elders from the group,” shared Johannes.

“Ya, and we were so pleased to have those elders part of our council and those members part of our congregation. They have been a wonderful addition,” observed Sjoukje. “So what’s happening now with them?”

“Tonight a number of them came to the council meeting and said they had a problem come up between them and the Scottish Church. They had been talking with them about possible burials of their fellow West Drenthers in the Scottish Church Cemetery. Back in 1853 when the Scottish Church broke away from the Reformed Church in East Drenthe, the members of the Reformed Church would not let the seceders use the same cemetery with them. So they established their own ScottishChurch Cemetery just down the road south of the village intersection. Now the members of Rev. Smit’s church won’t let the group who joined with us use that cemetery with them.”[^]

“That sounds like we aren’t learning to live together yet,” noted Sjoukje sadly. “What did the council suggest to the group?”

“We decided that we would purchase some land about two miles west of the Drenthe intersection for a cemetery. And then we will assign ownership of that land to the people of West Drenthe and they will have their own place to bury their dead.³⁸¹ So there will be three cemeteries connected with the village of Drenthe,” said Johannes.

Sjoukje said softly, “What a testimony to the stubborn hearts of people.”

³⁸¹Vriesland CRC Minutes, Dec. 23, 1867, Art. 3.

1868 *

“Mr. Van Haitsma,” the council chairman, Rev. Frieling, asked, “we would like to ask you to check with the county Registrar of Deeds to make sure that the sale of your land to the church has been legal and proper.”³⁸²

“Why, of course, Rev. Frieling. I’m probably not the best person to check things out. Just being a farmer, I don’t know much about things legal,” answered Johannes.

“I understand,” responded the Reverend. “However, of us you are most proficient in English. And that will help you get the job done. Besides it has to do with your former property, so I think you might have an interest in making sure that the transfer from you to the church is all proper and legal.”³⁸³

Following the General Assembly meeting on January 8, 1868 Johannes fumed, “Now we are going to publish our own version of the Catechism?³⁸⁴ Printed by one of our own printers?”

“Hey,” Johannes Groen cautioned, “what are you so worked up over?”

Johannes responded, “We agreed to honor the Heidelberg Catechism as the Synod of 1619 did. When we got new ministers from the Netherlands, they wanted to use digests by Bortius and others. Now they want to print our own version? How far are we drifting from our standards? What’s wrong with the Heidelberger?”

“I don’t have any answers to that,” Johannes Groen uttered.

“I cannot believe it,” muttered Johannes.

“What a reason to be thankful to the Lord!” exclaimed Johannes one Sunday morning.

“What are you so happy about, Johannes?” Sjoukje asked.

“That Rev. Jan Schepers is preaching in our church today,” Johannes answered.

“We’ve had other preachers on our pulpit,” wondered Sjoukje. “What makes this one special?”

³⁸²*Ibid.*, Jan. 20, 1868. Deed of church land given to A. Riddering when Rev. Frieling moved on, Oct. 4, 1871, Art. 7.

³⁸³ No deed or sale document in the Ottawa County, MI was available in the digitized records.

³⁸⁴*CRC General Assembly*, Jan. 8, 1868, Art. 21.

“Two reasons,” responded Johannes, sounding like the Catechist. “He’s the first preacher who has been trained by our own ministers.³⁸⁵ That is a big reason. Since Rev. Van Leeuwen came and now Rev. Van der Werp, we’ve had a few young men in training. And now we are seeing the results. Praise the Lord!”

“Ya,” agreed Sjoukje “that is a big reason for praising the Lord. And what’s the second reason?”

“He’s also the first preacher who grew up in our little church here in Vriesland. Even before we were a church, he and his father would walk from their home in Drenthe to be part of our fellowship group.³⁸⁶ And now he is the first preacher to come from our church and be trained by our own preachers.”

“Yes, that is wonderful indeed,” Sjoukje responded. “After all, it is becoming clear that the Lord is blessing our church. So far all the ministers have come from the Netherlands, and now we have one grown up here, studied here and he comes from our congregation!”

“His father has been our delegate to many Classis meetings. How proud he and the whole family must be. Let’s invite the family over before he goes to Chicago to take up his first church over there. Just think, one of our ministers from little Vriesland will be a pastor in the large city of Chicago.”

“What about Rev. Meinders?” asked Sjoukje. “He also grew up here in America, didn’t he?”

“Ya, he did,” responded Johannes, “but he was trained by a seminary in Dubuque Iowa, and then came into our church. **Rev. Schepers studied under our own Rev. Van der Werp.**”[^]

Sjoukje agreed, “Let’s invite them all over for dinner tomorrow. I think we have a nice ham curing in the barn.”

Sjoukje cautioned him, “Now remember, my man, you’ve noticed and talked about how the preachers from the Netherlands have brought changes into our church that we didn’t ask for and aren’t so comfortable with. And now we have to wait and see if Jan has kept his *Kolonie* culture or if he has absorbed a whole lot of the preacher-culture imported with the ministers who trained him.”

“Ya, I guess I’d better wait and see. Is he still like us in the pew, or has he been changed by his training to become like the others in the pulpit?”

³⁸⁵CRC Classical Assembly, Oct. 4, 1865, Art. 11.

³⁸⁶ Beets, H., *Gedenkboek*, p. 246.

Tjalling asked Johannes, “What are you talking about, brother?”

“Oh, about our council asking if what we did was ‘orderly and lawful’ when we considered calling a minister for half-time preaching services.”³⁸⁷

“Doesn’t that make sense, considering our church is still so small?” asked Tjalling.

“Ya,” answered Johannes, “but last year we were given permission to proceed with a call, and now we are asking again. It’s like we can’t kind of wrap our own heads around that decision. Now the Classis has given us permission with so much flexibility and has encouraged other congregations to provide free-will contributions to support us. It seems kind of hard to work with that.”

“I can understand that. Things are not cut and dried in all these decisions, are they?” suggested Tjalling.

“No, brother. It would be nicer if we had more members, and although we’ve been growing, we really don’t have the support within our church to provide salary and manse for a minister.”

“Well, you are a keeper of the books, Johannes, so you would have a better idea of the strength of the congregation than anybody,” countered Tjalling.

“And then,” added Johannes, “we keep wondering what the Classis thinks about us. Last December we were included in the list of congregations that are considered part of the church, and then this spring we asked the Classis for confirmation because we were not recognized in the list of delegated congregations.”

Tjalling suggested, “Is that merely because the recording clerk was not accurate?”

“Could be, but our council did not feel ready to leave it at that, so they specifically asked for clarification. And of course they got it. I just don’t know what to make of it all,” commented Johannes.

Elder Roek knocked on the back door. “C’mon in,” Johannes called from his kitchen table.

So Roek left his boots at the foot of the entry and came in. “Hello, Mr. Van Haitsma.”

“Well, Roek,” Johannes responded. “The Classis meeting must be over.”

³⁸⁷*CRC Classical Assembly*, Jan., 11, 1865, Art. 11.

“Ya, Johannes. And I’m glad of it. I don’t much enjoy sitting there all day listening to the ministers debate the issues. And somehow we *Kleine Luy* end up agreeing with whoever is the most persuasive of them.”

“^Ya, it sure isn’t like a Parent Teacher Association meeting, is it? There we all feel we can contribute in both the discussion and the final vote. But at Classis or the Synod it seems like we get relegated to the quiet bench and aren’t really expected to contribute,” Johannes suggested.

“No,” Elder Roek considered, “it seems our only input is the questions we ask through our council. And the ministers discuss them and tell us what the decisions are. But enough of that. There is a bit of surprising gossip that comes from the meeting. Well, it isn’t really gossip because it was officially mentioned on the floor of the Assembly.”

“Well, man, what’s the news?” Johannes urged.

“I got a big surprise! You remember Gijsbert Haan, the father of Gysbert Jr.? He was part of our church back in the early 1850s.”

“Oh, ya,” exclaimed Johannes. “He was an upright man in body and spirit. Well spoken, though too often not well thought of; strong in his opinions, in his ideas, and above all strong in his words.”

“Classis heard from the Grand Rapids delegation that Mr. Haan had returned to the Dutch Reformed Church,” reported Elder Roek.³⁸⁸

“Now that is truly a surprise!” exclaimed Johannes. “That is the last thing I expected you to say! After all his strong voice of objections to the Union and against Rev. Van Raalte, and his long arguments in favor of going our own way. And now his actions belie his own words! I wonder what his son and grandson living here think about that?”

“Obviously that’s a bit hard to say,” suggested Roek. “But in recent Classis meetings it was clear that he and the Grand Rapids congregation were having their mutual difficulties.”

“I rather suspect,” Johannes observed, “that his reputation as a straight-laced believer may be a bit tarnished by his unexpected return to the church he so firmly condemned. Maybe I won’t ask his family here about it at all. They might be embarrassed by his actions.”

“I agree,” Roek said. “There’s no sense rubbing salt in a hurting family.”

³⁸⁸Gysbert Haan Sr. later returned to the First CRC Grand Rapids. Brinks, H., *German Influences*: “The leading elder [in First Grand Rapids CRC] G. Haan, had shifted loyalties several times between the CRC, RCA and independentism.” *De Wachter*, Jan. 29, 1869.

Johannes said, “Sjoukje, It’s time for me to bring a load of wheat to the mill in Jenison. They give the best price, so the extra miles will be worth it.”³⁸⁹

He harnessed the horses to the wagon and started on his way. The trip was a pleasure for Johannes as he sang his way through the miles. Arriving at the mill, Johannes unloaded and the clerk weighed the wheat. He then invited Johannes into his office and proceeded to figure what he owed Johannes for the wheat. When the clerk gave his quote, Johannes said, “That can’t be correct. It should be two dollars more.” The clerk showed him his paper work to prove what he said.

Johannes said, “I can’t read your numbers. But you are not correct.” They dickered back and forth, and Johannes insisted he was correct.

The clerk said, “I’ll get my boss and he’ll convince you that I’m right.”

“I think not,” affirmed Johannes.

“I’ll bet you the difference that I’m right.”

“Okay,” said Johannes, “if you are right, I will pay you the two dollars”

The boss came in, looked over the figures the clerk had written out. Then he concluded, “Yes, the customer is right. His math is better than yours.”

So the clerk paid out the money Johannes had quoted. The clerk asked, “Do I have to pay that extra two dollars also?”

“You bet,” said Johannes.

The clerk asked, “What are you going to do with that money? It’s more than you expected.”

Johannes said, “I am going to buy a pair of boots for my brother-in-law who has just come over from the Netherlands.” And with that, he got back on the wagon and returned whistling and singing back home. Right then he was feeling good about his ability with figures. And he was thinking how happy his brother-in-law Peter would be with the new boots that Mr. Ulberg would make for him with that two dollars!³⁸⁹

Coming home, he saw Sjoukje behind the house. “Hi, Sjoukje,” he called out from the wagon, “What are you busy at?”

“Hi, Johannes, hope you had a good trip. I’m busy making some soap. We’re running out and our ash pit is full.”

³⁸⁹ Van Haitsma, *Family Legends*.

“Well, we’ll have clean clothes again! I’m kidding! You always keep us in clean clothes. Say, I got good news for your brother.”

“Oh? What’s that about?” she asked.

Johannes told her the whole story about the two dollars. “I am going to pay Mr. Ulberg to make Peter a pair of boots for working in the wet fields and in the barn.”

“Ya, that will be a wonderful gift for him. Wooden shoes are not always the best footwear on the farm,” Sjoukje laughed. “But come off your throne and put the horse to pasture. Supper is about ready.”

“Oh, good!” exclaimed Johannes, “I’ve been looking forward to your good cooking.”

“I’m very pleased,” Johannes confided to Sjoukje, “with the new-fangled machinery that is being made for farming. When we first came here, we had to do it all in back-breaking hard work. It certainly was harder than I remember on the barge back in Friesland. That was hard enough with all the wheelbarrow loads up and down the gang plank.”

“Ya,” agreed Sjoukje, “a lot of our work is becoming easier. But work still is hard enough. And we still have to work many hours to feed our family. But, ya, in our twenty years here, life has become much easier. And we live in such a spacious home now. What a change from the box beds we grew up in. Now we can stretch out luxuriously.”

“And **railroads**^ are rapidly expanding their tentacles into communities that are not on the main lines. Holland is expected to be connected soon in all directions. Our crops are being shipped faster and faster all over the country,” Johannes observed. “Soon the **telegraph** will be in every little village, not just the ones by the railroads, and we will be able to communicate without having to ride hours to get to the closest office.”

Sjoukje added, “The waterways, lakes and oceans are still heavily used, but more and more those trains are bringing stuff from coast to coast. And a lot faster and on schedule. Who’d a thought?”

“And now we can see our neighbors much more easily with all those trees coming down and our fields opening up. What an expanse our farm has become! And instead of burning all those trees, we can sell the wood and increase our income. The Lord has so blessed us, I find it hard to fathom,” Johannes exclaimed.

“How our little denomination is expanding!” Sjoukje rejoiced at Johannes’ report of new churches coming into the group. “We began with just a few, four or five, depending on who is included. Now we are double that, maybe more.”

“Ya, with the group in Chicago organizing, we are even considering dividing into two Classes.”³⁹⁰ celebrated Johannes. “In ten years doubling in size!^ I know in the total scheme of things, we still are a very tiny denomination, but to grow that much in so short a time! I don’t know how to explain that! Groups want to join our church! I think mainly because of the standards we have embraced. And I think maybe because on the whole we have avoided accusing others. When we started in Vriesland, we were very conscious about being loving and kind. We started with positive intentions to be by ourselves again. We wanted to trust the Spirit to guide and direct us. Now I think we are beginning to see the fruit of that positive spirit.”

Johannes added thoughtfully, “And now I am hoping and praying that the discussions in the church magazines, our *De Wachter* and the *De Hope* of the Dutch Reformed Church, will not poison the good atmosphere here in the *Kolonie*.”

“I confess,” said Sjoukje, “I have not been reading the *De Wachter* much. What are they saying?”

“The discussion in *De Hope* was started by Rev. De Beij, new from the Netherlands, like most of our preachers. He gave an inaccurate history of how our denomination got started. Then one of our members, known only to the editor of *De Wachter*, wrote a lengthy response. Neither article was very kind.”³⁹¹

“You mean that the new preachers are stirring up a hornets’ nest when we have been so pleased that the relations between our churches have mainly been peaceful?” asked Sjoukje.

“Ya, I’m afraid so,” answered Johannes. “I know there were some harsh words spoken back in 1856 and 1857. But those voices have long ago quieted down. Now people who don’t know the actual history are speaking up. I know I told you that our own ministers at Classis didn’t know what had happened and they didn’t ask us who were part of it until Mr. Dam spoke up at one of the meetings.”

“I remember you saying something about that,” Sjoukje responded.

“Now I hear that our own ministers, who are newly from the Netherlands, are wanting to put together a history that they can send back to the Separated Church Synod in the Netherlands³⁹² to help them decide whether or not to be in a mother-daughter church relationship with us. I’m not at all sure we need that, but I think no one’s going to listen to me. We have been able to attract a

³⁹⁰*CRC Classical Assembly*, April 1, 1868, Art.18 and Oct. 7, 1868, Classis Illinois (footnote 33 of Sept. 22, 1868, p. 190). Art. 19, letter from Pella, IA, asked classis to be divided, April 1, 1868.

³⁹¹*De Wachter*, July & August, 1868. Kromminga, J., *The Christian Reformed Church*, p. 43. (He fails to note that both *De Wachter* and *De Hope* were edited and usually written by ministers recently imported from the Netherlands.)

Note from brother Jan Harm Boer: That one member may, by his own confession, well have been Professor Geert E. Boer. See the twin to this book, namely, Geert E. Boer, *Een Man des Volks*, Grand Rapids: J. B. Hulst, 1904, p. 178; and its translation, *A Man of the People*, p. 93, including footnote 69.

³⁹²*CRC Classical Assembly*, Jan 11, 1865, Art. 11 and Oct. 4, 1865, Art. 4.

few ministers to come here, and thankfully we are now seeing more of our own young men being trained.”

Sjoukje observed, “Wouldn’t it be nice to celebrate the good stuff and leave the bad old stuff on the manure pile?”

“It sure would be!” chuckled Johannes. “We now have twelve churches and we are splitting up into two Classes. We have ten preachers to serve us.³⁹³ And more new congregations in scattered immigrant communities are asking for our help in their start-up. My, we do have a lot to celebrate. And this after only eleven years! And much of that time with only one minister.”

“Ya,” added Sjoukje, “the Lord has done marvelous things.”

And Johannes was prompted to say, “And we had little to do with it, except to be who we are.”

Sjoukje observed, “But that did take some community effort, didn’t it? I remember when we first came that we worshiped at Kaslander’s, on the section line, so that we could accommodate the request from Drenthe to share our minister.³⁹⁴ We were trying to find a way to make attendance at church a little easier for all.”³⁹⁵

“Ya,” added Johannes, “and back then we quietly held our fellowship meetings for all those years until the blowup of the secession letters. Sometimes I think that our Vriesland church has majored in settling the disputes among us. We readily opened the door when part of the Scottish congregation asked to join us and we made two of their leaders into our elders right away.³⁹⁶ Keeping the peace in our community has been so important to us Vrieslanders. And now sadly the ink on the pages of *De Wachter* is just bleeding with conflict[^]. This has to grieve the Lord who asked us to live at peace with each other as much as possible. And it sure grieves me too!”

“Ya,” commiserated Sjoukje, “I know that it can be very tiring sometimes. But the Lord does not give up on us and we can’t give up either. We want to please the Lord.”

Rev. Frieling came to the fence line, seeing Johannes busy with the harvest. Johannes climbed off the reaper to greet him. “Well, Reverend Frieling, how was the Synod meeting? I already heard that Student Schepers is now Reverend Schepers. We are so pleased with him, growing up

³⁹³*CRC General Assembly*, June, 1868. Ministers in the CRC: Koopman in Pella, Frieling in Vriesland, Duiker in Grand Rapids, van den Bosch in Noordeloos or Cincinnati, Van der Werp in Graafschap, van Leeuwen in Paterson, De Beer in Niekerk, Meinders in Steamboat Rock, Ridott (Vacant), Hulst in Holland, Candidate Stad in Collendoorn, Wust in Chicago (April 28, 1869, Art. 16), none in Niekerk, Gibbsville, Kalamazoo, Low Prairie, Polkton, Rochester or Muskegon. Schepers to Chicago, all listed in 1868. Then also see *General Assembly*, Art. 26, April 1, 1868, Rev Hulst comes to Holland, Polkton shows up again, Art 28, Collendoorn, built a church building and a congregation? Art. 29.

³⁹⁴*Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction.

³⁹⁵ Schermer, C., *History of Vriesland, MI*.

³⁹⁶*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Dec. 9, 1863.

among us and being part of the church for these past ten years. And now being an ordained minister. It's enough to burst a button!"

"Ya, Mr. Van Haitsma," smiled Rev. Frieling, "we were very pleased to hear him preach. He's still a bit timid, but maybe that's a good thing. We have so many outspoken persons in our churches. We can be blessed with some pleasantly quiet ones. I am curious though about a person by the name of Haan. No one was saying much about him personally. But it was obvious he was known by many oldtimers."

"Well, I expect so," responded Johannes. "I can tell you a few things about his story. It is well-known by many people. He must have come to America a year or so before our family did. And when he came to Vriesland, he had already spent two years in the East. He came to us telling about how the churches of the Dutch Reformed Church in the East said they upheld the Standards of Dordt, the Belgic, the Catechism and the old Church Order of 1619, but he did not see much evidence in their practice. So when he joined the Vriesland Reformed Church in 1849, and heard about the union of the *Kolonie* Church with the Dutch Reformed Church, he made clear that he was not pleased.

"He began to protest, first in our Vriesland Reformed church and then in Classis Holland. He wrote letters, and talked strongly and firmly."

Rev. Frieling asked, "So he was part of the Vriesland Reformed Church?"

"Ya, but I don't think farming was what he wanted to do, and a few years later he moved to Grand Rapids. When he requested to transfer his membership, the Vriesland council added a negative statement about his attitude and behavior. He asked that the comment be removed, but the council wouldn't send a transfer letter without the statement."³⁹⁷

"Meanwhile Mr. Dam had begun a fellowship group in Vriesland and we used to meet in Mr. Haan's empty log cabin close to where Sjoukje and I lived then. After settling in Grand Rapids, Mr. Haan was part of the new Second Reformed Church organized for the Dutch immigrants. But he became dissatisfied enough to begin another fellowship group, just as was done in the Netherlands before 1834."

Rev. Frieling observed, "So there were two Dutch Reformed Churches and an English-speaking Reformed Church in Grand Rapids?"

"Ya," responded Johannes. "In January 1857 Mr. Haan convinced Rev. Klyn to leave that second church and join his independent church. And then Rev. Klyn notified his departure from Classis Holland. Mr. Haan and Rev. Klyn were part of the group that met with us to form this denomination after the April 8 letters of secession were offered at Classis Holland. So Mr. Haan was usually an elder in the group in Grand Rapids, and he was the first elder delegate to preside at the Classis meeting when Rev. Van den Bosch was sick. He was often delegated to the Classis meetings. For a while we did not hear much about him. Then rumors were that he went back to the Dutch Reformed Church."³⁹⁸

³⁹⁷*Ibid.*, Jan. 2, 1852. Van Koevering, A., *Legends*, p. 543.

³⁹⁸ Van Koevering, A., *Legends*, p. 548.

“And then last year the Acts of Synod reported that they had received a letter about him coming back to our church,”³⁹⁹ said Rev. Frieling, “and he was advised that he could join the church in the same way as others. Apparently that was not a satisfactory answer because at the meeting yesterday we were asked again, and then the Assembly made it clear that he would need to make his profession to rejoin the church.”

Johannes wondered, “Was that profession to be a profession of guilt for leaving, or a regular profession of faith?”

Rev. Frieling said, “I guess that wasn’t really clear, but perhaps it was both.”

Johannes said, “We had a few others go back and forth too. Rev. Klyn himself went back to the Reformed Church only months after he had seceded. The Polkton church went back shortly after being part of us.⁴⁰⁰ A couple of years ago we thought the Reverends Smit and Schepers might join back with us again, but that has not happened. But let me tell you how pleased I am with so many new congregations joining with us and so many ministers now. One way or another, God is growing our Church!”

“Sjoukje,” Johannes began. “Today is the day a group of our men are going to build a house for Mr. and Mrs. Unen so I will be there for the whole day.”

“That sounds like it might take more than a day,” suggested Sjoukje.

“I expect it will take several days anyway,” said Johannes. “You know, that family has been living in the old Vriesland schoolhouse which truly is no longer fit to live in. So we deacons have decided to build them a new home.”

“I think that’s a wonderful plan!” Sjoukje responded. “What a nice gift to give them in the name of the Lord.”⁴⁰¹

1869 *

Relaxing in his living room, Johannes perused the minutes of the June Classical Assembly. “Sjoukje,” he called out, “you’ve just got to hear this!”

“Wait a minute, Johannes, I’ll be right there,” she answered from the kitchen. Soon she was removing her apron, and asked, “Is it good news?”

“I don’t think so, but maybe,” he answered.

³⁹⁹*CRC Classical Assembly*, 1867, Art. 11, p. 249 and 1868, Art. 9, p. 257.

⁴⁰⁰Beets, H., *Church*, p. 59.

⁴⁰¹*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Nov. 6, 1868, Art. 3, p. 91.

“So,” said Sjoukje, “what are you reading?”

“The minutes of the January 6 Classical Assembly,” he responded. “I feel sorry for Rev. Van den Bosch. One more time the issue of his salary was under discussion. For years he has been asking for a fair salary, and it has never happened. He had to do like the rest of us, work his farm to put food on the table. The churches have promised again and again to provide, but there never was enough to cover his cost of living. Once he even had to announce he could not provide pulpit supply in the Grand Rapids church because he couldn’t afford the winter clothes to keep warm on the journey. Then Classis complained because he worked his farm too much. He has had to do yeoman’s service for so many years and never has he been fully taken care of.”⁴⁰²

“That sounds very unfair of the churches and Classis,” said Sjoukje.

“Ya, I agree,” Johannes added. “Now on top of that in 1866 Classis had assigned a committee to finalize his credentials with the church in Zeeland.⁴⁰³ You know, he really has not had an official call since March 1857 when he separated from the Zeeland Reformed Church, who had been his calling church for Noordeloos. He has been assumed into our little group of churches. But never had a calling church till 1866. Now three years later that is being questioned again.”⁴⁰⁴

“And he just keeps on ministering anyway?” asked Sjoukje.

“Ya,” said Johannes. “But that uncertain relation to the churches is unsettling for him. And it was a blow to him when the Reformed Church stopped paying the money they promised to pay him for coming here in the first place in 1856. He served them less than six months, and so they declined to pay for his trip over.”

Johannes was on a roll. “You know what else was discussed at Classis?”

“Now you know I wouldn’t know unless you tell me,” smiled Sjoukje.

“Well, back at a Classis meeting in 1865 Mr. Dam gave an account of how our church got started. So now four years later Classis received a letter from a Rev. J. Nentjes of the Provincial Assembly of North Holland’s Separated Church asking for either an apology or a defense of our secession from the Reformed Church. Reverends Vander Werp and Hulst were assigned to assemble the requested information. Then at our June meeting they presented a thirty-nine page brochure, documenting the ‘actual situation’ in the Reformed Church, as an answer defending the formation of our church.⁴⁰⁵ Classis had it printed and copies were sent to the Rev. Van Velzen in Kampen and to other delegates. What surprised me was that this booklet didn’t include any of the details Dam had recounted to Classis in 1865.⁴⁰⁶ It is once again like those details weren’t worthy of note.”

⁴⁰²*CRC Classical Assembly*, Jan. 6, 1869, Art.33, p. 34, June 5, 1860, Art.9, Feb. 20, 1867, Art. 19.

⁴⁰³*De Wachter*, July 30, 1869.

⁴⁰⁴*CRC Classical Assembly*, June 6, 1866, Art.20, p. 149, April 29, 1869, Art. 22, p. 200.

⁴⁰⁵ Vander Werp, D., *et. al.*, *Brochure van Kerkelijk Gebied*.

⁴⁰⁶*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Sept. 3, 1869, Art. 5.

“I guess that did not surprise any of the elders, did it?” suggested Sjoukje.

Months later, Johannes learned from Rev. Frieling another part of the story, and shared it with Sjoukje. “Rev. Frieling just told me a disappointing piece of news,” he said. “Do you remember the brochure I told you about?”

“Sure do,” Sjoukje said, “I don’t forget much of what you tell me.”

“The Reverend told me that Rev. Vander Werp got an answer back from Rev. Van Velzen, who is often called ‘the apostle of Friesland.’ That letter told us that the Separated Church in the Netherlands was prepared to give both the Reformed Church and our church equal recognition.⁴⁰⁷ That rather deflated the hopes and expectations of our church leaders.”

“Ya, we were expecting a much stronger sense of affiliation with the church there, weren’t we? I expect our Dutch ministers will be even less happy about it than the rest of us,” suggested Sjoukje.

“Ya,” affirmed Johannes, “Rev. Frieling seemed exceptionally upset.”

“Hello, Rev. Schepers,” Johannes greeted the young man. “It’s good to see you in our church again. I’m certain your family is delighted to have you visiting all the way from Chicago.”

“Ya, Mr. Van Haitsma,” Schepers replied. And I am happy to see them all. And so glad to see old friends again from my childhood church and neighborhood. I have good memories of my life in Vriesland. And listening to the Old Fathers!”

Johannes said, “Well, I’m glad to hear that we’ve given you such a good impression. I’d like to think that will make you a better minister for whatever church you will be serving in the future. I hope we have an opportunity to have you on our pulpit before you move on.”

“I would very much like that, Mr. Van Haitsma. Rev. Schepers looked around to see who might be in earshot. “But something is disturbing me.”

“Oh?” Johannes cocked his ear to hear better.

“Ya, I think you’ve gotten to know **Rev. Van der Werp**^ a bit over the few years he’s been here.”

“Ya,” answered Johannes. “What’s making you uncomfortable, Rev. Schepers?”

“Well, it seems he has some very strong opinions,” Rev. Schepers responded. “If I raise a question that I wonder about, especially if it suggests my thinking might be a little different than

⁴⁰⁷Harms, R., *The Dutch-American Experience*, p. 196.

his, he responds so strongly with an answer that I feel utterly inadequate. It seems like a real serious discussion over questionable issues just isn't tolerated."

"Do you feel you're being put in the same box that he is in and anything that doesn't fit is not ok?" wondered Johannes.

"Ya, I think you've hit it right on. There doesn't seem to be any wiggle room for considering other ideas. He seems to want to make me into his mold, and use only his ideas. My own ideas are not worthy to be discussed. I thought I heard when the *Afscheiding* took place that each of the preachers came with their own ideas, often different from his brothers-in-law and they hashed them out until they kind of agreed, or close to it."

"I do remember hearing they were all strong and opinionated people. And that they didn't always agree or work together well. But I was kind of young in those days. And nobody paid much attention to a kid in the corner who happened to be listening to the dockside conversation."

"I guess," he continued, "you better listen to the Word and the Spirit and discern what is true to the Lord. He's after all the one we want to follow and learn from."

"Ya, I know that too. I want to follow Him in all that I do," responded Rev. Schepers. "And I want to thank you for listening to me. Now I'd better join my family at their dinner table."

On the evening of July 3, the Van Haitsmas were surprised by a knock on their door. Johannes asked, "Who can be calling at this time of the night?"

On opening the door, he greeted his surprise guests, "Why Elders Schepers, Mast and Roek, and Deacon Riddering, I didn't know you'd be coming by tonight."

"Mr. Van Haitsma," answered Elder Schepers, "May we please come in? We have an important matter to deal with, as you know."

"Well, ya, I expect it has to do with the matter of mutual censure that was left hanging at the meeting last night. Ya, please do come in."

They slipped out of their wooden shoes, and followed Johannes into the parlor. Sjoukje welcomed them and said, "I'll have coffee on in a few minutes. Please make yourselves comfortable."

Taking the lead, Elder Schepers suggested, "Please, Mrs. Van Haitsma, we would very much like you to join the conversation too. This is about having peace among ourselves in the council before we celebrate communion."

"All right, I will be in shortly with the coffee," answered Sjoukje.

The men sat uncomfortably in the plush parlor waiting to begin the discussion. Elder Mast ventured, “How does your harvest look, Mr. Van Haitsma?”

“It seems promising,” Johannes responded. “How about in your fields?”

Covering the awkward silence, Deacon Riddering suggested, “My harvest seems promising too. We did have some good rain just when we needed it. Of course we will all know better when we actually harvest the grain in the fall.”

Sjoukje entered the room and distributed the steaming coffee cups. “I hope that a hot drink will please you gentleman on this warm evening,” she apologized.

Sitting down, she gave the cue to begin the serious discussion. She did not know what to expect.

Again Elder Schepers took the lead. “Mrs. Van Haitsma, you probably don’t know what we came to discuss tonight. But it concerns a conflict between Elder Roek here and your husband.⁴⁰⁸ We don’t want that to affect your family or the church, so we have come tonight to see if we can help get this settled between them.”

“Oh? I had not heard about this at all,” wondered Sjoukje. “Johannes, you’ve been quiet about this. I knew something was stewing in your heart, but I had no idea what.”

“Well,” suggested Johannes, “what is said in council stays in council. So it was not something that I felt free to talk about.”

Elder Mast picked up the slack, “We have been talking with Elder Roek tonight to ask him to come with us here to settle the matter and he kindly assented to our request. The issue seems to have come through a misunderstanding about financial matters and who was asked to do what on behalf of the council. And then a few harsh words were uttered at the close of our meeting.”

Deacon Riddering added, “We were hoping that we could bring this conflict to a close.”

Johannes admitted, “Those were some harsh words spoken as we left the meeting. I was not feeling very good about all that.”

Elder Roek interjected, “I was not feeling good about it either. I have my job as treasurer, and it seemed to me that you took in hand to fulfill what was mine to do.”

Elder Mast spoke up and said, “Ya, we asked Mr. Van Haitsma to take care of it because you were not at that meeting.”

Elder Roek said, “I could have taken care of it anyway. It just didn’t feel very nice being sidelined by Mr. Van Haitsma.”

⁴⁰⁸*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, July 2, 1869, Art. 7.

“So some harsh words were spoken and hurt feelings were nurtured,” observed Elder Schepers. “We are asking if the two of you would make up and let bygones be bygones and hold no grudges.”

Sjoukje looked at Johannes and said, “And you, Mr. Van Haitsma, you know better than to take up a grudge and harbor ill feelings to your fellow servants in the church. I expect more of you.”

Johannes looked embarrassed, and sheepishly responded, “Ya, and so you should. Doesn’t the Bible tell us to live peaceably with each other if at all possible? Elder Roek, I want to apologize for my wrong feelings. I’m sorry. Please forgive me.”

Elder Roek, looking just as embarrassed, responded, “I, too, Mr. Van Haitsma, have wronged you with my words and attitude. Please forgive me.”

On cue all realized their coffee was getting cold and quickly sipped at their cups to hide their discomfort. Soon the visiting council members made their excuses and were on their way, relieved that the evening had brought their concern to a successful conclusion.

1870 *

“My, O my, Sjoukje,” Johannes muttered, “this is slander on slander!”

“What are you talking about, husband?” asked Sjoukje.

“This article in *De Wachter*,” answered Johannes.

“What is that about?” persisted Sjoukje.

“[^]Our editor reprinted an article from *De Hope* about one of our Vriesland members slandering our preacher. I thought that had remained just in our church council. Now the *De Hope* has broadcast the whole story throughout the church in North America. And in the *De Wachter*, Rev. Frieling, who was the one slandered in the first place, has added insult to injury by making sure it is also well-known in the Netherlands!”⁴⁰⁹

“I don’t know what that’s all about,” said Sjoukje.

“That’s how it should be,” responded Johannes. “I did not tell you about it because it was a personal matter in the council. But now it has been spread over the world!” exclaimed Johannes. “On top of all that, our preacher, who admits he did not know for certain who wrote the article in *De Hope*, has suggested in *De Wachter* that it was the preacher in Drenthe who wrote that first article.”

⁴⁰⁹*ibid.*, June 12, 1870, Art. 7.

“Why would he do that?” gasped Sjoukje.

“Because the Drenthe preacher’s initials are the same as the author of the first article.”

“So, the article in *De Wachter*, writing about a slander that took place in our Vriesland community, spreads that slander and adds to that slander by suggesting who wrote it without having any proof that he did it. That’s kind of self-righteous, isn’t it?” wondered Sjoukje.

“Ya,” agreed Johannes, “like sinning while accusing another person of sinning. And the church papers are spreading all of it by printing it and making it public.”

“So, now the person who slandered the preacher in the first place, and apparently has made confession before the council, has his forgiven sin blathered throughout the churches,” observed Sjoukje.

“And all, I guess, by our preacher to defend his own reputation. It’s an embarrassment to our church and to our forgiving God. I can’t believe it.”

1871*

On April 15, 1871, Johannes said, “I’ve been kind of confused since our last council meeting.”

“That’s not a bit unusual, is it? What’s got you stirred this time?” asked Sjoukje.

“As you know, since the parsonage was built, we’ve been wanting to have a new pulpit for the church. Our old pulpit has been in use since we were in the fellowship building and we never felt the need to upgrade it. Then I was appointed to a committee to go to Grand Rapids to find out if Mr. Spanjaard would build a pulpit for us like he did for the church there. We had heard that he could make a beautiful pulpit.”

“That must be something special,” Sjoukje responded.

“Ya,” Johannes suggested, “I can appreciate that the congregation would like a beautiful pulpit. But the committee turned it down because the price was too high. So we went to Mr. Cats in Drenthe to see if he would build one for us. But even that would be costly. He’s charging \$80.”⁴¹⁰

“What?” asked Sjoukje. “\$80 is astronomical! How can a pulpit cost that much?”

“Ya,” answered Johannes, “but to tell you the truth, what really bothers me more is that the council accepted a proposal that the old pulpit become the lectern, and the elders would need to

⁴¹⁰*Ibid.*, April 14, 1871, Art. 4.2. *CRC Classical Minutes*, Sept. 5, 1966, Art. 25.

use that for reading the Sunday's Scripture or for reading sermons. Only the ministers are to use the new pulpit when we get it. ^ I really don't understand what's going on."

"I don't know what that's all about either," wondered Sjoukje. "I do remember that in the Netherlands State Church, there usually was the same pattern. When the fellowship groups became churches, some adopted having both a pulpit and a lectern. Maybe that pattern continued in the Churches Under the Cross."

"Well, I can't help but wonder what we are saying about ourselves when we accept such a proposal," concluded Johannes.

1872 *

"Oh, Johannes, I'm worried about our Wopke. He's running such a high fever and he's sleeping so much," Sjoukje fussed.

"It's probably nothing," answered Johannes. "Whatever it is, it will probably clear up soon. It's pretty hard to keep a strong lad like him down for very long."

"Well, let's see how he is in the morning then," Sjoukje suggested.

In the morning Sjoukje looked in at Wopke. "Johannes," she called, "come quickly! I think our Wopke died during the night. He's so cold."

"No," Johannes called back, "that can't be. He's been so healthy. Are you sure?"

"Ya, he's not moving or breathing," Sjoukje returned.

"Oh, I'm shocked." Johannes uttered entering Wopke's bed room. "Why would the Lord call him home? He's been so full of promise."

"The boys didn't say anything. I guess they got dressed in the dark to do their chores," Sjoukje observed.

"Oh, my," responded Johannes. "We'd better call them all right away to let them know."

The boys came trooping in the house, wondering what was up. Sjoukje broke the silence, "Boys, during the night your brother Wopke passed away. He's now in the arms of Jesus."

Their sisters came in sleepy-eyed, wondering at the noise and were also told, "Your brother Wopke died during the night."

With shocked and tearful eyes they looked at their brother. The older boys said, "But we were making plans to do some trapping later."

Johannes looked at them, “I’m sorry, boys. What I would like you to do, Titus, is go across the road to Wiebe’s and tell *Beppe* and the family that Wopke died. Reinder, will you go to my brothers Tjalling and Jetse and tell them? I will get on the horse and tell my brother Wopke in Zeeland.”

The next day Wopke Van Haitsma was buried in the Old Vriesland cemetery in lot R12, L12, next to his little brother.⁴¹¹

On September 17, 1872, Johannes, driving the buggy from the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the founding of *de Stad*, said to Sjoukje, “I really enjoyed listening to the Reverend Van Raalte’s account of the forming of *de Stad*.⁴¹² Some of those details I had never heard before. I wonder if he keeps his message notes in his stovepipe hat like President Lincoln was reputed to do?”

“Of all that he said, though, what stood out for me was his referring to freedom when he talked about the *Afscheiding* in the Netherlands, and again when talking about our situation in this new land of ours.”

Sjoukje asked, “What did that mean to you, husband? I heard that too, but I guess it just went over my head.”

“I’m thinking that when we organized our church, we also were exercising our freedom. We took Rev. Wyckof at his word that we had the freedom to leave the Dutch Reformed Church. At the same time Rev. Van Raalte and the rest of Classis Holland exercised their freedom to associate with them.”

“I think,” suggested Sjoukje, “that in our own quiet way we have pretty much accepted that. But from what you have been saying about the changes brought in by our imported ministers, we may have sold our freedom to ‘return’ for a mess of pottage.”

“Ya, I’ve begun to wonder if we really had a choice, or if circumstances dictated to us what to do,” considered Johannes.

“What circumstances, Johannes?” Sjoukje wondered.

“Well, we needed ministers for our churches. We did not have anyone to train our local boys like Jan Schepers. Rev. Van den Bosch didn’t volunteer to add that to his impossible load. So, it was kind of natural to look to the Netherlands for some ministers. Now we have several of our young in training, so maybe we won’t need to import more. But even the trainers of our ministers came from the Netherlands. And they all brought changes we had not anticipated, which we didn’t feel we could oppose.”⁴¹³^

⁴¹¹Vriesland Cemetery Records, Feb. 21, 1872.

⁴¹² Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 481.

⁴¹³Harms, R., *Experience*, p. 190.

“Do you think God had other possibilities in mind, husband?” asked Sjoukje.

“I suppose we could have stayed a fellowship group and not considered asking the other independent-thinking groups to think about starting our church. But that did not seem a reasonable alternative. I’m glad I don’t have to wonder about working the farm and buying equipment with the same kind of possible consequences,” added Johannes. “I’m glad not all of life gets so complicated.”

“But on the other hand,” Sjoukje observed, “a lot of other choices don’t have so many unexpected and unwelcome consequences.”

Johannes quietly mulled this over, and he began again, “I do have great respect for what Reverend Van Raalte did for the *De Stad* and for the whole *Kolonie*[^]. He did stimulate us all to live together in our villages in this land. Other immigrants who scattered here and there did not have the kind of mutual support we had. Consequently he was able to inspire schools and other community decisions that have benefited even those of us who did not settle in *de Stad*. It has been so nice for *Pake* and *Beppe* to have had friends of their own age here, and we too have had friends who share our language and our faith.”

“Ya, I agree,” affirmed Sjoukje. “Without his planning and asking for support from the Dutch Reformed people, things would not have worked out nearly as well. Even after last year’s fire, both the local people and the larger Dutch community here in America have responded so well, partly because the Reverend laid the groundwork for such assistance. There’s a lot we have to be thankful for even though we live these ten miles away from him.”

“I hope,” suggested Johannes, “that the community will recognize his significant contributions and besides the growing community will also erect a proper monument in his memory.”

Johannes continued, “The Reverend referred to his short time in Detroit. It amazes me to realize he knew how to connect with the government and other powerful and influential people both in the churches and the community. That man knew how to influence such people.”⁴¹⁴

“Something else came to mind also in the Reverend’s account,” admitted Johannes.

“Now, that’s to be expected considering the way your mind works its way through so many issues,” Sjoukje responded, waiting for what was to come.

“Well, you know, Rev. Van Raalte was surely disappointed not to actually preach at least once from his father’s pulpit. He was grateful to be embraced by his friends and brothers-in-law in the Separated Church. But in 1840 in the same Church Synod in which Rev. Scholte was ejected, he felt so bad he walked out,⁴¹⁵ never to return to that Synod until he visited back in the Netherlands in the late 60s. So, imagine how he felt when he arrived with the first shipload of immigrants and he was so warmly embraced by the Reverends De Wit and Wyckoff. That must have given him such good vibes that joining the *Kolonie* church to the Dutch Reformed had to be a natural for

⁴¹⁴ Wabeke, B., *Emigration*, p. 124. Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 483.

⁴¹⁵ *Doskers, Levensschets*, p. 27.

him. That Church in America seemed like almost the equal of the State Church that he so wanted to be part of.”⁴¹⁶

“I think I hear you suggesting that it was nearly inevitable that he made that union come together,” Sjoukje wondered.

“Ya, I think we had no idea of how powerfully he was drawn to that union,” reflected Johannes.

Sjoukje suggested, “But maybe he had no idea of how powerfully we wanted to return to our dream of being our own church and not being allied with a larger established church in America. And then we drifted into an informal alliance with the Separated Church in the Netherlands instead. We still have not really gotten to be by ourselves.”

“No, I’m afraid not,” lamented Johannes.

On September 26, 1872 Johannes proclaimed to no one in particular, “Now it’s Vriesland’s turn to celebrate.” And added, “I know, Sjoukje, we didn’t come till a year later, but I think we want to join the community in this celebration.”

“Of course we do, Johannes. It is a community celebration of arrival here regardless of specifically when any of us came. We are part of the community as well as all the others. It will be interesting what Rev. Uiterwijk⁴¹⁶ will have to share of the story of Vriesland.”

“He’s only been here a few years, but I’m sure he’s heard plenty and read the minutes,” suggested Johannes.

“I’ve heard something about the plans for the celebration,” admitted Sjoukje.

“Ya,” teased Johannes, “and I bet it has something to do with food.”

“As a matter of fact, ya,” confirmed Sjoukje. “I hear they are planning three cakes representing past, present and future. The first cake made from old fashioned crushed ryemeal with the number 1847 on it, the second of Johnny cake with the words ‘land ahead,’ and the third made of fine white flour with the number 1872 on it, representing the future.”

“And I heard,” echoed Johannes, “that the speeches are to evoke the word ‘Ebenezer,’ so giving God the praise for all the blessings He has showered over the whole community.”

“Well,” concurred Sjoukje, “He surely deserves such praise.”

⁴¹⁶ Author unidentified, Herrick Library, Vriesland file, p. 8.

1873 *

Johannes' face was streaked with tears as he milked his cows. Brother Wopke had just delivered the news that Ma had died.⁴¹⁷ He needed to milk the cows before taking his family to Ma's house. His tears threatened to fill the milk pail. Now in a hurry to be going to his mother's home, he yanked a bit hard and the cow swatted him with her tail. He said, "Sorry, cow, I'm in a hurry and want go with the family to Ma's place."

Son Titus came to the barn and said, "I'll fork hay to the animals."

Reinder followed him and said, "I'll feed the pigs and scatter grain for the chickens."

"Thanks, boys," Johannes managed to utter. "I'll get the horse hitched up to the buggy, so we can go as soon as the milking is done." Johannes knew that Sjoukje was getting the younger ones ready to go too. In short order the work was finished and the family climbed into the buggy and was on their way. It was not far, but to walk was a bit too slow for Johannes and family.

In tears they all came to the old farm house. "O Ma," Johannes moaned, "I wasn't ready for you to go yet. I wanted you to be around longer."

One at a time the family came into the parlor and gazed quietly with heavy hearts. Uncle Wopke looked very downcast in the corner. Uncle Wiebe, now the caregiver on the old homestead, stared into his hands. All were in awe in the presence of death.

"*Beppe* looks so pale," nine-year-old Andrew observed.

"Ya," answered Johannes, "we are only seeing the body she has left behind. She is now very alive in the presence of the Lord, maybe holding hands with *Pake*. Her spirit left her shell with us to bury while she is enjoying the paradise of heaven."

"I didn't want her to leave us yet," twelve-year-old Peter uttered. "But I think she's not wheezing and coughing up a storm and is much more comfortable now."

"Ya," Sjoukje added, "she is much healthier in heaven than she was here among us the last while. But I agree, I wasn't ready for her to leave us yet either." And silence filled the room again.

Soon the family and other immigrant friends came to join them at the grave site for *Beppe's* burial in the Old Vriesland Cemetery.

⁴¹⁷*Vriesland Cemetery Records*, April 18, 1873 or May 29, 1873. *Ottawa County Deaths*: May 29, 1873.

A few months later Johannes was busy trimming the grass in the cemetery when Elder Zwiers came along. “Mr. Van Haitsma,” he said, “I’ve just been to Synod.”

Johannes asked, “So what’s been discussed there this year? It’s been a few years since I have been to Synod or a Classis meeting. What’s the news you’re bringing home?”

Zwiers said, “Several significant issues were brought up. One was to encourage us to form our own Christian schools in the denomination.”⁴¹⁸ The churches in Chicago already started one in 1871 and Grand Rapids did too. What do you think of that?”

Johannes answered, “We in Vriesland have had our Christian education from the start in the school district organized by the state.”⁴¹⁸ We’ve been able to hire good Christian teachers right out of the *Kolonie*. Who is it that’s promoting that idea?”

Zwiers said, “Well, it seems mostly to come from the new minister Graafschap brought over from the Netherlands. Before he became a preacher, he had been a teacher in the school that the government didn’t support.”

Johannes responded, “The issues in our church’s Assembly have changed a lot, haven’t they, now that we have imported ministers from the church in the Netherlands? Is this what we were asking for in ministers?”

“Well,” pondered Zwiers, “maybe we didn’t realize all the possible consequences of our decision. We were kind of impatient about having our own ministers, and it seems that Rev. Van den Bosch was not really inclined to start training people for ministry like Rev. Vander Meulen did in Zeeland.”

“Ya,” admitted Johannes, “we are the ones who started looking back there for ministers who wanted to return to the same 1619 Principles that we did.”⁴¹⁹ I wonder where this is all taking us? I have also heard the idea that

“Maybe,” Johannes said, “such schools could have that effect. But I think that our school will do that even if it is part of the school district. And maybe a good result will be that our children will learn English. Also they need to learn to get along together even though they are from two different denominations and maybe some from no church at all.”

“I also have been wondering,” pondered Zwiers, “if other people are also asking why the ministers at Classis are pushing for separate Christian schools”⁴²⁰ even though in several of our villages, we have wonderful Christian teachers already.” I wonder if they’re afraid of losing our

⁴¹⁸ The District School in Vriesland, MI has been a successful Christian-run local school for over 100 years.

⁴¹⁹ Krabbendam, H., *Freedom*, p. 234. *CRC General Assembly*, 1873, Art. 8.

⁴²⁰ *CRC Classical Assembly*. The first references to schools are in 1861, in a general discussion when only district schools existed. The next reference is by Rev. van Leeuwen in 1863, Art. 9, still on district schools. Then the third time schools are brought up is by Rev. van der Werp in the *CRC General Assembly*, 1870, Art. 36.

Dutch heritage. Or maybe it has something to do with the influence of that Dr. Kuyper in the Netherlands who has become very influential in both church and government.”⁴²¹

“Another issue that was discussed and firmly determined,” Zwiers continued, “was the concern over the secret societies. They minced no words over stating that membership in such a group would not be tolerated among our church members.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” uttered Johannes. “It’s a shame that the Dutch Reformed Church has the policy that each congregation can decide that for themselves.⁴²¹ There are times to draw the line for the Lord.”

Mr. Zwiers said, “There was some talk at the Assembly that the famous Dr. Abraham Kuyper feels the Masonic is not as much of a threat as we think it is.⁴²² But I am glad that we are actually keeping that line.”

“Don’t you wonder,” asked Johannes, “how smart that famous man really is if he condemns the Masonic and then says we can live with it in our churches?”

“I surely do,” responded Zwiers, “and apparently more believers in the Dutch Reformed Church are thinking the same way. Quite a large number of them are coming over to our churches because of our stance against membership in the Masonic.”⁴²³

“I will be glad to see some of our brothers with that insight come and join our church,” said Johannes.

“As you know from experience,” said Zwiers, “lots of things get brought up at Synod. This time again they brought up the idea of printing up a different version of the Heidelberg Catechism.⁴²⁴ Apparently the Rev. De Cock who began the *Afscheiding* in the Netherlands in 1834 already had created his own edition of that standard. Now some Classes have approved reprinting that version.”

“Now, I think that’s not very good news,” interrupted Johannes. “We have so many times affirmed that we honor that standard. Why do we need several different versions for our churches? Isn’t the original good enough anymore?”

⁴²¹ Boonstra, H., *Equation*, p. 17.

⁴²² ^ Abraham Kuyper found that Freemasonry in America was less opposed to the Christian faith, but added in the next sentence: “If anyone should ask if a person could at the same time be a confessor of Christ and a conscious adherent of the principle of Freemasonry, then it must be answered without hesitation that this is *impossible*.” But then he added immediately, “That to say that everyone who has joined Freemasonry or who does not break with it, denies the Christ and must be excommunicated by the church goes much too far.” *De Heraut*, 30 Oct., 1892, p. 2. This position was very close to Van Raalte’s view. Cf. Dosker, H., *Levensschets*, pp. 301, 334-335.

⁴²³ Hemkes, G., *Gerechtsbestaan*, p. 191. Swierenga, R., *Quarrels*, p. 115.

⁴²⁴ CRC General Assembly, 1873, Art. 24.

Zwiers opined, “I think that if the new editions are good in the churches the ministers came from, it is thought to be good for us too. I don’t understand that thinking. But then, if I speak up, nobody pays any attention to me anyway.”

“I guess I can appreciate that,” said Johannes. “It seems that these ministers don’t have a very high opinion of us *Kleine Luy*. After all, we haven’t had their education. And we’re just farmers anyway, what do we know?”⁴²⁵

“I think,” added the elder, “they don’t know what the cost has been for us. First, many of our older members went through the persecution times. Then we decided to emigrate and start over in the middle of these giant forests. And then we were looked down on by many people of the *Kolonie* for wanting to keep on the ‘return’ path we talked about so much. The ministers come from the old country and already they are better off here than they were over there. There they had to walk to every person they visited. Here they get to ride around in a horse and buggy.”⁴²⁶^

1874 *

Johannes said, “Sjoukje, in a few weeks Titus and Anna will be married as well as Elizabeth and Jan Hendrik. I have been thinking of a good wedding present for us to give to Titus and Anna. What would you think if we give them the farm we bought in 1868? This is early spring; he could begin right away to prepare his own fields for planting instead of working our farm.”⁴²⁷

“Oh, Johannes, that sounds like such a wonderful gift to give them. We can afford to do it. What a nice way to give them a start in life! Maybe we can ask him to invite Anna over for dinner and we can discuss it with them. What do you think?”

“That sounds great, Sjoukje. And then we need to give Elizabeth and Jan Hendrik a similar present, don’t we?” wondered Johannes. “Their double wedding should at least start with equal-value gifts from us.”

“Oh ya. If we are going to be generous to one, we need to be generous to the other too. But what?” asked Sjoukje. “Should we talk to the Berends to discuss this? We don’t want to interfere with whatever they will be doing for them. And will we be able to do something just as generous for the rest of our children when they get married?”

“Well, I think that’s asking me to be a prophet!” Johannes grinned. “That I don’t have a reputation for. But I would sure like to be just as generous to each one.”

⁴²⁵ Cox, H., *Seduction*, p. 170: “... We [theologians] are part of a ‘director society’ which is busy every day subduing, controlling, ‘improving,’ developing and otherwise dominating the ‘directed’ societies.”^

⁴²⁶ Hemkes, G., *A Brief History of the Vriesland Church*.

⁴²⁷ *Holland City News*, May 22, 1969, p. 12.

After hearing the announcement that another minister had declined a call to come to Vriesland, Johannes confessed, “Sjoukje, I’m so glad we can talk so easily together. There are just so many people I can’t talk to freely.”

“I can understand that, husband. I can’t speak my mind either to anybody but you,” responded Sjoukje.

“Well you know I can talk to the cows, but I don’t get much feedback except less milk,” chuckled Johannes. “And now I’m thinking about our getting another decline to our call for a minister. We’ve had several declines since Rev. Rietdyk left us. And I confess to you that I’m not so sad that our requests were turned down. Here it is almost three years since we’ve had our own minister, and I’m just delighted to be hearing the sermons from the Old Fathers again. What’s the matter with me?”

“Well, I could test your temperature, Johannes,” Sjoukje teased. “But I think it would be normal. And I think your feelings of enjoying the worship better with these reading sermons are normal too. I’m also more pleased with them. There’s such a warmth in them and they seem so like the Spirit of the Bible.”[^]

“Something else has been rummaging around in my little brain,” confessed Johannes. “And I’m almost embarrassed that my mind should go there.”

“Should go where, hubby?” wondered Sjoukje.

“I was talking with Wiebe and celebrating that he had asked our church to recognize his baptism. But deeper inside, I was also thinking about him developing the elevator business at the intersection. I wondered if a reason he did not give me was his concern to keep his relationship with all the farmers of the community as clean as possible.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Sjoukje.

“Well, all the years in the Netherlands, one reason I did not join the Separated Church was to keep our business more viable and not lose business because of that. Now I wonder if Wiebe is thinking the same way about keeping peace with all his potential customers by not totally joining either church.”

“We are a peaceful community, aren’t we?” mused Sjoukje.

“Ya, we are,” answered Johannes. [^]“But the ministers keep stirring things up in the church magazines. It’s almost like the Dutch ministers who come to our church feel they have to prove they made the right choice by not becoming ministers in the Reformed Church. They seem so strident about the differences.”⁴²⁸

⁴²⁸ Beets, H., *Gedenkboek*, p. 58.

1875 *

Johannes and Elder Zwiers sat in the back bench of the church building. Johannes asked, “Mr. Zwiers, you just attended the Synod of our church. What’s the news? What do you make of how things are going in our church?”

“Well, Johannes, as I sat there listening, I found myself wondering that very question. You know how we wanted to return to the Church Order of 1619 and the confessions and all.”

“Ya, Mr. Zwiers, that memory is so clear to me. And you were part of the group in Drenthe with Rev. Smit. You had a clear focus on that too.”

“Well, it seems to me that our new ministers have forgotten all about that,” suggested Zwiers.

“What happened to have you notice that?” asked Johannes.

“A Rev. Mollenbeek, coming from the Congregationalists, and student Ekke de Vries were presented by the Muskegon council for examination to the ministry. There were eighteen elders and thirteen ministers at the meeting. The ministers did all the examination of the two, and after they were excused, the ministers asked each other if they had any concerns, and then incidentally asked the advice of the elders. Then the ministers voted on whether to admit them, and after they all voted in favor, the ministers welcomed them to the ministry. The elders were only included in the process as advisory. **Have the ministers become so important that the elders have virtually no voice anymore? Have they forgotten we are the ones who listen to their sermons?”⁴²⁹**^

Zwiers continued, “I’m beginning to ask myself if I made a mistake coming into this True Holland Reformed Church.”

“Ya, I can understand that question, for sure,” shared Johannes. “This does not at all sound like they were following the Church Order like they affirm they are doing.⁴²⁹ I’ve asked myself the same question. Did we go wrong somewhere? Are we ‘returning’ like we decided to do back in April, 1857? Are we getting diverted? I know I’m only a member and just a deacon. But I can see when I have plowed a crooked row.”

“Ya, me too, most of the time,” added Zwiers. “On the other side is the story of Rev. Van Leeuwen,” the elder went on. “Rev. Van Leeuwen used to be in the Grand Rapids congregation, but he has now come to be pastor of the Collendoorn congregation.”

“Ya, I remember him. Didn’t he have some difficulties with the church along the way?” Johannes pondered aloud.

“I believe he wrote some articles in a religious magazine and members or ministers objected to what he wrote. He repented and later, when he was in Patterson, he apparently joined the Masonic, and he also had some problems with his wife. In March, Classis Michigan interviewed

⁴²⁹CRC General Assembly, June 3, 1874, Art.6, Art.8, Art.16, Art. 23.

him, and he again repented and they were satisfied and decided to make him available for call.⁴³⁰ He accepted a call to Collendoorn and at our Synod he was so well embraced that he was elected clerk of the Assembly and even assigned to participate in the examination of a candidate. Now, I figure that is a wonderful example of forgiveness by the church.”

“Isn’t it a marvelous gift from Jesus that we can be forgiven for our sins? Without that grace we would all be in so much misery! Thank God for that hope in Christ Jesus. The church is full of forgiven sinners. God is so good.”

“Isn’t it wonderful, Johannes?” Sjoukje observed. “We started having our own children a bit late, but now we are seeing weddings in the family. I wonder how many grandchildren the Lord will place in our quiver?”

“I guess,” suggested Johannes, “that will just remain to be seen as our children marry and then present us with these grandchildren. We will just enjoy every one of them that the Lord sends our way. He has blessed us this far, and we can expect Him to keep on blessing, as long as we walk in His paths.”

Sjoukje kept busy with her crocheting, while Johannes was perusing the latest *De Wachter*. “I keep asking myself,” noted Johannes, “why the editor of our church paper includes so much about what’s in *De Hope* and what other ministers think about that. I thought we had left that behind years ago. We so dearly want to live in peace with our neighbors who are part of the Dutch Reformed Church. ^Why do we have to keep rubbing salt on the old wounds?”

“Ya, it irks me so much that I find little pleasure in reading that paper,” Sjoukje responded.

“You know,” Johannes went on, “I remember back when Mr. Dam and I were talking about gathering the groups that announced their separation from Classis Holland, we determined we would not include any negative comments about that church. We simply wanted to move positively ahead with the 1619 Standards. We didn’t think we needed to defend our position over against the Dutch Reformed. Now it seems every *De Wachter* has strong arguments.⁴³¹ It seems like our Dutch clergy imports want to argue with the ministers like Dr. Steffens, also a Dutch import into Classis Holland, about what and why we felt it necessary to go our own way. Why can’t they just accept the differences and focus instead on encouraging us to follow Jesus?”^

“I think we have been just pleasant peaceful neighbors,” Sjoukje agreed. “We really don’t need to rake over all those old issues anymore.”

“Ya,” sputtered Johannes, “it takes alot of pleasure out of reading that paper.”

⁴³⁰CRC General Assembly, June 19, 1867, Art. 20; June 2, 1869, Art. 15; March 14, 1872, Art. 4; 1875, Art. 41.

⁴³¹Kromminga, J., *The Christian Reformed Church*, pp. 47 ff. Swierenga, R., *The Dutch in America*, p. 186: “The Masonic ‘controversy’ was underway in 1868.” That’s the year *De Wachter* got started under Rev. D. J. Van der Werp.

Elders Schepers and Zwiers came to see Johannes after Rev. Rietdyk and Mr. Zwiers had attended the Synod in June 1875.

“Mr. Van Haitzma,” Zwiers began the conversation, “I know that you and Mr. Schepers were part of the whole scene when our church got its start in April 1857. We also know you are a thoughtful man who doesn’t spread around what you have heard. We really want your insight in things that have begun to disturb us in our church.”

Johannes answered, “Well, my friends, I thank you for the honor you have just given me. I do try to keep confidences, and yes, I was there. But I don’t know if I am as insightful and knowledgeable as you suggest. But please come into the parlor.” He asked Sjoukje, “Would you please put on a pot of coffee; I think we may be awhile.”

When each had found a comfortable chair, Elder Zwier began, “I’ve been delegated to Classis and to the Synod since 1870. I’ve seen how fast our Classis is suddenly growing. And I see how our ministers have been increasing. I’ve also signed the Form of Subscription in each meeting of late. And we always affirm that we honor the Standards of 1619, including the three Forms of Unity and the Church Order.

“Back at the 1871 Synod, in an official notice from our Assembly and the True Reformed Dutch Church, we stated that ‘While we claim unity in doctrine and belief, in trivial and significant matters we will practice tolerance, and in all things [practice] love.’ Recently I was surprised to see again that last part about ‘trivial and significant matters.’ I guess my question is, what is all included in that phrase?”⁴³²

“Ya,” considered Johannes, “that is an interesting observation and question. I suppose no one thought to explain what that meant.”

Schepers observed, “That sounds to me like a lot of tolerance for all kinds of ideas, doctrines and practices. Do we really want such a wide range of ideas in our church?”

Johannes said, “That was not the idea of living by the Standards that we had wanted in 1857. Isn’t that exactly what both the State Church in the Netherlands and the Reformed Church in America have accepted?”

Zwiers joined in, “What also struck me is what began to happen after we had an increase in the number of ministers.”

“What did you notice?” inquired Johannes.

⁴³²*CRC Classical Assembly*, June 7, 1871, Supplement, p. 289.

Zwiers continued, “They began to be appointed to all the committees. Only a few elders were appointed. I know that the ministers have more training, but we elders have been part of the church for years. We also have a sense for the way we want our church to run.”⁴³³

Schepers explained, “One of the first proposals that Rev. Van der Werp made after he arrived was to cancel the order for copies of the Church Order. Instead he encouraged us to order a *commentary* on the Church Order. Classis agreed and orders were made for enough copies to distribute in all our churches. Granted, few of us had read the Church Order, but why order a *commentary*? Schepers added sadly, “I was one of the elders who approved the copy Rev. W. H. Van Leeuwen showed us.”⁴³³

Schepers continued, “In 1863 Elder G. Van Tubbergen of Graafschap reported his dealings with a fellow elder and repeated this principle ‘If the accepted Church Order of 1619 is binding, it must be done as stated and carried out; otherwise each can do as he pleases.’ Those are the principles we expected to follow when we started this denomination.

Johannes affirmed, “[^]Ya, that is what we expected. I know that many of us didn’t know just what the Church Order actually required. That does not mean we didn’t want to take it seriously. We had to trust our church leaders to be leading us with integrity.”

Mr. Schepers noted a small example, “In 1864 Classis ‘Decided to abide by Article 41 of our accepted Church Order of Dordt’ and yet they expected two elders and one minister from each church at the Classis meeting instead of the two representatives the Church Order asked for. I know that is a small matter but how can we say we follow the Church Order if we feel free to change it?”⁴³⁴

“Ya, that is a dilemma,” affirmed Johannes. “We made a covenant in 1857 to join together on the basis of the Church Order and the Confessions. What are we doing to that covenant?”

Zwiers added, “Classis members keep referring to ‘our adopted Church Order.’ We have assumed that we know what we were talking about. I wonder if even our preachers have any idea what we are affirming time after time.”

Schepers reminded them, “And we made a similar promise to use the Heidelberg Catechism for our teaching tool. The Classis minutes of ten years ago reported that Rev. Van den Bosch recommended we use the well-known catechism by J. Borstius.⁴³⁵ Didn’t we embrace the Heidelberg Catechism in our constitution meeting?”

“I just don’t understand,” murmured Zwiers. “We wanted to return to the 1619 Standards, just like the Separated Church wanted. And we keep affirming that at our Assemblies.”⁴³⁶

⁴³³*Ibid.*, Aug. 19, 1864, Art. 19 and Art. 29.

⁴³⁴*Ibid.*, July 22, 1863, p. 64; Feb. 3, 1864, p. 73.

⁴³⁵*Ibid.*, June 4, 1862, Art. 2, p. 49; Oct. 12, 1864, Art. 7, p. 93.

⁴³⁶*Ibid.*, Oct. 12, 1864, Art. 5, p. 92, the Form of Subscription, per the supplemental.

Johannes responded, “It seems the pace of these changes has increased with the new ministers who came from the Netherlands. Maybe they knew that the church there had changed so much over the years since 1834, and now have little issue with changes that we ordinary members know so little about. I will say this, you came here tonight hoping for wisdom, but I do not have any wisdom about what the ministers are doing to our churches. It is wonderful that our church is expanding. It is wonderful to have more clergy to help lead worship services. But it seems the ministers are a mixed blessing.”

Johannes confessed, “I am an old wooden shoe, and I still want to return to those old standards! Sometimes I am fearful that maybe there is no way anymore to return. I comfort myself by looking forward to the times when we have reading services with the sermons from the Old Fathers!”

Schepers responded, “Perhaps you will not like the decision about that. The Synod decided only sermons that have been approved by the Assembly of Synod may be read in our churches. So, I think that means only sermons written by Rev. Van der Werp which were noted in *De Wachter* as available in print.”⁴³⁷^

Schepers continued, “There’s another thing. In the 1871 Assembly it was agreed that only the ministers would be deciding if a student for the ministry was qualified. I know that the whole assembly including the elders agreed with this. But who is willing to stand up against those learned brothers? It seems like all these changes are initiated by the ministers.”

“That is strange, isn’t it?” said Zwiers. “We all tend to agree with whatever the ministers suggest. But we are the ones who listen to the ministers preach, so should our opinion of a candidate’s qualifications be discounted?”⁴³⁸

Johannes observed, “It seems to me I heard that in 1834 when the Secession took place in the Netherlands, one of the reasons was that the believers didn’t want to have the government decide how to worship. That was also something on our minds in 1857. Now it seems that the Classis and Synod are being used by the ministers to mandate rules for the local congregations. Don’t they recognize we have a different history than the church they came from?”

“Johannes, Johannes!” Sjoukje called out, “We have a first grandchild! Titus and Anna have named her Dena.”⁴³⁹

Johannes hurried to the house, “That’s naming her after her grandmother Dena, isn’t it?”

⁴³⁷*De Wachter*, Dec. 2, 1870, p. 3.

⁴³⁸*CRC Classical Assembly* 1871, Art 7; Art. 28, p. 285: “^All the ministers equally are chosen to be present at the preparatory examinations.” The exams having been concluded and the students having absented themselves, the assembly proceeds to judging the proffered exams. The president asks if any of the ministers have concerns and then proceeds to ask the advice of the elders. And since no one has objections, after being led in prayer by Rev Stad, the assembly proceeds to a vote by the ministers on whether to admit them. *CRC General Assembly*, 1875, Art. 23, p. 314; 1877, Art. 14. p. 397; 1878, Art. 16.

⁴³⁹*Census* 1880: Dena Van Haitsma, born 7-21-1875 in Zutphen, MI.

“Ya,” Sjoukje responded, “They are following the familiar pattern. Naming the first daughter after her mother’s mother.”

“We are grandparents for the first time now! Are they doing well?” asked Johannes.

“I hear they are doing very well,” Sjoukje said. “I wonder how soon they will have the baptism, and a baby celebration? We could have the party here and invite our whole family. The first grandchild is a good reason for a party, isn’t it?”

“Ya, wife,” laughed Johannes, “that’s a wonderful reason to have a party.”

“I wonder,” asked Johannes, “Who will be the preacher to baptize our new little grandchild?”

“Well,” suggested Sjoukje, “We’ll just have to see how soon Titus and Anna will want to have the baptism done by the preacher there. I don’t think it matters much, you think?”

“No, I guess not,” responded Johannes.

1876 *

Johannes was excited. Sjoukje asked, “What’s going on, Johannes? You seem worked up over something.”

He responded, “I just heard from the clerk that **Rev. Boer⁴⁴⁰** is going to be preaching in our church Sunday.”

“Isn’t he the docent at our new Seminary?” wondered Sjoukje.

“Ya,” responded Johannes, “He became the professor of the seminary on March 15. It will be nice to hear him. Maybe it will give us a feel for how he will be teaching our own young men for the ministry.”⁴⁴¹^

“And as usual, we will invite him to eat with us and stay at our place, won’t we?” Sjoukje suggested.

“Ya, and if we get along, maybe we’ll extend him an invitation for any time he comes to preach here,” answered Johannes. “We can call one of our bedrooms the ‘prophet’s room.’”

“We have some new potatoes to treat him with, and some of that pig we just butchered,” offered Sjoukje. “We can treat him royally.”

⁴⁴⁰ ^ **Rev. Geert Boer was my great, great uncle.**

⁴⁴¹ March 15, 1876, *www: CRC Developments.*

After services on Sunday, Rev. Boer and Johannes were walking along the path home. “Thank you so much for coming to Vriesland, Rev. Boer,” Johannes tendered. “I hope you are enjoying life in this land. We certainly have felt blessed by the Lord to live here. When we came here we had virtually nothing but the land and our desire to develop a farm. Now we find ourselves living beyond what we could imagine if we had stayed in the Netherlands.”

^Rev. Boer responded, “I also have found my life has become well beyond what I expected. I was born on the farm too, you know, and I knew I was not going to make much of a living that way.⁴⁴² But then the Lord called me into the ministry. When I was invited to become a preacher here in America, I hesitated at first. I wondered if I wanted to bring up a family in this land away from all the familiar in the Old Country. But I have been pleased to be entrusted by the church to become the trainer of the future ministers. I just hope that I am up to the task.”

“Ya,” said Johannes, “I can see that would be quite a challenge. Before Rev. Van Leeuwen came here, we only had Rev. Van den Bosch as our circuit-riding preacher. I think he did not consider doing any such training of our future ministers. He was busy developing his farm so his family could eat. He served faithfully every Sunday, covering as many of our churches as he could.”

Rev. Boer opined, “I think under those circumstances, I could not be doing it either. Even just serving Spring Street Church made it difficult to keep up with training our young men. I’m not sure how Rev. Van der Werp was able to care for his flock, put together *De Wachter*, and also do this training.”

“That seems like quite a load for one minister,” agreed Johannes.

“It is,” said Rev. Boer, “but even in the three years I have been in this land, I have seen much growth in the church. It won’t be all that long and we will need more teachers for the seminary.”

Surprised, Johannes sat up straight, “Sjoukje, you’ve got to hear this!”

“What’s up, Johannes?” she asked.

“I see in *De Wachter* that the ^Rev, Van der Werp died on April 1.”⁴⁴³

“I’m surprised too,” responded Sjoukje. “He wasn’t all that old, was he?”

“No,” Johannes said, “he was sixty-five. He was born eleven years before me. *De Wachter* notes he was buried in the cemetery in Graafschap. I’m not surprised about that. He spent his major time in America serving the church there.”

“I suppose that *De Wachter* had many good things to say about him and his years here,” wondered Sjoukje.

⁴⁴² Boer, G., *Levensschets*, p. 23.

⁴⁴³*De Wachter*, April 13, 1876.

“I would expect that lots of good things were written about him. He certainly was a hard-working man in the church,” suggested Johannes.

“Well, I know he did preaching, he edited and wrote a lot in *De Wachter*,” Sjoukje said.

Johannes chimed in, “He also trained preachers for the church and carried on correspondence with other churches. He also travelled a lot helping organize groups around the country that wanted to become part of our denomination. He left his mark on our church all right.”

“Now, hubby, you make that sound a bit less appreciative,” answered Sjoukje.

“I’m afraid I do have some negative thoughts about his ministry among us,” Johannes admitted. “I don’t know if anyone else feels the same way as I do. But I think he did a disservice to our church that was not all that wonderful.”

“Like what, my dear husband?” Sjoukje asked encouragingly.

“Well, I told you that one of the first things he did at the first Classis meeting he attended was to reverse our decision on bringing in copies of the old 1619 Church Order. He convinced us that we should bring in the rule book used in the Netherlands. And I think that should have warned us he was bringing into our church whatever the church in the Old Country had decided. We never made any decisions that went against the Church Order as we remembered it. But he brought all the changes decided on in the Netherlands and assumed that we were going to live by them in our church assemblies.”

“Now that sounds like a lot of changes from the way you’re talking,” wondered Sjoukje.

“Ya,” said Johannes, “instead of deciding issues on the basis of the Church Order, he and the other ministers kept referring to the articles of the rule book they brought along. Now we run our church based on their rules, not our own decisions. That’s not what I expected. Just as I don’t farm the way they do over there, I see no reason for us to run the church here the way they do over there.”

“It sounds like you have built up some resentment over all that,” observed Sjoukje.

“I know I have,” responded Johannes. “Right from the start of his time here, he shut the doors to visitors at our assemblies too. He moved the preaching to after the meetings so people wouldn’t keep crowding in on the discussions. He seemed to want to shut off the many different opinions of our guests. But worse than that, he made us delegates feel like we didn’t have any reason to share our opinions either. He made us feel it was his way or no way.”

“Are you saying he made the church into his image instead of what we had hoped we would be?” suggested Sjoukje.

“Ya, a lot of the baggage we thought we left behind in the Netherlands came right back to haunt us here by the influence he and the other imported ministers had in our church. It just didn’t

seem like our church anymore.”

“You think we gave up the chance to grow a church with the worship riches we had for the colder theological ways of thinking that they brought along?” asked Sjoukje.

Johannes thoughtfully suggested, “If we had done our farming here like we had done in the Netherlands, we would still be in poverty. Now we have learned new ways that work over here and we have become successful farmers. I think our preachers never considered that they might need a new approach in this new land. I think I’ll always be wondering what kind of church we might have developed if we hadn’t felt the need to bring in the preachers from the Old Country,” Johannes admitted. “The ministers seem to want to control everything and every decision. Everything has to be approved by them.”⁴⁴⁴

“And many of them had known each other for quite a few years before they came here, hadn’t they?” added Sjoukje.

“Ya,” agreed Johannes, “even the earliest ones that came had studied under the same teachers, or attended the same assemblies, just like our Rev. Frieling knew several preachers here from over there. Almost like a good ol’ boys club.”

“And all the time they made you feel like you were too ignorant to participate in the important work of the church!” Sjoukje spoke up indignantly.⁴⁴⁴

“Ya, I’m afraid many of us in the pew slowly built up such feelings,” lamented Johannes.

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Johannes,” Sjoukje agreed, “that what we thought was a good thing, to bring preachers for our pulpits, turned out to be such a questionable idea.”

Johannes added, “As much as we’ve all read the Bible so many years, and have increased our knowledge in spiritual truths, none of us felt that we could begin training our young men for the ministry. I’m sure we have done a lot of informal training in our congregation for those who are choosing to prepare for ministry. But we seemed to think it needed more than people like Mr. Dam and Mr. Groen would be able to do. But I wonder....,” trailed off Johannes.

On November 9, 1876 Johannes and Sjoukje returned from the funeral of the Rev. Dr. Albertus Christian Van Raalte.⁴⁴⁴ “My,” Johannes reflected, “what a lot of people came to pay their respects to the Reverend! I think it is wonderful that he was so honored. There must have been near eighty carriages, including our own. And I wonder how many people were following on foot.”⁴⁴⁴

Sjoukje added, “Even though there has been a lot of criticism that Rev. Van Raalte had to endure throughout his leadership in *de Kolonie*, people came through with appreciation in the end.”

“Ya,” Johannes considered, “He may have made a few decisions that we did not approve of, but

⁴⁴⁴ Douma, H., “How Holland, Michigan, Remembers its Founding Father,” *Michigan Historical Review*, 36.2

his judgment on most matters had a very futuristic perspective. Without him Holland would not have existed and definitely would not have grown like it did. And the same is true for Zeeland and all of our smaller villages. I think history will continue to hold him in esteem.”

1878 *

One Sunday when everyone was sitting around the table, Wiebe spoke up, “That was a very nice service this morning. Rev. Hemkes is a good preacher, isn’t he?”⁴⁴⁵

Johannes answered, “Ya, we are pleased that he’s here. He’s been here a year now. But you know, there’s always something nagging in me. I know he was born in the early years of the *Afscheiding*, and he was a young man when Rev. Ypma was the pastor of their church in Hallum. He completed his training in Kampen. It just seems to me his preaching sounds different than the Old Fathers. In fact all the preachers I have heard seem different than I expected.”

“Sometimes,” he added, “I wonder whether we even need a preacher. Perhaps we would be more satisfied with the sermons of those Old Fathers. It seems like the preachers keep bringing in new ideas. I guess I sound kind of old fashioned in the church.”

Johannes smiled, “On the other hand I just bought a McCormick self-binder⁴⁴⁵ to harvest the grain, and maybe to rent out to other farmers to help them bring in the harvest.”

Wiebe said, “I sure could use your services to harvest my grain. What a time saver that would be.”

“That’s what I’m hoping others will say too. And I will need to use the equipment on other farms to help pay the high cost,” added Johannes.

Standing by the horse barn behind the church, Johannes observed to Elder Schepers, “Something has been slowly dawning on me about the history of the church in my lifetime.”

“What is it, Johannes?” asked Schepers.

“Maybe it’s a small difference, but I suspect that in the long run it sets an attitude in our minds that is important. We often talk about the Separation from the State Church in the Netherlands, and speak of our own Separation in 1857 as a parallel,” suggested Johannes.

“Ya, we often compare those two,” agreed Schepers.

⁴⁴⁵ Van Haitsma, J., *Family Legends*.

“I think,” said Johannes, “there’s a significant difference that is forgotten. In 1834 the ministers were all kicked out of the State Church, except Rev. Van Raalte who was never accepted into the State Church in the first place.”⁴⁴⁶ Now in 1857, the four letters of separation were from those of us who wanted to separate ourselves. We had a direction we wanted to take our church life. In 1834 that perspective developed afterwards, when a year later Rev. de Cock brought the various ministers together. We gathered ourselves together based on returning to the Old Standards.”

“How do you see that making a difference in our church?” asked Mr. Schepers.

“I think that our new ministers who all came out of the 1834 event are stirring the turmoil in the church newspapers because they want to prove our church had a right to separate. So they keep pointing to the weaknesses in the Dutch Reformed Church. We knew all that when we chose the way we wanted to go. So we all were thinking in positive directions. We had made our choices and knew they were the good direction that the church had wanted to go for over two hundred years.”

“And are you thinking all the articles about the weaknesses of the other church are a negative attitude that just spoils the peace in our communities?” Schepers wondered.

“Ya, I think those articles are focusing on what we want to get away from, while our churches started with where we wanted to go to. I believe that’s why so many churches are choosing to join our denomination. They want to go in the same way of following Jesus with faith and integrity,” suggested Johannes. “We called together the various congregations that had already gone their own independent way and invited them to walk the same path together.”

“Well,” suggested Schepers, “I don’t know how many would see the significance of that attitude. But I agree we should quit blasting our brothers and instead encourage each other to faithfulness.”

“Reverend Hemkes, what in the world is pushing this issue so strongly?” asked Johannes. “This Masonic issue has been around for a long time with no changes. And now many families are leaving the Reformed Church to join with our church. What is going on?”

“Mr. Van Haitsma,” responded the Reverend, “You know that I just recently came to this country and your church. I am not the best one to answer that question. But I do understand that it started in Classis Wisconsin of the Dutch Reformed Church. It seems to me that a Rev. Henry Karsten was the primary writer of letters to their Acts of Synod.”⁴⁴⁷^

“Oh, I know him!” Johannes said in surprise. “That man is the stepson of my late friend, Mr. Hendrik Dam here in the Vriesland area. His brother Peter is part of our council.”

⁴⁴⁶ Dosker, H., *Levensschets*, p. 12.

⁴⁴⁷ These letters are located in Calvin Archives.

“His stepfather must have been quite a man to raise a son willing to take on the Actions of Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church!” responded [^]Rev. Hemkes.

“Ya, he sure was. I learned a lot from him. He was a primary spark for the start and growth of our denomination,” answered Johannes.

Johannes came home late in the evening. “I’m weary of these meetings, Sjoukje. But something different came up tonight. It seems all our churches are having new members coming in. A lot of them are new immigrants from the Netherlands coming to America to better their lives, as we did forty years ago. But others are drifting out of the American Reformed Church because the awareness of the evil of the Masonic is growing.”[^]

Sjoukje asked, “Is that a good thing, Johannes? Or will that mean more conflict in our communities?”

“I guess we have to wait and see what that will mean. Right now it means we had several people come to the council meeting to ask to join our church. But that also means our building is getting more crowded.

“It is probably a good thing that people living in Overisel have asked permission to organize into a church in their area. You know they already have catechism meetings there. I think the Reverend will be doing some of that teaching along with Mr. J. Zwiers.⁴⁴⁸ It is a good thing we have supplied him with a good horse and buggy, which he enjoys using. He said something about that being so much better than in the Netherlands where he had to walk everywhere.”⁴⁴⁹

Sjoukje mused, “I guess more and more we will be hearing that things are much better for us here than if we had stayed in the Old Country.”

“I’m sure that the new immigrants will find that true for themselves too. And they won’t have to go through the primitive times that we had to,” considered Johannes.

“Sjoukje,” Johannes said, “I am so surprised at the number of people coming out of their way to see me work with the reaper[^]. I know that’s all so new. Maybe I should ask the company for a commission on showing the machine at work! Our farming was such back-breaking work. This reaper is a great change, especially since I’m not getting any younger! I just hope nobody will say I’m taking jobs away from people. I’m sure the sickle and scythe will be in use for many years yet.”

⁴⁴⁸Vriesland CRC Minutes, June 16, 1877, Art. 2.

⁴⁴⁹ Hemkes, G., *A Brief Historical Account of What Happened at the Christian Reformed Church at Vriesland, Michigan*, p. 5.

“I’m so happy for you, Johannes,” Sjoukje smiled. “My job in the house has also become a lot easier than when we first came here. Don’t you wonder what gadgets people will think of next?”

Johannes walked across the road to greet Wiebe. “Hey, Wiebe, how are things going? We haven’t talked for a while.”

“Ya, Johannes, it’s been a busy time getting all the harvesting done. There are still some low wet spots on my land that I have to fill in.”

“I still have a few areas too,” responded Johannes, “that need better draining and drying. I heard that Willemina is planning to make profession of faith at our next council meeting.”

“That’s what she would like to do. We have been talking for some time about it, and she’s convinced this is the next step she needs to take in her walk with the Lord.”

Johannes asked gently, “But what about you, Wiebe. You’re not a member of either church. Are you thinking about joining with her?”

“I’m sorry, Johannes,” Wiebe answered. “I am not prepared to join your church, but I am not prepared to join the Reformed Church either. I do not want to get into any argument about the churches. I have respect for your choice twenty years ago, but please don’t push.”

Johannes responded, “It grieves me to think that maybe I might have made decisions that ended up causing some friction in your family. I very much want us to live in peace, in both home and church. I don’t want to be the one that pulls you and Willemina apart.”

“Now, Johannes, you don’t have to worry about that. Willemina and I are perfectly okay with the choices we are making. She really enjoys the preaching of Rev. Hemkes so much more than the services at the Reformed Church,^ and I’m fine with that. I respect her feelings and choices. Ever since Pa was shut out of communion, I have not been so faithful at the church anyway. It just hasn’t been comfortable for me. Over the years my feelings have gone up and down. It’s taken me years to forgive them.”

“I’m sorry about that,” replied Johannes. “That’s twenty-five years ago. Isn’t it amazing that our hurts can leave such a long trail? I know we tend not to be aware of unintended consequences of our decisions. But I think I have never realized how much my choices in the start of our church impacted on others. Maybe especially on you and Jetse. You have lived in the shadow of the church building all these years. Now I have a nagging question in my heart: was it all worth it?”

Wiebe responded, “I know it’s a long time ago, but ya, it has been kind of uncomfortable for me around the whole church thing. And I guess I’ve also wondered if it was all worth it.”

Johannes said, “We’ve never really talked about this, have we? I know I’ve had strong feelings.”

“Ya,” said Wiebe, “I kind of knew that, and I was able to talk with Willemina, so I didn’t get all bothered up about it. Once in a while we talked with Pa and Ma about those days. ”

Johannes agreed, “Sjoukje and I have talked about these events a lot. But other than that I haven’t really talked with anyone about them. I think I’ve been afraid of getting too passionate about it all; I might let out a torrent of frustration.”

He continued, “One thing I have become aware of over the years is that our church also has changed since 1857. Some things have become less important, and it seems that our preachers just do not preach as I expected. I know times change, but we were so insistent on the 1619 Standards, and I’m not sure we even really knew what they were about.”⁴⁵⁰

He added, “When Willemina makes her profession of faith,⁴⁵⁰ I hope you will come along. And I would like to invite you and your family to come to dinner that day.”

1879

“Another church council meeting over,” Johannes said to Sjoukje after returning home. “Last year we added new members, and then this year we organized the church in Overisel. That helped even-out the crowding of our church. Tonight the council has approved a tentative plan for the organization of the church in Jamestown. I knew this was coming, because Titus had mentioned it to me.”

Sjoukje responded, “For years our little church remained our little church. Now there’s a new spirit and we are expanding and organizing new churches in the area. God seems to be doing some new work in our denomination.⁴⁵¹ I hope we do not lose connection with our standards.”

1880 *

In May 1880, sharing the buggy ride with Elder Peter Karsten, Johannes observed, “Tonight we are forming the second church to come out of our Vriesland congregation.⁴⁵² It will mean less travel for the members from Jamestown. I’m glad for them, and I pray that the Lord will bless them just as richly as He has our congregation.”

Johannes admitted to Karsten, “I’m also interested in hearing again the preacher from the seminary. I understand that Rev. Hemkes and Rev. Boer went to Kampen Seminary together, and also that Rev. Nicholas Steffens was a classmate of theirs.⁴⁵² I wonder if he will be here too. I heard that Rev. Steffens just became the pastor of the Reformed Church in Zeeland.”

⁴⁵⁰*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, May 8, 1878, Art.: Hilligje (Willemina) Haagendoorn.

⁴⁵¹*Ibid.*, June 4, 1877, Art. 2; May 30, 1878, Art. 2; Aug. 6, 1878, Art. 4; Dec. 26, 1879, Art. 4.

⁴⁵²*Ibid.*, Dec. 26, 1879, Art. 4; May 7, 1880, Art. 4.

Karsten replied, “I don’t understand how Rev. Boer and Rev. Steffens, coming from the same seminary, can have such different opinions, that they are in different denominations here.”^

“I heard there are several other ministers who also came from the same seminary in Kampen. Some became ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church just as some have become ministers in our church,” noted Johannes. “That is hard for me to understand considering that they admit Masonic members into their church.”

Entering the church building in Jamestown, Johannes greeted friends and relatives. Johannes’ eye sought out his son Titus, “Hi there, son. I’m glad you are here tonight. How’s the farm doing for you?” Turning a bit, he saw daughter-in-law Anna. “Hi, Anna,” he greeted her. “How are you and your baby doing? Will this be a boy or a girl? I expect neighbors have made predictions.”

Anna gave him a shy hug, “We’re both doing fine, Pa. I’m eager to find out too if this will be a helper for Titus or for me.”

Johannes felt a tug on his pants, and looked down, “Hi. little lady,” he said, reaching down to pick up his first granddaughter, Dena. “It is good to see you. My, you are growing up so fast. ”

Looking around more he saw his daughter Elizabeth and hugged her. “Hi, Lizbeth, you are looking good.” He saw his son-in-law Hendrik holding little one-year-old Bert. He reached out to have Bert wrap his hand around a finger. He felt another tug, and looking down he saw Susie, almost a twin of her cousin. “Well,” he said, “This is a family reunion! I’m sorry Ma is not with me. Mr. Karsten and I came in a two-seat buggy.

He wandered to the front where he was expected to sit with other elders and deacons during the service. Mr. Karsten had sat down already, but had saved a seat next to him. He said, “Thanks, Mr. Karsten, I had to greet my family on the way in. Thanks for saving me a seat.”

Johannes craned his neck to see if he could glimpse Rev. Boer, whom he expected to be sitting with Rev. Hemkes. But both must have still been in the council room, waiting to come in with the whole council of the new Jamestown church. He could smell the cigar smoke seeping out of the council room.^

Following the inauguration service, tables outside were loaded with food and surrounded with chairs. As one of the official representatives of the mother church, Johannes was seated at the head table. He turned to Rev. Boer, shook his hand, and said, “Rev. Boer, how good to meet you again. I’ve been waiting for this opportunity to get to know you better. I am Johannes Van Haitsma, deacon of the Vriesland mother congregation.”

Rev. Boer returned his greeting, “Ya, I remember. It is good to see you again. I understand this is the second congregation that has started out of the Vriesland congregation. How are the numbers holding up?”

Johannes said, “We have been receiving member transfers from Reformed churches and new immigrants are also helping to keep the church full.” The two men were deep in conversation when Karsten motioned he was ready to head for home.

One day Andrew approached Johannes with an idea. “Say, Pa,” Andrew ventured, “You know that some of my friends have been industrious in finding a way to have their dogs do the hard and tedious work of churning the milk for butter. Is it okay with you if I try my hand at that too?”⁴⁵³

“Well, son, I have heard that too,” responded Johannes. “I think that’s definitely worth a try! We do need to keep on developing ways to be most efficient. There’s plenty of work to do on the farm, as you know. And some work-saving methods can make our day easier. Ya, go ahead and see what you can do. Does it make a difference what kind of dog works best?”

“I don’t know, Pa,” answered Andrew. “My friends who have been successful have a variety of dogs, some big and some smaller.”

Johannes surmised, “So you think maybe our average-sized mixed breed dog might be okay for what you have in mind?”

“Ya, pa, I think so,” responded Andrew.

“Son, go for it. And let me know what you will need that we don’t have around the house.”

“Thanks, Pa,” Andrew said. “I’m interested in giving it a try.”

The council got back together after a little break time. The smoke-filled room reminded them they had been talking for some time. Deacon Johannes spoke up, “We have a request from the family of the chief that he be buried in our little cemetery. I think it may be a little surprising that they want him buried here⁴⁵⁴ instead of the old Indian Cemetery by Black Lake. But I think they have been pleased to be part of our church these years.”

Another old timer spoke up, “But he’s not Dutch.”^

“I know,” retorted Johannes, “but he has been attending for years now. He heard us singing in the woods when we first were cutting down our trees. And he was not afraid to stay around when so many of his people moved north to Traverse City. We were the strange ones, and he became part of our community. Look how well he adapted to our farming way of life and how he became part of our church community. He even learned to talk a bit Friesian with us!”

⁴⁵³ Kuiper, R., *Voice*, p. 54.

⁴⁵⁴ *Vriesland Cemetery Records*.

“When we first were here and I went to work in the logging camps to bring some cash home, he was looking out for Sjoukje’s safety. He hardly knew us, but he did know the dangers in these dense woods,” continued Johannes.

“Not long ago,” said Elder Roersma, “my son told me something about the chief. About ten years ago, my son was trapping beaver near the swamp. He said he heard some noises in the woods, and heard some grunting. He figured it was a bear! Oh, he got scared. He was paralyzed with fear. He couldn’t run. Then out of the corner of his eye he saw a man come running with gun in hand. It was the chief. He told my son to run home. ‘That bear never got close to me,’ my son said. **The chief shot at the bear and scared him away**[^]. My son said he was still shaking when he got home, but he was safe. But he was too embarrassed to tell us then. He had been careless in not watching out for bears. And he did not want to be told he could never go trapping again. So I vote we say ‘yes’ to the request of the chief’s family.”

“And,” spoke up another elder, “We do have a commitment to Jesus to witness to the nations. It is one of the reasons we came here to America.⁴⁵⁵ It has been easy to be so busy at work and not think about that, but the chief has certainly been part of our mission field.”

[^]Johannes said, “I think there’s more to it. He hasn’t actually joined our church, but he’s been a Christian for years. Already before we came, he occasionally heard old Rev. Smith preach in their village church on the Black Lake shore. He told me some years ago that he has learned to love Jesus just as we do. He said he was impressed by us coming to his country wearing wooden shoes. He could see we didn’t know how to handle an axe. He couldn’t figure out why we wanted to live among these trees. But he could see how much we loved to sing songs while we cut those trees. Even though he couldn’t understand what we were singing, he knew we were singing to Jesus.”

“He learned from Rev. Smith that we had come to this land of freedom because of our love for Jesus. He saw us as fellow believers when he left a hunk of deer meat by our door. He cared enough to stay when most of his tribe went north. He no longer wanted to live in a tribe that fell into drinking binges. He felt a stranger among us, but he knew we also felt ourselves to be strangers in this land, and certainly among the few Indians left in *de Kolonie*.”

On hearing that testimony, the chairman asked, “Are there any objections to this request?”

The rest of the council murmured in agreement. **And so it was that the Indian chief was buried in the Vriesland Church cemetery, just across the street from the church he had learned to love.**[^]

1881 *

Relaxing with *De Wachter* on a Sunday evening, Johannes observed to Sjoukje, “Interesting!”

⁴⁵⁵ Carroll, J., *Holland: Missional Community. First Church of Holland Minutes*, Nov. 24, 1851. Van Eyck, W., *Landmarks of the Reformed Fathers*.

Sjoukje took the bait, “What is so interesting, dear husband?”

“There is an article by Rev. Steffens, minister of the Reformed Church in Zeeland,” offered Johannes.

“Ya, and what is that about?” asked Sjoukje.

“He’s writing about all the arguments in *De Wachter* over the differences between the Dutch Reformed and our own church. He says if we have differences, why not just quietly go our own way? Well, that is just what we intended to do in 1857. Back then we didn’t even extend invitations to those who shouted the loudest at Classis Holland. We didn’t reject them; we just did not invite them to our initial meeting about coming together as a church.”

“Ya,” added Sjoukje, “that was important to us all, wasn’t it?”

“Ya,” responded Johannes, “we thought that was the best way to get along in our communities, and the best way to respond to Rev. Wyckoff’s offer to go back to being by ourselves.”

“It seems, somehow, not everyone got that message, did they?” wondered Sjoukje.

“No,” answered Johannes. “The other day **Rev. Hemkes** ^stopped me and asked me about Rev. Wyckoff’s visit with Tede Ulberg. It seems our Reverend had heard about that and is busy writing a book about the right of our church to exist. I don’t know why that’s so important to him. He asked me if I’d heard Mr. Ulberg talk about that visit, and I said, ‘Ya, we talked often, living next door to each other in those years.’ So I asked him what he was interested in. He said that he had heard several of us would gladly testify to Tede’s statement that he heard Rev. Wyckoff give his conditional offer of walking away from the union with the Reformed Church. And I told him that I would be glad to do so if it was important.”

“What did he say to that?” wondered Sjoukje.

“He said he was going to include the idea in his book.”

“Then I also mentioned to him that Mr. Ulberg had written an account for the 25th Anniversary for Holland and I believed he told that story then and it was published. So his account is already public information. Rev. Hemkes seemed pleased with that, and we both went on our way.”⁴⁵⁶

1882*

Johannes walked to the south end of his farm looking over the field to see if the low areas were dry enough for plowing and planting. He crossed the fence to the manse and knocked. “Rev. Hemkes,” he said as the Reverend opened the door, “do you have a few minutes to talk?”

⁴⁵⁶Hemkes, G., *Gerechtsbestaan*, pp. 191, 384. Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 284, ff.

“Why, sure,” answered the Reverend, “it’s always good to visit with you, Mr. Van Haitsma. What’s on your mind?”

“I’m thinking,” responded Johannes, “or rather Sjoukje and I were thinking, about the years gone by. This 28th of April will be the 25th anniversary of our congregation and of the True Dutch Reformed Church. I have not heard of any plans to celebrate this milestone.⁴⁵⁷ And there are so many reasons to celebrate what the Lord has accomplished in this church and our denomination. Ten years ago the *Kolonie* celebrated its 25th anniversary. Ours comes a decade later.”

Rev. Hemkes asked, “What kind of reasons to celebrate comes to mind, Mr. Van Haitsma?”

Johannes responded, “On April 23, 1857 we agreed to return together as a church to the Standards and Church Order of 1619. To tell you the truth, I think that solemn agreement was the only thing that kept us together in the beginning, along with the work of God in our meetings. The first ten years were years of testing and turmoil among ourselves. There probably was no Classis meeting in which someone in the leadership did not have to apologize for things said or done to others in the church. That we survived ourselves and each other was a great blessing of the Lord.”

“Who all were involved in making that agreement, Mr. Van Haitsma?” the Reverend queried.

“Our elder Mr. Dam, God rest his soul, felt inspired by God to pull the groups together. He told me he was afraid that each group would go off on its own if we did not quickly try to bring us together. So our fellowship group in Vriesland extended an invitation to the greater part of the Graafschap Church, to the Polkton congregation, to Rev. Klyn and the independent church in Grand Rapids, and to Reverend Van den Bosch of Noordeloos. And a week later, on April 23, we came together and committed ourselves to those standards. We then set a meeting date on April 28 to hold our first Classis meeting. We followed the pattern we had heard that the Separated Church in the Netherlands did in 1835.”

“Did Mr. Dam have any reasons to fear that every group could go its separate way?” asked Rev. Hemkes.

Johannes responded, “Oh, ya! Back in 1852, Rev. Smit in Drenthe pulled most of the church there into the Scottish Presbyterian. Elder Smit in Graafschap, with Student Schepers, did the same with part of the Graafschap congregation. Rev. Duin took most of Noordeloos into an independent direction. Gysbert Haan Sr. also took part of the 2nd Reformed Dutch Church in Grand Rapids in an independent way. Graafschap became independent and at first planned to connect with the church in the Old Country.”⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷*CRC General Assembly, Acts of Synod, 1882.* The minutes have no mention of a 25th anniversary. *1st CRC Grand Rapids History* noted “In 1882 we were twenty-five years old, but the event was not commemorated in any special way.”

⁴⁵⁸*Graafschap CRC History:* Independence seems to have the normal direction for the churches and ministers whose letters of separation were read at Classis Holland on April 8, 1857. Classis Holland, April 2, 1856 reported that G. Haan encouraged Rev. Smit, who had separated in 1852, to go independent also.

“I was present with Mr. Dam and Elder Ulberg when they discussed the letters that went to these churches. I personally delivered one of the letters to Rev. Klyn while Mr. Dam and Mr. Ulberg delivered them in the other directions. Elder Dam felt that there would be only a small window of opportunity to bring these groups together or they would all go into different directions. So within three weeks or so of Classis Holland receiving the separation letters, we formed this denomination.”

“Oh, my,” exclaimed Reverend Hemkes. “What foresight and wisdom Elder Dam had! Has anyone of you thought to write down the account of that happening?”

“No,” said Johannes. “As far as I am aware, none of us has made a record of that time.”⁴⁵⁹^

“What other ideas would be part of a 25th celebration?” asked Rev. Hemkes.

Johannes thought a bit, “Well certainly after those early years of barely holding together, we can celebrate the rapid expansion since then. Congregations are springing up in other states; new immigrants are forming groups that want to join on the same basis. There are churches in the East who are considering joining with us. These are all wonderful reasons for rejoicing. And even now I am hearing about five congregations, including our neighbor Drenthe, who are talking about the possibility of joining our denomination.

Johannes continued, “It’s like a parallel to our farming here in the *Kolonie*. The first years we were barely able to create farms out of the woods and had limited food available. Now we have rich acres of farmland for miles around. Or like our own family, Sjoukje and I came here with no children, and then in 1851 we started having children. Now we have seven children and some grandchildren. That’s what we need to celebrate in our church. ‘Ebenezer.’ Yes, God has helped us to this point.”

Rev. Hemkes responded, “You are right, Mr. Van Haitsma, these are all wonderful reasons for celebrating and for thanking God. I will plan for that in our service in the middle of April. The existence of this church is truly a work of God. Thank you so much for coming and sharing this idea with me.”

Rev. Hemkes got up from his chair, and Johannes knew the conversation was over. He walked over the rough ground of his fields back to home and Sjoukje.

“Sjoukje,” he said on entering his home, “I don’t know if anything will come of this celebration idea.”

“Well, Johannes,” she replied, “you have offered the idea. We can at least have our family celebration of the anniversary.”

⁴⁵⁹ ^ There are no accounts of the beginning of the CRC in any of the letters published in the immigrant memoirs. Dam and Ulberg did leave small records, but not with any mention of a constitutional event. The CRC Classical Assembly noted the need to try to find such records, but none were reported.

“One of the frustrations,” murmured Johannes, ^“is that we *Kleine Luy* get pretty much discounted, don’t we? At least we can take it seriously ourselves. I think we should have our 25th anniversary celebration on April 28, the day our church denomination was constituted and held its first official Classis meeting.”

He continued, “I’m sorry Mr. Dam is no longer with us. He was the true spirit of our “returning” church. He was gentle in criticism and kind in affirmation. He faithfully shared with us the Old Fathers’ teachings. The fellowship meetings we held together those years from 1850 till we constituted our church in 1857 were such wonderful times of worship.⁴⁶⁰ I can understand why sometimes we wish we had never organized into a church.”

“Ya, Sjoukje,” lamented Johannes, “we had no thought that the idea of being a ‘Church’ would bring such a change in our ways of worship. We ended up opening a can of worms, didn’t we, in actually becoming a church organization?”^

“It seems,” said Sjoukje “that a whole new way of thinking and new values became important. And now we look back and wonder if those changes were worth the gains when our denomination is becoming more and more preacher-dominated.”^

^Johannes observed, “I wonder if old Rev. de Cock of Ulrum, who organized the Separated Church in Groningen,⁴⁶¹ ever regretted moving away from the fellowship groups that seemed to be the vitalizing force of the whole Christian community. It appears that calling ourselves a ‘church’ pushed us into a frame of thought that had been burned into our collective brain throughout the history of the church.”

“Those fellowship meetings we had during the week sure gave us motive to come to church every week, didn’t they? But somehow we returned to where we didn’t want to go. In the Netherlands the government imposed rules on us; now here we impose rules on ourselves and each other and we also import rules from the church in the Netherlands. Why, we even have a censorship committee to make sure we publish only approved books and listen to approved sermons.⁴⁶² It begins to make us look like the church we didn’t want to be a part of here in *deKolonie*. What are we doing to ourselves?”

Sjoukje observed, “Maybe it isn’t worth celebrating after all?”

“Sjoukje,” Johannes gazed out the window. “Do you suppose celebrating my 60th birthday would even be a good idea?”

“Ya, Johannes, in fact I have already invited our family to join us for a party.”

“Oh? I didn’t know,” responded Johannes. “It’s not supposed to be a surprise party, is it?”

⁴⁶⁰ Vander Werp, H., *Outline*, p. 11.

⁴⁶¹ Keizer, G., *Afscheiding*, p. 26. Swierenga, R., *Brothers*, p. 1. Cox, H., *Seduction*, p. 184.

⁴⁶²CRC *Classical Assembly*, April 28, 1869, Art. 25, p. 201; June 6, 1880, Art. 58; June 15, 1881, Art. 79.

“No, dear, the 60th birthday is too important an event to leave it a surprise. Not everyone reaches that goal in life, as you are well aware.”

“We have seen too many early deaths, haven’t we?” noted Johannes. “I suspect over half of the people in America don’t live that long.”

“So, we need to celebrate. The Lord has blessed you with long life as well as so many other blessings,” Sjoukje observed.

“I hope you told everyone to come without a gift? I surely don’t need any more things or socks. You keep me well supplied with wonderful warm socks.”

“Ya, I made them promise. But you know the kids and grandkids; they may not be able to resist bringing you something. You’d better be ready to thank them kindly without telling them ‘you shouldn’t have!’ Each would like their gifts to be appreciated.”

“Ya, I think I’d better remember that a gift received is itself a gift,” reminisced Johannes. “And if any one does ask, I wouldn’t mind a nice long clay pipe. They smoke so smooth.”

Sjoukje chuckled, “Now, why doesn’t that surprise me?”

Johannes exuded pride. He said, “I am amazed.”

“What about, Johannes?” queried Sjoukje.

“That so many people have been coming through our church.”

“Ya, there have been a lot, haven’t there?”

“Ya. First we saw the people south of Drenthe start their own church in Overisel. Others left to become members in Beaverdam and Jamestown. And we still have quite a lot of people. From those early years to today this church has been such a blessing to us. So many others have been blessed as they have answered the peal of our church bell and come through our doors. Who’d a thought?”

“God can begin wonderful works from small beginnings, can’t He?” Sjoukje reflected. “I know that Graafschap and Grand Rapids have many more members, but neither of them spawned off so many congregations.”

“I think we just have to be pleased to serve the Lord in our own little acre,” observed Johannes. “And we need to be ready for whatever the Lord would like to do through us in that acre. For us it has been this growth, but what God has for us to do for Him in the years ahead we just have to

wait and see. Just like in the spring we have to wait and see what the harvest will be like in the late summer and fall.”

On a beautiful summer evening Johannes and Sjoukje relaxed in their back yard. Johannes said, “I can’t believe what’s been happening this last year, Sjoukje. Our neighbor church has been steadily losing members over the Masonic issue since last October. At least fifteen members of the Reformed Church left the Vriesland congregation and joined our congregation just this month.”⁴⁶³

“That’s been happening at a lot of churches, hasn’t it?” wondered Sjoukje.

“Ya, I know many have long objected to allowing Masons as church members. But in the last few years this has really become a noisy issue for the churches. Our own *De Wachter* has given quite a lot of attention to it too. It seems to me kind of simple. We’ve been told the faith of the Masonic is not Christian. I don’t quite understand the name given to it, ‘Deism.’ But if it is not Christian, why should the church tolerate that faith in the congregations?”[^]

“Well, understand it or not,” Sjoukje responded, “I’m glad some people are choosing to become part of our church. With the number of people who have left us for the new churches closer to their homes, it’s nice to have some new blood come in to fill up our pews again.”

“I too am glad that they consider our church a good home for them,” agreed Johannes. “You know, I was talking with Elder Yntema the other day. And he wondered why our *De Wachter* was spilling so much ink over that Masonic issue. He said that it is an issue in the Reformed Church and they’re having enough arguments about it in their own papers. Why do the writers in our *De Wachter* have so much to say about that?”^{464^}

“How did you respond to that, Johannes?” Sjoukje wondered.

“I admitted to Yntema that it seems to me that our ministers and writers in *De Wachter* are doing a lot of meddling. I agreed that we had settled the Masonic issue for ourselves when we decided on the foundations for our church[^]. We really do have plenty enough issues of our own to keep our minds and hearts busy in honoring the Lord.”

1883 *

“It dawns on me,” Johannes looked up from his record keeping, “that almost our entire Van Haitsma family has in one way or another become part of this church. *Pake* and *Beppe* started coming to the fellowship before the church was organized; we were part of that fellowship

⁴⁶³Vriesland RCA Minutes, Oct. 3, 1881 to Aug., 1882.

⁴⁶⁴Hemkes, G. *Gerechtsbestaan*, p. 191.

group; Tjalling and family became members; Wiebe became a baptized member; now Jetse was honored by our council in being asked to teach the youth.⁴⁶⁵ Sietske moved to Jamestown. Only brother Wopke remained part of the Vriesland Dutch Reformed Church.”

“It has been wonderful that our family has been so together all these years with no discord over church membership,” agreed Sjoukje. “Some families were split over the church issues. I know Wopke did not join us, but he never seemed to feel there was any need to dispute anything.”

“He and I talked about that before this church was even started, and he said he didn’t feel any need to leave the Dutch Reformed Church, but would never cause any disagreement over it all,” Johannes remembered. “It is good when brothers live together in unity, isn’t it?”

Sjoukje added, “And Wopke has his own diaconal ministry in his church, just like you have had here.”

“I am sorry for any friction that my being part of the start of this church might have brought into other families. I know I’m not responsible for how they are reacting to each other, but I feel bad about it anyway,” Johannes confessed. “It is wonderful that all the people in Vriesland, no matter which church they go to, are all ready to work together to help each other, and to join in the harvesting crews and barn raisings.”

“Ya, we do live in a peaceful community, don’t we? I do love it,” smiled Sjoukje.

Johannes began to chuckle while waiting for the signal to walk down the aisle with his wife to their assigned seats. He said to Sjoukje, “I’d been watching Peter and Andrew in their contest for the heart of Gertie Brower.⁴⁶⁶ They were in obvious competition for her.”

“Evidently Andrew won out with Gertie, and Peter knew he had to look elsewhere. He did well though, finding his Katie. She’s a wonderful person and will make a marvelous wife for Peter,” Sjoukje said with motherly satisfaction.

“I think both boys have chosen well. Andrew’s wedding may be a ways off yet, but I wouldn’t be surprised if Peter and Katie will be married soon,”⁴⁶⁷ offered Johannes. “After all, he is the older of those two boys.”

“I’m glad that **Rev. Hemkes is still available to conduct the wedding**[^]. At least he’s gotten to know our family somewhat over these years,” suggested Sjoukje.

“Ya,” agreed Johannes, “a familiar preacher does make the event more memorable, doesn’t it?”

⁴⁶⁵ *Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Art. 4: On Dec. 20, 1883, the council asked Jetse if he would teach the youth.

⁴⁶⁶ Van Haitsma, *Family Legends*.

⁴⁶⁷ Peter’s wedding was on April 20, 1883.

Shortly after the 1883 Synod meeting, Elder Karsten came to Johannes, “Oh, Johannes. I am so disturbed!”

“Why, Mr. Karsten,” said Johannes, “what’s happened?”

Karsten said, “You know I was delegated to the Synod meeting.⁴⁶⁸ And the past president of Synod, as usual, made an opening statement of welcome.”

“Ya,” answered Johannes. “I realize that the pattern at Synod is a little different than the pattern at Classis meetings. So what happened there to bother you so much, brother?”

“Well,” said Karsten “our former pastor, Rev. Frieling, was the past president and so he made the opening speech. You’ll never guess what his opinion is of those of us who have helped make the church into a reality.”

“Now you really do have me curious,” said Johannes.

^The elder went on, “Rev. Frieling said, ‘At the time of our origin, our number seemed very small indeed, and in addition to this, we were woefully lacking in talents and strength...’ and he noted that we had ‘weaknesses and impotence.’ It’s bad enough that he reported that we were criticized by the Mother Church, and that our actions ‘were judged very improper.’⁴⁶⁹ But to have our own former minister express such a low opinion of those of us who struggled through the early years,” Karsten struggled for words, “I was shocked and saddened.”

“Ya,” spoke up Johannes, “I had no idea he thought so little of us. I had no idea his heart was so against us. Maybe that’s why his services and sermons left me sort of cold. He really did not give off the same warm vibes that the Old Fathers did. I don’t mean that his doctrine was off, or that his applications were wrong, just that he never seemed to give the kind of uplift we got from those reading services.”

“Ya,” responded Mr. Karsten, “sometimes I too have wondered if having ministers was such a good idea.”

⁴⁶⁸CRC Classical Assembly, May 23, 1883, Art. 9. Mulder, A., *Americans*, p. 181.

⁴⁶⁹Kuiper, R., *Voice*, p. 85. Cox, H., *Seduction*, p. 274. Beets, H., *Church*, p. 67. These all seem to share this low estimate also: “That there is and should be logical and biblical growth and development, also of the Calvinistic system of truth was, we presume, not grasped by many, if any, of our Pilgrim Fathers of Michigan.” Kromminga, J., *The Christian Reformed Church*, p. 42: “It is worthy of special note that this interest [in ‘fundamental theological questions’] was shared in a full measure by the ...rank and file of the membership of the church.” Though elsewhere he shows the same low estimate of the founders. Van Koeveren, A., *Legends*, p. 507: “Their (the membership of the churches) ignorance and prejudice were not inductive to sound judgment.” Haan, G., in *Gedenkboek* who knew his Vriesland neighbors well, in 1857 and following, shows appreciation for their ‘sound judgment,’ p. 244. Kromminga, D., *Tradition*, p. 99 echoes the same sentiment. In contrast, 1853 *NY Tribune* opinion printed in 1855 re the people of the *Kolonie*, contrast with the CRC clergy opinion. The reporter, D.C.H., visited the *Kolonie* in Autumn 1853, published Oct 8, 1855 in *NY Tribune* (but not found in the www copy of that day) and noted: “The colonists are generally well educated in their own language, and many have acquired a good acquaintance with the English, French, and German languages, besides possessing a knowledge of the classics.” Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 366: “They represent a large and influential class of the people of Holland [NL]...”

“Maybe,” murmured Johannes, “it is that low opinion they have about us that results in ministers thinking they must run the church, and why the committees are almost entirely filled with ministers. They don’t realize we regular members are the backbone of the church. As Jesus pointed out, we are all expected to be servants of each other.”⁴⁷⁰

“It’s kind of ironic, isn’t it?” said Mr. Karsten, “we spend so much time and energy in our council meetings on calling a minister, and then when one comes, we end up not feeling so good about him.” And he added, “I’ve seen some of the minutes of Classis Holland of the Reformed Church, and they noted that even Rev. Van Raalte was inclined to think of us as ‘*Kleine Luy.*’ He also tended to have a low opinion of us regular members of the community. As much as I have respected his leadership of the *Kolonie*, that attitude is really disrespecting of us.”⁴⁷¹

“Ya, I agree that’s disturbing,” uttered Johannes.

“Well, here’s some good news coming out of Synod,” Johannes expressed.

Sjoukje was all ears, “Ya?”

“I hear that because there are so many people leaving the Netherlands for America, Synod is going to prepare a brochure to distribute over there. They want to give information about our churches here and also give connecting information so people can find help to avoid the shysters all along the line.”

“It was helpful for us, wasn’t it,” Sjoukje remembered, “to have the packing lists and some names to help us make connections?”

“Ya, without that help we would have made costly mistakes along the way. The other thing is that Synod is going to place missionaries in the areas in South Dakota⁴⁷² where cousin Anske and family are moving.”

Johannes continued, “I don’t know what Anske’s relation to the Lord is, but to have missionaries encouraging people to keep faith with Jesus will be a good thing.”

“Ya,” added Sjoukje, “there are enough problems just getting a foothold in this new country. It will be a great help to have people point the way to Jesus and the church.”

⁴⁷⁰ Matthew 13:12-17.

⁴⁷¹Mulder, A., *Americans*, p. 112. For a higher opinion of the *Kolonists*:[^] “They were not fiery rabble-rousers, but the people were like people of any land, with only a limited amount of public schooling, men and women of good sense rather than of intellectual attainments; deeply versed, however, most of them, in the theological subtleties that constituted their breath of life. ” “...the congregations were composed in large part of people who in the narrow sense of theological disputation were far superior to the typical travelers over sawdust trails.” The pejorative opinion of the tradesmen, craftsmen, laborers, and small farmers and small-income people who were the backbone of the Secession in 1834 and 1857 seems to be shared by the elitist historiographers such as Brat, Swierenga, Kromminga, and also A. Kuiper and H. Cox.

⁴⁷²CRC *Classical Assembly*, April 26, 1882, Art. 60.

“It’s amazing to me,” Sjoukje shared, “that now thirty and forty years after we came, some more of our relatives are also migrating here. I guess things haven’t improved much in the fatherland.”

“I hear,” said Johannes, “that there has been another recession there, and the labor outlook isn’t any better now than in our day. Aren’t we blessed to have come here and have our lives so much more comfortable! And there are also far more prospects for our children.”

“Yes,” agreed Sjoukje, “we have been blessed beyond measure.”

The council meeting lasted long into the night. There was one issue left. The chairman reported, “The Drenthe church has requested that we share our minister between us.⁴⁷³ They are asking that he preaches and teaches catechism in both churches, and also that he do pastoral visits in both locations. They are willing to share the salary and costs of Rev. Hemkes. Anyone have a comment?”

One senior elder said, “Now, isn’t that something! Way back in 1848 the Drenthe church asked to share Rev. Ypma.⁴⁷⁴ That did not work very long because of disputes about the pastor’s salary. But I can understand why Drenthe would make the request this time, their having so many people and no pastor.”

After considerable discussion, Elder Terhaar spoke up, “With the smaller congregation that we have now since we have split our membership to distant places, it would certainly be helpful for us to share the cost of the Reverend’s salary.”

Johannes sensed a generous spirit among the brothers, and as one of the deacons with awareness of the congregation’s finances, he added, “I think it is a good idea. We certainly can use the help with our finances. How do you feel about that, Rev. Hemkes? That arrangement would make your work load considerably heavier.”

Rev. Hemkes said, “I am okay with that, but I really did not want to enter into the decision. This has to be your decision and I will abide by it. So, if there is no further discussion, let’s vote on it.” After the vote he continued, “As I hear it, the ‘Ya’s’ have it. We have approved their request.”

A few months later, Johannes shared with Elder Brink “Maybe we should have seen this coming.”

“What, Johannes?” Brink asked.

⁴⁷³*Drenthe CRC History.*

⁴⁷⁴*Vriesland RCA Minutes, Introduction.*

“That sharing our preacher with Drenthe was going to mean we’d lose some of our members to Drenthe. We lost so many when we started Overisel, Beaverdam and Jamestown. Those we could foresee and plan for. But this we didn’t. A number of our Vriesland congregation who live toward the south have transferred to Drenthe. And it does make sense for them to do that because it’s the same minister. Now they have considerably less traveling to get to church.”

“Ya,” agreed Brink, “now instead of being overcrowded, we have empty pews again. Maybe we should consider blocking off some of the back pews so we don’t scatter across the sanctuary so much.”

“That certainly seems easier than putting up a partition as someone has suggested,” agreed Johannes.

“This loss of membership to the Drenthe Church has been discouraging to our congregation,” Sjoukje said to Johannes. “I wonder if there is any chance of rebuilding our membership?”

“I don’t know,” said Johannes. “I know there are still new immigrants coming over from the Old Country. But they would have to settle somewhere in this neighborhood, and I’m not sure how many properties are for sale here. Every farm along the roads here is going strong.”

“Elder Karsten,” Johannes asked, “I hear that Rev. Hendrik Vander Werp has accepted the call to serve the Drenthe church.”⁴⁷⁵

“Ya, Mr. Van Haitsma, that will be good news for them.”[^] They were happy to share Rev. Hemkes with us, but they have now grown so much they will be happy to have their own minister.”

Johannes wondered, “Do you think they might consider returning the favor we showed by sharing Rev. Hemkes?”

Karsten said thoughtfully, “Maybe they will. It sure is easier to have church services with a minister leading.”

Johannes shared, “Your stepfather and I had some misgivings when ministers from the Netherlands accepted our calls. There seemed to be something different from what we experienced in the fellowship meetings and the reading services he and the other elders were leading all those early years.”

“Ya, Mr. Van Haitsma, I remember having some conversation with him about that. I guess I never totally understood all that he was saying.”

⁴⁷⁵ In 1883, Rev. H.D. Vander Werp from Noordeloos, MI accepted the call to Drenthe CRC.

“No, I suppose not,” responded Johannes. “Each generation tends to find its own preferences and styles. Most of your adult life you have heard preachers from the Netherlands or those trained by ministers from the Netherlands. Our seminary with Rev. Boer and Rev. Hemkes now also has the same kind of influence on our preachers who came from inside our own congregations.”⁴⁷⁶ I think our dream of returning to the Standards we publicly espouse may be hard to fulfill.”

Karsten said, “I know what those Standards are, those Three Forms of Unity and Church Order. But surely there’s something else in that return that most of us younger folk don’t seem to know.”

“You’re probably right,” responded Johannes. “I guess some things get lost along the way. Another big part of our desire was to worship in the atmosphere of the Old Fathers.”

“Now that sounds like something my Pa spoke about. I guess I was too young to really know what that was all about,” Karsten admitted.

“Well, maybe it’s like when the cows are getting milked gently. They respond with calm, patient behavior and more milk. Sometimes I work out a bit of my frustration with harsh milking; then they get uncomfortable and swat me with their tails! That calm and gentle atmosphere in sermons from people like Rev. Da Costa and others early in the 1800s encouraged us and gave us worship times that were wonderful. Now it seems we get deep doctrinal sermons that hardly reach our hearts and maybe not our minds either,” explained Johannes[^].

“Now that I can tune into,” noted Karsten.

Sjoukje called out to the barn, “Johannes, O Johannes!”

Johannes stepped out of the barn, “Hey, what’s up, Sjoukje?”

“We have another grandchild! Lizzie had her fourth child. A girl!”⁴⁷⁷

“Are they okay?” Johannes called back.

“Ya, Hendrik’s man says they’re doing fine. Can you get away so we can hurry over to their place? I would like to get over there and help out. Having her mother there is better than only a midwife, don’t you think?”

“Sure, Andrew can take care of the rest of the milking, so I’ll be with you shortly,” Johannes called back.

It took little time for Johannes to harness the horse and get moving on the road to Jamestown. “Five miles doesn’t take nearly as long as when we had to walk or use the oxen to get anywhere.

⁴⁷⁶ Kromminga, J., *In the Mirror: an Appraisal of the Christian Reformed Church*, p. 15.

⁴⁷⁷ Granddaughter Minnie (Hermina) Berends, born Oct. 30, 1883 in Jamestown.

And the road is in good shape now before winter.” It was also a relief to know Andrew would take care of the animals at home. “Getting closer to retirement might not be so bad after all,” Johannes muttered to himself.

1884*

^Electric lights had been added to the church auditorium and communion was now served at both services. “What a wonderful idea!” Sjoukje exclaimed. “This is so considerate. So many families have little children and have difficulties all getting to the morning services.”⁴⁷⁸

“Ya, and now if someone has to stay home, people can take turns. No one will have to miss attending communion,” added Johannes.

“I wonder why we never thought about doing this before,” uttered Sjoukje. “We’ve had this inconvenience for years.”

“I guess,” muttered Johannes, “it isn’t easy to think about changing old patterns. We have established ways. Some changes should have been made long ago. Other changes should be avoided forever.”

“Maybe it is hard for us to think through some of our traditions,” conceded Sjoukje.

Meanwhile Johannes was rummaging in his desk drawer. He’d broken the nib for his metal pen the last time he had to finalize the treasurer’s book of the church. He was certain he had another somewhere, but it escaped him. “I know I have a spare, but I can’t find it.”

Sjoukje asked, “Don’t you have a quill that you can use? It seems to me that we had a few feathers that came from that crow we found dead a few weeks ago.”

“Ya, you’re right. I think I put them by the back door,” Johannes noted. “I’ll go look.”

“Here is one,” he said. “Now I need that sharp knife to shape the quill.” He soon had his well-cut tool and was able to write the figures over in ink.⁴⁷⁹ “Sometimes it is nice,” he said to Sjoukje, “to be able to fall back on the old-fashioned tools.”

⁴⁷⁸Vriesland CRC Minutes, Feb., 6, 1884, Art. 5.

⁴⁷⁹ Kuiper, R., *Voice*, p. 94, noted that he wrote in 1881 with “a well-cut pen:” The writing instrument that dominated for the longest period in history (over one-thousand years) was the quill pen. Introduced around 700 A.D., the quill is a pen made from a bird feather. The strongest quills were those taken from living birds in the spring from the five outer left wing feathers. The left wing was favored because the feathers curved outward and away when used by a right-handed writer. Goose feathers were most common; swan feathers were of a premium grade being scarcer and more expensive. For making fine lines, crow feathers were the best, and then came the feathers of the eagle, owl, hawk and turkey.”

“Wiebe didn’t waste any time,” Johannes suggested to his Sjoukje.

“What do you mean, husband?” she asked. “He certainly waited a couple of years after Wilhelmina died. He wasn’t in that much of a hurry.”

“You’re right about that. But Elizabeth only recently immigrated to this country and Wiebe was ready to snatch her for his wife,”⁴⁸⁰ affirmed Johannes.

“I must say,” suggested Sjoukje, “it seems more difficult for a man to be a widower than for a woman to be a widow.⁴⁸¹ And with *Beppe* gone, there is a great need in the household for a mother and wife. Better to have a wife than a housekeeper.”

“I would certainly agree there, and Elizabeth will be a good wife for Wiebe. She needed a place for herself, and their marriage is a blessing for her and for Wiebe too,” agreed Johannes.

“Congratulations!” Johannes said to brother Wopke. “This is quite a record in the family, having two weddings in one month!”

“Thanks, brother,” Wopke responded. “It is wonderful to see Titus married and settling down. And his Anna seems such a wonderful woman.”⁴⁸²

“I notice that Titus is already well involved in the community. I saw his name in the paper as a member of the volunteer fire department,” noted Johannes.

“Ya” agreed Wopke, “At home we have always encouraged community involvement. That is part of the survival needs of the whole village. And we saw in 1860 and 1871 how important it is for our communities to have active fire prevention programs.”

“Obviously,” observed Johannes, “with the density of buildings in Zeeland town, that is a lot more necessary than it might be in our scattered village of Vriesland. Well, brother,” he added, “Sjoukje and I must be on our way. I think I hear the cows are lowing!”

“Ya,” laughed Wopke, “They tend to be demanding, don’t they?”

On July 4, ^1884 Reverend Hemkes announced to the Vriesland Church council that he had accepted the call to become the second teacher at the church college. Johannes admitted after the meeting, “I expected that would happen. He already was teaching there part of the time since last fall. And between serving both our church and the Drenthe church with preaching and teaching, he was kept extremely busy.”

“Ya” agreed Karsten, “We could see the handwriting on the wall.”

⁴⁸⁰ Wiebe married Elizabeth Roosendahl on April 5, 1884 with Rev. Hemkes officiating.

⁴⁸¹ Sinke, S., *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States*, p. 40.

⁴⁸² Titus married Anna de Vries on April 24, 1884.

Johannes added, “Many of our preachers have not stayed in one place very long. That might be another reason he’s ready to switch to the seminary.”

“And the fact is,” affirmed Karsten, “we have all been eager to see our own young men become prepared for our church ministries. With Rev. Hemkes added to the staff, it will be possible to teach and train more of our future ministers.”

“I think that’s a good thing,” observed Johannes. “Then we also become less dependent on ministers who come from the Netherlands[^] and can’t speak “American,” or even think as Americans.”

Karsten reflected, “Well, I wish him well, and I hope it doesn’t take too long for us to find a new man to fill our pulpit.”

1885 *

Sjoukje trudged through the snow to her brother’s house. “I just thought I’d come and see how you are doing.”

Brother Peter said, “We’re not doing so well, sister. Both of us are finding ourselves so weak we can hardly do the things we need to do. I quit the janitor work at the church because it got to be too much for me.”

“I’m so sorry, Peter,” Sjoukje responded. “Is there anything we can do?”

“Well, you could do us a favor and ask Johannes to talk to the council for us. We need advice.”

“I’m sure Johannes would be glad to talk to the men at the council,” Sjoukje answered. “What is it you want him to ask?”

“We know our weakness, and we feel we can’t take good care of our grandchild any more.⁴⁸³ You know he’s an orphan, and will need support for a number of years before he’s old enough to be out on his own,” Peter said.

“Sure, Johannes will ask for advice for you two. I’m confident that both we ourselves and the whole church community will stand with you to help raise your grandchild. Remember that at the baptism we all promised we would support the family in raising their children in the name of Jesus?”

“Ya,” responded Peter. “My wife and I know that, but I guess we both just need a bit of reassurance that such a promise will be kept these years later. Thanks so much for your caring.”

⁴⁸³Vriesland CRC Minutes. Peter Roersma and his wife lived for twenty more years, outliving both Johannes and Sjoukje.

“You’re very welcome.” smiled Sjoukje.

“Sjoukje,” Johannes asked over the breakfast table one morning. “How about we make plans for what we want our retirement house to look like?”⁴⁸⁴

“That sounds exciting!” Sjoukje’s eyes sparkled. “This will be the first time that we get to plan the whole house in which we will live.”

“Ya,” Johannes observed, “the house we have been living in was planned by Wopke and Annie back in the early years. We did add rooms to make it work for our growing family, but our planning was limited. Now we can dream the ways we want our house to look.”

“Oh, that will be fun!” exuded Sjoukje. “And we do want to remember to include that prophet’s room we talked about years ago. So that takes care of one of the upstairs bedrooms!”

“I know that people are building bigger houses to accommodate larger families,” suggested Johannes. “And we would be blessed with a guest room upstairs as well. But we should have our own bedroom downstairs.”

“Downstairs,” dreamed Sjoukje. “But we don’t need a long hallway like in the manse.”

“What would you like in your house, dear Sjoukje? Now that you’re the primary planner?” prodded Johannes.

“First of all,” Sjoukje exuded, “we want electric lights in all the rooms of the house!”

“My,” responded Johannes, “you are the modern lady, aren’t you?”

“Ya, then I would like a sewing room with a window and it should be large enough to have company with me to make doilies. I would like a new-fangled sewing machine from the Montgomery Ward catalogue.⁴⁸⁵ How about a large dining room to seat the whole family when they come to visit? A nice pantry for storing food supplies and a kitchen right by it.”

“That’s getting to be quite a list,” encouraged Johannes. “We’ll need to build large enough, won’t we?”

“Oh, I haven’t finished yet,” Sjoukje continued. “We need a nice bedroom also with windows, and a pleasant parlor facing the street. Oh, ya, the kitchen needs a nice stove so I can cook indoors all year long. I really don’t want a summer kitchen.”

“Then what about a basement?” asked Johannes.

⁴⁸⁴ Van Haitsma, *Family Legends. Zeeland Centennial Homes Brochure.*

⁴⁸⁵ Montgomery Ward catalogues have been available since 1872.

“That would be wonderful. I can do the wash down there, and have a cool food pantry for storing cabbages and potatoes and carrots and all the fruit. And space for canning jars for vegetables and meat for the winter. Do you think we could have another stove down there to heat up water for washing and for canning?”

“Oh, dear Sjoukje, yours is but to request and we’ll see if we can do it,” laughed Johannes. “It isn’t every day that we can plan a new house with all that we would like in it.”

^“Do you think we could make space inside for a water closet, with a large bucket so we don’t have to carry out the waste more than once a day?” wondered Sjoukje.

“And I’m thinking maybe we should also install a windmill in the back yard to bring up water into a storage tank so we might have running water in the house,” suggested Johannes.⁴⁸⁶

“Oh, that would be absolutely wonderful!” Sjoukje shouted. “Oh, Johannes, this is so exciting!”

“I think,” added Johannes, “we could plan three bedrooms upstairs, and have room for a storage room too yet.”⁴⁸⁷

Johannes tossed and turned. Sjoukje finally asked “What’s going on, Johannes? You are so restless.”

“Oh, Sjoukje, you will never guess the anger I felt among the men of the church at tonight’s congregational meeting. ^They felt so overpowered by our counselor, Rev. Rietdyk.”

“What was the talk about?” asked Sjoukje.

“We’ve been talking about the questions of if we should move the church building and what minister to call next, now that Rev. Hemkes is gone to teach at the Seminary in Grand Rapids. Eventually the council asked the congregation to no longer discuss the building issue. But then they did remind the group that *if* we were going to proceed with a building program, that we would all have to work in unity. We were all so confused!”

“Then Rev. Rietdyk asked the clerk to read again this reminder to quit talking about the building issue. I guess he was hoping for a discussion, but no one spoke up.”

“Why were the men so tongue-tied?” asked Sjoukje.

“I know we have struggled with these issues for over a year now, and just couldn’t find words tonight. It is, after all, New Year’s Eve,” Johannes suggested. “Rev. Rietdyk repeated his request

⁴⁸⁶ Kuiper, R., *Voice*, p. 45.

⁴⁸⁷ The house Johannes built and moved in 1893 to the town of Zeeland, now at the corner of Maple and Central, would likely have accommodated most of these features, as they were all available by then.

^{two} more times and still no one uttered a word. All of us were silent. I guess everyone took the council request not to talk about the building issue seriously. But the Reverend was insistent.”⁴⁸⁸

“Well, husband, don’t keep me in suspense. What happened then?”

“Silence is what happened. And then Rev. Rietdyk announced that he took the silence to mean there was no support for the proposal to move the church, and therefore the issue would be returned to the council,” answered Johannes.

“How did the people respond to that?” Sjoukje wondered out loud

“His statement loosened the tongues and a babble of voices began to speak up. And then the Reverend surprised us all by saying, “Sorry, it is too late now; the proposal should have been supported.” He simply cut off conversation. We all sat there, just stunned. Just when the men were ready to share their opinions, he high-handedly told us all to keep quiet.”

“I’m sure that didn’t sit well with anybody,” responded Sjoukje.

“It sure didn’t,” spoke Johannes energetically. “We could just as well have shut off the furnace then, because the fuming in the congregation kept the room hot enough.”

“Maybe we should not be surprised by his actions,” suggested Sjoukje. “He showed a strong personality⁴⁸⁹ when he was our pastor for those two years. Everything was done by the book. And I guess he followed proper rules of order this time too.”

Johannes added, “I was hoping maybe he had mellowed a bit since he was our pastor thirteen years ago. But one thing he hasn’t learned is to listen to a congregation that has struggled now for some time about our situation.”

“I think,” suggested Sjoukje, “he has no idea of how much we value unity in our congregation.”

“You’d think he would have learned that from having been with us,” Johannes added.

Jetse opened the back door and yelled, “Anybody home?”

“Sure, Jetse, come on in,” Johannes called back. “The coffee is on, come and set awhile.”

“My, your house is so nice and comfortable,” Jetse exclaimed. “I think Geertje might be a little jealous if she saw me sitting at this table with you two.”

⁴⁸⁸Vriesland CRC Minutes, Dec. 31, 1885.

⁴⁸⁹www: Christian Reformed Ministers.

“Well, you probably will also make your place more comfortable as time goes on. It took us a while to get to this comfort too,” Sjoukje shared.

“I’m glad to find you both home,” Jetse replied. “I’ve just got to talk to somebody.”

“Why, what’s going on?” asked Johannes.

“Well, you know for years I have watched my son Titus struggle. It seems he was uncomfortable with who he is. He didn’t feel he was Dutch and he didn’t feel like he was American. He seemed so lost. Others have noticed it too. Some people have been calling him ‘Zwarte Piet.’”⁴⁹⁰

“Ya,” Johannes said gently, “I have been aware of that. He seems to have become a troubled soul. But what’s happening in his life now that has you stirred up?”

“Well, you know he got married to Ollie, an American girl and they live in Grand Rapids and have two children. Now he tells me they’re moving far away to California,” explained Jetse. “I think he’s the first one of the whole Van Haitsma clan to move that far away. I’m just not comfortable with that.”

Johannes asked, “Does he have a job waiting for him there? Or is he following the gold rush?”

“He didn’t say, but I expect he’ll find a job there. He did work in the logging camp like you and I did, and who knows if he might follow that line of work.”

“You think maybe he felt stifled here among all us Friesians and decided to spread his wings?” wondered Sjoukje.

“Ya. That seems sure. But this seems about as big a break as we made when we left our barge behind and came here.” Struggling for his words, Jetse thought aloud, “Maybe I’m feeling a bit the same as all the family in the Netherlands felt when we left them behind.”

“And,” Johannes added, “maybe fearing you’ll not get to know your grandchildren?”

“Oh, ya, and more, I expect,” Jetse sighed. “I do wish him and Ollie Godspeed and blessings, but I think I miss them already.”

“I guess I should not have been surprised,” spoke up Johannes.

“About what?” asked Johannes Groen.

“That people in church have still been talking about moving the church building somewhere else, further north, I think, so it will be more centrally located for our members.”

⁴⁹⁰ Van Haitsma, *Family Legends*.

“So, my old friend, what do you think is sparking that idea?” pondered Groen.

“You know,” continued Johannes, “we have helped other congregations get started in all directions. Overisel to the south, Jamestown to the east, Beaverdam to the north, so numbers of our congregation living in those directions have been pleased to have worship services in their own areas.”

Groen agreed, “Ya, we’ve seen quite a few empty pews lately, haven’t we? But we can’t begrudge those members for wanting a church closer to home.”

“No, we can’t,” agreed Johannes. “I know I’ve been happy to live so close to the church building. In fact when I retire next year, I plan to build my new home on my property just north of the church building. I am going to pass my present home on to my son Reinder. And my son Andrew plans to build a house for his wife on his half of the farm to the south of the church.”

“Ya,” observed Groen, “our families are growing and expanding. My own son plans to ask the council for a recommendation to prepare for the ministry at the next meeting.”

“That’s wonderful!” exuded Johannes. “Another one of our own in the ministry!”

“With all the changes in family and people coming and going,” observed Groen, “it’s no wonder our members are doing some thinking.”

“And the fact is that I am now living on the southern edge of the congregation. Most of my neighbors to the south are worshipping in Drenthe,” Johannes responded thoughtfully. Then he added, “You can see why my personal preference is to keep the church building where it is. But as a member of the council, I know we do have to think about all the people and their convenience and preferences.”

“Ya,” Groen said thoughtfully, “after all, our worship is not just about us. And we do want to help others find Jesus and build his Kingdom.”

“Ya,” added Johannes, “we need to do all we can to further God’s kingdom. I am glad that some of the new immigrants coming to this country are also settling in our community and I would like them to embrace Jesus and become part of our church.”

After a moment or two, Johannes continued, “But there is something else to consider. Our buildings and property are all ours and all paid for. And our congregation is rather small right now. Why go to the expense of setting up new buildings and on more-expensive land too yet?”

“Sjoukje,” Johannes said, “I guess our family is beginning to spread a bit. Titus is living on the farm in Zutphen, and Peter has just built his new house some miles further east.”

“Ya,” answered Sjoukje, “our children have grown up and are striking out on their own. I guess it’s too much to expect our children will settle as close to us like you and your brothers settled near *Pake* and *Beppe*. Back then we were all within a mile of each other.”

“I am glad, though, that none of our children have moved as far away as Sidney of Tjalling. He went all the way to the middle of the state of Michigan, near Vogel Center.”

Sjoukje chuckled, “Ya, but give them time, they may yet spread their wings more than we would like.”

Johannes continued, “Now that our Peter has a new house, all of our children have lovely homes. That log cabin Peter and Katie moved into after last year’s wedding was very ready to be taken down or moved for other uses. I’m really glad for them to have found a good farm with thirty of the eighty acres cleared and useful. He has been thinking ahead by planting a plum orchard. I think not many of us thought about an orchard as a future cash crop.”

“You have taught our boys to be thinking ahead, Johannes,” said Sjoukje. “They won’t be the laggards in the *Kolonie*.”

“And they also know how to capture the pretty women too. It was interesting watching Peter cozy up to Katie when she was housekeeping for Rev. Hemkes next door. He didn’t have far to go courting.”

“And,” added Sjoukje, “if she needed to learn more about keeping house, I’m sure the Missus of the Manse was more than willing to instruct her.”

A few days later, Wopke came by. “Hey, Wopke!” called out Johannes. “Good to see you, man. Come on in.”

“Ya,” Wopke returned the greeting, “I thought I’d see how you and the farm are getting along now that you’re sharing with Andrew. How’s that working out?”

“From my perspective, pretty good. I can slow down a bit, and he can build up the farm with even more clearing. I’m amazed that after all these years, there are still a lot of mammoth trees that need to be cleared out. And I’m looking forward to my retirement and building my new house next to the manse.”

“So then Andrew and his family will have the south half of your property, eh?”

“Ya,” said Johannes, “his little family will undoubtedly be growing and will need the space.”

Wopke said, “I have some unusual news to share with you, brother.”

“Oh?” responded Johannes, “what’s the news?”

“I was in the bookstore in Zeeland last week and the clerk told me of a book written by the Rev. Kuiper who has been at the Graafschap CRC since 1879.”

“A book written here in America?” asked Johannes.

“Ya, and it is about the *Kolonie* here,” said Wopke. “The thing that is most interesting to me was what he had to say about us.”

“You mean our family? Did he write about our family? I wouldn’t think he knew about us at all.”

“Now you’re right about that. No, he wrote about all of us pioneers who came to clear the land and create these farms out of the forests. And in connection with the question of union with the Dutch Reformed Church, he wrote ‘The people as a people could not judge....Incapable themselves, they were obliged to submit to the leadership of a few [ministers].’ He obviously did not have a high opinion of us.”^

Johannes responded, “That is an echo of what our own former preacher said about us in the opening of the Synod in 1883. It makes me angry that they think so little of us! Just think of what we have accomplished. We have wonderful farms and businesses where thirty-five years ago was big forest wilderness. You and I have made the transition from barge merchants to successful Americans. We are wealthy beyond any expectations in the Netherlands.”

“Ya, and these ministers were not here to participate in those early years. Now they are happy to become our ministers. Rev. Hemkes even celebrates that it is easier to be one here than in the old country,” said Wopke.

Johannes expounded, “They have no idea what, by God’s grace, we have accomplished! We have built all this from scratch. And they call us “Weak in gifts and strengths?” They come after we have earned the comforts and they call us ‘incapable’? They give no credit that we have maintained our church since 1857 without them? What do they think they would come to if we had not done all the work to make this possible? I can’t believe they think so little of us!”

Wopke chuckled, “My, my, I’ve never seen you so worked up. Careful or you will blow a gasket!”

“I’m embarrassed that I let myself go on like that,” said Johannes. “Please don’t tell anyone. What we say here, stays here, ok?” asked Johannes.

“You bet, brother! No one is going to hear it from me,” assured Wopke.

They quieted down some before entering the house.

Later Johannes shook his head, “They did what?”

Rev. Hemkes said, “Synod discussed the Vriesland Church request to change the denominational Day of Prayer to be held in mid-April, not when the winter snows still cover the ground. But they decided to follow the rule as it was in the Netherlands.”⁴⁹¹

“So,” Johannes observed, “Synod disregards our local farmer request in favor of a rule in the Netherlands^ while at the same meeting they agree to set no rules for the feast days because the Bible does not give us dates for the birth and death of Christ. God did not set rules either for the Day of Prayer.”

“What can I say?” responded the Reverend. “Synod made a decision.”

Johannes muttered to himself as he walked away, “Do they have no regard for preferences here on the farm, while holding high the rules of the church in the Netherlands? Doesn’t a request from a local church seem worthy of consideration? But a ruling made in the Netherlands years ago is worth holding on to?”

Joining Sjoukje at the table later that day, Johannes said, “Never did I expect that we’d end up living by rules from the Netherlands. We had decided to be ‘by ourselves,’ that’s why we organized separately in the first place. No rules from the Dutch government, no rules from the Dutch Reformed Church in America, and no rules from the Reformed Church in the Netherlands either!”

“Ah, Johannes, dear,” responded Sjoukje, “You’ve had a lot of questions about the ministers we imported from the Netherlands. It seems that there’s a whole different way of thinking when people get the honor of being on the pulpit, and before we realize what is happening, they take over in the church.”

“It gives me nightmares sometimes,” answered Johannes. “I just don’t know where the church is going. It seems like we are losing sight of our starting place, and we are losing our sense of direction.”

“Now,” cautioned Sjoukje, “they must have some sense of direction, don’t they?”

“Well, I think if they do, it has little to do with us here in Vriesland, Michigan,” Johannes concluded.

After another meeting of the church council, Johannes was still mulling things over when he entered the house. “Well, husband,” Sjoukje said, “I see you’re deep in thought again. What happened at the meeting tonight that’s got you ruminating?”

“Maybe a different direction than you might expect,” Johannes responded.

“Well, I’m usually kind of surprised by both what you’re thinking about and the direction your mind is going,” smiled Sjoukje.

⁴⁹¹Vriesland CRC Minutes, Oct. 22, 1885, Art. 3.

“As you know,” began Johannes, “since Rev. Hemkes left us in July, 1884, we’ve had lots of discussions about what ministers to call. What has surprised me is that this time all the suggested names are ministers either trained here or they have already come here and served some other congregation. Without speaking about it, we all seem to have concluded that we really don’t want any more of the influence from the Netherlands.”⁴⁹²

“Now that seems to be a major shift in thinking,” uttered Sjoukje.

“Maybe,” wondered Johannes “more of us have been feeling uncomfortable with the sense of elitism they bring along.”

“And just maybe,” added Sjoukje, “we have become more Americanized than we realize and would like to shape our church to fit better in our new home.”

“That could be too,” considered Johannes. “I do remember when we were wanting a new pulpit a few years ago we asked ourselves if we wanted a Dutch model or an American one.”⁴⁹²

“It seems like, for whatever reason,” continued Sjoukje, “changes are happening both around us and inside us.”

“I truly did not see this coming! Of all the churches to join our little denomination!” Johannes uttered.

“What do you mean, Pa?” Titus stopped working at the sound of his father’s voice.

“Well, you probably know that the Pillar church in Holland was originally established by Rev. Van Raalte. But two years ago the church shut out Holland Classis and they went independent.”

“Ya, Pa, I had heard about that. So what did they do now?” Titus asked.

“⁴⁹³They just became part of our denomination this month. One more congregation that has stepped out of the Reformed Church and become part of ours,” Johannes shared.

“So, how did they take the church away from the Dutch Reformed?”

“The story I heard is that the majority of members, including the council, simply told the members who wanted to stay in the Reformed Church that they were taking over the church. Since the church had not been incorporated, there was no legal way to stop what they did by majority rule. And when the Classis Holland planned to meet in the Pillar church, some of those members locked the doors and stood guard. So the ministers of Classis Holland simply walked away.”⁴⁹³ Pillar Church remained independent until this month.”⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹²*Ibid.* March 8, 1871, Art. 2.

⁴⁹³ Swierenga, *RCA and CRC Schism*, p. 44

Titus noted, “That doesn’t seem very Christian of them.”

“I’m inclined to agree with you about that, son,” stated Johannes. “Many things that are said and done when churches are in disagreement are far from loving. That’s one reason we did not make much noise or accusations when we invited the dissenting congregations and preachers to come together in 1857. We wanted our organizing to be peaceful and positive.”

On October 21, 1885 Sjoukje embraced her sister-in-law and Johannes said, “Annie, I’m so sorry! I knew Wopke hadn’t been feeling well lately, but I really did not expect him to die yet.”

“Not me either,” admitted Annie. “But he has been sickly a lot lately. Breathing has been more and more difficult for him. He’s had to rest a lot more than he ever did.”

“Has the doctor given any diagnosis for his death?” asked Sjoukje.

“He says it was that terrible TB that’s been going around. Wopke was talking about going to some drier place to live, but I guess all that was a little late,” Annie said regretfully.

“So what are you going to do? Will you continue living here?” asked Johannes.

“Ya, for now anyways,” responded Annie. “Titus has plans to build a new house on the farm on Perry Street. He said he’s going to include a living area for me. But that will be a few years yet. In the meantime I’ll be fine right here in my cozy house.”

“Titus has been a good son to you, hasn’t he?” suggested Sjoukje,

Yes, he truly has been,” Annie smiled, “ever since the day that Tjalling asked us to care for him. He has been such a wonderful part of our family. I never think of him as our foster son. And yes, I know he will take good care of me.”

Johannes asked, “Will Wopke be buried in the New Vriesland cemetery? Andrew bought a large family plot there already. But I don’t want to be laid to rest there for a good number of years.”

⁴⁹⁴*Pillar Church History*, www. Insert by brother Jan H. Boer: In this year of Harry’s passing, the summary of the subsequent history of the Pillar Church appeared in the CRC’s *The Banner*, of July/August 2018, p. 22 by Alissa Vernon. “Congregants who won the vote (for separation from the Reformed Church) are said to have physically barred the minority faction from returning to the church with chains and axe handles,” a story that reminds one of Abraham Kuyper and his cohorts’ axing the door of their Amsterdam church to *gain* entry instead of barring someone else’s entry. Eventually, the church became a member of both denominations--
www.google.ca/search?q=alissa+vernon+tools+of+destruction+turned+to+tools+of+grace&rlz=1C1AVNG_enCA658CA662&oq=alissa+vernon+tools+of+destruction+turned+to+tools+of+grace&aqs=chrome..69i57.28464j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8. Accessed September 7, 2018.

“Well,” said Annie, “you know the timing is not really up to us, is it? But no, Wopke has claimed a large plot in the Zeeland cemetery. I don’t know how many he expects to be buried there; it is also a large plot.”⁴⁹⁵

“One thing to be said for my brother is that he was always planning ahead. That’s one of the ways I have tried to follow him. And that’s always been good for us too,” shared Johannes.

“Mr. Meengs,” Johannes asked when all the others had left the building. “What do you make of the tension in the congregation about the new school building that will be going up in the village?”⁴⁹⁶ I can understand not having communion under the circumstances. I think that was a good call. But it is mighty unusual among us. Ever since our church started we have never before postponed communion. Maybe we have never had such strong conflicting feelings in the congregation.”

Meengs responded, “Ya, Mr. Van Haitsma. That was an unusual decision. I hope it never happens again, either. But the talk has been so strong and people are so upset that we simply had to recognize there was no peace and unity among ourselves.”

“I agree with you there,” Johannes joined in. “I think I have some understanding about why people in the churches are upset. But we don’t need more differences of spirit among ourselves than we already have.”

Meengs shared, “It seems to me that we have had mostly a friendly spirit in the village, even though we have two churches here. Parents seem to have found our living together pretty comfortable. We have our own school board in the village, even if the school has been under the supervision of the School District drawn up by the State of Michigan. We have been allowed to choose our own teachers, and have paid for them ourselves, even though the state has set the proceeds from Section 16 as the fund set aside for our schools.”⁴⁹⁷ The state has not interfered with us and our school.”

“You think that might be what’s at the bottom of the tension? That our people are worrying whether the state might begin to interfere with our running the school that our children are attending?” asked Johannes.

“That certainly has been a fear ever since we have come to this land, hasn’t it? We struggled with that in the Netherlands and set up our own schools. We were worried about big organizations telling us what to do. That’s also part of the reason our denomination was started, because we didn’t want the big Reformed Church to lay down rules for us,”

“And now with the Michigan school system telling us we need a new building, you think there’s a fear the state will start telling us how to run our school?” wondered Johannes.

⁴⁹⁵ Wopke died of TB and was buried in Zeeland Cemetery.

⁴⁹⁶ *Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Oct. 22, 1985, Art. 3.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ottawa County History*, p. 8.

“When there’s money involved, like financing this new school building, doesn’t it seem likely to have state demands on our school system? We already have state regulations about what kind of teachers we may hire. The state wants them to have a teaching certificate,” Meengs added.

“We certainly do want qualified teachers for our children, so that might not be much of a problem. And in choosing our own teachers we have been able to hire those who share our faith. And then we do want quality buildings for our schools. There’s talk in our family that my brother Wiebe has offered to sell a piece of his land near the village corner for the new school building. I think that will be a good central location. You think there’s a problem with that?” queried Johannes.

Mr. Meengs considered, “I don’t think so. I don’t think that having a new two-room school is a problem for anyone. Our school now is surely old and too small. And that suggested location is only across the road from where it has been for years.”

Johannes added, “I think that the idea of having privies inside the building⁴⁹⁸ probably will be quite a relief for all, especially in the winter. And I’m sure the new building will be a lot easier to keep the children warm.”

“But,” interjected Meengs, “ever since 1861 our Classis meetings⁴⁹⁹ have encouraged every congregation to have separate Dutch Christian schools. I know that Grand Rapids was on board with that early, but in villages like ours we already had schools to our liking and resisted setting up separate schools. We hired teachers who we knew would do a good job teaching our children. But some of our members may have been convinced we need to follow that Classis expectation and set up our own schools.”

“Ya,” responded Johannes, “that could well have added to the tension. My own idea is that the school we have had all these years is wonderfully adequate for our children and we don’t need a school just for the children of our church. I believe it is good for the children of our community to mingle with each other just as we adults do.” Johannes hesitated a bit, “Elder Meengs, what can be done to reduce the tension in our church and community?”

“What comes to mind is to ask the parents of the school children to come together and talk about this. Maybe airing our issues will bring a peaceful solution and a good spirit back,” suggested Meengs.

“That seems to be a reasonable idea,” said Johannes. “We can ask the chairman of the parent group to set up a meeting, and then announce it in both churches. Getting everyone together may help sort out what seems to be causing the tension. We certainly don’t want it to fester among the people of Vriesland.”

Mr. Meengs offered, “I’ll go talk to the chairman of the parents and see if he will call such a meeting.”

⁴⁹⁸ This building, sheathed in Veneklasen brick, seems to have been in use until 1951.

⁴⁹⁹ CRC Classical Assembly, Feb. 6, 1861.

“I appreciate that, Mr. Meengs. I hope he’ll be open to that, and that people will come and talk together about it. Do you think it might be a good idea to invite the Zeeland Township School superintendent to the meeting so he might answer any questions that people might have?” wondered Johannes.

“Ya, that would be a great idea,” answered Meengs. “I wonder if you would be so kind as to pay a visit to Mr. Van Loo and invite him to come?”⁵⁰⁰

“Agreed,” responded Johannes. “I think we need to do all we can to bring peace to our congregation and community so that we can hold our communion services again.”

A month later Mr. Meengs again chaired the council meeting. He reported, “Following the October council meeting when we agreed to cancel communion, there has been a meeting of the parents of the school and Superintendent Mr. Cornelius Van Loo. The issues that were causing concern were about the building costs which will come from sales of land in Section 16. So we parents no longer will have the burden of paying for the cost of running the school. Also the issue of hiring the teachers we want was discussed and settled, and now there is a peaceful spirit in the community again. I would like to entertain a motion to hold communion on Nov. 13. Rev. Fless will be leading our services on Nov. 8, so we can have a preparatory sermon. And Rev. Rietdijk will be coming on the Nov. 13 so we could proceed to have communion together then.”⁵⁰¹

Elder Housma spoke up, “Perhaps before we vote on such a motion, we need to ask ourselves if we are in the right spirit with each other here to actually hold communion.”

“Ya, of course,” the chairman observed. “We will need to answer around the table if all is well between us in the council. Mr. Housma, please start us off with a response.” Housma agreed, “Ya, I am in good relation with each and all of my brothers here around the table.” Each elder and deacon echoed that affirmation. Chairman Meengs said, “Then I will be glad to connect with the preachers for the next two Sundays, and we will plan for communion on the 13th. Praise the Lord that we again have such unity around the table.”⁵⁰²

“Sjoukje, it’s really going to happen! We are going to retire! I will keep working with Andrew, but I’m going to do a lot less! And I’m going to sit in my rocker and watch the men build our retirement house. The lumber is on order, and red bricks for the façade are being prepared by Veneklasen. And before we know it, we’re going to move in!”⁵⁰³

“Ho, Johannes, that sounds wonderful!” exulted Sjoukje. “I can almost imagine seeing the red brick house going up.”

⁵⁰⁰*Ottawa County History*, p. 43.

⁵⁰¹*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Nov. 26, 1885.

⁵⁰² Called “mutual censure” and required by the *Church Order of 1619*, Art. 81.

⁵⁰³ Centennial home on Zeeland’s historic homes list, built in 1885.

“Ya, me too!” answered Johannes. “But I’m glad I won’t be doing all the work. From the time I was a little boy, I’ve had to do a man’s work. Now I can watch others work and only carry on part-time farming, with Andrew being primarily responsible. I plan to spend more time in my work of being a deacon. There’s always people who have needs that I can respond to. What a change that will be in my life!”

“I think we’d better be sure to get two rocking chairs,” suggested Sjoukje. “I’ll want to do my share of sitting and watching the house go up. You don’t get all the pleasure!”

“I’ll look forward to sharing that pleasure with you,” chuckled Johannes.

1886 *

Johannes shared with Sjoukje, “Mr. Housma and I have been asked by the council to visit one of our members.”

“That sounds like some serious personal business,” suggested Sjoukje.

“Ya,” responded Johannes, “he’s reportedly been grumbling about a discussion we had at our last council meeting of 1885. He seems to think that one of our elders and I were in disagreement with the rest of the council and that the council made a decision that was not unified.” I know that this person has always carried the church in his heart,” remembered Johannes. “And usually he knows what decisions must be carried out in unity and which ones can be carried by majority vote.”⁵⁰⁴

“Well, I’m sure the council knew you’d be a good person to help diffuse this issue. You’ve been on the council a lot longer than any other member. You know how important unity is among the council. And you know what decisions are mere majority choices,” Sjoukje suggested.

“Ya,” answered Johannes, “and since I’m one of the ones who were thought to disagree with the rest, I need to reassure him that I was quite okay with the decision of the council.”

“So off you go, husband; it’s time to mend the fences,” added Sjoukje.

Johannes said to fellow deacon, Mr. Van Wijngaarden, “Yesterday I heard that the elders of the Scottish Church in Drenthe were at the deathbed of the Rev. Smit. They were surprised, not that he was dying, because he’d been sickly for a time. But that he asked them to disband their church and join with the Drenthe Church now that it has become part of our denomination. He seemed to feel that their reason for separate existence no longer held any water.”⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Jan. 7, 1886, Art. 4.

⁵⁰⁵*History of the Drenthe CRC*.

“It seems to me,” Mr. Van Wijngaarden answered, “that in the 1860s Rev. Smit came to our Classis meetings several times to encourage our joining with them. And each time our Classis countered by asking them to join with us. Neither, of course, happened and for over twenty years we have gone our separate ways. Now, at the end of his life, he’s finally conceded?”

“I wonder,” suggested Johannes, “if he thought that if his congregation is going to be part of the ‘returning’ church, that’s more likely to happen with us rather than the Scottish Church. Part of his congregation broke away years ago and became part of our Vriesland Church, remember?” “Ya, and we were blessed to have Harm Schepers and Gerart Van Rhee as elders in our church,” replied Van Wijngaarden.⁵⁰⁶

“We certainly benefitted from their wisdom,” Johannes added. “It is good now that all the believers in Drenthe will be together again. And it will be good to see the rancor of the past truly be in the past.”

When Johannes returned home, he told the Scottish Church story to Sjoukje. And he confessed, “I had a secret hope that with his death, some of the families of the Scottish Presbyterian would come to our church.”

“I understand that, Johannes,” she said. “One of the hopes for gaining a few members to our church just went out of the window. This becomes one more blow to your hopes that our church will have a significant increase in members.”

“And I sometimes wonder,” Johannes added, “if the reputation of our Vriesland church for being somewhat argumentative may also keep people from joining our church. But that is not an accurate assessment of who we are. We simply like to talk things out to a point where everyone agrees or, at least, they agree to accept and live with the majority thinking on the matter.”[^]

“Well,” responded Sjoukje, “that didn’t stop the breakaway group from the Scottish church from joining with us back in 1863.”

“You’re right, of course; it also didn’t stop the Reformed Churches from joining our denomination in 1882. And now many new immigrant churches across the whole country are also joining with us. And don’t forget the Hackensack Classis becoming one with us. Maybe the original stand we took when forming still has an influence in congregations looking to be part of the historic Reformed Church. Hopefully we can lay to rest our denominational need to defend our existence.”

“Now that, dear husband, may be dreaming a bit too big,” smiled Sjoukje. “But it is wonderful that in our little corner of *de Kolonie*, our own church and the Drenthe church are building a congenial relationship and that the Scottish church is also now part of our community.”

“Well, Sjoukje,” Johannes said after coming in from the field, “I just heard that the last call we extended was turned down. We’ve had a few declines since Rev. Hemkes left for the Seminary.”

⁵⁰⁶Vriesland CRC Minutes, Dec. 9, 1863, Art.3 and Art. 4.

“Ya,” agreed Sjoukje “after having a preacher for awhile, it is different being without one again.”

“The thing that surprises me, Sjoukje, is that I am not at all unhappy with the decline. I realize that I’m pleased to be hearing the sermons of the Old Fathers.”

“But I’m not so sure we are listening to them. Didn’t Synod decide only approved sermons could be used?⁵⁰⁷ Has the reading elder identified who wrote the sermon?” asked Sjoukje.

“Well, you’re right,” said Johannes. “At least we better be sure what’s being read is from the Old Fathers.”

A few days after the June, 1886 meeting of Synod, Johannes knocked on the door of Elder Riddering. “Well, hello, Mr. Van Haitsma. It is good to see you. What brings you to my place?”

“Brother Riddering, I know you went to Synod this past week, and I am hungry for news of things that took place.”

“I’m glad you came, Johannes; come on in. Let’s have coffee at the kitchen table. I think there’s a freshly-made pot on the range.”

The men settled around the table and Mrs. Riddering joined them. She said, “I’ve been curious too what things happened at Synod. We haven’t had time to talk about it yet, so I’d like to sit in if you men don’t mind.”

“Ya, please, Mrs. Riddering,” said Johannes. “There surely is nothing private in this discussion. And thanks for the coffee.”

“You’re welcome, Mr. Van Haitsma. You’re welcome at our table any time. So Pa, what things were brought up at the meeting? You’ve been gone for about two weeks. There should be lots to talk about.”

“Ya, there is,” answered Mr. Riddering. “Maybe the most striking to me was the request from South Holland, brought by Rev. Meinders. They wanted clarification from the rest of us. ‘Are we following the Church Order of 1619 or are we following the Order of Utrecht?’ And by the way, this was the very same reason why South Holland did not want to give up the name the True Dutch Reformed Church. They felt that our change to Holland Christian Reformed Church implied we had wandered from our return to the 1619 Standards.”⁵⁰⁸^

Johannes observed, “That seems like the very question that we were already talking about in 1857. We started our church with a commitment to follow the Church Order of 1619. We saw that the Reformed Dutch Church was no longer following that Church Order, even though they claimed allegiance to it.”

⁵⁰⁷*CRC Classical Assembly*, 1880, Art. 58, p. 481; 1871, Art. 43, p. 289.

⁵⁰⁸*Ibid.*, June 5, 1886, Art. 20.

“And that again is the issue that Rev. Meinders and the South Holland Church wanted an answer to,” responded the elder.

“So what was the Synod’s decision?” asked Johannes.

“The first response,” said Mr. Riddering, “was to place this question into the hands of a committee made up of mostly ministers. They went into private conference with Rev. Vos as the reporter. They met off and on for several days and when they felt they had discussed it enough and were ready to make a report, they told the president who gave the floor to Rev. Vos. We heard an extensive report that tried to assure the South Holland Church of our faithfulness to the Standards and Church Order of 1619.”

Johannes suggested, “I suppose the committee wanted to assure the continuity of the Reformed Church from 1619 to 1836 to our 1857?”

“Ya,” continued Mr. Riddering. “The committee even quoted from the Acts of Secession of 1834 and of the Christian Separated *Gereformeerde Kerk* to help convince the South Holland group.”

“So was the South Holland delegation convinced?” asked Johannes.

“No, I’m afraid not,” Mr. Riddering responded. “After the assembly agreed with all the points the committee made, Rev. Meinders was ready with a statement to the effect that their doubts were not lessened but actually strengthened. **And then Docent Boer gave a response full of regret.**”^{509^}

“Oh, my!” exclaimed Johannes, “The way I hear it, that sounds very much like an official accusation that our church is not following the Standards we have so long claimed we were.”

When Johannes had finished his chores that evening, he said, “Sjoukje, I’m not at all ready to go to sleep yet. My mind is still whirling over what I heard from Riddering today.”

“I was wondering,” said Sjoukje, “why you seem so subdued. I thought maybe you were sick or something.”

“Maybe I am sick,” answered Johannes. “But sick for the Lord and heartsick for the church.”

“What was so shocking to you, Johannes?” asked Sjoukje.

“The elder told me that our South Holland Church doubted that we were following the 1619 Church Order. We have been discussing that very issue at our Classis and Synod meetings for years. Now I know I’m not the only one with questions and doubts. **I’m starting to wonder whether any of our leaders have ever seen an original copy of the 1619 Church Order.**”[^]

⁵⁰⁹*ibid.*, Art. 44.

1887 *

“It will be public information by now, I’m sure,” Johannes said excitedly. “Last night Gilbert Haan appeared at the council meeting and asked for our permission and recommendation to prepare for the ministry.⁵¹⁰I gave him a hearty congratulations and told him I was sure he would make an excellent minister. This makes four of the young men from our little Vriesland congregation who have asked and have been given approval to study for the ministry.”

“Remind me again,” said Sjoukje, “who are the others?”

“Johannes, son of our friend Johannes Groen, Jan Schepers, Jacob Wyngaarden,⁵¹¹and now Gilbert Haan. I am so glad that the atmosphere in our church community is sparking those desires in our young men. Maybe soon we will have enough ministers trained here in America that we’ll not need to call them from the Netherlands anymore. I know that is the dream that inspired the start of our seminary.”

“I’m so glad to hear that, Johannes, I know we can use some good news in our church.”

It was a beautiful day for a ride to town. After they had completed their errands, Johannes and Sjoukje decided to check out the Pioneer Monument at the park in Zeeland.

“I am surprised, Sjoukje,” Johannes spoke up after looking at the monument.

“What?” asked Sjoukje, “that your name is on that monument?”⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Aug. 2, 1887. ^Gilbert G Haan, the grandson of Gysbert Haan who was often lauded by church historians as the founder of the Christian Reformed Church. G. G. grew up in the Vriesland, MI. community with his father, an elder of the CRC for a number of years. He knew the van Haitsma family personally and describes Johannes van Haitsma “as a supporter of Hendrik Dam and Harm Schepers, leaders of Vriesland and Drenthe” and as “The youthful, practical farmer who could not do much with words, but did much in supporting others (my translation).” “Were they [Hendrik Dam, J. Schepers, Johannes van Haitsma and Johannes Groen] such unusual people? Oh, no, not in themselves, but God knows who are His for a significant task, and He knows where to find them at His own time.” “They began a work, . . . and God’s work, begun by them, continues on.” From “The Founders of our Church Community” in Beets, H., *Gedenkboek*, p. 246.

⁵¹¹*Christian Reformed Minister Data Base*, [www:johannes Groen](http://www.johannesgroen.com), Jr, born Feb. 17, 1865 in Vriesland, MI. Trained at Calvin Theological Seminary, ordained Sept. 13, 1891, and served 1st Zeeland, MI, Eastern Ave, Grand Rapids, MI, Los Angeles, CA. His father was part of the group of people in Vriesland, MI who began the Christian Reformed Church in 1857.

Jan Schepers, born May 25, 1837 in Hijken, DR, NL, the first graduate trained in CRC circles; ordained Oct. 25, 1868 and served 1st Chicago, Lafayette, IN, Ackley IA, Vogel Center, MI. Beets, H, *Church*, p. 64: He and his father attended the Vriesland Christian Reformed Church from its opening day. His cousin, J. R. Schepers accepted ministry in the breakaway group from Graafschap in 1851, and later also became a minister in the CRC.

Jacob Wyngaarden, born Feb. 20, 1865 in Vriesland, MI; trained at Calvin Theological Seminary, ordained Sept. 21, 1890 and served Oostburg, WI, Firth, NE, Harrison, SD, New Era, MI, South Olive, MI, Eastmanville, MI, Walker, MI.

⁵¹² Zeeland City Monument, erected in 1887, located downtown Zeeland, on the corner of Central Ave. and Church St.

“Ya, kind of,” answered Johannes. “But maybe more that Pa and Wopke aren’t on the monument. I think they deserve the recognition more than I do. Wopke moved to Zeeland Town some time ago, and Pa, of course, was the patriarch of our family. Why should I be so honored? I think I’m hardly known here. And most of my business dealings have been through Wopke.”

“Well, dear Johannes,” Sjoukje noted, “maybe it is God’s way of carving your name in stone to honor you for your faithful service in the church.”

“But this monument has nothing to do with my work in the church,” countered Johannes. “I know it’s too late to have my name taken off and Pa’s put on. But that’s the way it should read.”

“Maybe, in the long run, husband,” chuckled Sjoukje, “your name is there because if you had been asked ahead of time, you would surely have said ‘no.’ Now all your descendants will be able to see the evidence in stone that you really were here, and you really did make a difference.”

1888 *

Some days later, Johannes brought up a difficult topic. “I have been thinking lately that maybe it is time that I made a will. I’m getting along in years, now being sixty-six, and I want to make sure my family is well cared for. And besides, I really don’t want more of my hard-earned money to go to the State than is required! The Lord has blessed us greatly and I wish to pass those blessings on to our children.”

Sjoukje responded, “That sounds like a good idea, Johannes. So what do you have in mind?”

Johannes said, “Over the years our Sietske has been a concern for us. She has never married, and has been living with us the whole time. I want to make sure there is a good amount of money set aside to help her throughout her continuing years. So I am going to set aside three thousand dollars just for her and then divide the rest evenly among the other children[^].”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea, Johannes. We’ve both had her limitations on our hearts and she would be blessed with extra provision for her future,” agreed Sjoukje.

“I will go to the office of Mr. van Loo and have the will properly recorded and witnessed,”⁵¹³ Johannes suggested. “But I want to take a little time to get it just the way we want it.”

A few months later, Johannes reported, “Well, now I have good news about our church, Sjoukje. The council received notice from Rev. Tamme Vanden Bosch that he has accepted our call to become our pastor. I wonder if maybe he will remember our issues of secession. He was only about fourteen years old at the time. He came to Noordeloos with his parents some years before his uncle Rev. Koene Van den Bosch came.⁵¹⁴ Maybe he will preach more like the Old Fathers. He was trained under Rev. Boer at our Seminary.”[^]

⁵¹³ Genealogy file for Johannes Van Haitsma.

⁵¹⁴ *Reformed Journal*, Nov. 1960: He immigrated to Michigan in 1848.

Sjoukje asked, “Isn’t he the one who went to some of the new churches to help them organize and become part of our Christian Reformed Church?”

“Ya, he is. And he has been working with some of the new immigrant communities,” added Johannes. “We can hope that he is a gentler spirit than his brother.”⁵¹⁵

“I guess we’ll have to see what he will be like, won’t we? I’m sure that Rev. Boer and Rev. Hemkes are good teachers, but they do carry with them all their background of training in the Old Country.”[^]

“I’m starting to realize that maybe we can’t take the old country out of old-country preachers any more than we can take the farm out of the farm boy,” suggested Johannes. “I think maybe I’m hoping against hope that he won’t be a cookie cut out of the same mold as the other preachers.”

“Oh, Johannes, you’ve been so disappointed in the way our “return” has turned out, haven’t you?” uttered Sjoukje.

“Ya,” responded Johannes, “and the squabbles in our congregational meetings haven’t helped that one bit. I have been elected deacon every term since 1861, and I will continue to be faithful to my Lord in that calling. But it is tempting sometimes to just walk away from it all. But then I did build our retirement house right next to the manse and church building, so I guess I made sure that walking away would not be easy.”

Tede Ulberg rode his buggy down to Johannes’s house one day late in June. Johannes greeted him, “Hey, friend! I haven’t seen you in quite a while.”

Ulberg answered, “Well as an old friend, I have slowed down some. I’m almost twenty years older than you. You’re a young man, retired much too early, even if you’re only half-retired.”

“Alright, my friend, come on in. I’m sure we can find something to eat and drink in the kitchen. Sjoukje is always prepared for company.”

Ulberg greeted Sjoukje warmly, “Hello, Mrs. Van Haitsma; it is good to see you. I hope you’re doing well?”

“Tolerably, Mr. Ulberg, tolerably,” answered Sjoukje. “How is Mrs. Ulberg doing?”

“She’s doing better than I am,” Ulberg said. “She’s going to outlive me.”

Johannes smiled, “We’ve also wondered who’s going to outlive whom. So, what’s the news?”

“Well,” responded Ulberg, “our annual Synod took place recently, as you know. Rev. Hulst made an announcement that Rev. Brummelkamp had died.”⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵Holland Classis Minutes, April 8, 1857.

⁵¹⁶CRC Classical Assembly, Opening Remarks, 1881.

“Now, who is Rev. Brummelkamp?” asked Johannes.

“He was the president of the Kampen Seminary[^] where all our imported preachers came from. He also was the brother-in-law of both Rev. Van Raalte and Rev. Van Velzen. Interestingly, in his condolence speech, Rev. Hulst made mention of the church in the Netherlands as our ‘Mother Church.’ That might not be worth noting except he’s not the first minister to make that comment.”⁵¹⁷

“Now that just does not make sense,” answered Johannes. “One of the first things Rev. Klyn and Rev. Van den Bosch did after our first Classis meeting back in 1857 was to write letters to that church in the Netherlands and ask to be considered one with them, and they refused us.”⁵¹⁸

“Ya,” added Ulberg, “and when Rev. Van Raalte went to visit them in the Netherlands, they extended the ecclesiastical olive branch to the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands. I realize that both of our denominations have called pastors from that same church’s seminary. But, to give the name “Mother” to the church that rejected us, did not please me one little bit.”

“I suppose,” said Johannes, “that now that our churches are part of denominations here in America, there are fewer reasons for us to embrace that church?”⁵¹⁹

“That sure is possible,” Ulberg said, “but maybe now that the issue of secret societies[^] has become so explosive recently, they may have decided to give us more credibility. Johannes, did you ever expect we’d be carrying on this kind of conversation?”

“No, Mr. Ulberg, but I have been doing a lot of reflecting, and more so all the time,” said Johannes. “Our church has not become the church I expected. Maybe that was never possible. Maybe we didn’t even know what we were saying in 1857. But we used the word ‘return’ to give some sense to what we really were longing for. And I have concluded that what we really wanted was a continuous sense of returning to the Lord, and a continual inspiring by the Holy Spirit.”

“Ya, I think that kind of describes our desire. But have we gotten there at all?” Ulberg asked.

“Well, I guess it’s something we need to keep in mind as we move forward. We need to recognize that what we thought would help, bringing in ministers from that church in the Netherlands, has not brought us there. And sadly,” continued Johannes, “I am seeing that having our home-grown ministry students training under Rev. Boer and Rev. Hemkes will simply mean that these students will follow the models and styles of the church in the Netherlands[^].”

Ulberg pondered, “Rev. Boer and Rev. Hemkes are the best teachers we have at this time.”

⁵¹⁷*Ibid.*, June 20, 1888, Art. 67. Hemkes, G., *Gerechtsbestaan*. He called the Chr. Reformed Church of the Netherlands “our Synode,” p. 231. He wrote, “Our church (CRC) here is a plant by the CRCNL.” (My translation), p. 256. Kuiper, R., Synod introduction 1880: “...our Church, as a daughter Church of the Christian Reformed Church of the Netherlands.” Van Der Werp preferred printing the elder rules for the Netherlands rather than the 1619 Church Order.

⁵¹⁸Beets, H., *Church*.

⁵¹⁹*CRC Classical Assembly*, June 20, 1888.

Johannes suggested hopefully, “Maybe they did experience the Old Fathers like we did, but I do wonder if it is possible that the seminary culture changed them too much?”

“It sure might have. Also maybe the Separated Church in the Netherlands has gone through changes that have made it different from what our changes brought us. You may have hit on something important there, Johannes. We hardly know what our changes have done to us over the years,” answered Ulberg thoughtfully. “Well, my friend, I think it’s time to return to my sweetheart. It has been good to talk with you about this.”

“Ya, thanks so much for sharing the news and your thoughts,” said Johannes. “You have given me more to ponder as I milk the cows. I do find that’s a good time and place to think.”

At coffee that night, Johannes shared with Sjoukje, “Talking with Ulberg this afternoon got me thinking.”

“I’m not surprised, Johannes,” she said. “You are much given to thinking, and milking time seems a good time for your meditations. So where has your mind been going?”

“It’s been running around something a little different. You know that I have wondered why the ministers think so little of us. We’re uneducated. We didn’t go to seminary. And we seem to so easily accept their evaluations of us, as if we have no minds of our own. Ulberg wondered why I stayed in the church or even continued to be a deacon. Indeed, there have been times I was ready to step out like we did from the Reformed Church in 1857.”

“Ya, you’ve had some bad times over all those issues,” murmured Sjoukje.

“Ach, but I don’t want to talk about that! I just remembered. When I walked over to the store this afternoon to get you some peppermints, you know, the ‘King’ brand you like so well. I walked into a group of your friends. They all said to say ‘hello’ of course. And asked about how you’re doing.”

“I hope you told them I was feeling fine? I don’t want people to be talking about my not feeling so well,” Sjoukje responded.

“Ya, I mumbled something of the kind,” said Johannes. “Mrs. Roek said something about remembering to rub your legs regularly. That apparently keeps the circulation going, she suggested. The others also had ideas to share for anything that might be ailing you. I guess saying you’re feeling fine didn’t fool them one bit.”

“Even though I could see this day coming, Tjalling’s death still surprised me,” Johannes told Sjoukje.

“I’m so sorry, Johannes. This is your second brother to pass away,” Sjoukje consoled him.

“Tjalling will be buried tomorrow on October 10, 1888, the first of our family to be buried in the New Vriesland Cemetery,” Johannes observed. “So now our family burial plots will be in four different cemeteries.”⁵²⁰

“Andrew made a large purchase of cemetery lots there, didn’t he?” wondered Sjoukje.

“Ya,” Johannes answered, “that was his way of contributing to the township paying for that cemetery and the cost of laying out the plans. I guess he’s thinking ahead, although I expect you and I will be buried in our church cemetery across the road.”

1889 *

Johannes spoke up in the council meeting. “I will not say anything about the bid for bringing firewood. I don’t want to interfere with your choosing between Reinder and Wyngaarden.”

The chairman said, “Thank you, Mr. Van Haitsma, for excluding yourself. We also don’t want to upset anyone in your family.”

The ballots were turned in and the chairman read the names out loud. “Wyngaarden has received the most votes, and his bid is ten cents less than that of the younger Van Haitsma.⁵²¹ Now we have to take up the problem of our dry well. Does anyone have a suggestion how to solve that? It is very inconvenient to have to keep bringing buckets of water to the church and parsonage.”

After a few suggestions, Johannes suggested, “When I built my house next door, I asked Mr. Arend Schreur for some help in finding water,⁵²² and we drilled a very successful well. So I think it might be worthwhile to ask him for his help.”

“That sounds like a good idea, Mr. Van Haitsma. Would you mind connecting with him?”

Johannes said to Wiebe, “Ten years ago our distant cousin Anske came with his family from Friesland. He heard about the homestead offer in America and so he moved to South Dakota.⁵²³ I hear that there have been a lot of immigrants who have moved out West. Now there are other distant cousins coming over. Maaïke, married to Herre Elgersma,⁵²⁴ wrote me to say she will be

⁵²⁰*Vriesland RCA Records.1884 Census: “Zyiling in Ottawa Co., MI Death Records 1883-1901, p. 92.*

⁵²¹*Vriesland CRC Minutes, Jan. 1, 1889.*

⁵²² Our Grandfather George Schreur, as his father of Arend, helped many to find water underground.

⁵²³ Van Haitsma, J., *Family Legends*. Brinks H., *Voices*, p. 6: “In the Netherlandic agricultural crisis (1875-1895), available homestead land in the United States offered a powerful inducement for the immigrants who came to the States between 1880 and 1900.”

⁵²⁴*Tresoor: Maaïke Rinses van Haitsma, born 1833 in Minnertsgea, Friesland; on July 21, 1856, in Barradeel, Friesland, married Heere Nannes Elgersma, born 1834 in Franeker, Friesland.*

stopping by here to visit a while before moving on to Iowa. She also said that her brother Wopke is coming to settle in Zutphen.⁵²⁵ Another cousin, Jelle, has plans to move to Grand Rapids.”

“Interesting!” said Wiebe. “After all these years more of our family is moving to America. I guess things aren’t any better in Friesland now than when we moved out of there.”

“I suspect not,” answered Johannes. “I hope when Maaïke gets here we can get a lot more news about what’s been happening in the family over there.”

Wiebe added, “I hope we all get a chance to meet together. I was pretty young when we came here. Maybe I can learn some more about the family over there. I wonder if any are still in the barge business. I sure enjoyed growing up on the barge. We saw so much of Friesland.”

Johannes reminisced, “I admit that I never expected to see family again. And now these cousins are moving to this country too.”

Wiebe picked up on those feelings, “You were a lot older and knew our family better than I did, so I guess you missed them more than I have.”

When Johannes returned home, he found Sjoukje resting on the sofa. He was aware that she was resting often lately. Yet it was a great shock to Johannes when Sjoukje spoke softly, “Johannes, please do not bury me in my headgear. It’s okay to be laid out in it, but I want to have it kept for the children. It is so much a part of our past.”

“But dear Sjoukje,” countered Johannes, “we really don’t need to discuss funeral arrangements, do we?”

“Ah, Johannes, you know I have not been doing so well,” Sjoukje retorted, “and if we don’t talk about it, you won’t know what my wishes are. I also don’t want one of those fancy caskets with a glass window in it.⁵²⁶ A pine box will be just fine.”

“I understand, Sjoukje,” agreed Johannes. “But when that day comes, we will want to honor you. The children may not understand so well. Things have been changing, you know. New funeral practices are being advertised in *De Wachter* as well as the newspapers.”

“Ya, I have seen them too, Johannes,” Sjoukje continued. “But I do ask you to honor my request and keep my memory in your heart.”

“That, of course, I will do forever,” answered Johannes. “And I promise that I will honor your requests. But I still want to hold on to you for many more years.”

“I want that too, dear husband.” Then Sjoukje added, “But I have a sense that the Lord may call me home in the not-so-distant future. I am looking forward to being in heaven with Jesus.”

⁵²⁵ Van Haitsma, *Family Legends*.

⁵²⁶ Kuiper, R., *Voice*, p. 39.

“Ya, me too,” confessed Johannes, “but I will gladly wait for that day that he calls either or both of us home.”

Johannes was glad that he had minimal farm work to do. He was able to spend much of his time during the cold month of February with Sjoukje. Johannes watched helplessly as day by day her strength was waning. And her appetite was disappearing too. Family came to visit and they both appreciated seeing the loved ones again.

On the morning of Feb 21, 1889, Johannes could see that Sjoukje was not doing well at all. She had trouble breathing and she was very pale. “Sjoukje, my Sjoukje, please do not leave me; I need you so.”

“O, Johannes, I am so tired. I am so ready to meet my Lord. I’m sorry to leave you, but I am tired of being so sick for so long. Please let me go. It’s time for me to go.” Sjoukje’s breathing became more labored and Johannes could hear a rattling sound in her chest.

Sister-in-law Annie said, “Johannes, this does look like the time for her to go. Maybe we can sing her into Jesus’ arms. Let’s sing her favorite Psalm.”

“Ya,” said Johannes, “she would like that.” Quietly, haltingly he began to sing the twenty-third Psalm.

They saw Sjoukje’s face slowly soften up and ease into a smile. They continued singing as her breathing slowed more and more. And then it stopped altogether. Johannes said, “I saw her spirit leave her face.” He buried his face onto her bosom. “Oh, Sjoukje, be well with Jesus.”

Annie knelt down on the other side of the bed. “Goodbye, Sjoukje,” she whispered. “May Jesus bless you.”

They remained quiet for a while. Then Annie broke the silence, “I’m going to go tell your family that Sjoukje has finished her work here.”

“Okay,” uttered Johannes through his tears. Annie found Andrew in his barn, fixing a piece of farm equipment. “Andrew,” she said, “your mother has just passed. Can you get word to the rest of the family?”

Andrew quickly went to his house to tell his Geertje. Then he jumped on the horse and was off to Reinder’s house and then across the road to Wiebe’s house. Then back across the fields to Peter’s and then Jetse’s.

Geertje went to see Johannes. She found him sitting on the chair, holding Sjoukje’s hand.

“I’m so sorry,” Geertje said, and she added, “I knew Ma was going to pass soon. She was tired of being sick so much. We are going to miss her very much.”

“Ya, me too,” agreed Johannes. “We’ve been through so much together. She helped me stay close to Jesus. And she’s been so brave all these years. She kept me from giving up on the church. That reminds me, Annie, would you go next door to Rev. Van den Bosch⁵²⁷ and let him know? He has been so kind as to visit with Sjoukje several times since he came here.”

While Annie went next door, Geertje reminded Johannes, “When Annie comes back, she and I and whichever sister comes will take care of Sjoukje and prepare her for viewing. Maybe you can put some water on the stove so we have warm water available? Do you want to pick out the clothes she will be laid out in?”

Johannes answered, “I think you ladies can better decide that. Her clothes are all here in the dresser and closet.”

Geertje said, “She would be pleased to have that head cover on. She was very accomplished with the designs she was able to create and share with others. But the gold probably needs to be cleaned; it hasn’t been worn for quite a few years.”

“Here’s Annie again, so you better go to the kitchen and get the water going. Soon the family and the preacher will come by and we want Ma to look good by then.”

“Okay,” said Johannes and went to the kitchen. He was a little lost here, “I haven’t done much in the kitchen except eat and visit. But I think I can boil some water.” He dug around in the cupboards to see if Annie had prepared any cookies or other treats to serve the expected company.

“Annie,” he said when she came back in, “Geertje sent me to get water on the stove, but I hardly know where to look for sweets and treats to offer when family members come. I guess I’d better put on coffee too.”

Shortly, a knock on the door announced the preacher. “Oh, Mr. Van Haitsma, I’m so sorry. Sjoukje was such a lovely woman. I’ve only known you two for a short time, and I’ve really treasured living next to you. I know you are going to miss her very much.”

“Thank you, Rev. Vanden Bosch. Yes, I will miss her tremendously. We’ve been through so much together!”

Gradually the family members came in their buggies, and the women cried with Johannes. They went to the bedroom to help make Sjoukje ready for the viewing. Annie had come in for the warm water, and had pointed to the place where the cookies were stored. Johannes had the coffee brewing. The men sat down with Johannes around the kitchen table. They reminisced and told stories about Sjoukje. And Johannes was comforted.

The ladies meanwhile prepared Sjoukje’s body for viewing. Annie prepared to place the gold headpiece on Sjoukje’s head.

⁵²⁷*Christian Reformed Church Ministers List, www.*

Geertje and Sietske agreed, “Ja, Ma would approve having them on for the viewing and also keeping them for the family mementoes.”

Sietske asked, “Pa, what do you think about the casket? We can get a nicely-decorated one in Zeeland. Think ma would like that?”

“Now, daughter, ma and I, we’ve talked about that. She would like a really simple coffin. I think she would prefer if the boys would put one together. That would make this whole time a real family affair. Ya, I think she would like that. I understand state rules now require a box in the grave that the coffin can be lowered into. And the boys can prepare that box too. And I expect that the trustees wouldn’t mind at all if we men dig the grave ourselves.”⁵²⁸

Some weeks later Johannes received some news that cheered his heart.

“Hey, Pa,” called out Andrew, “we got a telegram from New York saying that your cousin Maaïke has arrived. They will arrive in Holland on the train in two days.”

“Ya,” said Johannes, “they wrote us a letter months ago saying that they were planning to come to America. I hope the trip was easier for them than it was for us.”

“It will be wonderful to meet relatives from the old country,” said Andrew.

Johannes pondered, “They seem to be coming for some of the same reasons we came, particularly looking for economic improvement. I hope they also came to be in a better spiritual climate. I hope to have a chance to meet their father too. I hear he comes as a widower.”

Andrew ventured, “A lot of things have changed over the years and I hope you all get a chance to talk a while. I know you left many relatives behind in the old country, and of course our family has also been fruitful and multiplied, as the Bible recommends.”

“I wonder sometimes,” Johannes said, “how many there are in our family now forty years after coming here. Most of us are concentrated here in *de Kolonie* and in the central area of Michigan.”

“It seems,” wondered Andrew, “maybe we still like to keep a bit closer to family these days. I understand that Uncle Jetse’s son is moving all the way to California. I don’t think I’ll make that kind of move. Not even as far as Peter did to Missaukee County. Even if the trips today don’t take nearly as long as yours did. Did it really take six weeks to get here from New York?”

“Actually it did,” said Johannes. “It took about that long to cross the ocean too. Travel by both boat and train is so much more comfortable now.”

⁵²⁸*Vriesland Cemetery Records* indicate that trustees were the supervisors for cemeteries. Sjoukje died Feb. 21, 1889 and was buried in the CRC Cemetery across the road from the Vriesland Christian Reformed Church.

“I’m so sorry to hear that Rev. Tamme Van den Bosch is already leaving us.⁵²⁹ He’s only been here a year. I can understand that his heart is on the Indian mission field. He was very much the itinerant preacher in our denomination. We were blessed to have him with us at all. He never stayed anywhere more than two years, and most only less than one,” confessed Johannes.

Son Andrew asked, “Did you enjoy his preaching, Pa?”

Johannes admitted, “He was different from most of our preachers. He spoke more from the heart. Maybe his sermons were not as deep as many, but he was easy to listen to. His last council meeting will be on October 21, 1889.”

Rev. Van den Bosch and Johannes sat together on the front porch of the church building, looking over at the cemetery in the sunset and sharing a private farewell time. “Rev. Van den Bosch,” Johannes murmured, “I’m so sorry to see you leaving again so soon. It seems we have just been getting to know each other. It has been good this past year. You have brought a bit of the Old Fathers to us.”

“Ya, Mr. Van Haitsma, as you know, I’ve been ministering to a number of new and young congregations since I graduated from seminary. Short term ministry is what I seem to know best. I like to think of being a bit like Paul in the New Testament. He sometimes stayed only three months in a place and then moved on.”

“I guess he knew how to organize groups of believers in a town and he knew by the Spirit when it was okay to leave again,” suggested Johannes.

“That’s kind of my thought,” the Reverend responded. “I sense that the Lord is saying that the Indians in Dakota Territory need my kind of ministry now. So I feel I have to obey the Lord’s prompting and go over there.”

Johannes added, “And I suppose that all the squabbling that we’ve been doing here in Vriesland has not made it very easy for your ministry among us, has it?”

Rev. Van den Bosch chuckled. “What you call squabbling, I think of as simply a difference of opinion. I will admit that all the different opinions I kept hearing in council meetings and congregational meetings have not made my time here all that easy. Other groups I have served have had many conflicts among them too. When groups are trying to deal with big changes in their lives, it seems easy for sharp conflicts to arise. And this church sure has had its share of changes. You have grown from being a small church to a large one needing to expand your building, and then back to being a church almost too small to survive.”

The men sat quietly for some moments and then the Reverend continued, “Differences of opinion do not concern me at all. In fact, when all the members experience the freedom to honestly state their opinions without fear of being belittled or criticized, I see that as a major strength of that church. Everyone is important in that church and their opinions are really heard.

⁵²⁹Vriesland CRC Minutes, Oct. 21, 1889. CRC Classical Minutes, 1889. Reformed Journal, Nov. 1960, p. 19.

Yes, sometimes that makes it harder to arrive at a decision that everyone can live with, and it may take a while to do, but when all is said and done, each man knows that they have been fairly heard and agrees to live with the final decision.”

Johannes said, “Rev. Van den Bosch, thank you so much for sharing this with me. For the first time in a very long time, I feel someone actually understands us Vrieslanders. That is exactly how our group operates. But most people find it hard to understand.” The men were comfortably quiet together.

Johannes thought out loud, “I do not know just what our future holds here, but I am glad to know that the Lord is the one who holds our future. That thought has been such a comfort to me over the years.”

“Ya, I can echo that!” replied Rev. Van den Bosch. “I did not expect that the Lord wanted me for ministry at my age. I did struggle against that for many years. Seeing my uncle with his foot in his mouth so many times did not make me feel too comfortable, either. I guess I was always wondering if I had the wisdom to really serve the Lord in challenging places. But I feel that He has blessed the journey I’ve been on this past decade and the many people whose lives I’ve been able to touch. I hope that will be true among the Indians too.”

Johannes responded quietly, “I’ve always had a place in my heart for our Indian neighbors. I got to know one chief early on. He would drop by our place unannounced. It first scared Sjoukje a bit, but she got to know him. And when I was working away from home in those early years, it felt good to know the chief was close by and watching out for my Sjoukje.”

“He and I spent times sitting like this outside the house and I learned to know how he had been listening occasionally to Rev. Smith in the Indian church. Years later he told me how impressed he was with our singing that he heard coming from so many cabins and from under the trees. He began to know the Lord bit by bit, and he finally said to me he wanted to follow Jesus just as I did. Oh, my. Did that ever touch my heart!”

“I’d expect that would,” answered Rev. Van den Bosch. “It’s always special to my heart to hear people confess their faith, and especially when I have had a part in their preparations.”

“And when he died,” continued Johannes, “it was special to me that his family expressed his wish to be buried among us. I am so glad that our cemetery trustees were willing to bury him in our cemetery across the street here.⁵³⁰ Now I tend both Sjoukje’s grave and his grave too, and place flowers by both.”^

Things were quiet in Johannes’ house. The corn has been shocked and was drying out in the fields, and the milking had been done for the morning. Johannes quietly waited for his family to arrive. The coffee was on, and daughter-in-law Geertje had baked a lovely cake. “Oh, Lord,” he

⁵³⁰Vriesland Cemetery Records.

thought. "It will be so nice to share this house again. Geri is such a nice woman and we will be such a comfort to each other in these later years. Her husband has been gone for awhile, and Sjoukje has been gone too."

The first carriage to arrive awoke him from his reverie. Peter and family who lived furthest away came first, as always. "Welcome, son," he shouted as they climbed down from the carriage. "Welcome all."

"Oh, Pa," called out Kate, "what a beautiful day for a wedding!"

Just behind them Titus and family came rolling into the drive. Then followed the others who lived closer by. Andrew and family walked over with Reinder and family. Brothers Jetse and Wiebe came close behind with their families. Last of all came the preacher. Johannes was looking past all their shoulders. Looking south he could see the prettiest sight of all, Geridiena being brought by her family from Overisel. The grandchildren were all bouncing around, so pleased to see each other, and the adults were all in intense conversation.

Soon all were crowded into Johannes' house and he escorted Geri through the door and they stood before the preacher. Both were ready to say, "I do!"⁵³¹ But first they had to sit through the message the preacher had prepared.

The prayer blessing completed the service and they were husband and wife. And the party began.

A few months later, Johannes rewrote his will. He said to Geri, "I am so blessed with you coming into my life. I hope I will be a blessing to you as well. So in my will I want to be sure I take good care of you in case I leave you in death."

"Oh, Johannes, you have been taking care of me already. You know my late husband left me well off, so please do remember your own children," Geri reminded him.

"Sure," responded Johannes. "And I have already taken care of my children with farms that I have been able to buy and give them as they started out their families."

1890 *

"The congregational meeting last evening," Johannes began, "was such a shocking meeting!"

"There have been several difficult meetings of the council and of the congregation, haven't there?" offered Geri.

⁵³¹*Vriesland CRC Membership List*. Geri joined the Vriesland CRC in Oct. 1889, although she is incorrectly listed as married to Sietse. *Michigan Marriage Records*, Oct. 12, 1889.

“Ya,” answered Johannes. “But only a few when we had to cancel communion because of the divided emotions in the congregation.”

“So once again people couldn’t come to unity?” wondered Geri.

“No,” responded Johannes. “Finally, after much discussion about which property to buy, we voted for the Widow Wiersma’s acre. Everybody was willing to go along with that decision except one person. He talked about helping the widow by buying her land was a good thing for her, but that as a church we needed a place which would not have a constant problem with standing water. We had earlier considered the higher land and house of Willem Maurits with six and a half acres. But that plot was considerably more expensive. It was clear we did not want to burden the membership with that much cost. Once again the long congregational meeting closed without resolving the issues.”⁵³²

Geri asked, “What do you think about the one dissenting vote?”

Johannes thought a bit and said, “I think he was right. Building on the wet land of the widow’s property would cause endless problems for years to come. I think it took a lot of courage for him to stand up at that point in the discussion. We were so close to making a decision, but it would have been a very poor choice for the church building.”

“Oh, my,” sighed Geri, “I wonder how that person feels after taking that unpopular stand.”

“I don’t know,” answered Johannes, “but I think maybe I need to visit with him and find out how he feels about it all.”

“I expect he would greatly appreciate your coming to give him encouragement,” Geri suggested.

Johannes stretched out his feet on the ottoman. He folded *de Wachter* magazine he had been reading. “Geri,” he said picking up the cup of tea, “I just don’t know what’s going on in our denomination.”

“Like, what’s on your mind?” asked Geri.

“Well, in one way it seems like such a small issue. But in another way it seems to point to a definite uncertainty about what the church stands for.”

“Ya, we have wondered if the church is still standing on the standards we all started with, haven’t we?” suggested Geri. “So what’s in *De Wachter* this week?”

“This happened about twelve years ago, way before you became part of my life and part of our Vriesland Church. Elder Yntema had translated a sermon written by the English preacher Charles Spurgeon. He was called on the carpet for doing that.”[^]

⁵³²Vriesland CRC Minutes, Feb. 20, 1890, Art. 6; Feb. 5, 1890, Art. 7; Feb. 3, 1890, Art. 4.

“Then some time later the preachers from the Netherlands persuaded our Synod to censor all sermons that were being read by the elders whenever the minister wasn’t on the pulpit. The elders were only supposed to use approved sermons.”

“Well, that suggests that elder Yntema was out of line, and the Classis was reaffirming the standards,” observed Geri.

“I agree,” Johannes said, “but now I noticed an advertisement on the last page of *de Wachter* for buying books by that same preacher Spurgeon. Doesn’t that seem contradictory? It’s like one hand doesn’t know what the other is doing.”

Geri added thoughtfully, “On the other hand, maybe the editor was not aware of that earlier event.”⁵³³

“I’m sure he knows of the policy to only use approved materials, but you’re right, he might not have remembered the spat over using Spurgeon’s sermon in church. But principles are principles. If Spurgeon was noted as not adequately Reformed one time, why should he not be so recognized some years later?” wondered Johannes.

“One thing I’ve become aware of,” noted Geri, “is that some preachers think we’re not very astute theologically. But I think they forget that the turmoil of the two secessions in our lifetimes has definitely increased our sensitivity to the doctrinal nuances that preachers are teaching.”

“I agree,” added Johannes, “we have been listening to truths long enough to smell a rotten thought rather easily. And I know how much we’ve enjoyed engaging in theological debates among ourselves and at the general store and other gatherings we might be having. There’s no way they can accuse us of being doctrinally illiterate. We’ve got good sensors for God’s truth.[^] Oh well, let me see what else the preachers put into *de Wachter*.”

On August 4, 1890 three ministers met together briefly before entering the Vriesland Christian Reformed Church building to attend another congregational meeting.

“This is a very important meeting,” **Rev. Hemkes** observed to his friends. “This Vriesland congregation is having such a hard time deciding what to do. I’m glad that you two⁵³⁴ are here as the Classical Committee assigned to help the congregation sort things out. I hope we can help them determine what they ought to do. In my own mind and heart, I know that this church has played an important role from the beginning of our denomination. There is no way that the doors ought to close permanently.”

Rev. Bos, who would be chairman of the congregational meeting, noted, “I think we are all agreed on that. But this congregation has to make their own decision for the future. Whether they

⁵³³*De Wachter*, Feb 11 and May 14, 1890. *CRC Classical Minutes*, 1869, Art. 26.

⁵³⁴Rev. Bos and Rev. Hoeksema.

are to continue or not is a decision they will have to live with forever. I hope we will have good ears to try to understand why they're having such difficulties.”

Rev. Hoeksema, the assigned clerk for the evening's congregational meeting, spoke up, “They've been struggling with this question off and on since 1884⁵³⁵ and haven't felt ready to make a final decision one way or the other. I think we need to give them good reasons to keep the doors open.”

Rev. Hemkes added, “I was asked to join you at this meeting because I was their pastor a few years ago.⁵³⁶ I think I know them pretty well. But I don't have any idea why they are having such a hard time with this. They are a wonderful group of people and I frankly don't understand.”

Rev. Bos asked, “Have you read through their minutes?”

“Ya,” answered Rev. Hemkes, “I've read through all of them. And it is obvious they have strong personalities among them. And that is understandable, as all of them were determined immigrants who had to struggle in all kinds of ways. I remember that they often would outspoke themselves and then have to apologize. But I also remember that was true for us in the 1834 *Afscheiding* too.”

“So you didn't see anything in those minutes,” asked Rev. Hoeksema, “that would explain the impasse they have been experiencing?”

“No, I still don't have a clue,” confessed Rev. Hemkes. “So, let's give them some good reasons to keep going and wait to see what they decide. Rev. Hoeksema, you gave five good reasons at the last Classis meeting. Do you mind if I summarize them for the congregation?”

“Not at all,” Rev. Hoeksema responded. “And any one of us can add our ideas to those to see if we can convince them.”

“Well,” said Rev. Bos, “let's call the meeting to order and do the job we have been assigned to do.”

The congregation settled down and waited for the Reverends to speak. “You all know why this congregational meeting was called,” began Rev. Bos. “We have been asked by Classis to see if we can be of service in bringing you to the decision that has been escaping you these past years. Your congregation has seen great blessings and has helped the start of four new congregations. This we celebrate with you. Now we would like to encourage you into a future with the Lord that will bring many more blessings to you all and to this community of Vriesland.”

There was shuffling of feet and seats, but no words came from the people in the pews. Rev. Hemkes spoke up after an awkward silence, “At the last Classis meeting, your dilemma was discussed, and the Classis appointed Reverends Bos and Hoeksema to have this meeting with

⁵³⁵Vriesland CRC Minutes, July 1, 1884, Art. 1.

⁵³⁶CRCNA Ministers Data Base: June 4, 1877 to 1883.

you. I was asked to join them because I have been your pastor. We are hoping to help you settle the issues.”

More silence that spoke loudly.

Rev. Hemkes hesitantly continued, “If I may, I would like to summarize for you a number of reasons for keeping this church active. Rev. Hoeksema outlined these reasons at the last Classis meeting.

The first reason is the importance of this church to the community. Second, never has a church with fifty families ever been dissolved. Third, older members couldn’t attend services. And your youth group, choir and catechism would not be attended. Fourth, it would be more difficult to establish a new congregation than now to work together and reconcile.”⁵³⁷

Johannes, sitting in the congregation, said to his neighbor, “The ministers don’t understand the dynamics of our congregation.”

A number of the congregation spoke up, not challenging these arguments, and not bringing up counter arguments. All their explanations agreed that they hadn’t been able to agree on what minister to call or whether to move the church and where to move the church.

Rev. Bos listened for a while and was frustrated. He tried a different direction. “Since part of the question is whether the church should move north of here, what financial support would the people who live south near the church now give to build a church further north?”

That question brought some response. Mr. Meijering offered \$100, Mr. Roek \$50 and Johannes offered \$150, and others offered their labor. Johannes noted for the chairman, “That is almost half of the estimated cost of a new building. Other members have pledged also, so it is clear that the money will be available for the building.”⁵³⁸

“Then,” asked Rev. Bos, “what is the problem that is keeping you all from agreeing to have your church a bit north?”

Elder Strembler, president of the last council meeting said, “We want unity among all the members.⁵³⁹ It is not enough for us that a mere majority makes decisions for us all. We desire to be in total agreement. No one is to be left out of the decision making. In our church the majority vote is voided if the minority are not able or willing to live with the majority vote. We want to move forward in unity.”^

At the close of the meeting, the shocked ministers huddled together. The congregation slowly exited the building until only Johannes was left with the clergy. “I would like to invite you to come to my house next door,” he said. “We can have some coffee and cake, and talk some more. Please come with me.”

⁵³⁷Vriesland CRC Minutes, Aug. 4, 1890. Hemkes, G., *Brief*.

⁵³⁸*Ibid.*, Aug. 4, 1890, Art. 4; July 21, 1890.

⁵³⁹Wabeke, B., *Emigration*, pp. 93-94.

The men trudged the path to Johannes' house in silence. After all were seated in the parlor, Geri brought them coffee and cake and quietly withdrew.

Rev. Hemkes turned to Johannes, "Mr. Van Haitsma, we are totally frustrated. We do not understand what is going on in this congregation. Can you please enlighten us? You were part of this group from the beginning in 1857."

Johannes responded, "Ya, I was already part of this group for some years before our denomination was organized. Most of us were members at the Vriesland Reformed Church which we faithfully attended. And like we did in the old country, we also held weekly fellowship gatherings for anyone who wished to attend. One big lesson we learned there was that the majority should not make decisions for the minority⁵⁴⁰. We know that church regulations allow that possibility."

Johannes continued, "So we were very aware that one major reason this denomination came into being is just because the majority in the *Kolonie* Church made decisions that a lot of us could not live with. We in Vriesland invited those who sent letters of secession to Classis Holland to come to a meeting and decide if they also wanted to live with the Standards of the Three Forms of Unity and the 1619 Church Order. Our new little denomination started with this agreement. This was an important reason why most of us emigrated from the Netherlands in the first place."

Johannes continued, "I want you to understand that none of us wanted to leave the church that was formed in the *Kolonie*. We had already seen how easily the church can splinter off, with the congregations of Rev. Smit, Rev. Schepers, Rev. Duim and later of Mr. Haan. We wanted to avoid causing such breaks in the body of Christ. Actually we felt that the churches of the *Kolonie* who joined the Reformed Church in the East were the ones who had left the dream of being by ourselves in a new land and community."

Rev. Bos wondered, "Is that the reason why many people and congregations left the Reformed Church of America in the last decade, because they could no longer live with the majority decisions?"

"Ja, Reverend," said Johannes. "We just could no longer live with the decisions of the majority. It is too easy for the majority to leave people out of the decision making. And usually it is the less wealthy, the less educated, the unmarried and the widows who get left out. One of the interesting dynamics here in Vriesland is that more of the wealthier members, like those who were ready to pledge tonight, live closer to our current church building. And many of the less wealthy people live further away to the north and east and west. Relocating to a more central piece of land would actually make the church more central to everyone."

"Obviously," Rev. Hoeksema added, "total agreement is a hard ideal to work towards and live with. It certainly is commendable, but it is so hard to have such a unity."

⁵⁴⁰Vriesland CRC Minutes, Jan. 28, 1890, Art. 5, p. 4.

“Ya, gentlemen, that is the difficult challenge we have been facing. It is far too easy to leave people out. Many people are already inclined to feel left out because of circumstances in their lives. We don’t want to contribute to their feelings of inequality or inferiority. Right from the start of the church in Jerusalem so many years ago, it was a challenge to treat all people equally. This is why deacons became an important part of the church, according to Acts 6. And that’s just what I see here in the Vriesland church.

Johannes continued, “So we have tried hard to make sure that no one in our congregation gets left out of the blessings of the Lord. Whenever we hear of a need, we do our best to be there for each other. Various times we deacons have brought a hundred pounds of flour to one of our homes to make sure there would be food on every table. We do not want anyone left out.

“That’s why only some of us offered pledges in answer to your question. So many people already feel like they have nothing to offer. We have encouraged people to offer their helping hands as pledges, as a few did tonight.”

“So,” suggested Rev. Bos, “the ideal of unity has resulted in the church council not being able to make decisions for the whole congregation because not everyone in the congregation agrees. I think this is an ideal that no one can live with.”

Ya,” said Johannes, “our impasse is certainly not about money. Last year when our committee looked at properties, members of the church pledged \$1,488 for moving and remodeling the church building⁵⁴¹ which was far more money than we would have needed. Each decision we were hoping to make, the minority refused to go along with.”

Johannes continued talking, desperately hoping to give the ministers an understanding. “It is like our family back in 1847 when we were thinking about emigration. Ma and Pa would not even consider the idea unless all of us were willing to go. As it was, Tjalling held back because of his young family; but when he made a solemn promise that his family would follow as soon as possible, Ma and Pa could live with the idea. The same thing happened in Rev. van den Bosch’s family. His mother would not give emigration a thought unless all would go. And only when the Reverend, as the oldest son, promised he too would follow did they agree to come to this land. In our church in Vriesland, we are like family and we don’t want to make decisions that leave anyone out, as if their vote was not important. Maybe Jesus’ observation of the widow who gave her last coin as giving more than anybody speaks to this ideal. We just don’t want anyone to feel left out as unimportant, either because of poverty, or their place in the church, or even the provinces they might come from. Most of us are from Friesland, and the Gelderland and Noord Hollanders could easily think they don’t count.”

The trio of ministers shook their heads. Rev. Hemkes said for them “Who can live with such an ideal? Majority vote should be acceptable for any of such decisions.” Soon they stood up to leave and Rev. Hemkes noted, “I will be going to spend the night with Nicolas in the parsonage. So good night.”

⁵⁴¹*Ibid.*, Jan. 18, 1893, Art. 1, p. 583; Feb. 13, 1893, Art. 3, p. 584.

Johannes said to the others, “We have bedroom space for both of you. You are welcome to stay the night; in fact we planned on that.”

The Reverends said, “We will be happy to accept your hospitality. It’s not very pleasant to be driving our buggy down the clay roads this late in the night.”

“So let me show you to your rooms,” said Johannes.

In the dark of their downstairs bedroom, Geri asked, “What do the ministers think, Johannes?”

Johannes quietly answered, “They do not understand why we want to resolve our building issues in unity.”

“They are used to deciding issues by majority rule, aren’t they?” wondered Geri.

“^Ya, they don’t understand why on these issues we want to respect the wishes of the minority. Too often the minority have been the more vulnerable people of the congregation. And we don’t want to trample on them. We want to keep talking until we can move ahead together,” murmured Johannes. “It is not really such a difficult concept to understand. Maybe they don’t want to understand us.”⁵⁴²

“But it’s also not hard to understand, is it, that some of our members are becoming impatient with the long time of discussion we’ve had?” wondered Geri.

Johannes agreed, “Ya, I do think that’s the main reason why some of our members have taken their memberships out of the Vriesland congregation. And now our numbers are getting even smaller. Rev. Hemkes said we still have fifty members, but my count of the numbers of voters doesn’t add up to that.”

He continued, “I am reminded of the time in 1857 when we chose to change from a fellowship model to a church model. The vote seemed to be unanimous, but after the meeting, I struggled with the thought that Elder Den Herder did not agree. But he chose to not cast either a positive or negative vote. He knew he would not go along, but he kindly chose to make no noise about that. He knew we had to live with our decision just as he was deciding to live with his decision to remain in the Dutch Reformed Church. We feel that the vote on our building and location will affect all our members so all need equal opportunity to have their opinion count.”

“^But,” Geri suggested, “the ministers grew up in a culture where only one out of five male members were allowed to vote.”⁵⁴³ “We have been so aware that many decisions in the *Kolonie* were made by ‘the leadership’ and never did take our opinion into account. How can the ministers possibly understand why we want to be inclusive with such an important decision?”

“And now I am wondering,” reflected Johannes, “if there is any way to reverse the declining membership in our church? A number of our members have already ‘voted’ by transferring to

⁵⁴² Hemkes, G., *Gerechtsbestaan*, p. 202.

⁵⁴³ DeJong, G., *The Dutch in America*, p. 6.

other churches. Would a smaller auditorium and an organ make a difference now? Should we follow the example of Graafschap with such an instrument to replace our beloved cantors? Personally I can't imagine an organ giving the special leadership in singing like Mr. Groen's rich voice does."

Later in the week, Geri heard a buggy coming up the drive. Looking out the window she saw it was the two Reverends Van den Bosch. "What a surprise," she said to herself, "to have fellow preachers paying a visit." She rang the backyard bell to alert Johannes.

Johannes hurried to the house and joined the conversation. "Reverends Van den Bosch," he exuded, "What a pleasant surprise! Please step down and come into our parlor. I'm sure we have a lot to talk about."

Looking at the younger, he said, "I haven't seen you since you left our church for the mission among the Indians." Looking at the older, he said, "I saw you briefly at the Synod meeting, but the ministers were all so busy. We never had a chance to talk."

"Reverend Koene," he continued after they had settled in the parlor, "you've been retired awhile now.⁵⁴⁴ I expect it's a relief to have some more reading time after all the years of hard work you did on the farm and for the churches. Reverend Tamme, I hear you had some disappointing time on the Indian field.⁵⁴⁵ We at the Vriesland church owe both of you so much for what you have done in our congregation and the denomination. But I'm talking too much. I'm sure you have interesting stories to share with us. Maybe some serious business too?"

Rev. Koene answered, "No, not really any serious business. Although talking about the situation in your congregation would be mighty interesting. I have been hearing things, and it would be nice to hear about it from you."

"I'd be glad to bring you up-to-date," Johannes responded. "But I've kind of had it up over my head, so I'd rather hear of all your itinerant and home mission activities. So Rev. Tamme, what happened in the Dakotas that got you so discouraged?"

"Ya, Mr. Van Haitisma, I did get awful down with that work. Of course I didn't know their language, although they spoke "American" too. But I think they never trusted me. Perhaps the years of being pushed around by white America laid the ground for that distrust. I think I wasn't prepared to understand and find ways to work with their own age-long religion. Now that I have given it up, I hear that many other churches have tried with equal lack of success. It may take years to gain a little of their respect, and maybe it would take just as much time for any missionary to learn to respect them and their ways. I do think it is easier to give and gain respect here among our own people, although I suggest that may not be as true as I think either."

"Now that sounds like wisdom, Rev. Tamme. I've had real questions too about the line of respect between us in the pew and the ministers in the pulpit. And having befriended the Indian chief

⁵⁴⁴ Rev. Koene van den Bosch retired in Grand Haven in 1881.

⁵⁴⁵ Beets, H., *Church*, p. 147.

that chose to stay among us and be buried in our cemetery, I can understand some of the mutual-respect struggle you might have had to deal with,” suggested Johannes.

“What do you think, Rev. Koene?” Johannes turned to the older minister. “Like us farmers, you worked for years in the fields, and then you accepted that call to Grand Haven and later did mission work among new communities of immigrants. Did you find things a bit unsettling doing ministry full-time again like in the Netherlands?”

“Mr. Van Haitsma, I am surprised at the kind of thinking you have been doing. No one has asked questions with such insight,” considered Rev. Koene Van den Bosch.

Johannes blushed, “Well, Reverend, we have all lived through hard times, and I think that gets my mind to working. Facing the enemy like these mammoth trees is bound to give us at least a grudging respect for others who are having difficult times.”

“I confess, Mr. Van Haitsma,” the senior pastor shared, “you’ve certainly hit the nail on the head. [^]Doing ministry one day a week with hard travel, and then working six days a week with the plow and in the forest was certainly different from preaching in the royal palace or hunting up immigrant communities scattered across this vast land. But then each of those situations also had its own kind of challenge. Maybe my time in *het Loo* gave me more of a challenge in my own heart while all the other times have given me other opportunities to study and to travel.”

“Certainly,” he continued, “spending much time in travel between communities or scattered homes gives time for thinking, but not much time for study. There is usually a warm welcome awaiting even if not a warm bed,” offered Rev. Tamme.

Johannes wondered, “Rev. Koene, how did you feel when the ministers started coming from the Netherlands? Did they look down on you coming to meetings away from the farm?”

“Ya, Johannes, that did take some getting used to. I had to learn to talk their talk again. That was not easy. Sometimes I felt like I was betraying the members of all my congregations.” Rev. Koene felt the need to direct the conversation away from himself. “So, Johannes, what’s been going on here in the Vriesland church?”

Johannes reflected, “This is all beyond my understanding. At least three times we have chosen plots of land where we could build a new church. We have voted to do that each time but we never had full unity. We do not want to make a choice about something this important by mere majority, not even a two-thirds majority. We will only move ahead when everyone is in agreement with the plan, or at the least, they are able and willing to live with the majority decision.⁵⁴⁶ And with every vote there has been one or more who just cannot live with the majority vote, so each time we chose not to proceed.”

Both Van den Bosch ministers exclaimed, “That’s a high standard for unity!”

⁵⁴⁶Vriesland CRC Minutes, March 31, 1890, Art. 3.

“I’m becoming more and more aware of that, gentlemen,” answered Johannes, “but the council wants to include and protect those who cannot afford to go along, or who might feel they have no voice in our church. I’ve been a deacon in our church for thirty years, and have made many visits to those in need or vulnerable, and I, for one, want to stand with them.”

“Johannes,” said the elder Van den Bosch, “I remember the comfort you gave me when I was sick and you visited me. Maybe I’m beginning a little to understand the reason for the impasse. It certainly shows you truly have a deacon’s heart. That was the reason the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to appoint deacons in the early church.”

They were all aware that the conversation had become more personal than they were comfortable with. Rev. Koene stood up with Rev. Tamme close behind. “Well, I believe we need to get back on the road. It has been wonderful visiting with you, Johannes. I hope we can both enjoy the retirement that the Lord has granted us.”

“Thank you so much for coming by,” Johannes shook their hands in farewell.

On August 2, 1890, Johannes lamented, “Another one of my friends passed away. “I have known Tede Ulberg for many years. I am aware there’s hardly anyone left who started in the Christian Reformed Church with us.”^

“Mr. Groen is still with us,” reminded Geri.

Johannes responded, “I’m grateful for that. There are too many changes. The church is shrinking, friends are dying, and our auditorium is being reduced in size. I’m getting too old for all these changes in our community.”

“Oh, Johannes, I’m so sorry,” offered Geri. “We just have to keep hold of each other and the Lord.”

“Ya, for sure!” Johannes agreed. “Having the Lord in our lives and having each other does make moving through all these changes more tolerable.”

Johannes began to reminisce. “Ulberg has been a close friend from the time we lived next door to each other in the early years here. He’s made many shoes and boots for us and others, especially when our wooden shoes wore out and there was no woodshoe maker in the Township. I know he’s had his ups and downs with the church. I hope life has been a bit easier for him since he’s moved away to Jamestown to be near his children. Even though I haven’t seen him much lately, I will miss him dearly.”

Geri consoled him, “It’s easier for him now at the throne of Jesus. We’re all looking forward to being at the throne. He has just beat us to it!”

“I’m sure he’s pleased the Lord has called him home,” suggested Johannes. “I’m ready to join the Lord too, but it’s okay too if He waits a while longer before calling me home.”

“It sure is okay with me if He keeps you here longer to enjoy our lives together!” exclaimed Geri. “We just got started on this journey together.”

1891*

“Sietske, I am so happy for you,” Johannes shared with his daughter. “You have obviously come to terms with your faith in the Lord, and now you have made a public profession of your faith.”⁵⁴⁷

“Ya, Pa, maybe at my age it’s about time, eh?” Sietske responded.

“That of course was for you to determine when you were ready. I took a good many years before I was ready to make my profession of faith in Jesus in front of the church. But I knew well before I took that step that I loved and wanted to serve the Lord,” Johannes offered.

Sietske said, “I understand that. I have loved the Lord as long as I can remember. But I had difficulty in feeling worthy of His love.”⁵⁴⁸

“Ya, that feeling of being worthy was the problem for me too^,” Johannes confessed. “Once we make profession of our faith, we are welcome to the Lord’s table.”

“But Pa, I am wondering if I will feel worthy when I am welcomed to the table,” Sietske confessed.

“I understand that too,” Johannes responded. “Many times I have wondered if I am worthy when I sit at the Lord’s table. But I am beginning to learn that the Lord also requires obedience when He said, ‘Drink of it, all of you.’”

“I guess I’d better remember that too,” Sietske answered with a smile.

“Maybe sometimes,” Johannes thought out loud, “we have to listen and obey the Lord even if our feelings don’t always sense the confidence. I guess we need to remember our faith is not based on our confidence, but our faith is based on His Word.”

“This is disappointing!” his normally gentle voice raised.

“What is, Johannes?” asked Geri.

⁵⁴⁷Vriesland CRC Minutes, Jan. 26, 1891, Art. 2.

⁵⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:27.

“I have been appointed to go the Classis meeting again. I went in August, and now I’ve been asked to attend the November meeting,”⁵⁴⁹ he answered.

“Well, that isn’t so bad is it? You usually don’t mind going to those meetings. I know you always come home with interesting stories,” Geri suggested.

“No, it’s not so bad. It is more what it means,” Johannes noted.

“Ya, I guess I understand where you’re going with this. It is one more indication that our church has shrunk and there are not enough elders available to go to the meetings,” Geri said.

“Ya, when we were small in the early years and didn’t have preachers to go to those meetings, I was appointed five times, I think.⁵⁵⁰ But even then we tried to avoid assigning deacons because the Church Order specifies elders and preachers. **And so they had to make special allowance to let me officially represent our church.**⁵⁵¹ So now my coming to the meeting will remind everybody that our church has become so small,” Johannes lamented.

“Well, you may not think so, but I know that the council is sending their best when they send you,” affirmed Geri.

“You’re right, Geri. I don’t think so. I think the elders are far more qualified than I am. I’ve never felt like I’m qualified to be a deacon, even after serving all these years.”

“But obviously the congregation has great respect for you and keeps voting you in term after term, and sometimes even though your name isn’t on the ballot. And sometimes with a large majority,” Geri reminded him. “And they like you on the committees because you get things done, and you take great care of people who have needs.”

1892 *

“Hello Mr. Van Haitsma,” Johannes heard from the garden.

“Well, Mr. Roek, it’s a pleasure to see you. Come sit in the shade with me. Geri gave me a nice jar of coffee to take out here. It should still be a bit warm. Come share it with me.”

“It is nice here in the shade,” Roek observed. “August weather here can be quite stifling.”

“Ja, it can be,” said Johannes. “And if I remember correctly, it never got quite as hot back in Friesland as it does here. But I am glad to have less of the cold winds that so often would blow

⁵⁴⁹*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Nov. 2, 1891, Art. 3.

⁵⁵⁰*Ibid.*, April 5, 1861, Oct. 7, 1863, Feb. 3, 1864, Sept. 2, 1865 at Synod, Aug., 1891 and Nov., 1891. **Almost every mention of Johannes is with a different spelling of his name.**[^]

⁵⁵¹*Ibid.*, Aug. 18, 1891, Art. 2 and Nov. 2, 1891, Art. 3.

across the canals. I think I can handle the hot weather that we have here better than those cold wet winds.”

“Ya, I have found that too,” Roek confirmed. “But, you know, talking about the weather is not my strong point.”

“Ya, mine either,” responded Johannes. “So what’s been on your mind?”

“^Well, pretty much our church, of course. Besides my farming, that’s what keeping my mind whirling.”

“And now that you are the one who is taking the minutes at our council meetings,” noted Johannes, “you have quite the challenge. I was thinking that it often must be hard to decide how much to put in. People may look back into those minutes in future years to figure out what in the world was happening that this church of ‘fifty’ families struggled so long to decide if it should keep the doors open.”

“Ya,” responded Roek, “I know Rev. Hemkes said ‘fifty’ families, but it seems every meeting a few more are asking for their certificates of transfer. From Sunday to Sunday I don’t know how many families are still in our church. At the same time we have new families becoming members. But the numbers don’t keep up.”

“Ya,” suggested Johannes, “I see that with my treasurer records too. What’s coming in is less and less. Now we will have to ask Synod to help us with salary for a minister if we should happen to get one. All of our accounts are getting smaller and smaller,” continued Johannes. “There are hardly any reserves to take care of those who are struggling.”

“So much of our minutes now include who is going to go to Classis or Synod, and the various money that keeps dribbling in,” Roek added.

“And then we keep on racking our brains about what minister we might want to call. And when we get another letter of decline, we struggle through the whole process over again,” Johannes considered.

“Ya, I don’t want history to listen in on our private opinions and issues about the building or our members. So I am keeping all that to a minimum.”

“Well, as I hear the reading of the minutes, you’re doing a great job of keeping us focused on the routines of our meetings. You manage to avoid some of the heavy discussions we are inclined to have in thinking about our church’s future,” opined Johannes.

“That we have those discussions at all is hard enough!” Elder Roek added. “But I think the minutes are not for hanging our dirty linens out on the line. They are for actual decisions made and records of who were there or not.”

Johannes chuckled, “I suppose if every part of our discussions were on record, we might not feel so good about saying that the church visitors find everything ‘in good order.’ On the other hand, our differences of opinion have in common a deep concern for the church and for taking care of some of our more needy folk,” Johannes said. “And I want to say that the council that was elected after the former group stepped aside is carrying on very well. It has been such a gentle succession.”⁵⁵²

“And I want to say, Mr. Van Haitsma, that having you continue on as deacon and one of our treasurers has made the transition so much more comfortable for us all. With your wealth of knowledge about decisions made and where to find answers and how to solve problems, we have been truly blessed. Even your willingness to attend Classis on our behalf has been greatly appreciated,” Roek observed.

“^You know, one of my biggest regrets is that when our former pastor Rev. Hemkes came to help us sort out our differences, that didn’t change anything in the long run. Even he just couldn’t understand us.”

On a cold sunny day in October 1892 Johannes and Geri were settling in the pew in the church in Oakland, Michigan. “What a beautiful day for a wedding,” Geri said.⁵⁵³

“Ya,” answered Johannes, “this is a wedding I never expected would happen. I’m so glad that Tjepke saw such good in her and is happy for her to be mother to all his children.”

“Isn’t it wonderful that since coming to this land he would turn to Sietske to help make a home here?” observed Geri.

“He’s such a good man,” Johannes bragged. “He’s already being considered for the elder position. I’m very happy for them.”

1893 *

The elder leading the worship service said, “I have an announcement to make. Rev. Hoeksema has been asked by the Classical committee to come to our council meeting again.⁵⁵⁴ Please be in prayer for the council on Wednesday evening when he will meet with us. Please pray for a peaceful spirit, for willing minds, for obedient hearts. We all want our issues solved.”

On Wednesday evening Johannes, with fearful anticipation, walked over to the church building to join the gathering he had faithfully attended for thirty-two years. Rev. Hoeksema arrived in his buggy, stabled his horse, and came into the church council room.

⁵⁵²*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, April 12, 1892, Art. 5; Sept. 14, 1892; May 5, 1980, Art. 3.

⁵⁵³Genealogical File for Sietske Van Haitsma.

⁵⁵⁴*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, March 14, 1893.

As usual for the preacher, Rev. Hoeksema sat at the head of the table and assumed the chairman role in the meeting. He introduced the topic for the meeting and, after they sang a Psalm and prayed together, he gave opportunity for discussion. “Brothers, please share with me what is going on in your council and congregation that you cannot come to affable solutions in your church.”

Various council members expressed their opinions on the issues of what minister to call to be their pastor and the best location of the church building. They talked loud and long.

Johannes had a hard time holding his tongue. He had invested so much of his life in this church and had been so deeply a part of it all. Now he felt like he could spill over if he even opened his mouth.

Rev. Hoeksema finally said, “Brothers, for the Lord’s sake, set aside your opinions and try to listen to the Lord of the church!”

But to no avail. There was no agreement amongst the council members. The evening wore on; the smoke and spirit grew oppressive and every one took a stubborn posture. Rev. Hoeksema finally threw up his hands and said, “Gentlemen, I am calling this meeting to a close. I cannot see a solution. May the Lord forgive us all for our stubborn hearts!”⁵⁵⁵

The meeting concluded with Rev. Hoeksema storming out. Johannes was close behind. He said, “I’m so sorry, Reverend, that we cannot settle our differences. But you need to know something. Our church went through lean times after we were organized. There were many strong people in our new denomination. Time after time leaders had to apologize for what they said or did. But we were committed to continue in unity together with the Principles of 1619. So in spite of hot heads and hard hearts we doggedly kept together. We were all fully committed in 1857 to the principles of returning to the 1619 and 1834 Confessions and Church Order.”

“Ya,” spoke up the Reverend. “I was your counselor for some years, so I got to know a lot of your congregation, and even some of your history.”

“I’m sure you did, Reverend,” responded Johannes. “But here’s something you probably did not know or understand. When finally Rev. Frieling came to be our first preacher, the whole dynamic of our church changed.⁵⁵⁶ And I am slowly becoming aware of how much changed just because preachers came into our churches. So I think a great deal of the conflict that our council expressed tonight was because it has been hard for us to understand what’s been happening to our own church. For example, when Rev. Van der Werp came to Graafschap, and attended the next classis meeting only a day or so later, there were two decisions he convinced us to make. One was to cancel our decision to order a printing of the 1619 Church Order. Instead he convinced us, and I was there, to order a *commentary* on the Church Order. I did not realize the implications of that. None of us did. The next decision he recommended and we followed, was to

⁵⁵⁵ Hemkes, G., *History*.

⁵⁵⁶ *Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Dec. 31, 1885, Art. 3.

order the Borstius Catechism to teach our children, and it would also be used with those desiring to make confession of faith.”⁵⁵⁷

Rev. Hoeksema countered, “Well, those were good decisions of Classis to follow.”

“But that was only the beginning of ministers coming from the Netherlands, or trained by preachers from the Netherlands and they all changed the church into being and thinking like them. So we people in the pew and those on the pulpit were not speaking the same language. We layfolk certainly did not realize that every time we went to Classis meetings, when we were affirming our stand on the Standards of 1619, the preachers were expecting that all the changes brought into the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands were also just going to be assumed into our church here in America.⁵⁵⁸ And so we ended up agreeing and making decisions we didn’t want to make.”

“Ah, Mr. Van Haitsma,” the Reverend exclaimed. “You know that I and the other ministers did not come to change your churches. We came to serve the Lord in this new land. Some changes in our lives and church do just happen. We still want to affirm the standards of the church that we returned to in 1834.”[^]

“Ya, but,” spoke up Johannes, “what is it that makes the worship services in our churches today feel so different than when our sermons came from the Old Fathers?”

“That is a powerful question, Mr. Van Haitsma,” said Hoeksema, “I grew up listening to the Old Fathers too. And I think and believe that we are continuing on in their spirit.”

“Well,” responded Johannes, “I am sure more comfortable and joyful in the Lord when we have a reading service than when we have a supply pastor. I am older than you, and I can remember those marvelous times of worship and Psalm singing with a fondness and a wishfulness.”

“Thanks for sharing your thoughts with me, Mr. Van Haitsma,” countered the Reverend. “It’s time for me to hitch up the horse and get my way back home. I have some teaching to do in the morning.”

“Thank you for taking time for me, Reverend. Have a safe trip back. Good night.” And Johannes turned to go home.

Johannes entered the kitchen, to the good smell of coffee. “Oh, Geri, we had another disappointing meeting. I just don’t understand what we are doing to ourselves.”

“Okay, Johannes, slow down, sit down, and tell me what happened.”

“As you can imagine from other meetings, we had a stormy session. Our counselor, Rev. Hoeksema, stormed out of the meeting and said he gave up! I followed him out hoping to quiet

⁵⁵⁷*CRC Classical Assembly*, Oct. 12, 1864, Art. 6.

⁵⁵⁸*Ibid.*, April 29, 1869, Art. 25.

him down, but I don't think I was very successful. I hope he's not too hard on his horse on the way home."

He continued, "But I don't understand what happened either. We made the decision to buy land from H. Faber. We had looked at it sometime earlier and agreed it would be a good place to build a new church building. Then after some more discussion we decided not to buy that land from H. Faber. That was it! We just could not come to an agreement that all of us could live with.⁵⁵⁹ And I have no sense of what really happened to suddenly turn our decision around one hundred and eighty degrees! I guess I wasn't following the discussion too closely or the talk got so loud that I kind of shut my ears."

Johannes' eyes teared up. "Geri, I thought we had made good progress in our discussions. We've had committees report on available properties. We've had committees to get estimates for moving the church building and for building a new one. We've had people asking the congregation for pledges and we actually have raised enough money to buy land and pay for a new building. We also received pledges of worktime from some of our members without money. We've had meetings with and without pastoral counselors to discuss what to do. I know the Lord has His hand in all this, but I don't know which way He's leading us."

"It seems like every meeting," pondered Geri, "we have high hopes. And then we end up just going back to square one. Do we have to ask ourselves if our dream of unity is the high value we have been thinking it is?"

"One thing is certain," observed Johannes, "we have rarely achieved that unity in any of our discussions lately. And yet, the dream of unity has driven us along all these years. Just as Jesus prayed in John 17 that we might all be one, we wanted to be an answer to His prayer."

Geri asked, "Did the congregation come any closer to deciding on the main motion to continue or not?"

"No," responded Johannes reluctantly, "that decision is still up in the air. Maybe the next meeting will be the deciding time, and maybe not, considering the way we go back and forth."

Geri tried to encourage Johannes, "Maybe by the next meeting the members will have thought it all through and they will decide to continue."

"I hope we can find some sleep after all this."

Church issues weren't the only topics Johannes mulled over in his mind these days. His son Peter had recently informed Johannes that he was moving his family from his farm in Zutphen and going all the way to Grand Rapids so he could partner in the store with his in-laws.

Johannes said to Geri, "Peter's choice of moving to Grand Rapids seems a strange thing. He already has a passel of kids. I've thought that having kids on a farm was a great learning and

⁵⁵⁹*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, March 14, 1893, Art.5 and Art. 6.

growing experience for them. What will happen to them if they live in a city without chores to be doing? I have no idea what living in the big city would be like.”⁵⁶⁰

Geri suggested, “Well, I think the decision to move to the city is partly for Katie to be near her family, but I think Peter wants to stretch out his choices a bit. I’m sure he will be very successful in whatever he does over there.”

“I’m not afraid about that,” said Johannes. “I know he’s very capable. And I certainly would not want to limit him in his dreams. I don’t mind sharing him with Katie’s family either. I guess I’m just disturbed over a bunch of things and it’s not clear in my mind.”

Before the Council meeting of March 21, 1893 Johannes confessed, “Geri, I feel so bad about what’s happening to our church here. I’m heartsick over it all. I think I’m going to skip tonight’s meeting of the church council. I don’t want to be there when we toll the bell for the death of the congregation.”

“I certainly can understand that. But except for that one time when Sjoukje was so sick, you have never missed a council meeting in thirty-two years!” Geri observed.

“I’ve been holding all this pain and frustration in my heart so long, I’m afraid of what I might blurt out. I just can’t go!” muttered Johannes.

“I am so sorry, Johannes,” Geri responded. “I know this is a very hard time for you. I heard from Sietske that our son-in-law is going to be absent too. He doesn’t have as long a record with the congregation, coming here only a few years ago. But he feels heartsick about it too.”⁵⁶¹

“It has been like a swing in the life of the church,” Johannes lamented. “The first years we were so small that we couldn’t afford to call a pastor. Yet by 1880 we were so large as to spin off the Overisel, Jamestown and Beaverdam churches. Now this year we are so small again that we are ready to close the doors.”

On Friday, April 4, Elder Strembler knocked on the back door. Geri said, “Welcome Mr. Strembler. Please come in. I’ll ring the bell for Johannes to come in from the barn. I was just about to put a pot of coffee on the stove, so I know he’ll be glad to come and sit with you.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Van Haitsma. I hope you’re well, and your family too,” the elder responded.

Geri showed him into the parlor, “Please make yourself comfortable. Johannes will be in shortly. I’m sure he will be eager to hear what happened at last night’s meeting of the council. I think I hear him chucking his boots.”

Johannes greeted Elder Strembler, “Strembler, it is good of you to come by. I’m sorry, but I just couldn’t bear to come to last night’s council meeting. I did not want to hear what decision was likely to be made.”

⁵⁶⁰ Van Haitsma, A., *Family Legends*.

⁵⁶¹ *Vriesland CRC Minutes*, March 21, 1893, Art. 4.

Geri had quietly backed out of the room, and soon came back with coffee. “I’m going to excuse myself,” she said. “This sounds like it might be council talk.”

The elder affirmed, “Ya, but I would be pleased to have you join the conversation. You are part of our church and Johannes values your input. So please stay with us. Nothing confidential will be discussed.”

“Well, Strembler,” Johannes began, “what did happen and what was decided?”

“What we did decide, Mr. Van Haitsma, is to give the congregation a two-weeks notice and then hold a vote to make a decision about whether to continue or not.”

“So,” suggested Johannes, “we’re back to the original question of 1884. Perhaps now we will actually make a final decision.”

“Ya, and we felt that the congregation would be pleased to have a breathing time between the announcement and the actual vote. I know we have been in an uncertain place for nine years now. And that is a very long time. But we never wanted to push the congregation into a corner. That’s not a nice place for anyone to be,” Mr. Strembler said.

“And,” mused Johannes, “we have come to the point of finally affirming that we have done all we can do to keep going. If the congregation’s choice is to continue, we will still have the church location question hanging over us. We will pray for God’s blessing on the future.”

“Ya,” added the elder, “but remember that even after that meeting, we still have the option of not going on.”

Geri suggested, “So even if the congregation in two weeks does decide to continue, that decision still can be reversed if we are not able to make decisions on our location.”

“Unfortunately,” Strembler said, “that’s the way of decisions, isn’t it? There may be a window in which we can change our minds. I would like to think we might just finalize the decision and all of us can move on whichever way the Lord leads.”

Johannes wrapped up these thoughts by suggesting, “Well, now we have two weeks of very special prayer to lift up, that God will give us clarity of mind and heart and a good pair of ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to our congregation.”

On Sundays, Johannes and Andrew took turns doing the evening milking. Today was Johannes’ turn and he put on the coveralls and his rubber boots. He walked into the cowbarn where grandson Johannes had gathered the cows. Taking the pail off the hook and picking up his one legged milking stool, he went to Sally and hunched down beside the calm Holstein, settled on the stool and began to milk her. Meanwhile he was thinking about the council meeting he had missed. He hadn’t had much time to gather his thoughts since that meeting, what with hosting the preacher for Sunday as usual.

Slowly he felt his temper rising. “Why can’t the church get its act together? For years now we have discussed about where to relocate our old building. And now they want to build a new one. But they don’t know where. The committee can’t decide. The council can’t decide. We can’t decide on a preacher to call. We just can’t get it together.”⁵⁶²

He stewed and steamed and yanked harder on the cow’s teats. Sally twitched her tail, lopping him on his head. She didn’t like his pulling so hard. Johannes began to yell at her to quit being so restless. His voice grew louder. He didn’t remember that his grandson was hanging around the barn as usual. He began to yell at the cow. Then he saw the shadow of his grandson fill the doorway. He realized he was being heard.

“I’m sorry, Johannes,” he finally said as he quieted down a little. “I’m not yelling at you.”

“What’s making you so grumpy, Gramps?”

“Well,” Grampa Johannes replied, “I’m upset because the church won’t come to agreement.”

“I’ve heard the loud talk around the building and by the horsebarn. I can’t figure out what they get so loud about,” young Johannes said.

“This church has been important to me for many years,” explained Johannes. “We started worshipping in a little log cabin, and then, when we organized as a church, we moved to a larger frame building across from our old house on Byron Road. That was such a nice cozy place. But about the time your Uncle Wopke and I switched farms about thirty years ago, that building had become too small for all the people. That was when I donated the land where the church building is now. With some other people, we raised the money for the parsonage and the cemetery across the road.

“Then the church began to grow and grow, and we started other churches. But now our building is no longer centrally located to where many of our members live. So we have been talking about moving the building to a more central spot. But all our discussions end up in loud arguments.”

“Loud arguments are not much fun, are they?” noted little Johannes.

“No, definitely not,” responded Grampa Johannes. “And at the last congregational meeting, it was decided to have worship services at our church for the last time on April 16. That’s it! It is decided. We just need to wrap up all the legal stuff,⁵⁶³ and I think we will give our communion ware to some church that can use it. We will sell all the buildings to Mrs. Palingdood’s family and sell the land to your father. And the money from all that will be donated to the church home missions fund.”⁵⁶⁴

Little Johannes said, “That sounds like a lot of stuff to do.”

⁵⁶² Hemkes, G., *History*.

⁵⁶³ *Vriesland CRC Minutes*, April 4, 1893, Art. 5; April 17, 1893, Art. 5 and Art. 10.

⁵⁶⁴ Ottawa Co., MI, Deeds Record Office. Trustees meeting, Feb. 16, 1893.

“Ya, I don’t know all the details of everything, but different people will do this or that until it’s all done. I hope we’ll find a church that would like the bell we fixed up a few years ago. I will really miss that old bell.”

“What will happen then, Grampa?” little Johannes sounded sad.

“I think I’m going to move away from here,” concluded Johannes.

“But Grampa, you have such a nice house here. It’s so easy for us to come here and get cookies from Grandma. We don’t want you to move away.”

“Oh, John,” Johannes answered him, “I’m glad you like to live close by. I have enjoyed it too. And it has meant being close to your Gramma’s grave and her memories. I also liked being close to the church on Sundays. I’ll miss all that too. Mostly I will miss being close to you all.”

“Sometimes I remember how we moved away from our family in the Old Country, never expecting to see them again, never able to attend the family weddings and funerals. That’s when I really felt bad. But I promise you that I won’t move very far away. I have bought some land just outside of Zeeland. So you will be able to come to see us anytime you want and you can still get some of Grandma’s cookies. And we have a nice horse and buggy that can take us back and forth to your place in no time.

John responded, “Just like Uncle Peter has moved away to Grand Rapids?”

“Ya, slowly we Van Haitsmas seem to be stretching our wings and moving further from the homeplace. You may not know this, but when we first came to the *Kolonie*, I lived on a farm just west of where your Uncle Wiebe lives now. So we’ve done a little moving around even in our first forty years here.”

“It seems strange,” John said, “to think of you moving away from the church building and cemetery. Who’s going to keep up the cemetery?”

“I’m sure it will seem very strange to me too,” murmured Johannes reluctantly. “I have really enjoyed being this close. But lately it has begun to feel a bit too close. And I think somebody living close by will take on the care of the cemetery.”

Mr. Wijngaarden came by, “Hey, Mr. Van Haitsma, I just stopped by to have a word.”

“What’s on your mind, old friend?” asked Johannes.

“Well,” he said, “I expect you’ve been stewing over the demise of this congregation.”

“You’re right about that,” responded Johannes. “It has been eating away in my innards ever since the council and congregation made that decision. I keep wondering what I might have done to keep it from happening.”

“I rather thought your mind might be going that way. That’s why I wanted to talk with you. I want you to know how much I respect you and everything you have done for this church and community. You have been a powerful example of faithfulness all these years. You have been there when the church struggled and looked like it was going to destroy itself from inside. You were there when preachers came and went; you were there when sudden growth came here and all those other congregations joined our denomination. You were there when our church spawned new congregations and you have stayed until this very end.”

“Ya, I’ve been a deacon now for thirty-two years. In the past we were always able to settle our differences peacefully,” Johannes said. “But nothing has shaken me like this decision to shut down and send the memberships to Drenthe.”

“Ya, I can appreciate that, Johannes,” Wijngaarden said. “But consider. This is not the end of the church. This is not the end of what we began back in 1857. This is as much a new beginning as anything. Look what happened. The Bible reminds us farmers that a seed has to die to sprout new growth. Yes, there are failings along the way, but there is new growth too. So the church that was part of the very beginning of our denomination is closing its doors thirty-six years later, practically to the day. But only after many more congregations have sprouted. God isn’t finished with us; He’s doing something new. And you in your graciousness and faithfulness have been part of it all these years. You have been such a blessing to so many.”

“Well, ya, maybe that is what I should be thinking about,” Johannes responded quietly.

Wijngaarden continued, “It’s kind of like our families, you know. You bring children into the world. You go through the pains of birth and growth. Some turn out as you might like; others maybe have different struggles. But in the long run, they all grow up and strike out on their own. You have seen your family scatter, acquire their own families and build their own barns and businesses. And God keeps working in and through them all.”

“Ah, my friend,” sighed Johannes. “You have scattered some clouds, and brought me a rainbow. Thank you for the rays of hope you have shared with me. I know God will continue to work in me and I look forward to what He has planned for the rest of my life. He gave me a new wife; she brought with her more children and grandchildren. Our quiver is truly full. I have much to be thankful for. Thank you for reminding me.”

“If I have been a little blessing to you now,” responded Wijngaarden, “I am grateful to God that in this I can repay you some for the many blessings I and others have received through you. May God bless you in the years that are yet yours.”

“I have seen how hard this last year has been for you,” Geri said to Johannes after he recounted the conversation with Mr. Wijngaarden.

“I never let myself think it would come to this,” lamented Johannes. “There’s one option that came to my mind, but never got discussed.”

“What was that, Johannes? I thought all ideas had been fully considered,” asked Geri.

“Well, it was at that last congregational meeting when the chairman cut off the conversation because there was an unwelcome silence in the congregation. I kind of felt hesitant to bring up something new. But I was wondering if we could just go back to being a fellowship group like we had before.”

“Were you thinking,” pondered Geri, “that maybe just keeping the small group without having a minister, we might have kept things going until we could grow again?”

“Ya. That’s exactly what I was thinking! I was remembering,” added Johannes, “how wonderful those worship times were before we called it a church in 1857. That was the worship atmosphere I’d so enjoyed all those years and wished to keep going.”

“And since we already had a meeting place in the church, and Nicolas was renting the parsonage, that might have been possible to do with only the costs of some repairs and wood for keeping the place warm in the cold weather,” continued Geri.

“But suddenly the decision was made to disband,” remembered Johannes.

“So, it was unity that the council wished for?” asked Geri.

“Ya, we were not ready to continue without a full unity among us all, and we could not get that.⁵⁶⁵ If that was hard hearted, as Rev. Hemkes thought, so be it,” concluded Johannes.⁵⁶⁶

Early in April, Johannes asked, “Geri, the council will soon be having its final meeting and I think we should request our membership transfer letters to our Zeeland church.⁵⁶⁷ What do you think about that?”

“But of course, Johannes, I will transfer my membership right along with you,” agreed Geri. “I couldn’t see us doing anything else. Since we will be living in Zeeland, we surely don’t want to ride all the way to Drenthe every Sunday.”⁵⁶⁸

“It does make sense, doesn’t it?” responded Johannes. “Of course, I don’t know just how eager I will be in a new church. I’ve been part of the Vriesland Church ever since we started it. And there’s so much water under the bridge that I might be a bit hesitant and find it difficult to feel at home.”

⁵⁶⁵*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, April 17, 1893; Dec. 31, 1885; Jan. 26, 1891, Art. 5; March 14, 1893, Art. 3 and Art. 6.

⁵⁶⁶ Hemkes, G., *History*.

⁵⁶⁷*Vriesland CRC Membership Book.Vriesland CRC Minutes*, April 16 and 17, 1893.

⁵⁶⁸*Ibid.* There is no mention of Geridiena’s membership leaving the Vriesland CRC, and it incorrectly has her married to Sietse van Haitsma who was never a member at Vriesland CRC.

“Well, Johannes, I can understand that. You have a long history with our Vriesland Church, and over the years you’ve had many questions about the church. We’ll just have to give ourselves time to make the adjustment. I guess we shouldn’t expect too much too quickly. We know the son of your old friend Mr. Groen is now the preacher there. It was so nice of him to attend so many of our congregational meetings at the end just because he was concerned. I hope that maybe that will make the transfer a bit easier for you.”

“It just isn’t easy,” Johannes exclaimed at the final official council meeting. “All these years this has been the church I belonged to. I have raised my children in this church. I have spent all these Sundays worshipping the Lord in this church. And now it’s time to personally bid her goodbye.”

“Ah, Mr. Van Haitsma, you have been such a mainstay in this congregation. You have faithfully served as a deacon for all these years. You have served on numerous committees; you have blessed the widows and the poor over the years, going out of your way to be generous. I believe you have given so much more to needy members of the congregation than many of us are aware of,” responded the chairman. “I do not know how we can ever properly thank you for serving Christ here in such a wonderful way.”

“It certainly has been gratifying to me, being part of this group of leaders in the church all these years. And truly God has blessed my family and me abundantly. It has been good to share from that abundance and pass on God’s grace to others along the way,” Johannes murmured.

He continued, “But now I have to make the formal step of asking that you give me a membership transfer so I can settle into the church in Zeeland. Geri asked me to request hers also, and Reinder and Aaltje will come shortly to request their transfers. The timing of this request has been heavy on our hearts too. **Do you know that tonight, exactly thirty-six years ago, this church first organized itself?**”⁵⁶⁹^

“Oh, my!” exclaimed some of the elders in unison. “We had not been aware of that. Can you tell us something of what happened then?”

“Well, it certainly is clear in my mind,” responded Johannes. “Just ten days before that day, on April 8, 1857, letters from two congregations and two ministers were read at Classis Holland, now part of the Reformed Church in America. These letters indicated that some of the congregation of Graafschap and all of Polkton, and the ministers Van den Bosch and Klyn were separating themselves from the Dutch Reformed Church. A few of us in Vriesland had already separated ourselves from the Reformed Church. We realized that unless someone at least tried to bring all the groups together, each would probably go in independent directions.”

“So we invited the others to our fellowship hall to talk about being together on the basis of the old standards and the 1619 Church Order. We then, at our next worship time on April 17, 1857, selected elders and deacons so that we had people who could speak on behalf of our Vriesland

⁵⁶⁹Vriesland CRC Minutes, Feb. 13, 1893, Art. 9; April 17, 1893, Art. 1; May 21, 1857, Art. 3; April 17, 1857.

group at that constitution meeting. Out of that agreement our Christian Reformed denomination was born. **And now, exactly thirty-six years later, this congregation bids goodbye to itself.**”[^]

Elder Housma said, “This is a painful time for us all, saying goodbye to a church we have loved. I’m sure it is very heavy on your heart. I’m so sorry it has come to this.”

The chairman spoke up, “We all have reason to grieve this moment. And to realize that on this date, thirty-six years ago, this little church began, makes it all the more hurtful in our hearts. I know that only a few people are left to remember those early years and that deepens the pain too. Many have given a lot of their time and prayers to the life of our church. And now to see the doors close is a heavy load. We can be thankful for the many blessings that this congregation has been to the larger community. But that does not take away our grief.”

That night Johannes went home with a heavy heart. “Geri, here are our membership transfer papers. They are just pieces of paper representing all those years in this church. What a life it has been, full of hills of hope and valleys of discouragement. I am not sure, but I think that maybe I am one of only three people still alive who were part of that event in the Vriesland community those many years ago. Sjoukje and I signed up as charter members on April 17, 1857.”

Johannes sat outside on a beautiful Sunday afternoon with his long pipe in hand. His oldest son, Reinder, came for a visit and observed, “Pa, you seem to be deep in thought.”

“Ya, son,” Johannes answered. “I am thinking about the journey our lives take. When I was a child, I followed *Pake’s* lead on the canals but also in the faith. When I was old enough I chose my own path and it was parallel with *Pake’s*. We came to this land together and farmed side by side and went to church side by side. But a time came when my path joined with Mr. Dam’s and we were among the first to embrace a new start in the church. Back in those days we were still walking some Indian trails and rudimentary roads. We were also breaking away from the church path that many of our neighbors walked. Gradually I learned to walk my path of faith along with some others.”

Reinder joined the pensive thoughts, “And I followed your path, and now as a grown man, I also am choosing a path for me and my family.”

“Ya, so we learn from the generation we follow. Here we started with Indian traces, then trails, then mud tracks and mud roads and now gravel on the mud roads. We hardly remember that our roads follow the trails that others have earlier cut and surveyed into the woods and fields.”

He continued, “Just like I hardly remember that my path was shaped by people I did not know, because they came years before me. Today I still yearn for those paths that the Old Fathers followed and shared in the sermons they published. Maybe that’s what happens in our older age; we yearn for the rich treasures we had in faith and worship during our youth. I am glad we are still singing the Psalm songs of the late 1700s, and I am not so comfortable with the light songs that are coming through our Sunday schools. But maybe when your children are grown, they will treasure some of those more than the old Psalms I grew up with.”

Reinder added, “Ya, my children are thoroughly enjoying those new songs. And I am glad that they are learning that God loves them from those songs as well as from the ones we sing in church.”

Johannes quickly added, “I would not want to deprive them of such good faith-building experiences. Maybe each generation does need to learn its own songs of Zion.”

After a comfortable silence, he said, “Son, let’s go inside for a cup of tea that I’m sure my Geri has waiting for us.”

Later that week Johannes sat quietly in the parlor, meditating with his long pipe in hand. Geri finished her after-dinner chores and sat near him. “You look like you have a busy mind, Johannes,” she spoke up hesitantly, not wanting to interrupt his thoughts, but all the same wanting to know them. “I have seen you scratching your head and trying to figure things out this past week. What’s going on in your heart? Johannes, I’m getting to know you a bit. So I know you have something big on your mind,” soothed Geri.

“I’m wondering,” Johannes began, “if we should move our house to Zeeland. With the warm days coming, maybe this is the best time to move the house.”

“Oh, Johannes, that sounds like such a big thing to do,” Geri’s voice sounded shocked at the idea of moving a house.”

“Ya, I know, and it’s even a bigger thing to think about!” grinned Johannes.

“Is it ever!” said Geri, tears welling up in her eyes. “Our lives have been so emotionally confusing. We do need time to think and to pray about it. The idea of leaving this place is hard.”

“I’m so sorry, Geri, to even ask you to consider that. But we are retired now, and Andrew and the boys do not need me to do as much on the farm as they suggest. I know they are being kind, helping me to keep busy and maybe not think too much about the church. But wouldn’t it be nice to move away to town?”

Johannes confessed, “I have had so much anger and frustration in my heart recently. I would like some peace in my life and in your life too. You haven’t been as strong lately, and I want to keep you around for as long as the Lord allows.”

“I know,” answered Geri, “and I’m tired of that all too. I’ve heard you yelling at the poor cows who have nothing to do with the church. I bet some days they just didn’t give as much milk as you expected! The barn is not so far away that I don’t hear a few things as I pass by. **But thinking about moving lock, stock and barrel to Zeeland, I don’t know about that. That’s five miles away!”**^

“Yes, it is,” responded Johannes, “but others have moved old houses to make space for a new frame house; even a church building has been moved. It took a bunch of oxen and wagons, but it

has been done.⁵⁷⁰ I know you love this house. So instead of building a new one, we could just move this one. But we should think about it some more and not be in too much of a hurry.”

“All these years that we’ve lived here, you have been a solid rock for this church,” Geri pondered. “We’ve entertained so many of the classical supply preachers in this house. We’ve gotten to know our denomination well through all that. And Vriesland has been your home ever since you arrived here years ago. Is it really a good thing to say goodbye to all that has been so close to your heart for so many years?”

Johannes slowly responded, “I think saying goodbye has already happened with the closing of the church. Oh, I’m so mixed up with all my feelings. I think I need a reminder of who God is and what He has done in our lives and our church. Would you mind getting the family Bible and reading the Scripture that long ago I felt the need to keep in our hearts?”

Geri got up and brought back the big *Staten* Bible. “What is that passage that you want to read?” she asked.

He said, “Deuteronomy 8 and 10:12-22. We did read it at our annual remembrance, but I think I need it now to bring some balance to my feelings and to shore up the confidence that I have placed in God all these years.” He listened quietly as Geri read the familiar words again. His spirit slowly settled into peace. “That’s what I needed to calm my questions. I need to know that no matter what, God is working things out, whether I understand it or not.”

“Ya, I understand,” responded Geri, “and I guess letting it explode in the barn is not the worst way to handle the frustrations.” Moments later she added, “I know you bought a piece of land by Zeeland, Johannes. Maybe we could take a buggy ride and you can show me. I haven’t been getting out as much as I would like to. A pleasant ride would be a nice way to spend a day. And maybe we could stop in for a visit with Annie while we’re so close.”

“That sounds like a great idea. We can take the time to see that house Titus built with her in mind. I hear that it’s a very nice house.⁵⁷¹ And on the way back we can stop at Wiebe’s mansion, if it isn’t too late.⁵⁷²”

The next day Johannes hitched up the buggy and they set out for that nice ride. “Oh, it is such a beautiful day,” Geri said as they started down the road. “The cemetery looks like it could use some care,” she observed. “You think we will still take turns keeping it up?”

Johannes said, “Our grandson asked about that too. I hope maybe other families who have loved-ones buried here may be encouraged to take it on. I do hope it doesn’t become neglected. There is still so much forest along the road here, but I’m sure that too will change in time.”

“To think,” Geri said, “that’s the way our place looked too when we first came.”

⁵⁷⁰*Graafschap History*: Graafschap Church building was moved with 10 teams of oxen. Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 302.

⁵⁷¹Still standing in 2016, just east of 104th on Perry St. in Holland Twp.

⁵⁷²At the intersection of Vriesland, torn down in the years since 2005.

The horse pulled them along the dirt road south toward Drenthe. Johannes pointed out, “That’s where Hendrik Dam used to live. Now they’re talking about putting up a creamery to process the milk from the farmers. And look at the orchard! Those trees have surely grown in the past thirty years.”

Geri asked, “Has Drenthe decided what they will do about a church building that will be big enough for all the people coming there to worship?”

Johannes said, “Ya, with our membership added and the membership of the Scottish Church, and all the new immigrants that have arrived lately, they will need a lot more space. I hear they are considering moving closer to the intersection than where they are now.”

Geri asked, “So they’re not considering the Scottish Church property?”

“No,” Johannes said, “I’ve heard they turned that idea down, partly because they think they need more space for a new building in the future.”⁵⁷³

They turned at the Drenthe corner to go west, admiring the homes that had been built and the big barns. “My, this area is becoming prosperous too, isn’t it?” reflected Johannes. Then he pointed, “Do you see that rise in the ground, near the little creek? That is where Mr. Dam worked to make shingles to sell in the City. There used to be quite a stand of pine trees there. Now they’re mostly gone. That’s the way it’s going to go with all the old growth around here. Already there is more cleared land than forest land.”

Geri pointed north and asked, “Isn’t that the swamp area we used to have to walk around to get to Vriesland?”

“Ya,” said Johannes, “that has continued to be soft ground, so that to get to Titus’ house the best way is still to go the south way. The Byron Road where I first lived is still not easy for travel. Maybe someday it will be better.”

Johannes reined the horse onto the north mud road that would take them to Titus’ place. “I think,” he said, “we’re now in Holland Township. Not long after we arrived, the State of Michigan divided Zeeland and Vriesland off from the Holland Township.⁵⁷⁴ I guess that had to do with the growth in population.”

A mile further they could see the grand brick home with all the beautiful filigreed woodwork along the roof lines. Titus had built it with a luxurious living room and bedroom for Annie’s private space. Geri said, “It truly was nice that Titus built his house large enough so Annie could comfortably live with them. It has been about eight years since Wopke passed, I think. And Annie had been living alone for a while. That living alone later in life can’t be so nice.”

“No, I think not,” agreed Johannes. “It has been wonderful that Titus has claimed Wopke’s family as his own, even though Tjalling was his birth father. That makes me aware that I am now

⁵⁷³*Drenthe CRC History.*

⁵⁷⁴ Zeeland Township was separated out of Holland Township in 1851.

the patriarch of the Van Haitsma family, with both my older brothers and my older sister passed. I'm sure glad you and I are together; what a blessing that has been!"

Coming to the intersection by Titus' house on Perry and 104th, Johannes spoke to his horse to turn the corner. Geri asked, "I just realized you're talking to the horse in Friesian. How does she know what you are saying?"

Johannes chuckled, "I've been talking Friesian to her from the day I brought her home. I talk to the cows in Friesian too. They understand me. They won't if I talk in your dialect. Try it!"

Geri raised her voice to tell the horse to turn the corner and the horse ignored her. "See," said Johannes, "She has learned to listen to me in Friesian, so that's what I use. If we get you a horse of your own, you can train it with your dialect!"

"Oh, Johannes," she laughed, "this is too much!" Still laughing, they turned into the driveway of the filigreed house that Titus had built.

Anna had seen them coming, "Oh, Geri and Johannes, what a pleasant surprise! Come in, I'll have our girl put on some tea and bring out some cookies. Annie will be so glad to see you. I'll ring the bell so Titus can come in from the field. Oh, this is so wonderful. Living out from town a bit, we don't get many visitors."

"Ya," said Johannes, "we have some close neighbors, but still we don't do a lot of visiting any more either."

Geri added, "And even we women don't get to each other's places much. That makes it especially nice for you and Annie to be close."

Annie, hearing the commotion from her private area of the house, walked in a bit slowly, with a welcome smile on her face. "Oh, Johannes and Geri, what a lovely surprise! It is so good to see you. How are you doing? What brings you this way?"

Geri spoke up, "We just decided to take a ride and enjoy the wonderful weather." And Johannes added, "We're headed toward Zeeland to see a farmer about a pig!" Everyone laughed loudly about that old saying used so often by the Dutchmen.

They were sitting at the table when Titus entered, "Oh, Uncle Johannes and Geri, thanks for stopping by. What brings you out on this lovely day?"

"Well, I am fully retired now, you know, and I can take time away from the barn and garden," Johannes said. "But really, we are going to look at the land I bought in Zeeland. We are planning to move our house to that piece of land."

"Now why would you move your house away from your nice quiet place and move to the busy town area?"

Geri was quiet, and so Johannes responded, “Well, you know that our church building and the manse are now empty. We like our house enough to move it away and make more space for Andrew’s farm. So now we’re going to see where on the new place we will set the house.”

“Oh, my!” exclaimed Annie. “I’ve heard of buildings being moved. Isn’t that a scary thing? Will the house be in good shape after such a move?”

“Ya, Annie,” Geri answered, “Johannes has hired the best oxteam driver to make that move. But I confess I had that concern too. Will there be cracks in the house once it’s moved? But Johannes assures me that much bigger buildings have been moved and they have had no problems with it.”

“It will be a bit different,” Annie suggested. “You will be moving from living with the open fields to living on the edge of town. I hope you’ll be comfortable with that.”

Johannes responded, “We do want to put a bit of a distance between us and the church we’ve been part of these almost-forty years. And if we have to start over with a church, well, Rev. Groen is the pastor there, so that will be one familiar face in the new place. Rev. Groen grew up in our Vriesland church, you know.”

Later, after goodbyes were said, Johannes and Geri continued on their road trip, silently enjoying the scenery and crossing the Black River. After a while Johannes said “Geri, I have asked bricklayer Nederveld to take the bricks off our house and plan to put them back on after we move it to Zeeland.”

“I guess I know that can be done,” responded Geri thoughtfully. “But it is beyond my imagination.”

“Well, we both will learn more about our house, then.” Johannes added. “I have contracted with the same ox driver that moved the Graafschap church building.⁵⁷⁵ He has a good reputation and we can leave the whole move in God’s hands and not worry about it.”

“I’m afraid that’s easier said than done,” said Geri. “It’s such a big job. It’s going to be hard not to be anxious about all the things that could go wrong.”

“Well, that’s why we hire people who know their jobs and have good reputations. Just like we learn to be dependent on the Lord, because He is faithful and knows His job.”

Some days later, Johannes informed Geri, “I just heard that Mr. Groen is very ill. I haven’t seen him for a while, so I think it’s time to go visiting.”

“Ya, husband,” answered Geri. “He’s been a dear friend for you and the church for many years, hasn’t he? Please give him my regards.”

⁵⁷⁵ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 302.

Johannes harnessed the horse and rode over to the Groen property. Tying the horse in a pleasant area of grass, Johannes proceeded to the back door. Mrs. Groen opened the door as he ascended the steps. “Welcome, Mr. Van Haitsma! My husband will be so glad to see you. He’s not had many visitors lately. But he hasn’t been feeling all that well either. Come in to the parlor and I’ll prepare some coffee.”

“That’s so kind of you, Mrs. Groen. I hope Mr. Groen is feeling up to visiting a bit?”

“Well, certainly with you, Mr. Van Haitsma,” Mrs. Groen responded. “You’ve been such an important person in his life, especially in the church.”

“As he has in mine,” offered Johannes. “We’ve sat through many worship times together as well as meetings. And through the years we have talked over many issues.”

Johannes entered the parlor to see Groen half sitting up in a daybed, supported by pillows. “Mr. Groen,” Johannes addressed his sick friend, “I hope you don’t mind my coming to visit. I won’t stay so long as to tire you out. But I dearly wanted to come and visit a bit.”

“Ah, Johannes,” Groen responded. “You are a good sight for sore eyes! I don’t see as many friends as I would like. But you’re right; I do tire a bit easily.”

“Well, we have a lot of history together, Mr. Groen. And now we have been through the closing of the church that you and I have treasured these many years,” said Johannes.

“Ya,” agreed Groen, “but I have some serious regrets and conflict over some of that.”

“Oh?” Johannes’ eyebrows lifted in inquiry.

“Ya, especially about that meeting in Feb. 1890 when I was the last holdout for approving the purchase of the Widow Wiersma’s acre. I know everyone was ready to agree on that purchase. I still feel bad that I was the voice who kept full agreement from happening. But I also knew that the Wiersma property was not the right place for our new church building. So I was torn between stopping a bad decision and preventing unity.”⁵⁷⁶

“Well, Mr. Groen,” suggested Johannes, “you saved us from making a very bad mistake. I agree that the Wiersma property would have been a poor decision on our part. I think it was desperation that made us ready to settle on that land. I was fully aware that it was too low and wet, and I knew it was too small. I believe you were right in putting your foot down and keeping us from a decision we would certainly have regretted for many years to come. You were a brave man to stand up like that.”

Johannes continued, “Do you remember that just a few years before that, we were considering a floor plan for seating three hundred people!⁵⁷⁷ How could one small wet acre provide space and parking for that many people? No, I think you can rest comfortably with the idea that you kept us

⁵⁷⁶*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Feb. 20, 1890.

⁵⁷⁷*Ibid.*, Jan. 14, 1890, Art. 5.

all from making a big mistake in buying that land. The other pieces we considered were so much better. Please do not blame yourself for that impasse. Others have shared with me too that they realized that the purchase of that acre would have been a big mistake.”

“Thank you, Johannes, for telling me that,” smiled a relieved Mr. Groen. “I have felt bad about that, maybe more than any other mistakes I might not want to confess to. You have lifted a shadow off my soul.”

“Isn’t it wonderful,” added Johannes, “that we live in God’s grace? And that we can leave in His hand all such real or perceived regrets?”

“Ya,” agreed Groen, “And I do rest assured in that grace.”

Mrs. Groen entered with steaming coffee, and Johannes realized Mr. Groen’s eyes were beginning to look heavy. Shortly after enjoying his coffee, he excused himself and returned home.

Turning his horse into the pasture, casting his shoes at the back door, Johannes came in and said to Geri, “I’m afraid Mr. Groen is not long for this world any more. I think we can expect news any day that he has passed into glory.”

“Well, then,” Geri said, “it is a good thing you made this visit. This may be your last time with him.”

“Ya, I think so,” responded Johannes.

A few weeks later, the news of the death of Johannes Groen saddened the families of the area. “Oh, Johannes, I’m sorry!” Geri comforted him.

“Ya, Geri, he was one of my oldest and best friends. We were the last two of those who started our Vriesland Church all those years ago. We spent years talking together about serving the Lord with our lives. We had long conversations about the way the church seemed to be heading. He had a marvelous voice for leading the singing in church. I remember that we could hear each other singing in the woods back when we were cutting down those mammoth trees. I learned a lot from him about the Bible in those fellowship meetings of old.”

“And now he leaves us only a month and a half after our church disbanded,” uttered Geri.

“I think,” said Johannes, “it broke his heart that our church, so dear to our hearts, somehow could not find a way to live in unity. Now I’m imagining that he’s leading the choir in heaven, and they’re singing all the Psalms!”

“When did he leave our church?” asked Geri.

“Just last year on October 14th.⁵⁷⁸ He joined the Zeeland Church just like we did. He certainly was helped in that decision since his son is now the pastor of the Zeeland Church. It didn’t hurt my decision either, as you know,” smiled Johannes. “I understand Mr. Groen is to be buried in the Old Vriesland Cemetery by his first wife. He may well become the last person to be buried there.”⁵⁷⁹

“We’re going to miss a dear friend in Mr. Groen,” lamented Geri. “May God bless him in His heavens.”

When the burial service was finished, Johannes and Geri wandered around the cemetery grounds and stopped where Johannes’ children had been buried. “Oh,” Johannes moaned, “I still miss the little guy; twenty two years have not done much to dull the pain. He would likely have been married by this time and begun raising a family of his own. But at least he wouldn’t have had to face the Civil War.”

“Ya,” observed Geri, “sometimes it is hard to separate the grieving from the blessings, isn’t it?”

Johannes noticed Reverend Groen, Jr. lingering at the grave site. Excusing himself, Johannes moved slowly toward him. He placed his hand on the young preacher’s shoulder. The Reverend Groen turned his teary face. “I’m going to miss him,” he sobbed. “He’s been such a great confidant, especially while I was going to the seminary. I had lots of questions about the Vriesland Church and he always took time to help me understand.”

“Ya, he had a good understanding of it,” agreed Johannes.

“And Pa also had his difficulties with it all. Even with the beginnings of it all. He told me what they meant with ‘returning’ and being by themselves. He said it was the same as in the Netherlands. Back then they did not want government interference or interference from a church establishment with different values. Fortunately the American government has been quite ready to leave churches alone. But my father had serious concerns that our church establishment seems lacking in integrity.”

Johannes pondered a bit, and said, “Some of our people couldn’t get a hearing from the leaders in *de Kolonie*. We were accused of being too outspoken and quarrelsome, and I believe that many words spoken were later regretted. But even the quiet ones among us did not get heard. Decisions were made for us without any regard.”

“Well,” Rev. Groen summed up his father’s concerns, “just as we’re now grieving over Pa’s death, so he had been grieving over all the harsh words, misunderstandings, and the final death of his beloved church.”

With promises to keep in touch, each man turned away to his own family.

⁵⁷⁸*Ibid.*, Oct. 14, 1892, Art. 4.

⁵⁷⁹*Vriesland Cemetery Records*.

“This is the day. This is moving day!” said Johannes. “The house bricks are off and loaded on to a Veneklasen wagon. The house is on blocks, ready to slide the wheeled frame under.”

“When will the ox teams arrive?” Geri asked.

“I’m expecting them within a half hour,” Johannes replied. “Mr. Stegenga is usually reliable and on time. I hope they will be able to complete the move of the house today. We’re starting early enough. The foundations are ready and waiting at Central Avenue and Maple. I expect they won’t do anything today but place the wheeled frame over those foundations.”

“This is going to be some interesting move!” Geri could hear the excitement in Johannes’ voice. “I heard the move of the church building to Graafschap was a sight to behold. I’m sure glad we are not trying to do it ourselves. And I’m glad we have a nice dry day. It wouldn’t do to have the oxen stuck in the mud or slide off the side of the road.”

“I hope we don’t regret this,” shuddered Geri. “I guess we have the confidence that the house is well put together?”

“That should not be a problem,” said Johannes. “Many houses have been moved. As far as I know, not one of them has had any serious problems after. This is not as scary as going on the ocean voyage back in 1848. We have a smooth road to ride over. Look, I see the dust that the oxen raise coming past Reinder’s house.”

1894 *

The storm had abated, and moved east. Johannes knew that the rain was welcome to the farmers of Vriesland. They understood this was God’s answer to their prayers at the spring prayer meeting.

Late in the day Johannes heard the clipclop of a horse cantering onto the drive. He opened the back door and hailed his son Titus, “Welcome son,” Johannes greeted. “Did you enjoy the rain too?”

“Ya, Pa,” spoke Titus as he dismounted and dropped the reins to signal his horse to stay. “But Peter and family didn’t. They had a lightning strike on their house. Little Susie was knocked unconscious and Katie carried her out into the open. They say lightning doesn’t strike twice in one place, but she wasn’t taking any chances.”

“Is little Susie okay?” queried Johannes.

“Ya,” responded Titus. “The whole family’s fine; only the kitchen is a bit messed up.”

“Well, thank God for that,” said Johannes, “the house can be fixed, I expect.”

“The damage wasn’t all that bad. I’m sure that Peter’s brother-in-law will be able to fix it for them in short order. It turned out more of a scare than a danger.”

“I’m grateful for that blessing,” returned Johannes, “but experience has taught us that lightning can be a big danger, especially to our barns built out in the open away from the trees. Generally our homes tend to be safer because of being surrounded by taller trees. And by the way, that old saying about lightning never striking twice; I know for a fact that isn’t true. I know a man whose barn burned down from a lightning strike. The community came together to rebuild the barn. And only a few years later, lightning struck the new barn and it burned to the ground. Hard to believe, eh? True story!”⁵⁸⁰

One day Geri asked Johannes, “Do you know when the church, manse and the other buildings are going to be moved?”

“Not exactly,” answered Johannes, “but I do understand it’ll be fairly soon. The newspaper announcement of the sale said it had to be by May 15.⁵⁸¹ I imagine they’ll be using the church building for a barn or henhouse, like we made a tool shed out of our first church building. That seems such a strange idea. I wonder if they’ll move the horsebarn and toolshed too or if they’ll use the lumber for another building? Actually, you know, the sale went to the stepson of Mr. Palingdood, a Mr. Mulder.”⁵⁸²

“Oh, I did know that, but I just forgot about it. I always think of him as a Palingdood. My, my, it will be good to have all this behind us, won’t it?” suggested Geri.

“Oh, ya,” uttered Johannes. “It’s all been on my mind far too long. It’s time to move on. A new church, a new place to live, and a lovely new wife! Ya, I would like to enjoy a wonderful new chapter for the remaining years of my life.”

“And so would I, my wonderful husband,” spoke up Geri.

Elder Strembler stopped his surrey in front of Johannes’ house in Zeeland. “Welcome, Mr. Strembler,” called out Johannes as he unwound from his flowerbed along the front of his house. “We’ve been thinking about you and all the people who were part of our church in Vriesland.”

“Ya, Johannes, I’ve been thinking about you too. How are you doing now that you have settled here on the edge of Zeeland?”

“Well, I am now pretty fully retired,” said Johannes. “But my mind is far from over the sorrow of the closing of our church doors. Mrs. Van Haitsma and I were just talking about starting a new life here in Zeeland. But I find it is hard to leave behind all that has happened.”

“Ja, I agree on that. Mrs. Strembler and I talk this over a lot too. So much has happened that we really don’t understand. So we keep talking about it a lot,” Strembler answered. “One thing we

⁵⁸⁰ Van Haitsma, *Family Legends*.

⁵⁸¹ *Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Feb. 16, 1894.

⁵⁸² Palingdood will in Ottawa Co, MI, Deeds Records Office.

have been thinking about is the coincidence that our last council meeting was exactly thirty-six years after the church first voted for elders and deacons. We're trying to see the Lord's hand in all that."

"Please, Mr. Strembler," offered Johannes, "come on in. Looks like we might have quite a conversation. And I'm sure Mrs. Van Haitsma would like to be part of that. I'm also sure she'll soon have coffee ready, if she hasn't done that already."

They settled in the parlor, and Johannes said, "One issue that's been rummaging in my mind is the number of people who have been part of our church, both coming and going. Once the church began to grow in the later 1860s, we could hardly keep up with expanding the building. And then twenty years later, we ended up making the sanctuary smaller to avoid having so many empty pews."

"One thing for sure," added Strembler, "the Lord surely had His hand in all this. We grew so slowly the first ten years, and then so many people came that by the end of the 1870s, we helped start four more congregations."⁵⁸³

"Ya," answered Johannes, "I certainly can't think of anything we did to bring that many people into our church. It had to be the Lord. We were just in the right place at the right time for Him to do what He was doing."

Geri had joined them and served coffee and cookies. The men enjoyed reminiscing together and Geri enjoyed listening to their recollections.

The conversation was winding down and Strembler stood up to leave. Johannes shared one last memory, "I did not attend the last council meeting. It was too difficult for me to face that choice to disband. So, just like other members who failed to come to meetings at times, I also voted in silence by not showing up. I have often wondered if, by not being there, I made it possible for the council to make a unanimous decision."

"Ah, Johannes," Geri murmured, "I don't think you have to carry that memory to the grave."

Strembler added, "I agree. And I want to thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Van Haitsma, for your hospitality and willingness to share this discussion with me. There are not many I can talk with who would understand the history of our church like you do. Thank you very much. I'll be on my way now, back to the barn and the cows. I'm sure they are lowing to give up their milk."

One day in the middle of May, Johannes and Geri climbed aboard their buggy. "Oh, Johannes, this feels like another funeral."

"Ya, it does, doesn't it?" responded Johannes wearily. "It's as tiring as a funeral too. But it has to be done. Justice of the Peace Van Loo is expecting us and the other trustees of the church. Andrew will meet us there too. It's not that far to his office, and it will be a nice ride."

⁵⁸³*Vriesland CRC Minutes*, Aug. 6, 1878; Dec. 26, 1879, Jan. 1, 1880; April 26, 1882; March 21, 1893.

“It is a lovely spring day,” observed Geri, “and it is always good to get out of the house for a little bit. There’s nothing pressing that won’t wait for another day.”

“Ya,” noted Johannes. “Retirement sure has its pleasant days, doesn’t it?”

“It seems that we don’t lack for things to keep us active,” added Geri. “Even if we did not do any gardening, it seems somehow that every day has something that calls for our attention. I keep on with my cooking, knitting and crocheting.”

“And I keep busy with all kinds of little projects. I never know what my hands are going to find to do next.”

“But I am surprised that I need to come along to this visit with the Justice of the Peace,” Geri wondered.

“I guess that’s my fault,” confessed Johannes. “I made out my will that makes you equal owner with me and the other trustees of the churchland that we are signing over to Andrew this morning. You are not coming as one of the church, but your signature is needed to complete the deed so that the land going to Andrew will be legally his.”

“But aren’t the trustees signing over all the church property?” asked Geri.

“Ya,” answered Johannes, “but there’s a small piece that’s part of what’s going to Andrew that needs both our signatures. I’m not sure I know all the details either, but that’s the message I got, so that’s why we’re both going to sign the papers with the other trustees.”

“You think maybe when you turned that land over for the church and manse, the boundaries weren’t exactly what we thought? And now with a proper survey we can correct that mistake?” suggested Geri.

“Ya, I think that could be the reason,” responded Johannes. “It would be nice if we could correct all the mistakes of our lives this easily, but I know for that we need our wonderful Savior.”

They clattered along the road to Holland. The freight train came roaring by and Johannes had to restrain his lively horse. “Quiet down!” Johannes hollered to give the horse a familiar sound. He pulled the reins a bit to let the horse know he meant business.

Arriving in Holland, Johannes tied the horse by the rail and gave Geri a hand to get off the surrey. Leading the way up the stairs, he opened the door into the Justice of the Peace office. “Good morning, gentlemen,” he greeted all as he led Geri into the group.

Mr. Van Loo remarked pleasantly, “Glad to see both of you, Mr. and Mrs. Van Haitsma. Of course you know everyone here for the signing. I see Andrew is just coming down the road on his horse.”

“Please, won’t you all come into the conference room?” he invited. “I think the legal paper is all ready for your review and signatures.”

Andrew entered the office with an apology for being the last. “Oh, Mr. Van Haitsma, that’s all right; we are just ready to look over the document to make sure all the t’s are crossed” observed Mr. Van Loo. “Oh, I almost forgot. This is Mr. Charles Clark who is the Registrar of Deeds for Ottawa County.”⁵⁸⁴

All spoke up, “It’s a pleasure to meet you, sir.”

Mr. Van Loo continued, “Please take your time to review this deed; we certainly do not want to make a mistake this time. Not even with one detail.”

After everyone had time to read the document, he asked, “Are you all satisfied that this is correct?” He looked round the table. After all agreed the wording was correct, he passed the deed around the table for each one to sign where he indicated. “It is a bit unusual,” he noted, “that a wife’s signature is needed. But, times are changing.”

After they shared their goodbyes the trustees, along with Geri and Andrew, wandered into the market-day activities. Suddenly Geri said to all, “It has been a long time since I’ve had a store-bought Dutch pastry. Johannes, would you be willing to treat us all to such a delight?”

They walked over to the vendor whose table was loaded with a selection of the pastries. “Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Van Haitsma,” they exuded as they bit into the tasty Dutch pastry.

Andrew rode back with his parents to Zeeland town. After they climbed down from the buggy he spoke up, “I expect that this signing of the deed has stirred up a lot of grief in your hearts.”

“Ya,” Johannes shared, “the signing was simple enough, but the meaning of it all weighs heavily on my shoulders. I am pleased the land is back in Van Haitsma family hands. But I sure wish this was not necessary.”

“Maybe,” considered Geri, “we can now put this business of the demise of the congregation behind us.”

Andrew suggested, “Do we ever walk away from the griefs of our lives completely?”

“No, I think not completely,” lamented Johannes. “Just as with all the family we have buried over the years, each one continues to have a special place in our hearts. The end of the church we have loved will not be an easy heartache to lay aside.”

A few weeks later Johannes and Geri were surprised when an old Vriesland neighbor stopped by. “Mr. Van Haitsma, I want to thank you for coming to my father’s funeral last week,” the elder of

⁵⁸⁴Ottawa Co. Deeds Office.

the Vriesland Dutch Reformed Church said. “My father often spoke of you and expressed how he respected you. He told me you were always being thoughtful, quiet, and considerate.”

“That’s very kind,” answered Johannes. “I have always enjoyed your father too. I’m thankful that most of us in Vriesland got along pretty well even though some differences divided us into two churches.”

The elder responded, “I think perhaps that softening of spirits was helped when the hotheads moved on to other places, and we were more gentle with each other. And that leads me to why I came to see you today.”

“Please come inside and let’s have a cup of coffee,” said Johannes.

“Mr. Van Haitsma, you know how important to us the Standards of the church have been, especially the Church Order. That was very important to my father too. Recently I got around to the job of cleaning out his attic, and I found a box that surprised me.”

“Oh?” murmured Johannes. “What interesting stuff did you find?”

“Well,” the elder went on, “I found some letters from Friesland. Father had apparently over the years written them for some help. He was aware that no one here he had asked had ever seen a 1619 Church Order. So he asked some friends over in Friesland if they could try to find a copy of the original Church Order written in 1619. Pa knew that there had been many new editions over the two centuries since 1619, but especially during the years when the church was run by the state. And since our differences in the *Kolonie* had a lot to do with that original 1619 Church Order, he was interested to see one.”

“Ya,” said Johannes, “for years I too have been interested in seeing one. The times that I was delegated to our Classis, and also in the minutes I have seen of other Classis meetings, there were frequent affirmations to live by that Church Order, but I never saw a copy. I already know that we did not follow the article about terms for elders and deacons. That original Church Order apparently called for two year terms, and I have been a deacon now for thirty-two years. Maybe that’s not such a big issue, but it does show we have not always been fully faithful to the literal regulations in the Church Order. Did your father know about other changes over the years?”

The elder said, “Ya, I think my father was also aware that there were discrepancies between our affirmations and our practices. So he occasionally reminded friends he was still hoping to see such a copy. Some years ago, unknown to us, his grown children, he received a copy of that original Church Order in the mail.”

“And what did he think about what he saw?” asked Johannes.

“He was quite chagrined by what he read and what he knew our practices actually were, so he told nobody about receiving that book. He also did not want us in the family to be disturbed about it. Maybe he was thinking back to 1857 when there was such loud argumentation around our church. He didn’t want to cause any more.”

“Ya, I can understand that! Living in peace with each other in those early days was a bit hard to come by,” observed Johannes.

“Well,” continued the elder, “my father put a note in the box and then closed it up and hid it away.”

“And what did the note say?” asked Johannes.

“He had written instructions,” answered the elder, “to please bring this box to you, Mr. Van Haitsma. He wrote that he thought you would be particularly interested in seeing the two books including the old Church Order. He may have even heard you ask our preachers along the way if they had a copy. So I am bringing this box to you as he requested. I have taken the liberty of first reading through the books, and so now I understand his disturbance somewhat better. We have taken liberties with the Church Order.”

“Did you find perspective in reading these books?” Johannes queried.[^]

“Oh, ya!” the elder responded. “First of all, the thick book was compiled by Rev. Van Raalte and his brothers-in-law back in 1840. And I understand that that was the Church Manual that we in Classis Holland adopted at the first meeting in 1848.⁵⁸⁵ That book includes Synodical decisions going way back to some Synod at Wessel in the Netherlands and then all the decisions till 1840 by the *Afgescheiden* Church.”

“So,” Johannes wondered, “what was in the thinner of the books?”

“That turned out to be a copy of the 86 Articles of the Church Order itself, only a couple of dozen pages worth,” the elder answered. “And I found, in reading, that a number of those articles definitely would not apply to our churches here in America.”

“Why would that be?” asked Johannes.

“Well, they have to do with how the local government officials have to approve many decision that church councils and congregations make,” the elder suggested. “We are now free of all that here in America. So I expect that reading this will also bring you a lot of food for thought.”

“I would guess that will surely happen. I thank you so much for bringing this to me and I’m deeply grateful to your father for having you pass it along. I do believe it will answer a lot of my questions. I’m also fairly sure it will raise even more!”

When the elder had climbed in his buggy and departed, Johannes called to Geri out in her garden, “You’ll never believe what has just been delivered to me.”

“I’m pretty sure I won’t, Johannes,” responded Geri. “What is it?”

⁵⁸⁵*Classis Holland*, 1848.

“One of them claims to be a copy of the original 1619 Church Order we’ve been hearing about for years but have never before seen. I am going to take the time to read through this one first, and see for myself just what is in this book.”

For the next several days, Johannes spent every minute of his extra time with his nose in “*the book*,” as he called it. Geri waited patiently to hear his reactions and was glad for the day he indicated he was ready to discuss it.

“Well, this will be interesting,” said Geri. “Have you decided if we should get a copy of the Church Order printed per decision of the Synod of 1892?⁵⁸⁶ Then we all can see if we have sincerely been following the original or if the church has made changes that we don’t know about.”

“Now, Geri,” chuckled Johannes, “are you thinking that the ministers who have affirmed allegiance to the old 1619 Church Order have been deliberately deceiving us *Kleine Luy*? Have they formed among themselves a sort of secret organization and kept from the membership what has really been going on?”

“Now, Johannes,” reprimanded Geri with a smile, “you can’t just go on thinking such accusative thoughts.”

Johannes persisted, “All this time we, who were part of the fellowship movement, wanted to live by those Old Standards. Even Rev. Van Raalte never told us or warned us when we first immigrated that we already were ignoring some specifics of the 1619 Church Order. And, for instance, because we didn’t know that in 1619 the terms for council members were only for two years at a time, the council in Vriesland, back in 1850, would not release Mr. Dam from the eldership.⁵⁸⁷ And we accused the Dutch Reformed Church in America of ignoring the Church Order of 1619 while we were doing the very same!”

Johannes continued, “Now maybe I understand why in the Synod minutes, they made references to the articles in the Netherlands.⁵⁸⁸ Those should have been great big hints to us that they were living by the practices of the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands. Maybe I should have understood this too when in 1882 five RCA churches joined us on the explicit awareness that they and we were following the Church Order the same way that the Separated Church in the Netherlands was doing.”⁵⁸⁹

“Geri wondered, “Are you thinking that the ministers we called from the Netherlands were deliberately altering our dreams for our church?”

“Ya, I am beginning to think so. The first little booklet is a printing of the original 1619 Church Order. But the second book is a large manual, which lists all the changes to the Church Order that were made through the years since the old 1619 Church Order. There are lots of regulations

⁵⁸⁶*CRC Classical Minutes*, June 15, 1892, Art. 20.

⁵⁸⁷*Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Feb. 19, 1850.

⁵⁸⁸*CRC General Assembly*, July 15, 1880, Supplement VII, p. 504.

⁵⁸⁹*Acts of Synod*, 1882, Appendix.

we did not know about as common members. We also didn't know that in 1619 the Old Fathers gave responsibility to the government to both protect the church,⁵⁹⁰ and keep us conforming to these regulations.⁵⁹¹ These are requirements that we wouldn't want here in America. We truly wanted a 'free' church with no government supervision. And not some other church organization either.⁵⁹² There was also a regulation in that early 1619 Church Order that the Church Order rules 'may' and 'ought' to be changed as deemed necessary.⁵⁹³ The preachers knew that, but we people of the pew didn't."

"No wonder," muttered Johannes, "that Rev. Van Raalte felt it was good to join the Dutch Church here in America. We weren't doing anything different with the Old Standards than they were. And just as they, we too were claiming to be honoring those worthy standards.⁵⁹⁴ Hendrik Dam was right all along! May the Lord forgive us for the falsehoods in which we have been living all these years. We have been blindly following what we didn't know."

"That does not feel good, does it?" responded Geri.

"No," said Johannes, "I am just afraid we have disappointed the Lord so much by being insincere and inconsistent. I've been thinking all day about our Bible reading this morning. My spine is still tingling. Acts 5 tells the story about Ananias and Sapphira deceiving the church. Was that just a coincidence to read that today?"

He added, "What's happening to our church? What would Jesus think of our church?"

The next day Johannes hitched up his buggy. He said to Geri, "I've just got to talk with Rev. Groen about these books. Maybe he can help me understand what's been going on."

He knocked on the parsonage door. "Mrs. Groen, is the Reverend available?"

"Ya, Mr. Van Haitsma, for you he's always available. Let me call him."

Johannes stepped inside, and Rev. Groen invited him into the parlor. "Mr. Van Haitsma," he observed, "I can see you are disturbed over something. Please sit down, and share with me what's troubling your heart."

"Thank you, Reverend," Johannes began. "I just received a copy of the 1619 Church Order from a friend. I have never seen it before, even though in our church we have claimed for years to live by it. Now I see that there isn't nearly as much in that Church Order as I have been hearing at our meetings. There are only eighty-six articles on only fifteen pages. The ministers always seem to have such a thick book handy when they refer to it. And I also received a copy of the big manual

⁵⁹⁰Church Order, Arts.5, 10, 28, 66 and 67.

⁵⁹¹ Van Eyck, W., *Landmarks*, p. 21: "We of today are in better position to consult the great Reformed Authorities (on orthodoxy and church orders), while the men of '57 had but little knowledge of such matters."

⁵⁹² Van der Werp, H., *Outline*, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁹³Church Order 1619, Art. 86.

⁵⁹⁴ Van Eyck, W., *Landmarks*, p. 19. *Church Order 1619*.

that includes all the rulings made since 1619, and that book looks a lot like the thick book I have seen at Classis and Synod meetings.”^

Rev. Johannes Groen Jr. said sadly, “You are right in pointing out that difference. What we ministers refer to are all the regulations that have been added to the original 1619 Church Order over the years. Of course, we believe that all those additions are based on the 1619 original.”

“So,” suggested Johannes, “all along the ministers have affirmed honoring the 1619 Church Order while they really referred to a thick book of changes and additions to that Church Order?”

“Ya, Mr. Van Haitma,” responded the Reverend. “The ministers who came from the Netherlands to serve our congregations brought along all the adjustments and regulations built on that original.”

“Then does that mean that we have been living with rules in our church that came from the Netherlands and were imposed on us by the ministers we called?” asked Johannes. “And here we insisted that we would be by ourselves and not under the rules and regulations of others?”

“I’m afraid that is what happened,” the Reverend spoke apologetically.

“So how come we kept fooling ourselves and deceiving ourselves that we were being true to those original standards?” wondered Johannes.

“Right from the 1834 Separation,” offered the Reverend, “the ministers wrote different church orders based on the 1619 original. The famous brothers-in-law, Rev. Van Raalte, Rev. Brummelkamp, Rev. Van Velzen and Rev. Moen, and then also Rev. Scholte and Rev. de Cock, all who were part of the first classis of the new Separated Church, disagreed over these modifications and finally decided to just go back to the original 1619 Church Order. But ever since those days, the church has been adding regulations while affirming the original.”

“And pulling the wool over the eyes of those of us in the pew, allowing us to think they were taking the original seriously. How can we know that they aren’t doing the same with the confessions? What kind of integrity are they promoting?” Johannes was struggling with his growing anger.

Attempting to soothe Johannes, Reverend said, “It may help to know that Article 86 of the original Church Order gave permission to make needed adjustments.”

“But then why was it not made clear that we were following amendments to the Church Order instead of giving the impression of honoring the original document?” asked Johannes. “I expect that you are aware that just months before the 1857 Separation, the ministers of Classis Holland put together a new set of rules for the Church Order. I believe that was the final tilting point that triggered our Separation. From then on the letters of Separation were written, and many people began to submit their separation letters from local congregations just as some of us did from the Vriesland Reformed Church. And several groups proclaimed their independence.”

“You mean to say,” asked Rev. Groen, “that the rules the church lived by were more important than the affirmations of the Three Forms of Unity?”

“I think,” pondered Johannes, “that playing loose with the Church Order gave us in the pew a lack of confidence in any affirmation that might be spoken. If the preachers are so loose with one part, how can we believe them about all the rest? Where is the integrity? If one ‘yea’ is ‘nay’ how can we believe any other ‘yea’ really is ‘yea?’”

“That is serious thinking,” reflected the Reverend. “Over the years that you were a deacon and attending council meetings and Classis meetings and even Synod meetings, you have had a lot to mull over. I wonder if you would consider having a ‘coffee *klets*’ with some of our deacons and reflect with them on some of the issues you have faced as a deacon? After thirty-two years on the deacon’s bench, I know you have much insight about serving as one of the Lord’s special people.”

“Well now, Reverend, I doubt I have many significant thoughts to share. You should know that I mostly uttered my concerns either to my wife or to the cows in the barn. And I was able to speak freely with your father through the years. But I’m really not a deep thinker,” Johannes confessed.

“Well,” said Rev. Groen, “I don’t know anyone who has been a deacon for as many years as you have served. I’m confident that our deacons would find your thoughts quite revealing. Since you kept on being voted in even if your name was not on the ballot, the congregation showed a great respect for you and valued your years of service. I am confident you would have valuable insights that would be a blessing for them.”

“Maybe,” suggested Johannes, “but I am not a public speaker and wouldn’t know what to say to a group.”

“That’s okay, Mr. Van Haitisma,” the Reverend hoped for an agreement. “We’ll just have a casual conversation together about serving as deacons.”

Reluctantly Johannes replied, “Well if we can keep it casual, I will do as you ask. All I can talk about is ‘been there, done that.’”

1895 *

“Well, Geridiena,” said Johannes, lifting his early morning coffee, “I’ve been ruminating through my life again. In a way, these years are the most peaceful years of my life. The hard frustrating work of the barge business was kind of hopeless because we could see there was no future in it. So we came here to the *Kolonie*. That too started off with incredibly-hard work. But we are now enjoying the fruit of our labors with a comfortable home and wealth to spare.”

“Ya,” Geri responded, “the Lord has so blessed us. We can enjoy the Sabbath rest of these later years with each other and the Lord. What a joy!”

“At the same time,” Johannes continued, “though there are so many good memories, there are also regrets gnawing at my soul. The one that weighs most heavily on me now is the realization that I too was part of the bickering crowd that would not settle the issues that finally closed the doors of the church I loved so much.”

“Oh, Johannes,” said Geri, “I am so sorry you have such a lingering sadness in your heart. I know that weighs heavily on you. You have always been so sensitive to the argumentative talk.”

“Ya, and now I have become aware,” Johannes said, “that I have also had a significant part in the ‘hardness of heart’ that finally brought about the painful end of our congregation.⁵⁹⁵ Oh, Lord, please forgive me. It is hard to admit that what I found so distasteful over the years, has also been in my own heart.” Tears running down his face, he continued, “I’m so ashamed! What I recognized in others has been deep inside my own heart too. Really, as the Bible says, there is no one that does good.”

“Ya,” answered Geridiena, “we are all part of the problem, even if we have also been part of blessing so many people over the years.”

“I don’t want to forget that,” said Johannes, “but neither do I want to forget that I too have contributed to the downfall of a church I deeply loved. I have to ask myself why my opinions were so important to me. I would like to think that I’ve always been gentle in discussions, but I know again that I harbored feelings just as strong as anyone else. And that I have contributed to the breaking of the dream.”

Geri responded, “I’m aware that the church was in a pivotal stage. We were sending off members to the new churches north, east and south. At the same time new immigrants were coming and were joining because we were free of the Masonic. And members of the old Reformed Church were also joining with us because of that.”⁵⁹⁶^

Johannes added, “Of all people, I should have seen that many of those newcomers and joiners were living north of us. But I had built my retirement house next to the church and cemetery. I so liked that arrangement. I could take care of the cemetery and grounds and Sjoukje’s grave.”⁵⁹⁷

“At the same time I could see that the more wealthy of us could go home between services while the less wealthy stayed at church with their picnic lunch. My own comfort with the situation blinded me from seeing the opportunity of making it easier for the people who were settling a bit north to also join our church. If that had happened, their influx may have kept our church from closing the doors.⁵⁹⁸ Why didn’t I see the signs? I really feel awfully responsible! Did I have to have things my way? Would it have mattered so much if I had to ride the buggy north to church? Do you think God will forgive me for having such a hard heart?”

⁵⁹⁵ Hemkes, G., *History*.

⁵⁹⁶ Kromminga, D., *Tradition*, p. 117.

⁵⁹⁷ *Vriesland Cemetery Records*.

⁵⁹⁸ Hemkes, G., *History*.

“On that question, I can say a confident, ‘Yes!’” spoke up Geri. “Our forgiveness was earned by Jesus back on the cross, and that includes the sins we now commit. God’s grace is sufficient! And He hears your repentance and sees the sorrow of your heart. We can’t undo what has been done. But God’s mercy is great!”

“Ya,” said Johannes, “I know that too, but my mind has a hard time hearing that.”

Geri added, “Maybe part of your feelings is your grief over losing Sjoukje. I know that sometimes I have such feelings over losing my Andries too. As much as I am glad to be your wife now, I do sometimes think back about the losses in my life. We were blessed to have them in our lives, and now we are blessed to have each other. I think we should remind ourselves of the wonderful impact that our Vriesland Church did have over the years and thank God for that.”

“Well, ya,” remembered Johannes. “Some very good things did come out of the life of that congregation, didn’t it? I guess I’d better keep that in mind.”

Rev. Groen walked over to the Van Haitsma home. Geri was glad to welcome him in. “Reverend,” she said, “I have a burden on my heart for my husband who is so full of grief over the ending of the Vriesland Church.”

“Ya,” Rev. Groen responded, “I have heard that from him too. What would you like me to do?”

Geri requested, “Please listen to the many issues that seem to be part of that grief. He needs to talk it out with someone other than me who is willing to listen.”

Rev. Groen asked, “Are there specific issues he seems to be particularly concerned about, Mrs. Van Haitsma?”

“Ya,” she said, “he struggles with having deceived himself about what was most important. He worries that he paid too much attention to Church Order issues rather than listening to the Bible itself. And he blames himself for not seeing the importance of moving the church north for the sake of many other families.”

“You can be sure,” assured the Reverend, “that I will keep my ears open for such issues when he and I talk and give him reassurance of the Lord’s grace on his life.”

“Oh, thank you so much, Rev. Groen. I know he values his talks with you immensely. You will help lift a weight off his shoulders. He’s too old to keep on carrying so much of that burden. What he needs is God’s peace in his heart,” Geri admitted.

Some weeks later Johannes said to Geri, “So now we’ve made this move, and I am glad to be away from the bickering. But you know, being in a new church with its own ways and its own history is still not as comfortable as I was in our Vriesland Church. Is that what it was all about? My own comfort? I think that’s not what the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 1 had in mind when it talked about ‘comfort.’ I do have the comfort of knowing that ‘I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.’ I do

have that confidence in my heart. But I miss the comfort of worship I remember from the old days.”

“I had hoped that worshiping under the leadership of Rev. Johannes Groen would remind me of the earlier years of worshiping with the Old Fathers. But I think I’m expecting too much. He grew up in my village, but he did train in the seminary under Rev. Boer who came from the church in the Netherlands. I guess there’s no escaping the fact that new ministers learn from the modeling of their mentors. Unfortunately that influence seems to have been stronger than the influence of his father, my old friend Johannes Groen, who was with us from the very beginning of our church in 1857.”

“One thing I really treasure is the memory of the peacefulness among our little group who came out of the Vriesland RCA. After Mr. Haan Sr. left for Grand Rapids⁵⁹⁹ to get away from the farming and back to his weaving, the relationship in the whole Vriesland community was more peaceful and we all cooperated in various community events, even the school.”

“So,” suggested Geri, “from the earliest days the Vriesland group was a peaceful and helpful group of Dutch settlers. It was the ideal group to be extending the invitation to gather and consider forming the new church based on the 1619 Confessions and Church Order.”⁶⁰⁰

“Ya,” agreed Johannes, “I think Vriesland had earned a reputation of peaceful relations. I remember that we tried very hard to be helpful to the Drenthe group when we all first came here.”⁶⁰¹

On October 25, 1895 brother Jetse Van Haitsma passed away.⁶⁰²

“Oh,” moaned Johannes, “another sibling gone! First Wopke, Tjalling, Sietske and now Jetse. Wiebe, you and I are the only ones left.”

“Ya, brother,” grieved Wiebe, “we’ve depended on each other so much. Each loss is another gaping hole in our family. Your Sjoukje has been gone for seven years already. And I have lost my first wife. We are seeing too many deaths in the family.”

“Our family cemetery lot is filling up too fast. It seems that a whole generation of pioneers is passing away,” Johannes lamented. “I hope we are still around when *de Kolonie* plans to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the planting of *de Stad* and Zeeland and our little Vriesland too. That’s only two years away.”

⁵⁹⁹*Grand Rapids City Directory, 1867.*

⁶⁰⁰This is contrary to Dosker’s accusation in *Levensschets*, p. 257. Oosterhaven, M., *Saints and Sinners: Secession and the Christian Reformed Church*, p. 31.

⁶⁰¹*Vriesland RCA Minutes*, Introduction.

⁶⁰²*Vriesland Cemetery Records.*

“I’m afraid,” added Wiebe soberly, “that then we will really see how many of our first arrivals have succumbed to the grave and the grace of God.”

“Ya,” considered Johannes, “we’ve seen many changes in these years, some for the better and others not. I hope that some of our stories will be told and maybe published in the *Holland CityNews*. They would be something to collect and keep for our children. I don’t think many of our stories will be told there, though. If we want to be remembered we will have to leave our own stories.”

“Well, do you see yourself writing your own story, brother? I sure don’t expect to; I couldn’t write it in English if I tried,” chuckled Wiebe.

“I wonder if anyone would even be interested in reading our stories. I know there has been a lot of God’s grace and work in our lives. But outside of that we Van Haitsmas have pretty much been keeping a low profile. So who would be interested in that?” Johannes responded.

1896 *

“Geri,” Johannes shared, “I’m reading the Synod report in *De Wachter*. One of the big issues for many years has been that we should only sing the Psalms. Now I remember that the 1619 Church Order approved a few hymns.⁶⁰³ Years ago in the 1870s, we were singing those hymns at Classis.⁶⁰⁴ And at Synod it was reported our German congregations have a hymn selection and the churches of the True Dutch Church in the East have some hymns too. If the preachers knew about these permitted hymns, why haven’t they ever talked about all this outside of Synod?”⁶⁰⁵

“Ya, Johannes,” answered Geri, “I think that they could have simply told us that the 1619 Church Order allowed for the singing of hymns. Who knows why they kept that quiet all these years?”⁶⁰⁶

Johannes responded, “Oh, Geri, I had such a high hope for our church that we truly would be firm and consistent with our Standards. Certainly most of us regular members never really knew what the Standards said. We trusted the ministers. Was that a mistake?”

⁶⁰³Church Order 1619, Art. 69.

⁶⁰⁴ Classical Assemblies led the way with morning songs (June 20, 1870) and evening songs (Sept. 5, 1866 and Sept. 29, 1869)

⁶⁰⁵CRC Classical Assembly, June 11, 1884, Art. 59; June 4, 1890, Art. 24.

⁶⁰⁶ Anonymous: “James Bratt’s *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* examined the history of Dutch Calvinist leaders and those who shaped the ‘minds’ within Dutch Reformed circles from the developments in the nineteenth century until the 1970s. Bratt’s main interest was in the battles over Americanization within the intellectual elite as evidenced by their writings in church periodicals, such as *The Banner*. Bratt emphasized the role of leaders and dealt less with the beliefs of the people in the pews.” This idea is echoed by Dr. Harry R. Boer in *The Reformed Journal*, Nov. 1985, p. 26.

Johannes continued, “And when I did see the Church Order of 1619 a few years ago, I realized that never in our church history did we ever fully embrace it. Even the old Separated Church did not follow it strictly in 1836. But we have been affirming the whole package, following the pattern of the ministers.”⁶⁰⁷

Johannes continued, “I guess I’m just an old wooden shoe! I still think we did the right thing by trying to return to those Standards. But I wonder if what we were really searching for had more to do with the spirit of the Old Fathers we loved so much, and not the Standards of Doctrine and Church Order. It seems to me that something deeply changed when we turned the fellowship group into an organized church. Years ago Mr. Dam would sometimes say that too. It seems that by calling ourselves a church, we began to pull a lot of rules and regulations into our wonderful worship times.”[^]

Johannes continued, “Is it possible to have such rich worship experiences without becoming an organized church? Maybe we should remind ourselves that Jesus really is the only foundation of the church.”

“That’s true!” agreed Geri.

“I’m beginning to think that we might always need spiritual stimulation from such fellowship meetings that don’t have to follow all the rules and customs that seem to be expected for an organized church. I suspect that what we think of being ‘Reformed’ really has more to do with a deep respect for the Lord and a firm desire to please Him in all that we do.”

“Do you suspect that God has also been grieved over all our regulations which seem to be more important to us than the spirit of service and worship?”

“Ya, I have been wondering about that,” responded Johannes.

One day when Johannes was walking along Central Avenue toward town, he found Rev. Groen also taking a walk. “Hello, Mr. Van Haitsma,” the Reverend began. “You’re also out enjoying the fall colors in the trees, I see.”

“Ya, Reverend,” responded Johannes. “It is such a beautiful time of the year. The changing colors remind me that we are entering the late season of the year, just like I have entered the late season of life.”

Rev. Groen observed, “And that brings a mixture of joy in the gorgeous colors and sadness that the leaves will soon fall to the ground, doesn’t it?”

“Ya. That pretty well describes the conflict of feelings in my heart. I have joy over the freedom and comfort of my retirement years. And yet a cloud of grief hangs over my head and heart with the growing number of deaths in the family in the last years.”

⁶⁰⁷General Rules from *Acts of Synod*, 1881, Art. 69: List of acceptable catechism books: Borstius, van Kessel, *History of Church* by L.J. Hulst, *Compendium*, Hellenbroek, *Heidelberg Catechism*.

“Those feelings of grief seem to be a heavy burden, don’t they?” observed the Reverend.

“Ya,” confessed Johannes, “sometimes they blot out the joy of life. Life can seem so dark.”

“That can feel so discouraging,” reflected the Reverend.

“Ya,” shared Johannes, “sometimes it makes me want to go to heaven before the Lord seems to be ready to call me.”

“It is a blessing to look forward to heaven where there is no pain and no sorrow,” agreed Rev. Groen.

“And a great comfort to know the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are waiting to welcome us home,” affirmed Johannes. “Thanks for listening to me a bit, Reverend. Enjoy your walk.”

1897 *

“Oh, Geri,” said Johannes, “I just heard from Titus that Andrew’s little son Reinder passed away.”⁶⁰⁸

“*Ach*, I’m so sorry, Johannes,” responded Geri. “Little children should outlive their grandparents. I wonder how many of our children and grandchildren we have laid to rest in the arms of Jesus.”

“Surely more than I want to count,” grieved Johannes. “I’m sure the Lord has His reasons for taking a little three-year old, but I don’t understand why.”

“Ya, Johannes,” Geri answered. “It is hard to say with Job: ‘The Lord has given, the Lord has taken; blessed be the name of the Lord.’”⁶⁰⁹

“But I do appreciate the Lord giving us the comfort of His promises that believers and their children belong to Him in life and in death.⁶¹⁰ We will see that little fellow again at the knees of Jesus,” confessed Johannes. “I wonder if our lives have had more joys than sorrows. I think I might not be able to handle all the sorrows without the assurance that ‘God works all things for the good of those who love Him.’”⁶¹¹

“And,” Geri added, “we don’t even have to pretend to understand why the Lord does this or that.”

⁶⁰⁸ Reinder of son Anne died September 21, 1897 at age 3.

⁶⁰⁹ Job 1:21.

⁶¹⁰ *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord’s Day 1.

⁶¹¹ Romans 8:28.

Some weeks later Wiebe came into the yard. He called out to Johannes who was busy in the garden, “Hey, brother!”

“Oh, hello, Wiebe, it’s good to see you. Come on in; let’s have some coffee.”

“That sounds good,” Wiebe said. “I thought I’d get away from the farm and the busy elevator. Titus can handle that for a while.”

“Ya,” responded Johannes, “it’s good to be handing our busy lives over to the next generation, isn’t it?”

“Oh, ya,” Wiebe answered. “So big brother, what’s been going on in your mind these days?”

Johannes laughed. “That’s one of the blessings of spending time in the garden. I pull weeds and think about the weeds in my life. I cultivate the crop and know that the Lord has been cultivating me. I don’t want to be a tree that doesn’t bear any fruit for the Lord.”

“That, brother Johannes, I’m sure of. You have borne much fruit for the Lord in your life. I have been aware of that over the years and I have learned so much by just following your tracks and your doings.”

Johannes said, “Thanks for saying that. I guess I don’t think that much of myself and my life or that I have been a good model for anyone else. But it’s nice to hear. Of course, I can’t wait till I hear the Lord say to me, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’ On the other hand, I am glad that I have another day here and the Lord sees fit to let me keep working at life here. But let me share with you some of the things that have been rummaging around in my head and heart. You know, of course, that the older we become, the more thinking we do about the bygone years.”

“Speak for yourself, brother; I’m too young yet to start reminiscing over my years! So what’ve you been looking over in your attic of memories?”

“Well, as seems usual, I’ve been thinking about the Lord and the church. About the Lord I have only good thoughts. About the church I have just so much in my attic that is keeping me confused. It’s good to talk about some of it, though, so I hope you have some time to hear me out.”

“Ya, for you, Johannes, I have lots of time; and I have lots to learn from you,” spoke Wiebe.

^^“One thing that I just can’t seem to settle in my mind,” said Johannes, “is why I was so pleased to listen to sermons of the Old Fathers, and not nearly so much with the various ministers that have come through my life. I was really shook up when I heard what our first pastor said about those of us who started the Christian Reformed Church. He had nothing good to say, only put us down as incapable.⁶¹² Then a few years ago the Reverend in Graafschap published a book in which he echoed the same put-down kinds of things about us.⁶¹³ All he had to do was look

⁶¹²Acts of Synod 1883, Opening.

⁶¹³ Kuiper, R., *Voice*, p. 83: “Incapable themselves, they were obliged to submit to the leadership of a few.”

around and see the kind of farms we have cut out of the forest and the wealth that the Lord has blessed us with.”

Wiebe asked, “You think maybe he was only talking about church things?”

“Oh, I’m sure he was. But were they so blind that they couldn’t see that in the first ten years of our churches we were managing just fine, even if we were small during those early years? The preachers seemed quite pleased to take all the credit for the growth of the church. And to give credit, Rev. Rietdyk and Rev. Kuiper did make a trip to the Motherland and very likely some people did immigrate here and join the church because of their visit.”

“^Well, I’ve noticed too that our preachers are quite ready to look down their noses at us *Kleine Luy*,”⁶¹⁴ Wiebe uttered. “And our preachers have never yet convinced me that I should become a full member in our church.”⁶¹⁵

“Another thing,” continued Johannes, “we *Kleine Luy* had never had a copy of the original 1619 Church Order and so we didn’t know what it said. We trusted our preachers. I was really shook up when I learned that the second new preacher from the Netherlands convinced us to stop looking for the original and just go straight to somebody’s *commentary* on that Order. I recently found out that Rev. Van Raalte was one of the authors who compiled that *commentary*. The preachers knew. But they didn’t tell us. It’s like we lowly guys didn’t deserve to know.”⁶¹⁶

“My, oh, my,” Wiebe was astonished. “How have you learned to live with that? You’ve been a faithful member for all these years. I haven’t. Oh, I believe in Jesus all right. But I have some difficulties of my own with the church.”

“That is a good question which I’m still trying to answer. And now that I’m not so closely tied to the Vriesland Church, I don’t feel nearly as attached to the churches as I did all those years I lived in Vriesland. One thing I’m learning, though, is that when one finger is pointing at another’s failures, there are three pointing back at me. I am so aware that my own stubbornness was a big reason that the Vriesland congregation couldn’t make up their minds about where the church building needed to be located. The Lord has been humbling me to be aware of my own human foibles so that I am not so aware of others. He’s been teaching me that deceiving ourselves is a tendency we all tend to fall into.”

“That’s a lesson we all need to learn,” echoed Wiebe. “Well,” he continued, “I guess I should be making my way back to the barn.”

“Thanks, Wiebe, for stopping by,” said Johannes. “You’ve given me a chance to clear my mind a bit. There’s not many I can talk to about all this. So thanks, brother.”

⁶¹⁴ Cox, H., *Seduction*, p. 178.

⁶¹⁵ *Vriesland CRC Minutes*, May 21, 1874. Wiebe van Haitsma was recognized as a member by baptism in the Vriesland CRC and joined the Vriesland RCA as a full member in 1906 after Johannes’ death.

⁶¹⁶ Kuiper, R., *Voice*, p. 82.

On August 25, 1897, the day of the Holland semi-centennial, their buggy crunched over the gravel road toward Holland City. Johannes said, “Geri, I’m so excited. We are among the honored guests of the 50th anniversary of *De Kolonie*.⁶¹⁷ I hardly dared to think I might live to see this special day. So many people I have known have passed away. But God has been good!”

“Ya,” agreed Geri, “He has been good to you and to me. He has kept us alive and well enough to attend this celebration, and who knows how many more years He has planned for us. And it is wonderful to be an invited guest at this celebration.”

“I hear,” continued Johannes, “that Chief Simon Pokagon is going to be speaking.⁶¹⁸ I’ve never heard him speak, but he is one Indian who has hobnobbed with President Lincoln and has written several accounts and stories about the tribes in our time. I wonder if he knew our friend, the chief we buried in our small cemetery on 64th Avenue?”

“We might find out,” suggested Geri. “It would be interesting to meet him.”

“Ya, and it will also be interesting to see who of all the people we knew back in those early years are still alive. I am rather aware that of all the people I knew in Vriesland those years, there’s hardly a one still living. Now it’s their sons and daughters I visit with, like the Revs. Groen, Schepers, Wijngaarden, and Karsten.”

“Ya,” agreed Geri. “Celebrations have their shadows, don’t they? Maybe the speeches we will hear at this festival will bring some good memories as well.”

“I sure hope so,” Johannes said. “And maybe we can all concentrate on God’s blessings, and not have any festering of the old conflicts that divided our churches. I am so sorry that our ministers kept that conflict alive for so many years. And they weren’t even here when it was all happening.”

“But they still put a lot of heat on a lot of old conflicts,” added Geri.

“We have arrived,” announced Johannes eventually, “and there’s the marshal directing us to a place to park our buggy. My, aren’t there a lot of people milling around?” observed Johannes. “Maybe they’ll show us where to sit for the festivities.”

Hours later, on their way home, Johannes spoke over the noise of the wheels on the gravel, “I heard some things today that I have not thought about for years.”

“What struck your attention, husband?” Geri wondered.

“The evidences that God had been preparing for years for this Dutch migration into *De Kolonie*. I hardly remembered that Mrs. Ely of Allegan could speak Dutch.⁶¹⁹ That made it so easy for me

⁶¹⁷ The Holland City 59th anniversary celebration, *Holland Daily Sentinel*, Digital Commons, Hope College, 1897. Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 6: “the semi-centennial of the *Kolonie* started with a parade on Aug. 25.

⁶¹⁸ Schooland, M., *De Kolonie*, p. 179.

⁶¹⁹ Hyma, A., *Van Raalte*, p. 107.

to find a farmer to work for. And that the Harrington son who helped with building projects was also fluent enough in Dutch to be a translator in Holland.”

Geri tuned into the ideas. “And that the Erie Canal was built so it would be a highway for us folk as a cheaper way to come to *De Kolonie*. That there were kindly Dutch-speaking ministers in this vast land who were so helpful to guide so many of us along the way.”

Johannes added, “And there were the influential folk like Mr. Ball who were inclined to give us Dutch folk a helping hand when we badly needed it.”⁶²⁰

“And maybe even the poverty and the economic downturn in the Netherlands to spur us on our way,” suggested Geri. “Oh, I’m sure we can keep adding to this list of evidence of God preparing a way for us to this Promised Land.”⁶²¹

“Sometimes, it seems, we need to have our eyes opened to see the wonderful mysterious ways of the Lord, and recognize His hidden nature in the world around us,” wondered Johannes. “Well the stories we heard today and the reflections that people shared certainly helped me see the hand of the Lord on our lives. We have so much to be thankful for!”

Some weeks later Rev. Groen paid the Van Haitsmas a surprise visit. Opening the door, Johannes said, “Welcome, Rev. Groen! It is good to see you. We’ve just been reflecting over times past and present.”

“Well, Mr. Van Haitsma,” smiled the Reverend, “I am a bit of both in your life, I think.”

“Ya, you sure are,” responded Johannes. “Your father was always a dear friend. I’ve missed him these last four years.”

“Ya, so have I,” Rev. Groen reminisced. “I also have lots of good memories of life on the farm in Vriesland.”

“Come in and set a while, Reverend,” spoke Johannes. “Mrs. Van Haitsma will have coffee ready in no time. I’ve had some questions bugging me for some time now. Maybe you can help me understand it all.”

“I would be pleased if I could, Mr. Van Haitsma, but you are many years ahead of me. Frankly, even though I went to seminary, I never could begin to answer many questions that my father asked either. So, what’re you wondering about?”

“Well, first I want to ask if you had any thoughts that your father may have died of a broken heart. It seems to me that his death, following so soon after the closing of the Vriesland Church, was not just a coincidence.”⁶²²

⁶²⁰ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, pp. 385, 33.

⁶²¹ Mulder, A., *Americans*, p. 100.

⁶²² May 30, 1893 according to the *Vriesland Cemetery Records*.

“Ya,” responded the Reverend, “I have had that suspicion too. It was almost like he just couldn’t get the energy together to get out of bed the last days. And I did not think he had any major physical illness.”

“I am aware,” suggested Johannes, “that he joined the Zeeland Church about six months before our church in Vriesland closed down.⁶²³ I had hoped that making that transfer would lessen his pain. But I’m not sure anything could do that.”

“I think you’re right, Mr. Van Haitsma,” answered Reverend Groen. “There probably was no way to take away the loss he felt over the church being closed. I suspect that’s true for you as well. Perhaps being busy with your garden here may have put your grief on hold for a while, but I expect it will continue to show itself in some way.”

“Well,” agreed Johannes, “I don’t have the possibility of shouting at my cows any more. So maybe I have to take it out on the hard ground with my shovel and hoe. I do not want to overload my wife with it all. And I would be very pleased to live comfortably here in this house for a few years yet. There are some grandchildren I would like to see get married and have children.”

Johannes continued, “And then I have been hearing about some newfangled inventions like horseless carriages. Who knows, maybe I’ll buy us one of those! And I’m curious about plans to have trains rolling through Vriesland. I’m excited about some of the new farm equipment coming out. I would like to see what the Lord will bring into our world in the new century coming in just a couple years.”[^]

The Reverend spoke up, “Ya, there are many interesting things that people are inventing. But I suspect you have some more personal things on your mind.”

Johannes stumbled over his words, “I keep wondering about integrity in the church. The very thing we feared was actually happening right before our eyes and we didn’t see it. Where is our integrity? Do we encourage pretending to be faithful?”

Johannes Groen struggled for words, “I’m sorry, Mr. Van Haitsma. I don’t think I can give you any comfort in these issues. The church is what it is. We are sinners saved by the grace of God. The church makes decisions that we would like to be for the better. We never can know for sure that they are. I hope that when I mature some more, I will have a better sense of all such questions. I am grateful that you are willing to share such struggles with me, and pray that you will find some peace with us in the church. Consistency and integrity may always be hard to come by.”

“And that, Reverend, is also something I have become more aware of. While I am seeking integrity, I also find that it is hard to live in integrity. I am becoming more aware day by day that in my own heart there are always currents that go against the Lord and His Word,” Johannes confessed. “I guess what makes it hard for me is remembering that we have spoken so strongly over these past forty years and now I don’t know that there was any value in what we have said.”

⁶²³Oct. 14, 1892 according to the Vriesland Membership List at Calvin Archives.

And, I hesitate to say it, but I am beginning to think that I helped to make the choices that destroyed the dreams we had when we started the church.”

Johannes continued to reflect. “Dreams and hopes are so important in our lives. And when we help to destroy the dream that has been driving us, it hurts so much. I was aware at the 50th Anniversary of the *Kolonie* that Rev. Van Raalte had led us into a dream that he inadvertently helped to destroy.”⁶²⁴

“Oh?” asked Rev. Groen, waiting for him to go on.

“Ya, and that wasn’t the first time for him. In his youth Rev. Van Raalte had the dream of preaching from the same pulpit that his father preached from. But he did not realize that his choice of friends made him suspect to the leaders of the State Church. And he never fulfilled that dream. Then in 1849 when he supported the union with the Reformed Church, he was caught in a conflict of dreams. Our big dream was to be by ourselves, but in developing the Holland community he needed the help of the RCA to fulfill this dream. Less than ten years later we realized that he and the *Kolonie* had left the dream of being by ourselves in a new land.”

“My,” noted Rev. Groen, “and now you are looking at the church we dreamed into reality and you are beginning to see problems with that dream also. I wonder if there is any dream in our lives that we will not somehow end up destroying for ourselves.”⁶²⁵

“Ya,” suggested Johannes, “I think any dream we have of following Jesus is always threatened by our own choices that don’t meet the Savior’s standards and desires.”

After a bit of hesitation, Rev. Groen said, “Mr. Van Haitsma, there’s something else I wanted to talk with you about.”

“Oh?” asked Johannes.

“Ya, Mr. Van Haitsma, I don’t know if you have heard that the elderly Rev. Van den Bosch has died.”⁶²⁴

“Oh, he died?” Johannes was stunned. “But you know he was only four years older than I.”

“My,” Johannes remembered, “He was an interesting man. As you probably know, he came here to *de Kolonie* just six months before we began our church. It did not take him long to decide that living within the Dutch Reformed Church was not what he wanted. He of course was far from the first to decide that. But he was at the Classis Holland meeting in 1856 when new regulations for the church were established.⁶²⁵ That showed him and us that the 1619 Church Order was no longer being honored. Your parents and others had already left that church also. I joined the exodus in February 1857.⁶²⁶ But Rev. Van den Bosch’s letter, along with the three others, was what made everyone take notice.”

⁶²⁴*CRCNA Ministers File*: Koene van den Bosch died in Grand Haven on Nov. 12, 1897.

⁶²⁵*Classis Holland*, Dec. 17, 1856, Art. 4.

⁶²⁶*Vriesland RCA Membership Records*, Feb. 1857.

“So he left his church in Noordeloos?” asked Rev. Groen.

“Well, yes and no,” responded Johannes. “It was the Zeeland church that had called him to work in Noordeloos. Noordeloos was still officially a part of the Zeeland church. That’s why his resignation letter went to Zeeland.⁶²⁷ The Zeeland Church council brought the letter to Classis. I gather that Rev. Van Raalte immediately took his name off the list of ministers who were financially supported by the Dutch Reformed Church.⁶²⁸”

Johannes explained, “So Rev. Van den Bosch became a minister without a church, without a call, and without a salary. There were about nineteen of his Noordeloos people who walked out with him. But for years he lived in poverty and in uncertainty about what church he was the minister of. In spite of that, and in spite of his tendency to be outspoken, he served each of our churches in rotation as best he could. I remember that one winter he could not get to the church in Grand Rapids because he didn’t have clothes warm enough for the trip there.

“In coming to all our churches in turn, he kept us close to the awareness of returning to the 1619 Standards. He gradually mellowed and later when new congregations wanted to join us in the 1870s and 80s, he was often the person sent by our Classis or Synod to help organize those churches into our denomination.”⁶²⁹

“So, in the long run,” Rev. Groen said, “he was a good servant of the denomination?”

“Ya, he did help to keep us together. If I remember right, he was the chairman of every Classis meeting except two until Rev. Van Leeuwen came to Grand Rapids. And all that time he had to work his farm to put food on the family table and keep clothes on their backs. The time spent farming pulled him away from ministry, of course, and Classis felt they had to ask for more of his time in ministry.⁶³⁰ He gave up a lot to be among us.”

Johannes continued, “Did you know he had been the preacher at *Het Loo* in the Old Country? That was where the King’s palace was. In spite of being a minister in the Separated Churches there, our Rev. Van den Bosch apparently was the King’s choice as preacher[^]. Then he accepted a call to be the minister at Noordeloos here. What a jump into pioneer life! At great sacrifice to himself he faithfully served our little congregations in those early years. It must have been quite a comfort for him to move away to minister at the Grand Haven church where he did draw a decent salary. Our church owes the man a lot. He was a man with great integrity and he gave so much of himself.”

“Now, young man, you have just kind of triggered a memory about your father that I think I need to share with you,” Johannes offered.

“Oh? Something I haven’t heard before?” wondered Rev. Groen.

⁶²⁷*Classis Holland*, April 8, 1857.

⁶²⁸Swierenga, R., *Quarrels*, pp. 84, 24. *Acts of Synod*, June 5, 1860, Art. 9.

⁶²⁹Hyma, A., *Van Raalte*, p. 44. *Origins*, Vol. XIX, Num 2, 2001.

⁶³⁰*Acts of Synod*, July 22, 1863, Art. 1; Feb. 20, 1867, Art. 19.

“Ya, it happened while you were in your last year at seminary, so I think you might not have heard the talk around the village,” suggested Johannes.

“Well, I would appreciate hearing anything about my father. He was such a good man in my life,” the Reverend responded.

“Your father was also a man with a great deal of integrity. I know you have been very aware of the struggle our little church went through in trying to decide between whether to relocate, where to relocate and all,” Johannes began.

“Ya,” affirmed Rev. Groen. “I sat in at a few of those last meetings. What a heart-wrenching period that was!”

“And you know, of course,” continued Johannes, “that many more meetings took place before those you attended. In one of those meetings in 1890, we finally seemed to be able to make the decision to buy the house and acre of the Widow Wiersma after tossing several other places around in our discussion.”

“Ya,” the Reverend replied, “there were several times the church came close to agreeing on one.”

“Ya,” Johannes agreed. “That February the council agreed that the emotions were so high we could not celebrate communion. And that hardly ever happened. Maybe the last time was in 1884. Those emotions continued high. But in desperation the congregation decided they would after all settle on the widow’s acreage. Everyone of the reluctant ones said they could live with that decision. And then your father spoke up. He said to us that we all knew that the property was the least desirable of the properties we were considering. It was too small, too wet, and there was no wisdom in settling on this decision that really no one wanted. So he reluctantly put his foot down and said he just could not go along with that decision. So with his wisdom and his determination, he vetoed the vote. He did that with such a heavy heart, but for the sake of the church he simply could not allow that decision. Everyone went home with the turmoil of frustration. We’d come so close to agreement, but we felt it necessary to honor his veto just as we had honored the vetoes of others so many times.”

“Oh, my” sighed the Reverend. “Pa must have felt awful to vote against that agreement, and must have carried a heavy burden home after casting such a vote.”

“Ya, I’m afraid so,” Johannes spoke softly. “It was a few months later at another congregational meeting that he made the request to hold communion again. He seemed to feel that healing in the church required such a communion service. Most of the council had resigned in May[^], and something needed to be done. And so when a pulpit supply minister came the new council asked to hold that communion.”

The Reverend uttered, “He knew how that veto had affected the whole church and he wanted to reconcile?”

“Ya,” said Johannes, “he knew he could not leave the church on the painful edge it had been on. I thought it would be good for you to know how your father agonized over those decisions and his part in them. Later I told him that he did the right thing, and we would have been very sorry

if we had proceeded with the plans for the widow's property. I suspect he didn't say much of that to you along the way."

Rev. Groen's eyes brimmed with tears, "I thank you so much for sharing that with me, Mr. Van Haitsma. It helps me understand even better the pain that he was going through the last years of his life."

Rev. Groen hesitated a bit and then began, "There's something exciting I'd also like to share with you. You know that I went on vacation in September."

"Ya, I remember. Where did you go?" asked Johannes.

"Basically we took the train south to New Mexico, and we saw the Grand Canyon. But the most interesting part for me, and I think you will appreciate this, was when we spent some time visiting Rev. Fryling and the Vander Wagons who have been setting up the Indian mission for the church."⁶³¹

"Oh, ya," affirmed Johannes, "that mission has been on my donation list ever since I first heard that it was going to be started."

"Ya, I thought I remembered that the Indian mission had been on your mind for years. I remember that Rev. Tamme Vanden Bosch left your church in order to engage the Indian tribe in the Dakotas," added the Reverend.

"How are things working out there for the Frylings?" asked Johannes.

"It seems not so well. There's conflict with another mission nearby, so they are considering where they should go to avoid obvious problems," answered Rev. Groen.

"I hope they can find a good solution," Johannes said hopefully. "This is an important mission in my thinking. We came to this country, after all, to share the gospel as well as do good for our families and worship in freedom."

"I guess I will be keeping close tabs on the work because I have been serving as the secretary of the **Synod's Heathen Mission Board**^," noted Rev. Groen.

"The other ministers must hold you in high regard to have you, young as you are, serving as secretary," observed Johannes.

"I suppose so," Rev. Groen mumbled in embarrassment. "I wanted to share this with you because I know you have an interest here."

⁶³¹*Zeeland Expositor*, Aug. 20, 1897. Secretary of the Synodical Heathen Mission Board, 1897. *Origins*, XXI, Num. 1, 2003.

1899 *

“Andrew,” Johannes said as his youngest son sat down at his kitchen table. “I hear you are selling your farm to the Palingdood family.⁶³² I thought you were pretty well settled on your place.”

“Ya, Pa,” answered Andrew, “I surely like the farm you passed on to me. But, I hesitate to say it, my brother Reinder and I do not always see eye to eye, and it’s beginning to get under my skin.”

“Now that’s a hard thing. The Bible says it’s a blessing when brothers get along together,” responded Johannes.

“That’s why I want to move a bit further away. I bought a farm just far enough away that we don’t have to be in each other’s face so much. I figure a little distance may make a more peaceful relationship between us.”⁶³³

“Son, that sounds like good thinking. It’s good to get along, and if a little distance will make that better, then by all means do it,” confirmed Johannes. “You are still in the neighborhood, and that’s good too. I’m not so sure I like having Peter and his family so far away in Central Michigan. Those long journeys are getting a little too hard on us old folk.”

“Oh Pa,” countered Andrew, “you aren’t old folk yet. I hope you have some good years to go.”

“I would like to think so too, son. But I’m not going to fool myself into thinking I have so much time left on this earth. Besides, the idea of going home to heaven is a pretty good thought some days.”

Some weeks later Titus rode his buggy into the driveway. Johannes had seen him coming and called out, “Good to see you, son. And you too, Anna. What a treat to have you come by! Geri will be very glad to see you too. Come, climb down.”

“Good to see you too, Pa,” Titus grinned at his father. “It has been quite a ride from Zutphen. The weather’s been good, but the road needs to be graded again.”

Anna added, “It has been especially interesting to see the progress being made on the railbed and tracks for [^]the new interurban train. Have you heard any report on how soon it is expected to start up?”

“I’ve heard some rumors, but mostly I hear of the problems they’re having with the railbed this side of Vriesland. That swamp has been a challenge for years. I remember when we pulled log after log into the bog to try to make a base for the road. But it kept on sinking. And even now I

⁶³² Van Haitsma, J., *Family Legends. Drenthe CRC History*.

⁶³³ *Zeeland Township Map, 1912*, shows an A. Van Haitsma living along Byron Road, ½ mile west of the Byron & 64th intersection.

guess the roadbed is not too stable. But come on in. I think Geri is ready for our tea time. She is such a comfort to me.”

They walked to the back door, and Anna said, “I imagine you are to her too, Pa. I think it must be a challenge for Geertje to be without Tjalling these last ten years. And you have been without Sjoukje, but then Geri came into your life. How blessed you are.”

“Ya, I have been blessed. God has been good. And at my age, my health is still good too.”

True to form, Geri said, “Welcome, come to the table. Tea and cookies are waiting for you. So, what’s the news? How are the children?”

Titus praised his offspring, “John is a big man on the farm, a great worker. It won’t be long and he’ll be looking for his own place. Gerrit at sixteen is pulling his share and wonderful with the animals. Susie has been so good with the horses, and they’ll do for her whatever she asks. Nick is finding his niche with the smaller animals and tinkering with equipment. Will keeps finding great ways to be of help and Herm helps a lot with little Sarah, who adores all of them and is trying really hard to get her walking legs so she can keep up with them all.”

Anna added, “Don’t forget about Dena. She’s got her eyes on Jacob Heyboer. I think he doesn’t know it yet. But I think for Dena, that’s a done deal!”

Titus spoke up, “I have interesting news for you. As you know, we have been corresponding with cousin Wopke, brother of the Maaïke who came to visit back in 1889. He made up his mind to emigrate, and he just arrived last week. You know, it took you almost three months to make that trip back in the 1840s. It only took them two weeks! They took steam boat and train all the way.”

“Oh, my!” exuded Geri. “What a change! That is just amazing! I’m glad for them they did not have to endure what we all did.”

Titus added, “They bought a farm in Zutphen,⁶³⁴ so we will be seeing some of each other.”

“So,” reflected Johannes, “emigration from Friesland continues to bring people here to America. I know we did not communicate much across the Atlantic, but that they’re settling near us means they feel the ties to family like we did.”

“And they won’t have to struggle quite like we did with those impossible trees!” spoke up Geri.

“Or live in drafty log cabins, like you did, Pa,” Titus noted.

“I’m sure that they have some of the same hopes for a land of milk and honey that we did. I have been hearing that the economy has been poor in the Netherlands lately. So I wish them well. I

⁶³⁴ Van Haitsma, *Family Legend*.

hope they come to visit us sometime soon. I'd like to hear more about the family that stayed in Friesland."

Some weeks later, there was another knock on the back door. Johannes said, "Well, Egbert, it's good to see you; come on in."

"Hello, *Pake*," said grandson Egbert. "I have some bad news for you."

"Come in and sit down. I can hear bad news better when I'm sitting down."

"That's probably a good idea anyway, *Pake*," said Egbert.

"So, what's the bad news, Egbert?"

"*Pake*, my mother passed away."⁶³⁵

"Oh, grandson, Lizbeth passed away? She's only forty-five years old!" Johannes called out to Geri, "Please come to the kitchen. Egbert has just brought bad news."

Geri came from the sitting room. "Egbert! It is good to see you. But what's the bad news you have to bring?"

"*Beppe*, my mother passed away."

"I knew she was not feeling all that well," said Geri. "But I didn't expect this; she's so young! And she's leaving a few young children too yet."

Johannes responded, "I'm sure that Hattie and Minnie will take good care of the boys, but it will make things tough on Hendrik as well as all the kids. Egbert, do you know what the plans are for burial?"

Egbert answered, "I think we are expecting visitation today and tomorrow, and then have the burial in Zutphen."

Johannes murmured, "It just doesn't seem right for parents to lay their children to rest. But we have been there before. Somehow God has helped us get through the pain and grief of those times. I'm sure God will be our 'Ebenezer' again this time." Tears rolled down his grizzled face. Geri reached out to take his hand.

"It's never easy, is it, to lose a child? Johannes, you and I have both been there."

"Ya, it's never easy," answered Johannes. "We might expect it would be one of us older ones, but not my daughter. But we do have to look up to the Lord; our help comes from Him."

⁶³⁵ Daughter Elizabeth Berends died in Zutphen on Sept. 29, 1899.

“Ya, *Pake*,” said Egbert, “and it’s good to know that Ma knew where she was going. She knew her only comfort in life and in death was to belong to Jesus, her Lord. You taught us all well to lean on Jesus.”

Geri, like a practical Michigan housewife, asked, “What shall I bake to bring along to the visitation and burial?”

A few weeks later Geri found Johannes busy working at his desk. “What are you working on so intently, Johannes?”

“I have become aware since losing daughter Lizbeth that I need to take care of a few more of life’s details. You’ve been part of my life now for ten years, and I’ve failed to rewrite my will so that you are provided for in case God calls me home before you,” shared Johannes.

“Oh, husband, you are going to outlive me. Besides, my first husband left me well cared for. He too had felt blessed and was generous in his will.”

“I’m glad,” Johannes observed. “But I still want to make sure I also provide for your future. Who knows how many years you might outlive me.”

“Well, thank you, husband. You do take good care of me. I appreciate it.”

“We have been so blessed,” added Johannes, “And we will be able to give all our children a handsome inheritance. Maybe we’ll even leave some for community projects.”

There was a knock on the back door. Geri said, “Who could that be?” She looked through the window of the kitchen, and hurried to answer the door. “Cornelius, what a nice surprise! I haven’t seen you in months. Come on in.” She called into the parlor, “Johannes, your nephew Cornelius is here.”

Johannes came through the parlor door, and said, “How good to see you, nephew! I hope you bring good news?” He remembered a recent knocking on his door to inform him of the death of daughter Elizabeth.

Cornelius said eagerly, “Ya, I have very good news. I proposed to Jessie Witvliet and she said ‘Yes!’ That’s very good news for me. It has been so lonely since my wife died. I’m sure you remember Jessie’s folks, Peter and Lammigje Witvliet. I’m so excited! And I have a great big favor to ask of you, Uncle Johannes. Because my parents have both died, I would like to ask you to stand in for them and bless my marriage to Jessie.”

“Oh, nephew, what an honor to be asked,” answered Johannes. “When will the wedding be?”

“On Dec. 14. And it will be in Vriesland, so you will not have to travel all the way to Grand Rapids for the wedding. We have asked the minister of the Vriesland Church to conduct the service because we both come from there. And we are praying for good weather.”

1900 *

Johannes put his feet up on the rail of the porch. “You know, Geri,” he mused, “I know I’m getting closer to going to heaven. I’m seventy-eight now, slowing down, and reflecting more than ever.”

“Ya, Johannes,” Geri responded with a smile. “We both are getting closer to being called home.”

“What I’m thinking about is how little we know about life with the Lord in heaven,” Johannes pondered. “Jesus said that God is the God of the living, and He recognized Moses and Elijah when He was glorified on the mountain. He said we shall see Him because we will be like Him. But I don’t have any idea what that will be like. I do expect to see Ma and Pa and our little children in heaven.”

“Ya, as little as we know and understand,” echoed Geri, “we do have some wonderful expectations of seeing the Lord and our family members again, don’t we?”

“I’m thinking it’s a bit like when our families set sail on the Atlantic to come to America. Leaving the familiar barge-home, and having very little idea of what was ahead for us. We had no real picture of the huge trees we would be tackling; no real idea of what farming would be like over here. But we went anyway. There were some letters published that gave us a little idea of it, but the reality was so overpowering. I kind of expect we’ll have a similar experience when we get to heaven.”

“And based on our experience here, we have so much more of God’s blessings to look forward to over there. For us the challenge is not where we are going as it is the journey we are on every day while we are here,” suggested Geri.

“Ya, where we are going has been secured by the wonderful promises of the Father. Like the word ‘Ebenezer’ says, God has helped us this far, and He’s not going to desert us now,” confessed Johannes.

Johannes was chuckling. Geri asked, “What’s going on in that mind of yours, Johannes?”

“I’ve been reading about Moses in the Bible, and I just realized that Moses had memory problems in his old age just like I do.”

“What do you mean?” wondered Geri.

“Well, when Moses went up on Mt. Sinai to talk with God and God gave him the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, Moses notes that God wrote with His own fingers the words of the covenant. Then when Moses had to return up the mountain after he shattered the first set, God told him to write that copy himself. Which he did. But near the end of his life when he is

recounting that experience for the people, he reports that God himself wrote those second tablets.”⁶³⁶

Geri joined in the chuckle, “I think Moses had a good excuse for his forgetfulness at the age of a hundred and twenty. You’d better not use the same excuse at being merely seventy-eight years old!”

“Maybe,” Johannes reflected, “I can use the excuse of my age for losing my temper once in a while like Moses did when in frustration he struck the rock instead of talking to it to bring out the water?”⁶³⁷

Geri thought, “Maybe hitting the rock was more dramatic, but it was not done in obedience. So, no, I think it would be better if you controlled your anger until the Lord comes to call you home.”

Johannes and Geri turned into Andrew’s yard. “Geri,” Johannes began, “I’m going straight into the barn where I expect Andrew will be fixing something.”

Geri understood Johannes was missing being in the barn and on the farm, and said, “Okay, Johannes, and I’m going directly into the house to visit with Gertie.”

Johannes heard the clinking of machinery repair and at the door called out “Hey, Andrew!” so Andrew wouldn’t be surprised.

“Hi, Pa,” Andrew responded, still bent over from shoeing Maude, the old mare.

“Ah! Good old Maude!” Johannes exclaimed. “How’s she holding up?”

“She is slowing down some,” admitted Andrew.

“I guess maybe she and I are kind of in the same state,” observed Johannes.

Andrew responded, “I’m beginning to think about when it will be time to put her down. She’s been such a good horse and faithfully pulling her weight. Much better than her younger teammate. But she’s noticeably declining.”

“We all, man and horse, come to the decline of our lives, don’t we? It’s a good thing God doesn’t slow down. In our partnership with Him in building the Kingdom, He’s definitely the one who pulls most of the weight. I’m so glad He is steadfast and sure. But, Andrew, I have a thought. When it is time to put Maude down, would you do me the favor of getting her coat to the tanner? I would love to have a nice warm winter coat made from her hide. That will be a way of keeping her memory alive, and keeping me warm on cold winter buggy rides.”

⁶³⁶ Exodus 31:18, 32:16, 34:1; Exodus 34:27-28; Deuteronomy 4:13, 5:22, 10:4.

⁶³⁷ Numbers 20:8-11

“Sure, Pa,” said Andrew. “Her hide would make a great coat on some cold days. I will keep that in mind.”

“Thanks, son, I look forward to wearing that lovely brown coat of hers,”⁶³⁸ Johannes concluded. “Now, I’m going to join Geri and Gertie in the house. I bet coffee is ready.”

“Ya, I’ll be there as soon as I finish shoeing Maude,” promised Andrew.

“Talking about being called by the Lord,” observed Johannes, “I think I see Rev. Groen come calling. He promised he would call on us before he leaves the Zeeland church and goes to his new charge in Grand Rapids.⁶³⁹ I will truly miss him. It has been good to talk with him about the years we both shared in the Vriesland Church.”

“Ya, husband, and I guess I will make the coffee and find some goodies for the Reverend,” Geri responded. “We want to give him a good memory of hospitality in our home.”

“Ya, I’ll meet him at the door,” Johannes said.

“Welcome, Reverend!” Johannes opened the door.

“Ya, Mr. and Mrs. Van Haitsma,” Rev. Groen smiled. “I wanted to keep my promise to you to come for a visit before I leave Zeeland. And I was thinking maybe we have some good news to share.”

“Oh?” asked Johannes.

“Ya, Mr. Van Haitsma, I just received a report of the actions of the last Synod. There’s something there I want to talk about with you,” observed the Reverend.

“Well, that sounds interesting,” noted Johannes. “I’m always ready for good news. But come and sit down. Geri has coffee ready, and I’m sure she would like to join in the conversation too.”

Enjoying the stuffed chairs in the parlor, Rev. Groen spoke up, “Thank you, Mrs. Van Haitsma, for your hospitality to me whenever I stop by. It’s always a pleasure visiting with you both and tasting your good treats.”

“You’re very welcome, Reverend,” Geri responded. “We are glad you had the time for one more visit. I do hope you will enjoy your new charge in Grand Rapids. It is so much bigger than Zeeland. And I imagine you will have many more parishioners there.”

⁶³⁸ This horse coat stayed in the Van Haitsma family for generations. Barb remembers it hanging in the garage and when her school grade was putting on a play for the parent-teacher meeting, they used that coat as a prop for a student playing a bear in the play.

⁶³⁹ *Zeeland Expositor*, Aug. 17, 1900.

“Ya, it is a bit larger than here, but I am going to miss the close friendships that I have experienced here in Zeeland, and with so many like yourselves from our home church in Vriesland,” Rev. Groen said thoughtfully.

“So, Reverend,” asked Johannes, “just what is this special news you have from the actions of Synod?”

“Well, do you remember how we commiserated in the early years that we had so few congregations and members? We had hopes that a lot more people in *de Kolonie* would join with us in returning to the Old Standards?” the Reverend began.

“Ya,” said Johannes, “at first there were just four churches, and then a few more trickled in. Then in 1866 we began to see some growth.”⁶⁴⁰

“Ya,” added Rev. Groen, “the good news is that there are now one hundred and forty-four congregations in our denomination!⁶⁴¹ **What a phenomenal growth!**”

Johannes said, “Wow, that is wonderful! We didn’t really see that coming, did we? But we should have. I’ve seen how God works with plants from a seed in the ground, to a seedling, to a strong stalk and then to the thirty to one-hundred-fold increase in new seed. We hardly had the faith to expect that in our denomination. What do you think were the reasons for that increase?”

The Reverend responded, “I’m sure that will be a study that will occupy the thinking of some of our students and historians. But I can think of some offhand.”

Johannes interjected, “I would like to think our basic foundational stance would have resulted in our being attractive to others, and especially to fellow immigrants and newcomers to this country.”

“Ya, I think that is the most important reason. **And that attraction would explain why so many members and congregations left the Dutch Reformed Church, especially in reaction to their church’s position on the Masonic issues,**” suggested Rev. Groen⁶⁴². “And about that same time, the Reformed Church in the Netherlands looked more kindly at us and began to recommend emigrants to join us when they came to this land. The new immigrants, I think, found us so familiar to their church in the Netherlands that they were often inclined to join us for that reason.”

Johannes said thoughtfully, “I am thinking that that’s not such a positive thing.”

“Oh, why do you say that?” asked the Reverend, curiously.

⁶⁴⁰ Schaap, J., *Album*, p. 175. **He described the CRC as “dead in the water” in the 1850s and 1860s.**

⁶⁴¹ Beets, H., *Church*, p. 96.

⁶⁴² Van der Werp, H., *Outline*, p. 39.

“Well,” answered Johannes, “to be attracted by our faithfulness and desire to return to the Standards of 1619 is a good thing. But to be attracted to us in a new land because we looked and felt so much like the church back in the Netherlands could be a negative thing.”⁶⁴³

“That is something to think about, Mr. Van Haitsma,” wondered Rev. Groen.

Geri shared, “Ya, Reverend, this husband of mine still does a lot of thinking. But he has not had many people to share his thoughts with. So many of the early members have gone to be with Jesus.”

“Ya, Reverend,” Johannes went on, “lately I have often wondered what kind of American church we would be now if we had stayed with the fellowship model. In farming, people are constantly trying to develop a better plant for the fields here. What if we had been able to do the same with our church? What would we now be like?”

“Now that’s some real food for thought, Mr. Van Haitsma,” considered Rev. Groen. “Maybe it’s unfortunate, but I’m afraid we’ll never know what might have been. Outside influences do seem to make a significant impact on inner growth and development. The economic situation in the Netherlands certainly helped to determine the ups and downs of emigration.”

“Ya,” confessed Johannes, “I have not given so much thought to those types of issues.”

“I’m pretty sure,” the Reverend added, “that few people have thought about these things. It seems so much of what we do is just following the models and ways that are familiar. And the ministers coming from the Netherlands just did what came naturally to them. And, ya, I can see that they brought unexpected, and maybe unwanted, changes into our church. I suspect that will not stop happening without a new revival in our church.”

“Do you think,” wondered Johannes, “that just like Rev. de Cock of the *Afscheiding* and Dr. Kuyper of the *Doleantie* were both converted by the people of the pew, it could be just such people of the pew who may have to be the vanguard of a new revival?”⁶⁴⁴

“That might just be the truth of it, Mr. Van Haitsma. But on the other hand, we probably need to remember that the Spirit of God has continually given insights to the church over the centuries. Just like the great Reformation.”

Rev. Groen continued, “^What we can know and appreciate is how widespread our church is now becoming. We have churches way west in Oak Harbor, Washington, south into Texas and New Mexico, and east in Maryland, even into Canada! We are not just in Michigan anymore!”

Johannes exclaimed, “Ya, that is phenomenal! And that certainly points to immigration, doesn’t it?”

⁶⁴³ Beets, H., *Church*, p. 67.

⁶⁴⁴ Swierenga, R., *Burn the Wooden Shoes: Modernity and Division in the Christian Reformed Church in North America*, p. 9. Van Koevering, *Legends*, p. 533. Bratt, J. *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, p. 4. Kromminga, J., *Mirror*, p. 15. Thomas, G., *Louis Berkhof, 1873-1957*.

“I would say, ‘for sure.’ Well, folks, I do need to be on the way back home,” the Reverend said. “My Mrs. is doing some packing, and I need to help, especially with the heavy books on my shelves. I wish you God’s blessings on your continued reflection and living. Thanks again for your hospitality and friendship over the years. I have appreciated that more than I can say.”

The Rev. Groen Jr. walked toward his home, and Johannes turned to Geri, “Dear wife, I’ve been thinking about the demise of our Vriesland Church a lot lately. The Reverend has helped to remind me that we really do not and cannot know what might have been if we had never turned into a church and got ministers and bought into the whole church structure thing.”

Geri considered this and said, “Following a dream that was so easily broken may not give the most helpful perspective on the church.”

“True,” agreed Johannes. “But I am thinking that following the examples and ideals of the Word may also bring us to an impossible impasse in this world.”

“Where are you going with this, Johannes?” Geri asked.

“Well, you know how I tried to convince the Reverends Hemkes, Housma and Bos that unity was the high ideal we in Vriesland were striving for?”

“Ya,” answered Geri, “they left frustrated because they could not understand that value the way you described it, and you came to bed frustrated for the same reason. Have you come to some insight there?”

“I think that remains to be seen, Geri,” Johannes suggested. “I am beginning to think that living in a broken world, and even in a church that is full of sinners, makes it impossible to live true to such lofty standards. Neither the world nor the church can live with such high values. We might claim we can, just like our church has kept claiming to honor the Church Order proscribed by the Synod of Dordt, but the evidence I see now is that there is just no way that we humans can ever live up to God’s ideals.”⁶⁴⁵

“Ya, and I think that both of us have realized that we ourselves cannot keep the standards of God’s Word,” Geri admitted.

“So, here we are,” Johannes responded. “We can aim for all those high ideals, but we have to settle for less and lean on God’s grace for forgiveness for all our failures. The only one who has ever lived up to God’s ideals is Jesus, and we can never expect to come anywhere near Him in perfection or in pleasing the Father. So we have to live with a church with lots of broken ideals and the church has to put up with a lot of broken people who are struggling to serve the Lord, always without full success. I think I am beginning to grasp the idea that our church ideals of total unity were bound to cause the demise of our congregation in Vriesland.”[^]

⁶⁴⁵ Steffens, N. *Gedachten over het Rechtsbestaan der Holl. Chr. Geref. Kerk in Amerika*, p. 22.

“Ya,” added Geri, “and now we must pray that the seed we did sow there will multiply through the growth and development and ministry of our new denomination.”

“Ya,” considered Johannes, “just like every spring we went back into the fields with loads of seeds and loads of hope for a plentiful harvest in the fall.”

“I guess in our advanced years,” Geri pondered, “we have earned the right to sit back and survey what God has been doing and might continue to do through what we have offered him. It is good to celebrate the good things and maybe grieve over the continued broken evidences in our church as well as in the world.”

“Ya, I think our remaining years will give us opportunity for just such vision,” concluded Johannes.

1901 *

Grandson John Van Haitsma, Johannes’ namesake, found his grandfather puttering in the garden to prepare for planting. “Hello, *Pake*,” called out John as he tied up the horse and wandered toward the garden.

“Hello to you too, John, and welcome,” Johannes responded. “What brings you here all the way from Grand Rapids? It must be important for you to come on the horse Peter would need to pull the store wagon.”

“I’m sorry, *Pake*, but I am the bearer of bad news.”

“I always dread hearing those words,” said Johannes. “What is it?”

“*Pake*, maybe you and I should join Grandma Geri in the house before you hear it?”

“Alright, John,” Johannes agreed and they walked to the house. Geri had seen John through the window and had already put on coffee. At age fifteen, John was already a strapping lad.

Sitting down at the kitchen table, Johannes leaned toward John. When Geri sat down, John said, “The bad news I am bringing is that my mother had two babies yesterday, and both have died already.”

Geri and Johannes were shocked. They looked at each other and then back to John. “Oh,” Geri spoke up, “that is bad news. How’s your mother holding up?”

“I guess as well as can be expected,” said John. “I think she and my Pa must be deeply disappointed by this loss.”

“Ya,” Johannes agreed, “she has always doted on her children. She loves you all so much.”

Geri observed, “Now we have three grandchildren who have gone to be with Jesus in just two months. I know we can expect deaths in our lives. But three so close together! And not so long after your brother Reinder died too.⁶⁴⁶ Oh, this feels too heavy!”

Johannes groaned a prayer, “Oh, Lord, please be with Peter and Katie and their family in this loss.”

“Sometimes,” Johannes murmured to Geri after John left their home, “I wonder about my faith. I seem to be strong in the Lord when I face the big issues of life. Like when we were tackling those giant oaks back when we came here. Back then I learned that even big challenges could be overcome one whack at a time. We did that and cleared an immense amount of acreage.”

“Ya,” considered Geri, “that took a lot of faith to change the woods to farms. But we all did it. I think that was God strengthening our faith.”

“But then,” Johannes went on, “we lose these little children, or we discover that we aren’t holding on to the standards we so dearly wanted to follow. Then I seem to begin doubting. I’m sure that’s a lot harder for Peter and Kate than for us. But it does make me wonder if the Lord does love us.”

“Ya,” Geri affirmed, “we get shaken with bad news.”

“But the Lord was quick to help Thomas in his doubts, wasn’t he?⁶⁴⁷ Sometimes it takes me a long time to work through my disappointments,” Johannes remembered. “And then I’m still not so sure. I guess I do often ask the Lord why these things happen.”

“Ya,” shared Geri, “we do want answers, don’t we? It’s hard to be patient till we get to heaven when our knowledge will be perfect.”

“And then I start thinking about what is happening in this world. You know, Geri,” Johannes continued, “we are living in an age of change and turmoil.”

“Like what, husband?” asked Geri.

“Well, we all make changes in our lives because new things are coming into our world. The steam engine became important for ships and manufacturing, and then railroads were added to move it all around. Inventions like these are pushing us out of our old life style. Now we have electric trains like our interurban, and the telegraph and telephone and electric lights and many developments of farm machinery that have revolutionized our lives. It’s almost beyond our understanding. We even have bicycles for getting around!”⁶⁴⁸

“Even in our homes,” added Geri, “we now have closets for our clothes instead of hooks on the walls. Furniture and even houses can be ordered through catalogues! Instead of fireplaces we

⁶⁴⁶ Van Haitsma, J., *Family Legends*.

⁶⁴⁷ John 29:24 ff.

⁶⁴⁸ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 447.

now have furnaces that can heat the whole house, and cookstoves to fix warm meals in the kitchen. And best of all, we have running water in our homes.”

“Ya,” noted Johannes, “we have lived through a time of major changes. What is left to be discovered and developed?”

“Well,” suggested Geri, “I guess just like the Lord isn’t finished with us yet, He’s not finished with the world either. And we’re only aware of a little part of what’s going on, what the Lord is doing.”

“Ya, that’s for sure!” pointed out Johannes. “Sometimes we can only think negative thoughts about changes in our world, but there are tremendous good changes that will make life look a lot different to our children and grandchildren.”

“And don’t forget our great grandchildren,” Geri observed.

The following Monday when son Andrew stopped by, Johannes asked Andrew, “Were you part of the one hundred men that tore up the tracks of the interurban last Monday? I read about it in the newspaper.”

“Well, ya,” confessed Andrew, “we Van Haitsma’s were well represented. Uncle Wiebe was there and my cousin Clarence and I were in the middle of it and so was Mr. Brand, the Road Commissioner of the township.⁶⁴⁹We were all convinced the contractor skimmed on the level of the railbed. You know how the water in the swamp rises with the rain.”

Johannes admitted, “That swamp has been a big problem since we first moved here in 1848. We had to go almost to Drenthe to get around it. The road has always had a problem there. It always needed more and more of a build-up. I think you were right to make them do it better. When the tracks are done properly and safely, the train will be a big boon to the whole area.”

“What a difference some years make,” Johannes reminisced with Andrew and Geri. “It used to take days to take an oxcart with produce to Grand Rapids; now it only takes a couple hours. It took weeks for news to arrive; now by telegraph, its only hours. Goods shipped to and from Chicago depended on the winds; now trains move it on schedule.”⁶⁵⁰

“And don’t forget,” added Geri, “it took all of us three to four months to make the trip from Holland, but now it can be done by steam boat and rail in less than two weeks.”

⁶⁴⁹*Holland Sentinel*, May 3, 1901; June 25, 1901. *Zeeland Record*, June 25, 1901. Historian Carl Bajema, through personal communication, indicated the location west of Zeeland. Van Haitsma, *Family Legend* indicated the location east of Zeeland. The fact that the Zeeland Township Road Commissioner was involved recommends the east location, as the Township is largely east of Zeeland.

⁶⁵⁰ Lucas, H., *Memoirs*, p. 448.

Andrew added, “Because of the train tracks coming through Vriesland, Titus has bought up some of the Faber land at the intersection and is planning to build the grain elevator there just south of the interurban station.⁶⁵¹ Then he can ship grain on schedule too.”

“That sounds like good planning,” Johannes responded.

On Sunday Rev. Schepers was assigned to fill the pulpit in Zeeland. After the service he connected with Johannes. “Mr. van Haitsma,” he began, “it is so good to see you again after all these years.”

“Ya, young man,” responded Johannes. “I’ve often thought of you being part of our fellowship as a lad and coming to the council to request permission to prepare for ministry. I hope you are enjoying serving in the work of the Lord.”

“Ya, Mr. van Haitsma, serving the Lord is the joy of my life. You know, of course that I have gotten to know your son and a few other relatives living near Vogel Center, don’t you?”

“Ya,” Johannes noted, “I’ve kind of kept track of your ministry over the years. You were the first young man of our Vriesland CRC congregation to become ordained in our denomination. We were so proud of you! As you know, there were three more from our church after you who also trained for the ministry. I wish there had been more from our churches in those years. You know,” uttered Johannes, “we should have considered right away finding some way to have Rev. Van den Bosch become the trainer of our preachers.”

Rev. Schepers responded, “But wasn’t Rev. Van den Bosch often in conflict with other leaders in those early years? Would he have set a good example for us young preachers?”⁶⁵¹

“I don’t know,” answered Johannes, “but at least then we wouldn’t have had to import clergy who brought so much of their own agendas along. There were so many conflicts and issues that came into our church with them. Maybe if all our ministers had been home-grown like yourself, we might have avoided some of those problems.”

Rev. Schepers asked, “What kind of issues are you thinking about, Mr. Van Haitsma?”

“Issues that have been going through my mind over and over now for years. And now some of them are crystalizing in my thoughts. For example, in the first years of our church, we got along well with the neighbors who did not choose to leave the Reformed Church. We helped each other with the building of better houses; we worked together on our farms; we enjoyed working together for our school. Many times we were using the same sermons from the Old Fathers in our reading services. We all thought a lot alike in many ways.”

“Are you saying that there was more squabbling inside our church than there was between the two churches?” asked Rev. Schepers.

⁶⁵¹*Zeeland Record*, Jan. 9, 1902.

“Ya,” thought Johannes aloud, “we cooperated with improving our roads and school. We didn’t need to keep fussing about things that were done and past. We simply and quietly went our own ways and were by ourselves just as we had expected when we first came to this country. Those people who stayed with the Reformed were our friendly neighbors.”

“And was that true in all the communities where the CRC formed?” asked the Reverend.

“Ya, pretty much,” considered Johannes. “This kind of friendliness was going on in Graafschap, in Drenthe, in Beaverdam, in Hudsonville, in Vriesland. And I think also in the bigger places: Grand Rapids, Holland and Zeeland. It’s like the discussion was over. We each had our own church community as we liked it. The issues that divided us kind of became accepted as settled.”

“And you think that mainly changed with bringing in ministers from the Netherlands?” wondered Rev. Schepers.

“Ya, that is what I think,” answered Johannes. “And I think that was true for both our denominations. The Reformed got preachers from Kampen just as we did, and it seemed that they took with them the issues of the Netherlands and stoked the fires here. There were lots of articles in *De Wachter* arguing against what was written in the Reformed church paper. I kept many copies of those two magazines and recently read them again. It seems to me now, reading all those articles in the order they were written, that there were a lot of strong and unkind accusations back and forth.”⁶⁵²

“So, you think,” wondered Rev. Schepers, “that the reputation of the two churches being quarreling antagonists was really more the result of the feisty imported ministers, and not the sounds of the original group of people of the pew who started the church in 1857?”

“That would be my conclusion,” said Johannes. “To live peacefully together was very important to us in those early days, and I believe that was important to the Rev. Van Raalte too, right from the start. He too was tired of all the squabbling over the church issues. In fact, he invited the dissenters to go their own way.⁶⁵² I’ve been told this is exactly what he and the other Secession ministers themselves did back in 1834.”⁶⁵³

“Are you suggesting, Mr. Van Haitsma, that in 1857, both churches actually kind of just accepted the idea of separating and quietly did just that?” wondered the Reverend.

“Ya, Rev. Schepers, back then Classis Holland just accepted those resignation letters as information.⁶⁵⁴ I believe the Rev. Van Raalte gave quite a speech after that, but that was it. We were on our own to worship as we wanted to. So our little group in Vriesland invited the signers of those letters to come and talk about whether we’d like to do together what we all had wanted and that was to be by ourselves.”

“My,” said the Reverend, “I do kind of remember all that happening, but I was more interested in

⁶⁵²*Classis Holland*, April 8, 1857, pp. 244-245.

⁶⁵³ Van der Werp, H., *Outline*, p. 27.

⁶⁵⁴*Classis Holland*, April 8, 1857, p. 244.

girls instead of all the behind-the-scenes things going on at the church. It was seven years later that I came to the council to ask permission to train for the ministry.”⁶⁵⁵

1902 *

Johannes and Geri were sitting in the back yard admiring the garden with its vegetables and flowers. “You know,” he started, “every year the garden comes up new and fresh. We have to do the weeding, but we can enjoy the food on our table and the flowers in the vase. There’s got to be a parable in there about the church.”

“How so, Johannes?” Geri asked.

“I was remembering a phrase I heard long ago about the Reformed Church. In Latin it said ‘*Ecclesia reformata, quia semper reformanda*’ and I asked Rev. Groen what that meant. He told me it meant ‘The Reformed church [is] because [it’s] always reforming.’⁶⁵⁶ It gives me hope that after every winter in the seasons of church life, there is within the church always some movement of the Spirit of God that will bring the church to spring renewal.”

“Oh, isn’t that an encouraging thought?” responded Geri.

“Ya,” agreed Johannes, “so when we grow discouraged that our church has not become what we had hoped and has drifted away from the founding dreams, God will be stirring hearts in the church to bring renewal again.”

“And I suppose it usually will be *kleine luy* like us that God uses,” reflected Geri.

“I rather expect that is true,” suggested Johannes as they continued to enjoy the view in their backyard.

“I have no desire to use the Interurban!” Johannes spoke in frustration. “If it’s confusing to Wiebe, it’s even more so for me.”

“But Pa,” said Andrew, “it means you can go to Vriesland on your own, if you want to. Or even to Grand Rapids.”

“And what would I want to do there?” retorted Johannes. “I like it in my house. I like my garden. I like to walk around the block. I don’t want to go shopping. “

⁶⁵⁵ Van der Werp, H., *Outline*, p. 27.

⁶⁵⁶ Benedict, P., *Purely*, p. xvi.

Andrew replied, “But Dad, you know how you like to hang around with the guys. You can do that in Vriesland.”

“Besides walking, I’m quite happy to get around in my lovely horse and buggy. What more do I need?” Johannes answered.

“The Interurban is very convenient and it saves quite a bit of time,” Andrew pointed out.

“Well,” Johannes came back, “if Wiebe doesn’t know where to get off the Interurban, I’m not going to get on and get lost!”

“Pa, what do you know about Uncle Wiebe and the Interurban?” asked Andrew.

Johannes said, “Well, I was told by one of the old neighbors in Vriesland that my brother Wiebe was travelling back home on the Interurban. When he got to the crossing before his house, he stepped off. In surprise he burst out in Friesian, ‘This is not my crossing!’ and stepped back on and got off again at the Vriesland crossing.⁶⁵⁷ I don’t want to risk getting lost on the Interurban!”

“You know, Andrew,” Johannes reflected, “that is a bit of the story of my life with Jesus.”

“How do you mean, Pa?” asked Andrew.

“Well, without realizing it, I was on my life journey like Wiebe was on the Interurban. And I didn’t know where I was on the journey. In the Netherlands we lived in a hopeless situation without a future. With the help of God we came to this new land. But we were faced with the impossible forest. Again with the help of God we cleared the land and developed beautiful farms. Who’d a thought?” he struggled a bit to catch his breath.

Johannes went on, “Now I’ve been thinking a lot about our Christian Reformed denomination. Somehow through all the impossible odds of people who dreamed but didn’t really know what the dream was all about, we crafted a church we thought would fulfill that dream. But we human beings were not the people to make that happen. God had to do it, ya, through us. And somehow that church has survived forty-five years, in spite of the people in it. God used the weak and foolish (in the eyes of the world) to keep building the body of Christ. It is God who kept the church alive and caused it to become the vibrant church that it is becoming in spite of the people in it. Years ago my friend Mr.Dam talked about this but I didn’t really understand.”

“I can imagine,” responded Andrew. “I think I may have to live some more years to begin to understand that too.”

“What I do know now is that I am going to be with Jesus forever, and that through all my questions, I need to abide in Him,” confessed Johannes.

⁶⁵⁷ Van Haitsma, J., *Family Legends*.

“Oh, Geri, I’m so sorry!” lamented Wiebe.

“Thank you, Wiebe,” Geri responded. “He lived a life in the Lord’s service, and was ready to meet the Lord. We both would have preferred a little more time together, but we aren’t the ones to decide when.”

“No,” agreed Wiebe, “and we do need to be grateful that his illness was only a short time.⁶⁵⁸ Surely he did live a quality life, always ready to serve his Lord. It is such a comfort to know he trusted in the Lord and His grace.”

“Ya,” responded Geri, “He didn’t depend on the strength of his faith but in the faithfulness of his God. What a wonder to know we belong to Jesus by His grace.”

Wiebe wondered, “Have you thought about who to ask to conduct his funeral?”

“Ya,” Geri said, “he was expecting to go soon, and one of the times he visited with Rev. Groen, he asked him if he would conduct his funeral. ‘Of course,’ Rev. Groen replied. So we will need to connect with him in Grand Rapids, to check when would be an agreeable time.”

“I’m glad,” answered Wiebe. “Rev. Groen was a comfort to Johannes these last years, and I know he was disappointed that the Reverend left for Eastern Ave. Church last year.”

Most of the Vriesland community came to the funeral in Zeeland. The attendance at the church was impressive and the mourners overflowed at the New Vriesland Cemetery for his burial. At the grave side, Rev. Groen noted, “He was so highly respected for all these years in the entire Vriesland village. If his farewell here on earth is an indication, there certainly must have been a tremendous welcome for him in heaven. We rejoice that we are assured by the grace of God that Mr. Van Haitsma is now in the presence of the Lord he loved and served.”

Later Wiebe walked away from the grave with Geri. “I have one regret,” he said. “I know Johannes would have loved to have seen me make profession of faith. He and I talked about it. But even then I had a hard time having faith in the grace of God that the preacher talked about.”

“Ah, Wiebe,” Geri consoled, “be patient and kind to yourself. God isn’t finished with any of us yet. You will know when to speak up for Him.”

Fifteen years later Geri chose, at her death, to be buried in Overijssel, MI among her family there.

⁶⁵⁸The New Vriesland Cemetery does not have a listing for his grave in their records. Nor does the Old Vriesland Christian Reformed Cemetery where his wife Sjoukje is presumed buried and then reburied in the New Vriesland Cemetery in the large family plot. Anson van Haitsma in his family legend noted they were buried in the New Cemetery, included in the genealogical listing by Mrs. Grace Keeler and Luanne de Vries and this is affirmed by the Ottawa Co. Digital cemetery records. *Find a Grave* shows his grave in the family plot in the New Vriesland Cemetery photographed by Kathy Bradford on Jan. 12, 2002.

Afterword *

In this biography of Johannes Van Haitsma, my intention has been twofold: first of all to tell his life story as accurately as possible, with actual cultural and historical data; and secondly, to tell the story of the forming of the CRC in its time both before and after the 1857 “return.” I deliberately tried to avoid evaluating how true to Reformed thought any of the events and statements were.

What I did wish to accomplish is to tell the story so youth can understand and appreciate the hand of God through Johannes’ life. I also wished to document as much as possible a slightly variant view of the beginning of the Christian Reformed denomination. As well, I wanted to elevate the importance of the “*Kleine Luy*” or the common people in the denomination and recognize their value in the nature and historiography of the Christian Reformed Church.[^]

Through it all I hope to have told an enjoyable story that reflects God at work through the lives of our families. It is my hope that, in the final analysis, God will be praised and we, the Van Haitsma family, will appreciate the fascinating part our ancestors played in the building of God’s kingdom.

This account started with a few comments recognizing Johannes Van Haitsma’s character. His grandson Professor John P. Van Haitsma wrote that Johannes was a thoughtful and careful listener and “carefully weighed” what he heard. He was ready to support justice in the community.

Hopefully through a well-documented story, with a kaleidoscope of details mentioned by writers giving accounts in the 25th and 50th anniversaries of the *Kolonie* in 1897 as well as those of the CRC in 1907, the story will come alive for family members, church historians, immigration students, seminarians and other readers. It has been an unbelievably-enjoyable retirement project for Barb and me.

Along the way, some details of our account differ from the accepted historical conclusions. This is partly because the evidence for some of the early history has directed our view to those conclusions. Having researched in our family legends, pulling together items in various other accounts by the children of pioneers and reproduced in the wonderful letter collections of Lucas, Bentheimers and Brinks, some more or less obscure details began pointing to the conclusions this account presents. Mostly they will be evident in the footnotes. But I suspect that some historiographers may assume my conclusions historically inaccurate. It is my sincere belief that the early CRC history is best seen through the lives of the *kleine luy*, the common people, like Johannes and his friends who became our spiritual forebears and the backbone of the Christian Reformed Church.[^]

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