

The Coming of the Dutch to the Dakotas

GERALD DE JONG

For many years the Dutch were reluctant to settle in the Dakotas. In 1860 when there were 310 foreign-born pioneers from nine European countries living in Dakota Territory, none were Hollanders; and in 1870 they represented only eight of the territory's 4,815 foreign-born. Beginning about 1880, however, their number gradually increased, and although never as numerous as some other ethnic groups, their influence became significant in certain areas where they settled near one another in colonies. In 1920, for example, shortly before Congress placed numerical restrictions on European emigration to the United States, about 35 percent of the 3,218 Holland-born living in South Dakota were located in only three counties: Bon Homme, Charles Mix, and Douglas. Although these figures were small, it must be noted that they did not include the many hundreds of American-born Hollanders also residing there.¹

Persons who came to the Dakotas from the Netherlands during the latter part of the nineteenth century left for a variety of reasons; but the main factors were poor economic conditions, which included unemployment, low wages, menial work, and child labor. Hendrikeus Van der Pol was a typical

1. U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Population*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 3: 764,953.

Coming of the Dutch 21

example of thousands of Hollanders who emigrated to America during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. His reasons for leaving the Netherlands in 1882 with his wife and three small children and homesteading in Douglas County, Dakota Territory, were explained in a recent book written by one of his sons.

My father was a farmer, the son of a gardener. As a day laborer, he found it hard to make a living for his family doing spade work, cleaning canals and ditches, and cutting hay or grain. . . . It was not unusual for a laborer to walk several miles to the farm on which he was employed. . . . In Holland, a large number of families were dependent on each landowner. Only two classes, the rich and the poor, existed and they lived very different but equally tradition-bound lives. Jobs were handed down from father to son and the laborer was expected to doff his cap whenever a landowner or burgomeister (civic officeholder) passed by. . . . There was very little opportunity for a poor family's children to advance. Some young people had to wait years before getting married. They had to wait to accumulate enough guilders.²

Information about the Dakotas reached the Netherlands in various ways, but personal correspondence was one of the most important. After a Hollander had settled here, he wrote his relatives and friends in the Netherlands urging them to join him. These letters were often passed around among the inhabitants of a community and sometimes were even published in the local newspaper. Sometimes a husband and/or an eldest son would emigrate first and, after finding suitable employment or farmland, would later send for the remainder of the family.³

2. Henry Van der Pol, Sr., *On the Reservation Border: Hollanders in Douglas and Charles Mix Counties* (Stickney, S.Dak.: Argus Printers, 1969), pp. 9-10. Interviews conducted for the South Dakota Oral History Project by the author during the summer of 1973 with South Dakotans of Dutch descent contained substantial information on why Hollanders came to the Dakotas. The Dutch Folder in *North Dakota Writers' Project Ethnic Interviews* (hereafter cited as *Ethnic Interviews*), found in the manuscript section of the State Historical Library at Bismarck, North Dakota, contains similar information. This resulted from a WPA project in about 1940 involving interviews with members of various ethnic groups in North Dakota.

3. One can only imagine the burdens this sometimes placed on a mother. Mrs. Maria Hoekman, for example, made the journey from the Netherlands to Monroe, South Dakota with ten children, ages three months to fourteen years, to join her husband and eldest son who had emigrated there earlier. Mrs. Anna Begeman, one of the ten children, Monroe, S. Dak., interview on 2 Aug. 1973, S. Dak. Oral History Project.

22 *South Dakota History*

The territorial government had limited influence in attracting Hollanders directly from the Netherlands because it tended to concentrate more on Scandinavians and German-Russians. Furthermore, during the 1870s, the Dutch seemed more interested in other areas, especially Michigan and Iowa.⁴ Steamship companies were active in promoting Dutch emigration to the United States, although not necessarily to the Dakotas. There is no doubt, however, that the low steamship fares of the latter part of the nineteenth century were a factor. The cost of transportation from Rotterdam to New York in 1885, for example, was only about \$12. Inland transportation was likewise very reasonable. Moreover, if a Hollander succeeded in the Dakotas, he could save enough money to make an occasional return trip to the fatherland. In 1881 all-expense trips from LeMars, Iowa (only about fifteen miles from the Dakota border) to Amsterdam and return were available for \$68.⁵

Railroad companies interested in selling land to immigrants and bringing in farmers who would use the railroads for shipping grain and livestock circulated literature in the Netherlands to convince discontented Hollanders that the American prairie was the Promised Land. A thirty-six page pamphlet, published at Rotterdam in 1883, gave detailed information on how to obtain government land through the Homestead Law, the Preemption Law, and the Timber Culture Act in the Dakotas and Minnesota.⁶ Considerable advice was also given about railroad land and the cost of various kinds of agricultural machinery as well as prices for draft animals, cattle, seed grain, and farm buildings.

Although some capital was needed to start farming properly, the pamphlet strongly emphasized that lack of it should not discourage a poor Hollander from emigrating. More important than money were "good health, a pair of strong arms,

4. On this question, see Herbert S. Schell, "Official Immigration Activities of Dakota Territory," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly* 7 (Oct. 1932): 5-24.

5. Henry S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America: Dutch Immigration to the United States and Canada, 1789-1950* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1955), p. 476; *De Volksvriend*, 22 July 1881.

6. J. Knappe, *Land en Dollars in Minnesota: Inlichtingen voor Landverhuizers* (Rotterdam: Van Hengle & Eeltjes, 1883). Despite the title, the pamphlet also contained information on the Dakotas, especially North Dakota.

Coming of the Dutch 23

temperance, thrift, and a firm will to get ahead. . . . There are hundreds, no thousands, who began with nothing but are now independent. The idea that the far west is a haven of refuge for the poor is not an exaggeration." The pamphlet carefully explained how even a poor immigrant could gradually get his own farm. By working a few years for another farmer or in a small town, a poor man could soon save enough money to begin farming on his own. Not much land was needed to start with; twenty acres would do—planting nineteen of them with wheat and the remaining acre with "potatoes, beans, onions and other vegetables." Nor was an elaborate house needed at first, because "when one travels over the prairies in the West, one sees numerous houses that cost hardly more than 40 dollars."

The pamphlet freely conceded that a Dutch immigrant who went into a completely undeveloped area to begin farming would at first experience numerous difficulties and several lonely years for himself and his family. However, the ultimate rewards were well worth such hardships.

One sees that the picture [during the early years] is not very tempting. But let us look at this undeveloped region 10, 12, 15 years hence. How completely has the situation changed! The great farms have all disappeared and have been divided instead into smaller units, the inhabitants of which are either renters or owners: the small houses of yesteryear have also taken on a completely different appearance; the fine farm buildings are proof of the improved status of the farmers; railroads have been extended; the earlier prairie land has been completely transformed

An immigrant wagon train passing through Platte in 1900



24 *South Dakota History*

into crop land and meadow land; there are trees that give shade and restrain the wind; one finds roads, churches and schools. . . . The farm, which earlier had comparatively little value, has become a priceless possession that has made its owner independent, and if death should take him from his wife and children, he may close his eyes calmly, knowing that they will be well cared for.

In addition to direct emigration from the Netherlands, many Hollanders migrated to the Dakotas from Dutch communities in Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, and elsewhere. Some who lived in large urban centers moved because of inability to find satisfactory work or because of dissatisfaction with the growing strength of labor unions. Others considered the cities an unsatisfactory place for bringing up children. Most Hollanders, however, especially those living in rural areas, were attracted to the Dakotas for the same reason as those who came directly from the Netherlands, namely, reports of cheap land. G.W. Rensker, a Hollander who homesteaded in Campbell County, South Dakota, in 1885, voiced the views of many when he declared, "Nine-tenths of the people wanted land—lots of it and with the idea of building up a colony and getting rich in a short time."⁷

Dutch-Americans learned about the availability of land in the Dakotas mainly from the Dutch language newspapers published in the United States. Of the approximately twenty such papers appearing at the close of the nineteenth century, *De Volksvriend*, published at Orange City, Iowa, was the most important.⁸ Also of influence were *De Weekblad*, published at Pella, Iowa, and *De Grondwet*, published at Holland, Michigan. Magazines issued by the Reformed and Christian Reformed churches, both of which were predominantly Dutch-American in membership, sometimes carried information about the churches in the Dakotas and thereby also stimulated interest in the area.

7. Henry S. Lucas, ed., *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings*, 2 vols. (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Company, 1955), 2:341.

8. *De Volksvriend*, meaning "the People's Friend," began publication in 1874. When it ceased publication in 1951, it was the last Dutch language newspaper in the United States. Northwestern College at Orange City, Iowa, has a nearly complete file of *De Volksvriend*. Orange City was one of the leading Dutch communities in the United States, and was located only twenty miles from the Dakota border.

Pamphlets published by railroad companies and various real estate agents extolling the possibilities of agriculture in the Dakotas also attracted settlers from the older Dutch communities in the United States. Promotional activities carried on by the territorial government, although not important in attracting settlers *directly* from the Netherlands, did create an interest among the Hollanders in Iowa and other midwestern states, especially through displays at county fairs. Clergymen serving Dutch congregations in various parts of the United States sometimes encouraged families who were in difficult economic straits to investigate the possibility of making a new start further west.⁹

The early history of Orange City, Iowa, is an excellent example of how overcrowded conditions and the rising cost of land in older communities caused many Hollanders to move to the Dakotas. Although Orange City was not founded until 1870, several thousand Hollanders were residing there and in neighboring Dutch communities by 1880, and they were still arriving—some coming directly from the Netherlands, and others from Dutch communities elsewhere in the United States. In the spring of 1882 it was reported that so many new settlers were arriving that it was becoming difficult to find even temporary quarters for them.¹⁰

Eventually, no more government land was available for homesteading in northwest Iowa, and the land that was already occupied could be obtained only at a high price. Many Hollanders consequently had no choice but to look further afield. Some went to Kansas, others to Nebraska, and a few even went as far as Oregon and Washington. Many of the land-seekers, however, decided to investigate the Dakotas, where stories about vast stretches of unoccupied grassland and fertile soil stirred their imagination. They included not only recent arrivals in northwest Iowa, but also "young men wishing to start out for themselves to whom the prospect of free land was most alluring. . .[as well as] farmers who had been renting land [and] had visions of independence and plenty when they heard how easily 160 acres could be obtained in Dakota."¹¹

9. *De Volksvriend*, 18 Mar. 1885, 27 Aug. 1885, 15 Dec. 1887.

10. *Ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1882.

11. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, 2:325.

26 *South Dakota History*

There is no doubt that the good harvests of the early 1880s attracted many Hollanders to the Dakotas. In recalling these years, a Dutch resident of Harrison, South Dakota, declared, "The soil was fertile. Flint corn and vegetables were raised very successfully on the newly turned sod, for the rain was abundant. Potatoes grew large and flat, but the best crop during the first years was flax."¹² Another wrote:

With the help of the patent [patent?] reaper, 15 to 20 bushels of wheat could be realized. . . .Wheat at that time was worth a dollar per bushel. Flax was worth \$1.50, and the freshly turned virgin soil would yield from 8 to 12 bushels. This was the poor man's land, his fairy dream. Some people who had a good living in the states, seeing this opportunity for gaining great wealth, sold out and bought large tracts of land in the territory of the Dakotas. . . .They came with few exceptions from the older Dutch colonies in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa.¹³

Two types of Dutch communities arose in the Dakotas. The one type started on a small scale and grew only with the passage of time; the other resulted from group migrations whose participants, from the beginning, had definite plans about founding a *nieuwe kolonie* on a grand scale. Because the two types were different in their origins and growth, as well as location, it is necessary to treat them separately.

The first communities of the small-scale variety were established by families who simply moved across the Big Sioux River from northwest Iowa into Lincoln County, and soon after, into adjoining Turner and Minnehaha counties and regions to the south and southwest. If the settlers prospered, news of the success gradually attracted additional families until eventually a distinctively Dutch community was established. As early as 1882 a Dutch pastor reported that some Hollanders in Turner County were prospering from raising cattle and hogs and from the cultivation of grain. "The beautiful pastures," he wrote, "fenced in by wire, which is becoming increasingly more necessary, is clear proof of the achievements of the county's farmers."¹⁴

At an early date Hollanders from northwest Iowa as well as from Minnesota began moving into the northeastern counties of

12. *Ibid.*, 2:329.

13. *Ibid.*, 2:340.

14. *De Volksvriend*, 6 July 1882.

Brookings, Hamlin, Deuel, and Grant. A few small groups were also attracted from more distant areas. Thus, already in 1879, some Dutch families from Alto, Wisconsin, established themselves a short distance southeast of Watertown at Palmer, now called Bemis, in Deuel County. Similarly, in the mid-1880s Hollanders who came primarily from Michigan began moving into Campbell and Emmons counties, and in 1892 several families came directly from the Netherlands to settle at Springfield, near Yankton, where a small group of farmers from Orange City had founded a community as early as 1874. The movement of Dutch settlers into the Dakotas from Dutch communities in adjoining states continued for many years. As late as 1902, for example, Hollanders, mostly from Iowa but also from Michigan, attracted by reports of lower land prices and cheap rent, began relocating in significant numbers at Volga, near Brookings. Although these smaller settlements have undergone considerable change, particularly since World War II, sufficient reminders still exist in religious matters and in Dutch family names to indicate that Dutch-Americans played a significant role in their history. Such communities include Bemis, Castlewood, Chancellor, Colton, Estelline, Monroe, Springfield, and Volga in South Dakota, and Hull, Litchville, Marion, and Westfield in North Dakota.

The other type of settlement involved the movement en masse of large numbers of Dutch families within a comparatively short time. In many respects the founding of such settlements in the Dakotas was similar to the founding of what are today some of the largest Dutch communities in the United States, such as Holland, Michigan; Pella, Iowa; and Orange City, Iowa. In founding this type of settlement, considerable study was made before a site was chosen. Travelers were interviewed and maps were carefully examined; mass meetings were held by those who expected to be members of the migration, and committees of "locators" were sent out to examine conditions at first hand. Finally, a decision was made to establish claim to a certain quantity of land in a specified region. Generally, one or two people played a commanding role in starting and "nursing" along the new settlement. There were two colonies of this kind founded in South Dakota during the 1880s: one was in Douglas County and the other in Charles Mix

28 *South Dakota History*

County. Although they adjoined each other, they had separate origins.

The Dutch settlement in Douglas County was preceded by several mass meetings in 1881-82 at Orange City, Iowa, where the possibility of establishing a "daughter" colony somewhere in the Dakotas was discussed. After considerable study, a committee of three men was dispatched in November 1881 to examine several sites. The committee spent three weeks in the southern part of the territory before making its report. A slightly larger group of "locators" was sent in January 1882 to look more carefully into a specific area. It returned after one month and, on the basis of its recommendation, a decision was made to lay claim to the four western townships of Douglas County.

The plans for the new colony were humorously reported in one of the Orange City newspapers after the return of the first committee of locators.

Another chapter of U.S. history is budding under the title of the Dakota Twig of the Sioux County Branch of Pella Colony. D. van den Bos, L. van de Meer, and F. Le Cocq, Jr. have organized themselves as a committee on explorations, to look after a small patch in Dakota, which old "Chris" overlooked A.D. 1492. If the country be found uninhabited, they will take formal possession of it in the name of the U.S. Congress, and forthwith issue invitations to old bachelors to come and 'squat.'¹⁵

On 6 April 1882 a party of men left by rail from Hull, located about eighteen miles north of Orange City, for the town of Plankinton. Upon arrival, they unloaded their cattle, horses, machinery, tools, seed grain, etc., from the freight cars that had accompanied the coaches. After purchasing additional supplies, the party set out for the place that had been selected for the *nieuwe kolonie*, located about twenty-five miles south of Plankinton. In the words of one of the first settlers, upon reaching the site, "the new arrivals at once went to work building a shelter for common use. The wagons were unloaded and nails, hammers, and saws came into play. Before nightfall they were resting in the shanty, a structure 12 by 14 feet. Here they were to stay until Frank Le Cocq, Jr. had surveyed the

15. *Sioux County Herald*, 8 Dec. 1881. The idea of Sioux County being a "Branch of the Pella Colony" is in reference to it having been founded by Hollanders from the Dutch community of Pella in southeastern Iowa.

Frank Le Cocq, Jr.



land so that the homesteaders could move onto their claims, build huts, and begin plowing as the law prescribed."¹⁶

Frank LeCocq, Jr. was one of the chief promoters of the Douglas County settlement. Born in 1858 in the Dutch community of Pella, Iowa, he moved with his parents in 1872 to Orange City where his father became prominent in banking and real estate. Despite a promising future in his father's business, young Frank became attracted to the Dakotas. He was a member of both groups of locators who went out to investigate homestead lands for a new colony, and was the chief founder of the town of Harrison. LeCocq later became important in banking and real estate and held various county and state offices, including county surveyor, county commissioner, state legislator, and state railroad commissioner.¹⁷

16. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, 2:321.

17. The Dutch Heritage Room in the library at Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa, has considerable manuscript material on Frank Le Cocq, Jr. Information on Le Cocq was also obtained from Miss Mary Van Gorkum, Le Cocq's niece, of Corsica, S. Dak., interview on 21 Aug. 1973, S. Dak. Oral History Project.

30 *South Dakota History*

News of the colony spread quickly, and other settlers arrived; towns arose and churches and schools appeared. Within two years after the arrival of the first Hollanders, all available land in the four western townships of Douglas County had been taken up. By 1900 there were 122 families attending the county's two Reformed churches and 113 families attending its three Christian Reformed churches. The first town was appropriately called New Orange, but was soon renamed Harrison in honor of Senator Benjamin Harrison of Indiana who, in 1884, had introduced a bill providing for the division of Dakota Territory and the admission of the southern part into the Union as the state of South Dakota. By 1886 Harrison had a population of about two hundred people and a trading area that extended as far as twenty miles. Another community founded by the early Dutch settlers was called New Holland, located about four miles west of Harrison. By 1886 it had a population of about forty. Still another small town Emden, later renamed Joubert, was located about five miles west of New Holland and never had more than a few families.¹⁸

At the same time that a large-scale Dutch settlement was being established in the western part of Douglas County, a similar colony was developing in adjoining Charles Mix County. Its origins, however, were very different in that its first settlers came directly from the Netherlands. Its chief promoter was an interesting person named Albert Kuipers. As the son of a poor baker in the Netherlands, Kuipers had received only a rudimentary education. Determined to improve his lot in life, however, he studied scientific farming on his own and purchased some wasteland near the town of Steggarda, Friesland. His studies evidently bore fruit because he soon converted it into a prosperous farm, for which he received wide recognition and several honors in the Netherlands.¹⁹

18. Federal Writers Project, *Douglas County Tales and Towns* (Armour, S. Dak.: Public Library Board, 1938), p. 22, states that in the late 1930s the population of Harrison, New Holland, and Joubert were "made up almost wholly of Hollanders." See also page 9 and Douglas County History Committee, *Douglas County History and Centennial Observances 1961* (Stickney, S. Dak.: Argus Printers, [1961], pp. 147-59).

19. There is a limited amount of information on Kuipers in Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, pp. 381-83 and in Van der Pol, *On the Reservation Border*, pp. 293-99. The writer also visited several times with Kuipers' grandson, also named Albert Kuipers, of Platte, S. Dak.



Albert Kuipers

Kuipers' decision to go to South Dakota was motivated in part by personal ambition, but also by a sincere concern for the plight of the poor farmers of his locality who were talking about emigrating to America. In 1880 this Dutch "Moses" dispatched his son Hendrik to the United States to study farming methods and to investigate possible sites for a colony of Dutch farmers. After visiting numerous places, including several in New Jersey, Michigan, and Iowa, young Kuipers arrived in the Dakotas. Here he was joined by two other Hollanders, H. F. Moss and Rekele Zeilstra, who were also looking for sites to establish Dutch colonies. All three men concluded that Charles Mix County in the southern part of the territory would be an ideal location.

Upon his return to the Netherlands in November 1881, young Kuipers and his father began carrying out their plans. Speeches were made throughout the Netherlands, and a small pamphlet describing the proposed colony was sent to anyone upon receipt of "two blue postage stamps." More than seven hundred letters of inquiry were received and answered by the two men.²⁰

20. Albert Kuipers in *De Wachter*, 4 Oct. 1883.

32 *South Dakota History*

Albert Kuipers was a very religious man and considered himself delegated by God to help the destitute people of the Netherlands find a new life for themselves in America. When opposition to his plans developed, he declared such criticism was particularly regrettable

because I am convinced that there are thousands in the Netherlands who even after hard work find it difficult to exist. God has created this fruitful land for a purpose; millions of acres of land lay here which still wait for the diligent farmer. . . .Netherlanders should participate in developing this region and have great need for doing so. I know that to be true because I have traveled in all the provinces and have had seven hundred letters from those who wanted information. . . . I believe it was the will of God and my duty to do what I have done in trying



Albert Kuipers (in fur coat) with his wife, daughters, son-in-law, and grandchildren in front of his home in 1890.

to establish this colony. God sent my son there to point out this territory for oppressed Hollanders, and He gave us the courage to travel through the great cities of the Netherlands to explain our plans to the people. . . .If we have erred in any small way, it was not intentional. We dare not lie or deceive the people; we could have no peace if we had.²¹

On 8 April 1882 the Kuipers left for the United States accompanied by about two hundred families, mostly from the

21. Ibid.

provinces of Friesland and Groningen. Unfortunately, when they arrived in America, dissension broke out within the group. There were also enticements from selfish land agents who tried to dissuade the new arrivals from settling in the Dakotas. Rumors were spread about the dangers of rattlesnakes and Indians. As a result of these developments, Kuipers' group split up. Some stayed in the East, while others went to Michigan and Iowa. Only about thirty families and some single men went to their original destination.

Albert Kuipers arrived at the government land office at Yankton on 19 April 1882, ahead of the main party of immigrants and, after a hurried trip to Charles Mix County, selected six miles along Platte Creek as the site for his colony. He thereupon joined his fellow immigrants at Running Water, about forty miles up the Missouri River from Yankton, where stock, agricultural implements, and covered wagons were purchased, as well as household articles and food supplies. Tents were also obtained to serve as living quarters until more permanent housing could be built. To their dismay, Kuipers' party later learned that their livestock and equipment were of inferior quality and that they had paid far above the market value for the goods. After a four-day trip, during which time they saw little sign of human habitation—no houses were seen for two days—they arrived at their destination on 16 May. Little time was lost in putting in the crops. "On May 22," according to the elder Kuipers, "we set the ploughs into the ground and immediately started with the planting and the sowing."²²

Although the original group of Hollanders who settled in Charles Mix County was rather small, their number steadily increased. Moss and Zeilstra, the two men young Kuipers met when visiting the region in 1881, soon arrived with additional immigrant families. The elder Kuipers did considerable writing, thereby spreading the news of the colony both in the United States and the Netherlands in the hope of attracting additional settlers. He also made a few trips back to the fatherland for that purpose. When the Reverend H. Bode, a Dutch minister from Iowa, visited Charles Mix and Douglas counties in February 1883, he reported that "anyone who intends to move there and

22. Albert Kuipers, "Nederlandsche Volksplanting," *De Wachter*, 7 Nov. 1883.

to live among the Hollanders should not hesitate because the land in both counties is being rapidly taken up."²³

By 1885 there were about two hundred Dutch families residing in Charles Mix County in several towns and hamlets. The most important town was Platte, founded in 1883. Some of the names of the communities indicate the Dutch origin of their residents. Overijssel, later renamed Edgerton, located about seven miles southeast of Platte, was named after the Dutch province of Overijssel. Friesland, located about seven miles southwest of Platte, was another town whose name indicated where its residents originally hailed from in the Netherlands.

After a new settlement had been founded, no matter if it was of the small-scale type established in the eastern part of the Dakotas or one of considerable size like that in Charles Mix County, Dutch language newspapers played an important role in its future development. Stories and advertisements were frequently carried, praising certain regions for their fertility, variety of crops, abundance of hay, and accessible water supply.²⁴ Pieter Ellerbroeck, for example, a storekeeper at Grand View in Douglas County who also carried on a real estate business, did extensive advertising in Dutch language newspapers in Iowa and Michigan. He was particularly active in promoting land sales in Campbell County, South Dakota, and Emmons County, North Dakota. One of his advertisements stated that farmers who settled there could expect good crops: corn, 40 to 50 bushels per acre; wheat, 18 bushels; oats, 40 to 60 bushels; potatoes, 200 to 400 bushels; and garden products as good as those grown in Iowa.²⁵

Some of the newspaper accounts and advertisements make interesting reading because of the manner in which persons of Dutch descent were urged to settle in a particular region. The 29 January 1885 issue of *De Volksvriend*, for example, stated in reference to Campbell and Emmons counties, "Very probable it is that in five or six weeks no more tree claims will be available." Such information was obviously designed to encourage Hollanders to make up their minds quickly, because a

23. *De Wachter*, 30 Mar. 1883

24. See *De Volksvriend*, 16 July 1885, 27 Aug. 1885, 11 Mar. 1886, 8 Apr. 1886, 25 Aug. 1887, 29 Sept. 1887, 15 Dec. 1887, 26 July 1888.

25. *Ibid.*, 18 Dec. 1884.

similar warning was made almost three years later in the 8 December 1887 issue. There were also frequent warnings urging Hollanders who were considering a move to come quickly lest settlers of other ethnic stocks beat them to it. Thus, the issue of 26 July 1888 reported that although there was still room in the above counties for additional Dutch settlers, they should "not wait too long because the Germans [German-Russians?] are coming in by the carload and are taking up the best land."

Not all press releases, however, were favorable. A writer of 1882, for example, strongly discouraged Hollanders of limited means, especially those who had just arrived in the United States, from settling in the Dakotas.

The 'little man' must not come to Dakota, but should settle in the mercantile and factory cities in the more eastern states, where he can begin earning money immediately on his arrival. Whoever goes to Dakota must have enough money so that he can immediately build a house and barn and buy a good team of horses, or at least a yoke of oxen, as well as a milk cow, hogs, wagon, plow, etc.. He must also have enough money to live on for at least a year and a half, during which time he will have no income but will always be paying out instead. How can the 'little man,' who arrives without a cent, make a start in Dakota? What shall the poor, penniless, simple Hollander do on the bare, uninhabited prairie of Dakota? If they are American Hollanders [of means, however] from Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, or Iowa, I would say to them, 'Go without delay to Dakota. Obtain there a homestead or a timber claim, or a preemption, or all three together.' An American Hollander, with his knowledge of the language and experience about prairie farming, might easily get along, whereas the green Hollander who has just arrived from the old country will experience the greatest misery.²⁶

The writer of the above declared that unless a person had a minimum of a thousand dollars, he should not consider moving to the Dakotas. A letter written in 1884 and published in one of the Dutch church magazines, recommended that farmers have a minimum of two thousand dollars before moving there.²⁷ In the Netherlands, several newspapers that opposed Dutch emigration in general also carried articles detrimental to the settlement of the Dakotas. Some of them, for example, referred to Albert Kuipers' plans in Charles Mix County as the Dakota Fraud and one of the greatest swindles ever to take place in the

26. *Ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1882. See also the issue of 6 July 1882.

27. *De Wachter*, 27 Feb. 1884.

Netherlands.²⁸ Fortunately, the bad press releases were more than offset by favorable reports, and as a result the number of Hollanders in the Dakotas continued to increase.

Most Dutch settlers were poorly equipped to begin farming when they arrived, but there were exceptions. Hollanders who had lived elsewhere in the United States before moving to the Dakotas sometimes had sufficient capital to secure adequate farm machinery and draft animals. William Cleveringa, for example, who left the Netherlands for Michigan in 1881, moved to Iowa in 1884, and to Emmons County in 1887, started farming in the latter area equipped with three horses, two mules, and a good plow. Similarly, Albert Hasper broke seventy-five acres of land and raised 600 bushels of flax during his first year in 1885, indicating that he, too, was well equipped for homesteading.²⁹

Less fortunate was the family of Maurits Van Soest, who arrived in the Dakotas about 1885 with only a horse and a cow hitched together to pull a wagonload of furniture.³⁰ The family of Hendrikeus Van der Pol, who arrived in Douglas County in 1883, was even worse off, having only a yoke of oxen and five dollars.³¹ The plight of the Van Soests and Van der Pols was typical of many Dutch immigrants who came to the United States during the 1880s and 1890s. As late as 1903, over half the immigrants arriving in the United States from the Netherlands had less than thirty dollars in their possession.³² A minister visiting the Dutch in Charles Mix County in the summer of 1882, a few months after that colony had been established, reported that because of their poverty they faced an unknown future.³³

28. Excerpts from several newspapers published in the Netherlands concerning this matter are found in *De Volksvriend*, 20 Apr. and 27 Apr. 1882, and in *De Wachter*, 4 Oct. 1883.

29. *Ethnic Interviews*. On the Dutch in Emmons County, see Gerald F. De Jong, "The Dutch in Emmons County," *North Dakota History* 29 (July 1962): 253-65.

30. *Emmons County Record*, *Golden Anniversary Edition*, 4 Oct. 1934, N. Dak. State University Library, Fargo, N. Dak. See also Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, 2:342.

31. Van der Pol, *On the Reservation Border*, p. 51.

32. U.S., Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1903* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903), Table 3, p. 7.

33. *De Volksvriend*, 6 July 1882.

Unfortunately for the Dutch farmers, especially those having little capital to begin with, the Dakotas experienced several bad harvests beginning in the late 1880s, and as a result many farmers and businessmen faced financial ruin. G. Nies, a storekeeper in Platte, wrote on 4 January 1895: "Last summer I gave credit for about \$3000 to farmers who needed help. These are good, honest people who would gladly pay me if they had even a moderate harvest. Now, because of the complete failure of the crops, they cannot settle accounts with me. I am not able to extend more credit; yet I know that there is dire need which will last until next summer when the harvest comes around."³⁴

Despite aid from Dutch communities in Iowa and elsewhere, as well as assistance from the railroads, some Hollanders abandoned everything to their creditors and left the Dakotas after each bad harvest. On those occasions Dutch language newspapers carried numerous advertisements of farms for sale. The 6 February 1890 issue of *De Volksvriend*, for example, listed twenty-three farms in Douglas County and eleven in Charles Mix County. Most of the farms were 160 acres in size and the price varied from a low of \$450 to a high of \$1,200.³⁵ A few of the Dutch settlers who left the Dakotas returned to the states from which they had come, mainly Iowa or Michigan. Others decided to push further west to seek their fortunes particularly in Washington.

Despite the departure of settlers after each poor harvest, the total number of Hollanders in the Dakotas did not decline. Departures were partially offset by the natural increase of those who remained. There were also a few moderately good harvests sprinkled among the poor seasons that kept many of the settlers from leaving and even influenced some who had left to change their minds and return to the Dakotas. During one good year "in 1892 the Hollanders and other people shipped from Armour 355 carloads of wheat, flax, oats, and barley, and 387 carloads

34. Lucas, *Netherlands in America*, p. 384.

35. Some idea of the primitive conditions existing among many of the Dutch farmers at this time is shown in the descriptions of the farm buildings carried in the advertisements. Although most of the houses and other buildings offered for sale with the land were made of wood, all were very small. A house of 12' x 24' was large, as was a barn of 16' x 30'.

of fattened oxen and hogs. The next year, 1893, like 1892 a year of average crops, they marketed 388 carloads of grain and 460 carloads of oxen and hogs. Each box car had a capacity of 700 bushels of grain."³⁶ Because the good harvests were duly reported in the Dutch language newspapers, new settlers continued to appear. Between 1890 and 1910 the number of Holland-born residents in the Dakotas doubled.³⁷

As was true of pioneers throughout the Great Plains, the coming of the railroad was eagerly awaited by the first Dutch farmers and townsmen in the Dakotas. Unfortunately, its extension was generally slow. As late as 1903, for example, the Hollanders in the more northern settlements had to travel nearly fifty miles to the railroad town of Eureka in order to obtain major supplies and to sell their grain and livestock. In light of this, it is understandable why an early Dutch settler of that region declared, "In Europe one says, 'All roads lead to Rome, but here all roads lead to Eureka.'"³⁸ Stage lines were quickly established to carry passengers and mail to the more outlying settlements.

On several occasions the early Dutch settlers located their towns at a particular spot in anticipation that the railroad would pass through at that point. When the railroad officials decided to lay their line elsewhere, it was often disastrous for any towns that were bypassed. When New Orange, later renamed Harrison, was founded in 1882, its residents hoped that it "would become the central point of a happy and prosperous Dutch settlement."³⁹ However, in 1886 the Chicago, Milwaukee, Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad laid its rails instead through the town of Armour, about sixteen miles to the east. Later, in 1905 when a branch line of the Milwaukee Railroad was constructed in a northwesterly direction from Armour, many of the disappointed businessmen of Harrison relocated themselves at Corsica, a new town built on this spur.

36. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, p. 385.

37. U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890: Population*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), 1:607; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 3:348, 702.

38. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, 2:357.

39. *Ibid.*, 2:331.

As one of the early Dutch residents of Harrison later told it, "It was almost as if a tornado struck that town, for in about a year's time, approximately 70 buildings were moved to Corsica," and her population declined from 275 in 1905 to 125 the following year.⁴⁰ Harrison's loss was Corsica's gain: in 1907 at least half the business firms in the latter town were owned by Hollanders.⁴¹

Failure to obtain a railroad was even more disastrous for the town of Grand View and its Dutch residents. As in the case of Harrison, great hopes had been held for its future, it having once been the county seat of Douglas County. When the railroad bypassed it, most of its residents moved to Armour, taking their buildings with them. Grand View soon became a ghost town. A similar thing happened when the railroad bypassed "old" Platte, which at one time had four stores, a church, a creamery, a hotel, a blacksmith, and a number of residences. In this instance, too, the town, buildings and all, was moved to "new" Platte, about two miles away from the old location.

In addition to anxiety about the arrival of the railroad, the Dutch pioneers had other personal experiences frequently associated with homesteading on the Great Plains. Preparing the virgin soil for crops was often backbreaking work. In summer, drought and severe hailstorms, as well as prairie fires and grasshoppers, caused frequent discouragement; the long, cold winters, interspersed with blizzards, added to the melancholy life of the early settlers. Housing conditions were generally primitive.¹ Settlers who could afford it used lumber for their first buildings, but these were often crude and makeshift because good building material was either too costly or unavailable. Poorer families, of which there were many, frequently made their first houses of slabs of sod, or "Dakota bricks," as they were sometimes called. One of the early Dutch residents of Douglas County described the building of these sod shanties as follows:

40. History Committee, *Douglas County History*, p. 150.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-19, 151. In the late 1930s, according to one study, the population of Corsica was still made up largely of descendants of the Dutch migrants who had settled in the western part of Douglas County during the 1880s (Federal Writers Project, *Douglas County Tales and Towns*, p. 21).



In 1901 all the buildings were moved from Old Platte to New Platte, which was closer to the railroad.



The first thing that had to be done when my folks arrived at their homestead was to get out the breakplow and find a patch of tough sod for building the sod house. The sod was cut into the lengths desired and then loaded on a make-shift stoneboat or wagon. Then the slabs of sod were placed criss-cross on top of each other until the desired wall-height was reached. The roof was made of rough lumber and covered with a thick layer of tar paper with dirt piled over that. The houses were cool in summer and warmer in winter than many frame houses, but the windows were small and few. My parents lived in that twelve-by-sixteen foot sod house [with their four children] without a board floor for two and one-half years. . . . It was pretty difficult for a mother to keep a home and her family clean in those sod-houses.⁴²

Improvisation was often the order of the day, especially for the poorer settlers. One early Dutch resident recalled her mother making mittens and everyday shoes from old grain sacks, real shoes being worn only to church and to the post office. Another recalled field corn being roasted and ground for coffee, and dried sunflower leaves being used for tobacco. Lard was frequently mixed with lye to make soap, and sometimes a rag in a flat dish of lard was used for lighting the home if the family could not afford candles. An early resident of Douglas County remembered that when he was a boy, his family sometimes ate bread smeared with lard in order that the butter could be sold for cash to be used for other needs. Families resorted to a variety of home remedies in the event of illness because during the early years the nearest doctor for some settlers was thirty to forty miles away.⁴³

The prairie could at times be an awesome and lonesome experience for the early Hollanders of Dakota, especially during the cold winter months. J. Van Erve reported in 1897 that during their first winter in Campbell County, his wife did not see anyone she knew for seven months. Isolation and hard work made the pioneers lose track of time. According to Van Erve: "Sometimes we lost track of the days of the week. So, for example, our friend P. Droog who after having worked on Sunday, on the next day dressed himself for church and, with his Bible under his arm, arrived at K. Scholten's house where

42. Van der Pol, *On the Reservation Border*, pp. 20-21.

43. *Ethnic Interviews; Emmons County Record*, Golden Anniversary Edition, 4 Oct. 1934; Van der Pol, *On the Reservation Border*, pp. 21, 23, 30, 151.

42 *South Dakota History*

they convinced him with great difficulty that it was really Monday.”⁴⁴

Despite its vastness and its dangers, the prairie at certain seasons of the year was beautiful beyond comprehension. When a group of travelers from Orange City visited Charles Mix County in 1882, one of them later recorded his impression of the trip for *De Volksvriend*. His description of the immensity and beauty of the unspoiled prairie was typical of many Hollanders.

When we reached a high point on the prairie and surveyed the landscape, we were breathless by the exceptional scene that lay before us. There was nothing but small hills and crevices, bluffs and ravines. The view made a profound impression on us all. . . . That we stood there a few moments and surveyed the scene was certainly no wonder; everyone who travels the broad expanses of the prairie will react in the same manner. . . . The prairie sunset was especially a beautiful spectacle as the golden rays gilded the hills and valleys; bathing the tops of the bluffs in gold and casting darkening shadows in the crevices and ravines. I and my companions were greatly touched by the contrasts in color and felt that our words, ‘What a beautiful sight!’ utterly failed to express what we felt in our hearts.⁴⁵

Even getting lost on the prairie on a summer night was not without its pleasant experiences. One early settler in Emmons County recorded that he passed the time by singing Dutch psalms.⁴⁶

In light of the above, it is interesting to note a remark made by a university professor from the Netherlands who spent considerable time in the United States in the late 1920s doing research on the history of the Dutch in America. He considered the Hollanders in the Middle West to be more conservative than the Hollanders residing in the eastern part of the United States, and attributed it in part to the influence of prairie living. The Dutch historian took his cue from a South Dakota author Haydn Carruth who stated, “The Prairie is the world in its calm, serene, beautiful old age, meditative, unhurried, unafraid; approaching Nirvana. . . . The Prairie is but the desert watered, and as hath been said, ‘The desert is of God, and in the desert no man may deny Him.’ ” According to the Dutch professor,

44. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, 2: 356-57.

45. *De Volksvriend*, 26 Oct. 1882.

46. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, 2:357.

the calmness and the endlessness of the prairie were conducive to fostering a "meditative and contemplative life" among the settlers and therefore "orthodoxy and all that pertained thereto" flourished longer among the Dakota Hollanders than among those living in the eastern states.⁴⁷

The Dutchness of the Hollanders who settled in the Dakotas was manifested in several ways besides religious orthodoxy. An early resident of the Grand View area recorded in his reminiscences that many of the Hollanders of western Douglas County "wore wooden shoes and smoked long pipes, just as they had in Holland. The Dutch Reformed Church was their religion and services were in their native tongue. Many of the older people never learned to speak English."⁴⁸ Two Hollanders of Douglas County, named Van Arendonk and Portier, did a good business in making and selling wooden shoes. Both were farmers who practiced their specialized craft during the winter months. Van Arendonk sometimes had as many as seventy wooden shoes on order at one time.⁴⁹ According to a Dutch resident of Douglas County, "most settlers kept a few pairs setting handy and many children wore them."⁵⁰

Generally speaking, the Hollanders retained their Dutchness long after their arrival in the Dakotas. This is quite understandable, considering that some of them came directly from the Netherlands, and many others had sojourned only briefly elsewhere in the United States before coming to the Dakotas. Even those born in the United States were frequently more Old World than American in their thinking, having been reared in communities that were very Dutch, such as Orange City or Pella, Iowa, or Holland, Michigan. Americanization of the Dakota Hollanders was also slow because most Dutch immigrants of the nineteenth century belonged to the conservative agricultural class and were hidebound by tradition.

47. J. Van. Hinte, *Nederlanders in Amerika: Een Studie over Landverhuizers en Volkplanters in de 19^e en 20^{ste} Eeuw in de Vereenigde Staten van Amerika*, 2 vols (Groningen, Netherlands: P. Noordhoff, 1928), 2:112-13. Van Hinte's quote of Carruth is from the latter's article on South Dakota in Ernest Gruening, ed., *These United States: A Symposium*, 2 vols. (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1923-24), 1:266-67.

48. History Committee, *Douglas County History*, p. 165.

49. Nelson. Nieuwenhuis, "A History of Dutch Settlement in South Dakota to 1900," (Master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1940), p. 36.

50. Van der Pol, *On the Reservation Border*, p. 167.

44 *South Dakota History*

The feeling of kinship that many Dakota Dutchmen felt toward Hollanders living elsewhere is clearly shown in their attitude toward the Boer War of 1899-1902 in South Africa. About 1900, for example, the town of Emden in Douglas County was renamed Joubert, in honor of Petrus Jacobus Joubert, a South African statesman and important Boer general. Some farmers named their horses "Oom Paul," after "Uncle" Paul Kruger, another famous Boer personality. *De Volksvriend* and other Dutch language newspapers were eagerly read in order to learn the latest news about the fighting. Some South Dakotans of Dutch descent who were children at the time of the conflict can still vividly recall prayers being offered at family worship in behalf of the Boers, and tears being freely shed when news about their defeat was received in 1902.⁵¹

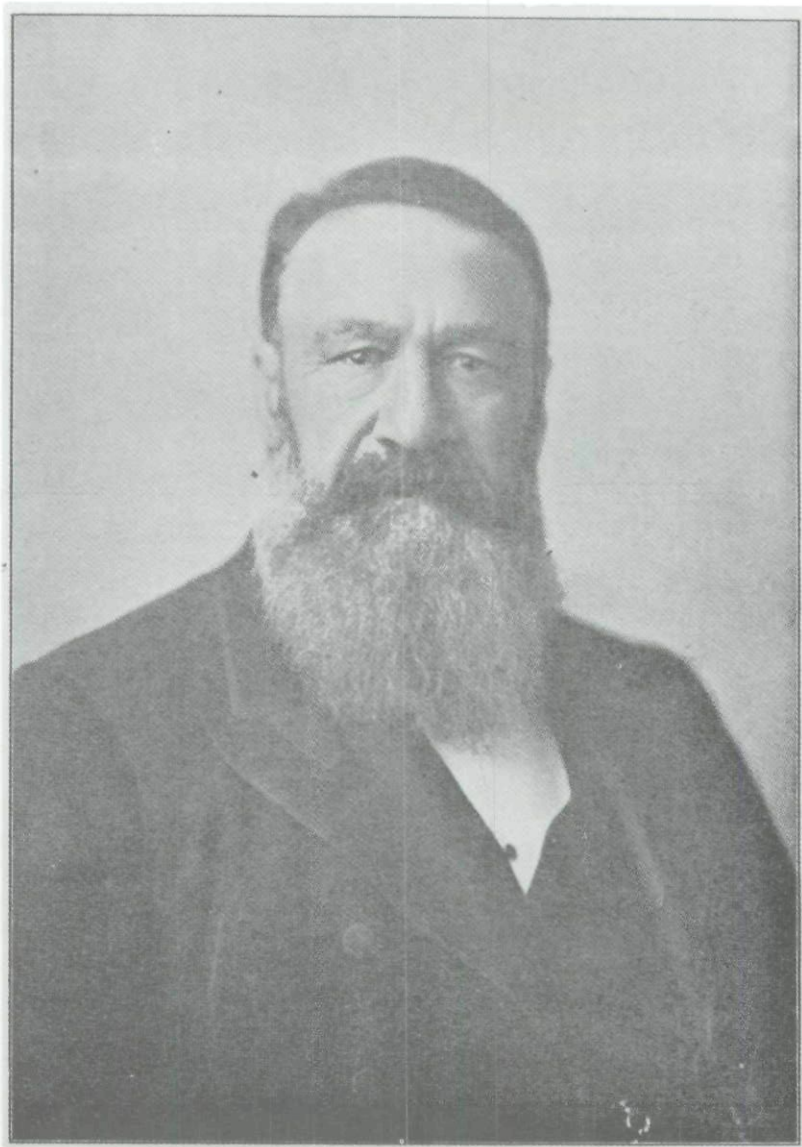
The close ties that existed between Dakota Hollanders and Hollanders living elsewhere in the United States were especially evident in the help the latter gave to the Dutch communities that experienced unusual hardships. According to an early Dutch resident of Harrison, for example, "the mother colony in Sioux County, Iowa, generously sent seed, clothes, food, and other necessities" in times of poor harvest.⁵² Similarly, when a prairie fire raged for a day and a night in September 1891 in southern Emmons County, destroying grain and gardens as well as farm animals, "boxes and barrels of clothing was sent by eastern [Dutch] churches and in such quantity that the poor people exclaimed they had enough and to spare."⁵³ In 1889 Christmas parcels, including toys, were received from one of the Dutch churches on Long Island.⁵⁴ In 1895 the Reverend A.G. Ziegler of Harrison solicited between \$4,000 and \$5,000 worth of cash, clothing, and food from Dutch churches, some from as far away as New Jersey and New York, to aid the drought stricken settlers of Douglas County. In the following year the Hollanders of Sioux Center, Iowa, located about ten miles from

51. Dick Vis, Sioux Falls, S. Dak., interview on 31 July 1973, and Pier Bakker, Springfield, S. Dak., interview on 19 July 1973, S. Dak. Oral History Project; History Committee, *Douglas County History*, p. 156; Van der Pol, *On the Reservation Border*, p. 121.

52. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, 2:333.

53. *Ibid.*, 2:349. See also page 343.

54. *De Volksvriend*, 9 Jan. 1890.



P.J. Joubert

46 *South Dakota History*



Christian Reformed Church at Friesland

Orange City, sent an entire carload of grain and other provisions to the residents of Douglas and Charles Mix counties.⁵⁵

The Dakota Hollanders, in common with most Hollanders throughout the United States as well as the Netherlands, took their religion seriously. It has been said that the first questions asked by a Dutchman who was considering moving to a new area were (1) "Is there a school?" and (2) "Is there a church?" Although the former question is undoubtedly an exaggeration, the latter is not. Again and again, ministers in the United States and in the Netherlands warned Dutch immigrants about their need to settle among Hollanders in order that they could worship in Reformed or Christian Reformed churches and hear preaching in the Dutch language. Even before the arrival of a resident pastor, the settlers met together in one another's homes on Sundays to pray, sing their favorite Dutch psalms, and listen to a sermon read by one of the more literate men in the community. As soon as possible, however, congregations were organized and steps were taken to obtain a minister. By 1895 eighteen Dutch congregations had been organized in the Dakotas. Sometimes two Dutch churches, one Reformed and the other Christian Reformed, were found in the same town.

On occasion, one pastor served two or more congregations; at other times a ministerial candidate rather than an ordained minister was employed. Considering the isolation of many of

55. Van der Pol, *On the Reservation Border*, pp. 44-45; Nieuwenhuis, "A History of Dutch Settlement in South Dakota," pp. 63-64.

the Dutch settlements during the 1880s and 1890s and the meager salaries that were paid, it is understandable why congregations often had difficulty in obtaining and retaining an ordained minister. The records for the Christian Reformed churches of Friesland and Overijssel in Charles Mix County (the two churches shared the costs of a pastor) indicate that the salary of candidate H.J. Dapper in 1895 consisted of "seventy-five dollars from Classis, one hundred and twelve dollars from the congregation, three hundred pounds of flour,



Dutch Reformed Church in Campbell County in 1886 made out of sod

ten bushels of potatoes, five bushels of corn, fifty pounds of 'spek' [i.e., pork] and a load of firewood."⁵⁶

By 1890 most of the congregations had their own church buildings, some of which were rather stately-looking for pioneer towns. Within two years after its founding, for example, Harrison boasted of Reformed and Christian Reformed edifices with spires ninety-two and sixty-eight feet high respectively that "were visible for miles around, proclaiming the importance of faith in the life of these people."⁵⁷ Considerable financial help was received from the denominations and from individual churches elsewhere for constructing places of worship such as these.

* 56. The author is grateful to Mrs. Hilda Beltman of Platte, S. Dak. for supplying him with this information.

57. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, p. 382.

Not all church buildings, however, were so dignified looking. The Overijssel church, built in 1885 at a cost of about four hundred dollars, measured only eighteen feet by twenty feet. The sod church that served a Dutch congregation in Campbell County was even less stately in appearance. Its construction was described by one of its members:

One beautiful day in the summer of 1886 nearly the entire settlement, old as well as young, set out with swords and pikes. By this I mean shovels, a plow to break the prairie sod, wagons drawn by oxen, and carpenter's equipment. In one day we erected a church structure. It was not so magnificent as Solomon's temple. Nor could any of us say with David, 'Behold we live in a house of cedar; and the ark of God stands in the midst of the curtains.' The dimensions of the church were 16 feet by 32 feet inside, and 21 by 37 feet outside. We had no critical tastes to consider in erecting the church. There were plenty of sods for building the walls; the roof of the tabernacle was covered with a triple layer of boards on which were placed tar paper and sods. We do not exaggerate in saying that when finished everybody was pleased. True, when it rained we had to move our chairs to get out of the rain into the drip. But the praises to the honor of God were not dampened by such rains.⁵⁸

The furniture was likewise crude—planks laid on blocks served as benches and a coffee box was used as a pulpit.

The churches, in particular, helped keep Dutch traditions alive. The mode of worship and the doctrinal standards were very similar to what had been followed in the Netherlands since the Protestant Reformation. The ministers were heavily steeped in Calvinist tradition and were well acquainted with the writings of the great Dutch theologians. The local *kerkraad*, or consistory, consisting of the minister and several elders and deacons elected from the congregation, kept a careful check on the behavior of the church members in order to see that nothing unorthodox took place and that no sins went unnoticed. Even community affairs sometimes came under the scrutiny of the *kerkraad*. Unorthodoxy and un-Dutchness were considered almost synonymous by its members, who were seldom young men. As late as 1932, the consistory of the Christian Reformed Church at Volga, "conscious of the need to warn against evil practices and to fight against the trend of worldliness, protested

58. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, 2:357-58.

against the 'free movies' which were being shown in the town." An especially watchful eye was kept on sabbath desecration, to prevent the opening of any business firms on Sunday and the playing of interleague baseball.⁵⁹

The Dutch language was used exclusively in most of the Reformed and Christian Reformed churches until about World War I, and even after that time the introduction of English was very gradual. The experience of the Christian Reformed Church at Volga can be cited as an example of this slow process. In 1919 it was decided to use some English (along with Dutch) in catechism and Sunday School classes, as well as at the meetings of the Young People's Society, but it was not until 1923, in response to a petition signed by sixteen members, that an occasional English worship service was introduced on Sundays. In 1927 the churches started having one English service per month, which was increased to one every Sunday beginning in 1930. Because there were two different services each Sunday, this meant that three out of four were still in Dutch. The frequency of English sermons was further increased in 1936 and 1939, but Dutch was not dropped until 1944. At that time, the congregation consisted of fifty-two families and had a total membership of 292 persons.⁶⁰

Dutch language newspapers also helped retain the Dutchness of the settlements. *De Volksvriend*, published at Orange City, Iowa, was extremely popular among the Dakota Hollanders. Written entirely in the Dutch language, it continued to have correspondents on its staff from several places in South and North Dakota until it ceased publication in 1951. It regularly ran weekly news items about these communities, as well as those in other states, and carried news about national politics

59. For a discussion of the conservatism in the Dutch churches, see George W. Heeringa, "The Christian Reformed Church in South Dakota," (Master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1955), especially pp. 95-97. Most of the approximately twenty interviews the author conducted during the summer of 1973 with South Dakotans of Dutch descent for the S. Dak. Oral History Project also included information on this subject.

60. The author is grateful to Henry Houtman, curator of the Brookings County Historical Society Museum at Volga for this information. Interviews between the author and various leaders of Reformed and Christian Reformed churches in South Dakota indicate that the Volga situation was not unique.

50 *South Dakota History*



New Holland in 1892

and international affairs, as well as information about happenings in the Netherlands. It is no wonder that the Dakota Hollanders, isolated as they were, eagerly awaited the weekly arrival of *De Volksvriend*.

Some of the South Dakota communities even had their own Dutch newspapers, although none lasted very long. The most important was *De Bode*, a weekly paper that began publication at Harrison but was later moved to Springfield, South Dakota. Its editor was John Hospers, son of Henry Hospers, one of the founders of the town of Orange City, Iowa, and an editor of *De Volksvriend*. Even the little community of New Holland had its own Dutch language newspaper known as *De Nederlandsche Dakotaan*, which was founded by W.P. Van der Zalm. The *Harrison Globe* for a time also carried a Dutch language section, known as the *Hollandsche Gedeelte* ("Dutch Department").⁶¹

In summary, it may be stated that although the number of Hollanders in the Dakotas was too small to make as great an impact as the Scandinavians and Germans who settled there in greater numbers, their influence was significant at the local level in certain regions. Their strict Calvinist beliefs and customs were particularly influential, and to this day, religious conservatism is very much in evidence in those communities where persons of Dutch descent make up a considerable part of the population.

61. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, pp. 536-37.

Also significant is the industriousness and tenacity of the early Dutch pioneers as tillers of the soil. Despite their small numbers, they were an integral part of those thousands of homesteaders who, by backbreaking work and persistence in the face of frequent adversity, gradually helped transform the prairie soil into the farmlands of today. The significance of this has been well explained in a recent autobiography by a Dakota Hollander who was born and raised during those pioneer days. "Before the generation [of the 1880s], prairie men had made fortunes in fur, in cattle or in trade with the Indians. Many generations had lived in the river bottoms as the Indians did, on a subsistence level. But to start making the prairie produce man-chosen crops and to learn what kinds of machinery were needed seems to me to be the biggest accomplishment of those first-generation farmers."⁶²

In addition to illustrating in microcosm the role that a particular ethnic group played in transforming the physical appearance of the prairie, a study of the Dutch pioneers tells us something about the mental changes that members of ethnic groups had to undergo in adjusting to prairie life. When the Hollander Albert Hasper stated in 1885 that the Dakota prairie looked to him like "a big ocean of grass," he undoubtedly was voicing an opinion shared by many other Dutch pioneers.⁶³ In no way at all did its appearance resemble the Netherlands with its quiet canals, small farmsteads and villages, and plentiful rainfall; nor did the simple agricultural practices used in Holland, which sometimes resembled truck gardening, compare in any way with the farming methods required on the prairie.

The hard work, droughts and blizzards, long distance from supplies, loneliness, and primitive housing, which were characteristic of prairie living during the 1880s and 1890s, must have caused many of the early Dutch settlers to have nostalgic feelings about the old country as they remembered it or as it was described to them by their parents. That so many Hollanders faced up to these trials and tribulations, adjusted themselves to the demands of pioneer living, and tried to transform the prairie into the land of their dreams is to their everlasting credit.

62. Van der Pol, *On the Reservation Border*, pp. 23-24.

63. *Ethnic Interviews*.

Copyright of South Dakota History is the property of South Dakota State Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

All illustrations in this issue are the property of the South Dakota State Historical Society except those on the following pages: pp. 23, 29, 40, and 47, from Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa; pp. 31, 32, and 50, from Albert Kuipers, Platte; p. 45, from Gerald DeJong; p. 46, from the Christian Reformed Church, Friesland; pp. 65 and 107, from the Robinson Museum; and p. 108, from Earl Sampson, Wakonda.