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A Concise History of the Settlement, Part 1

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A Concise History of the Settlement of the Dutch Colony in Sioux County, Iowa
Part 1
By Henry Hospers

Translated from the Dutch by Nelson Nieuwenhuis, May 1971
Taken from De Volksvriend, June 25, 1874

In 1847 under the leadership of the Rev. H.P. Scholte, the Dutch colony was established in Marion County, Iowa. The favourable lay of the land, the rich soil, the coal deposits which in later years would be mined, God willing, and the railroad, good markets, and overall zeal and industry of the diligent Hollanders made for a steady increase in population, so that soon the colony was able to spread out in all directions from Pella.

Had it not been for this magnificent part of the fertile State of Iowa, our Mother Pella would not have been any different from other towns. Another factor was the rapid Americanization of the Dutch here.

In 1847 it was possible to obtain excellent prairie soil for only $2.50 per acre, and farms that were already cleared brought a price of from $5.00 to $6.00 per acre. Twenty years later farms in this area were selling at a figure of from forty to sixty dollars per acre! In 1847 there was hardly a house to be found in the town of Pella, and now the town is one of the neatest inland communities in Iowa with some 3000 inhabitants, and about twenty thriving stores. Pella has several factories, one attractive church building, an excellent school system with capable teachers, an academy, and a peace loving population.

Not only has the population increased by means of the immigration of our dear Dutch colonists, but also through the normal development of the increases in the families living here. Those who were children in 1847, have now, twenty years later, become adults. In the meantime the prices of farm land have steadily increased to the point where it takes considerable amount of capital to buy a farm and the things that are needed for its proper operation. The people of our Dutch colony were naturally all seeking to better themselves. Especially among the young was there an eagerness and strong desire for
realizing life to the full, and these could not be expected to merely wait for opportunity to come to them. The young people were not going to be satisfied merely to live from the honey out of the mother hive, so to speak, they would not live off their elders all of their lives.

**BUT WHERE?**

That question the topic of conversation in many meetings during the winter of 1868-69. A provisional association was formed which quickly grew in numbers. A committee was named, all possible information gathered, and funds were obtained from contributions looking forward to any preliminary expenses which might be incurred.

That winter the establishment of a new colony was discussed, and farmers spent many hours around their firesides thinking about this. During the long winter evenings many allowed their imaginations to take them to the fertile, inexpensive, and expansive lands that lay somewhere out West.

With the coming of spring however, came also the time to act. At a meeting held in March of 1869, it was unanimously determined that a committee made up of trusted, practical farmers be sent out to look over the areas in the West and Northwest of Iowa, and to bring back a report. With this purpose in mind, by common consent the following men were chosen: S.A. Sipma, H. Muilenburg, and J.H. Van Der Waa. Jelle Pelmulder was added to act as surveyor for the group.

Thus, in April, 1869, the Committee set out on a straight course northwards riding in a well-constructed light wagon drawn by a pair of harnessed mules. They had with them camping equipment and provisions, etc.

**“THE COMMITTEE”**

There they go! Except for Mr. Van Der Waa, the men had never been further away from their families than a few miles. Two of them, in fact, never having been away from their homes even for one night! For all of them, a splendid experience awaited them in colonization. Some experiences were to be
pleasant, and others not as pleasant. However, in the established of this new colony they were to be united as together they faced the difficulties of the journey.

The climate and soil of Iowa was now fairly well known to these men as a consequence of having farmed in the state for some twenty years – each man on his own farm which they had through hard work and industry built up successfully. Having lived together in the Dutch community of Pella, they had enjoyed each other’s fellowship, not only through social contacts but also in their common bond of church relationships. Nevertheless these men were willing to leave their pleasant surroundings and endure many privations and difficulties because of the noble purpose that urged them on, and no amount of money could have drawn them from their purpose. For better or for worse, they had determined to make this journey. But what was this strong urge which impelled them to venture out? Well, you see, each of those men were fathers, and each of them had a number of children already. They saw these children growing up into young manhood and womanhood. Some of them were now ready for marriage just as their fathers and mothers had. Now what was to become of these young people? Was there room for them in the Pella community? Was there sufficient land for each to share? Would there be enough horses and wagons for them so that they might be well provide for? That would cost too much. Better would it be for them to rent land somewhere.

There was no need for children to go begging for their bread for all could earn an abundance of the things needed. The future certainly was brighter here than in the Netherlands. But why not go Westward? There land could be obtained, and in abundance and for little cost in money. There it would be possible for the young people to establish an estate for themselves.

You see, these men had consecrated their children unto the Lord in baptism, and they had a strong desire that their children place their trust in the Lord, and to keep them bound together in a common church life. The elders did not want their children to go off somewhere along to some strange country, but rather that they might live under the shadow of the Church and School.
You can understand now the reason why these men undertook this journey, with hearts that beat with parental love, with souls in prayer to Him from whence came the earth, that a place might be found where their people could together establish a settlement, and where brothers from the same households might live near each other. Then too, there were yet many in the Fatherland for whom hopefully a place might be found where all might together share in the Blessings of God. It was such thoughts, then, which gave our committee courage—a Committee, which from every point of view possessed the requirements to carry out the required tasks, so that we all might be thankfully remembered by our offspring.

A committee of quite a different character from ours some years ago was sent on a mission on behalf of some rich stockholders of the Northern Pacific Railroad, and owners of much land in northern Minnesota. They were gentlemen who were completely devoid of practical understanding—who under the influence of a bottle of champagne or something similar looked for the splendors of a Niagara. They were men more impressed by romantic scenery, and looked for murmuring streams, steep mountains, and endless forests rather than for lands and climate congenial to Dutch farmers.

Well, our good friends are now on their way, meanwhile, we are waiting expectantly to hearing more interesting stories from a member of the Committee, Mr. Pelmulder, in the next issue of De Volksvriend. He will have something or other to present to us, and snatch from oblivion some of our history. We shall meanwhile prepare a sequel to this article.

Henry Hospers.