REFLECTIONS

Narratives of Days Gone By

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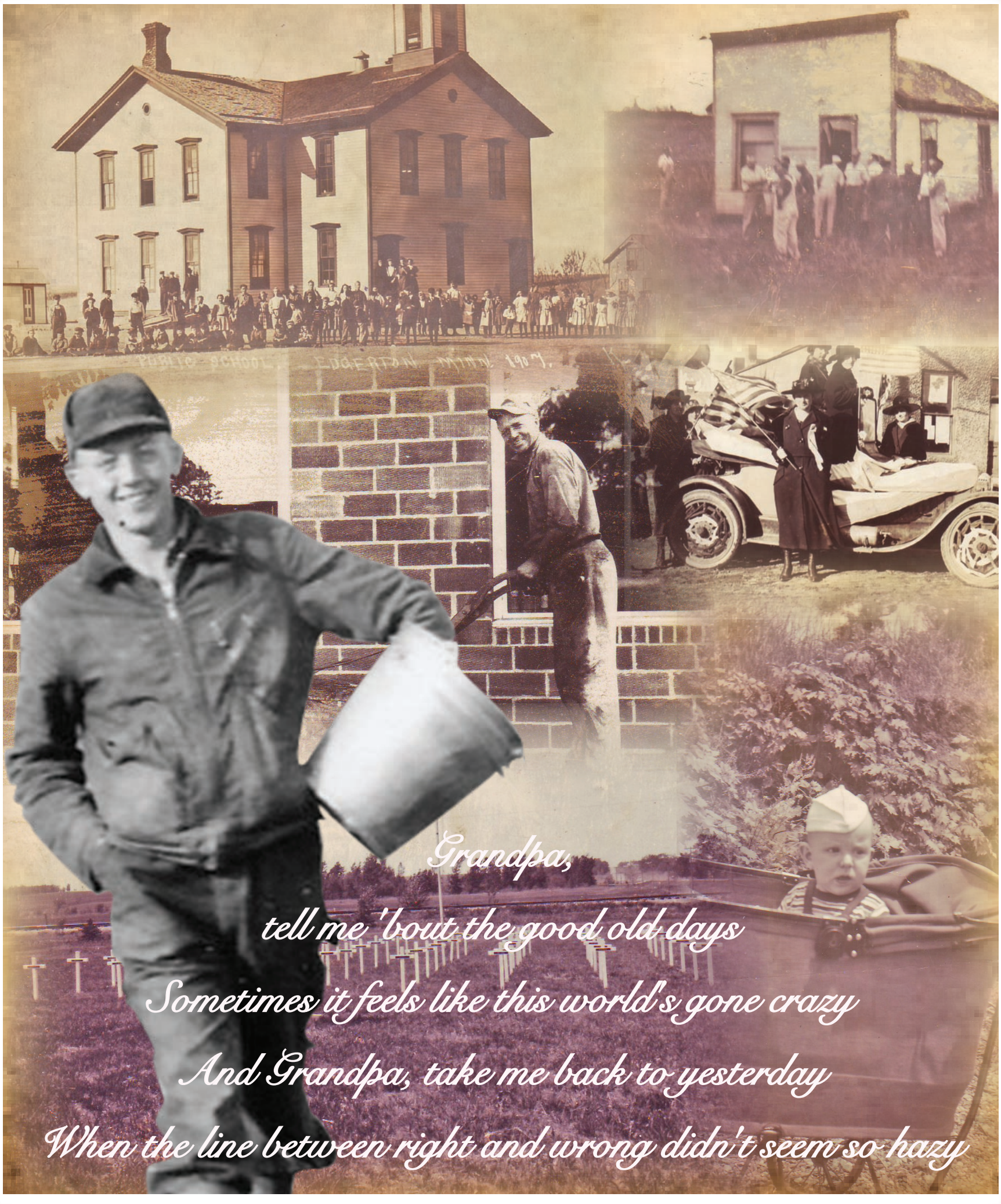


Grandpa,

tell me 'bout the good old days

Sometimes it feels like this world's gone crazy

And Grandpa, take me back to yesterday

When the line between right and wrong didn't seem so hazy

Cover them with a blanket of love

. . . Jennie Van Essen

Jennie Van Essen preparing a quilt.

by Jill Fennema

Quilting is an art form that used to be a necessity for life. Sewing warm blankets out of leftover pieces of fabric was one of the things that many a pioneer woman needed to be able to do.

Today, quilting has become a hobby or craft that is less about necessity and more about art. However, for a group of women in Edgerton, quilting is about helping those in need.

Each week at the home of Jennie Van Essen, a group of gals works together to make quilts for the homeless and for anyone in need. Their comfy quilts are delivered to Cary, Mississippi, Hope Haven in Iowa, and locally to the Volunteers in Mercy out of Pipestone. A group that goes on a mission trip to Mexico also brings quilts to needy people there.

"I don't like to be cold," Jennie says. "So I think about those people."

This type of work started about 22 years ago. The Banquet in Sioux Falls, an organization that helps feed the homeless, ran a campaign called "Cover them with a blanket of love." Jenny heard the advertisement and made a decision to help.

"It became a community effort," Jennie said. Women came with their sewing machines and their ironing boards to Runals Memorial Building. Approximately 100 women came together for four days of work (two days in mid November 1994 and two days later in the month) to make 68 quilts. They donated their time and yards of denim, double knit fabric, flannel, and yarn for the quilts.

After that initial work of making blankets for The Banquet, Jennie decided to continue to make quilts on her own. She would call her friends to come help with tying. It has grown into an in-home industry from there, with the group making approximately 200 quilts each year.

Even though the work they are doing is serious work, filling a need in the life of someone who has fallen on hard times, these women enjoy their work and make their work sessions into a social event.

The fabric they use is donated and recycled. Hope Haven donates fabric often and others who know about Jennie's quilting group also give her fabric.

Grace Schelhaas sews the quilt's front and back together.

Jennie explained that when families start going through Grandma's house, they often find unused fabric – sometimes large quantities of brand new yardage that they bring to her.

But not all the fabric is brand new. Some is donated from crafters who thought they would use the fabric but didn't. Other people donate nice sheets or draperies that can easily be cut into quilt squares.

Jenny does not cut up old clothing, with the exception of some denim. Jean fabric makes for a warm blanket, but can be difficult to work with. "I focus on warmth rather than beauty," Jenny said.

The quilting process that the ladies use is much like that of women of old, but they do use modern conveniences whenever that is available.

Jennie's niece, Grace Schelhaas, is one of the many volunteers who help out. She cuts a lot of quilt squares for the group. Jennie takes the squares and designs a pattern and then Dena Hibma, another volunteer, sews the quilt squares together.

The group usually uses a 6-inch size quilt square, but the blankets are made in all sizes, from infant and crib blankets to queen size bedspreads.

Once the quilt squares are sewn together, a group of 4 to 6 women trim a backing to fit the quilt and put the two pieces together on a quilt frame to be tied. They use pieces of yarn tied at the corners of the squares to "quilt" the two layers together. Sometimes they only tie every other square, and other times they tie each square.

Jennie likes to put batting between the layers because that makes for a softer, warmer blanket, but she does not always have enough batting on hand to do that.

Once the squares are all tied to the backing, the backing is trimmed and a couple more women will carefully fold and pin the edges. This is tedious work and one needs to make sure that the blanket remains square throughout the entire process.

Then another volunteer will sew all the way around the four edges. Oft-times that work is done by Tressa Ryswyk. But others also help out as their time allows.

Murial Walhof has been

Dena Hibma (left) and Murial Walhof pin layers of a quilt together.

A group of four women work on tying a quilt on a quilt frame. Pictured are Marie Dyke, Rena Tinklenberg, Gert DeJong, and Arlene Vahl.

helping with the quilts for about 10 years. She says that she really enjoys the work. “It’s good to be doing something worthwhile,” she said. She also enjoys the social aspects and having a good time with other women.

None of the women involved wanted the spotlight to be on them, especially Jennie. The work they do together is a labor of love and they are glad to be able to help others in need.

“It’s a hobby I enjoy,” Jennie added. “We all have a good time.”

An array of beautiful quilts ready to cover those in need.

Attending high school -

was considered to be highly educated . . . Pete De Kam

Pete De Kam - 1960

by Jill Fennema

Peter De Kam was born and raised in Sanborn, Iowa. He was the 1st of 12 children born to Andrew and Elizabeth De Kam. When he was a teenager, his family moved to Leota. He attended Edgerton Christian Elementary School until he graduated from the 10th grade.

As was quite customary at the time, he stayed home and helped on the farm for the next year. In the fall of 1949, he began attending high school at Western Christian High School in Hull, Iowa. Southwest MN Christian had not opened yet and other parents from the area were sending their children to Western for high school. Pete recalls traveling to Iowa with Rolly Christians and Bert Schelhaas regularly.

He graduated from high school in 1952. Many were being drafted into the Korean War, so Pete made the decision to join the Air Force. After his training, he spent two years at Clark Air Force base in the Philippines. Pete says that he learned a lot in the Air Force – about people, places, morse code, and even typing.

One of his duties was to listen to the voice/radio communications and send and receive morse code messages. Pete served in the Air Force from 1953 to 1957.

Also in 1953, he married Esther Bolt. After their wedding, Pete went overseas for two years. When he returned to the United States he and Esther were in Warner-Robins, Georgia, for two years, where Pete was stationed at Robins AFB.

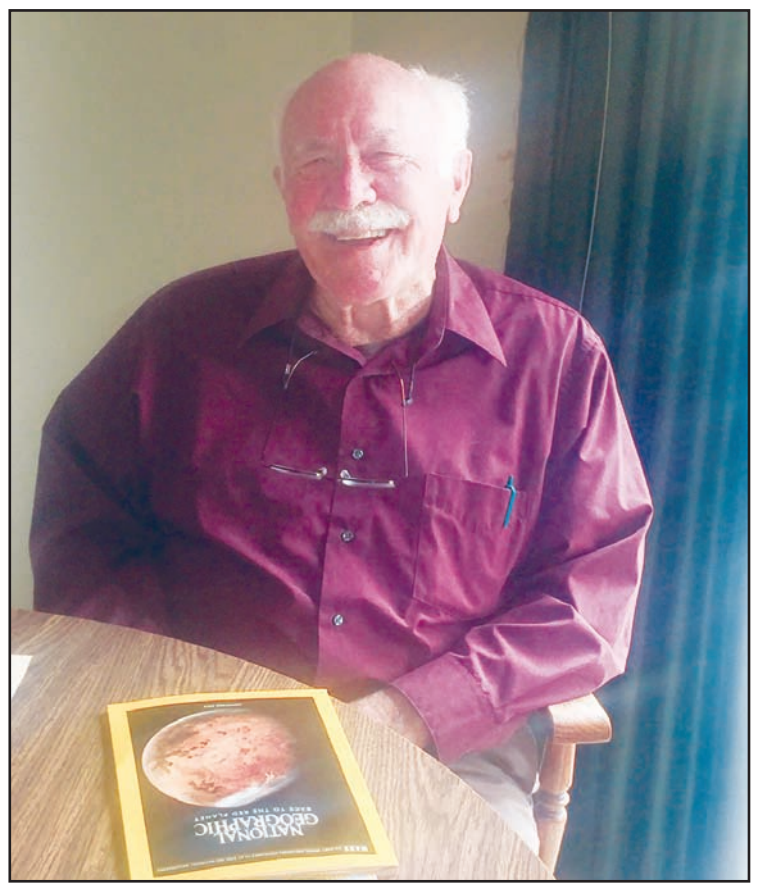
After his service to his country expired, Pete made the decision to attend Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. The government paid him $160 a month for 36 months. He used that money to pay their living expenses and his tuition.

He pointed out that today, families often help support their children through college. He did not have that luxury. In fact, it took him five years to complete his four-year degree because he took a year off to work and earn money.

For the sake of comparison, the average family income in 1950 was $3,300 and a median home cost $7,354. When Pete was at Calvin College, his tuition was about $500 per year.

In 2014, the average family income was $51,000, the median home price was $188,900 and tuition at Calvin was about $30,000.

College now is much more expensive than it was back then, but more and more students attend some kind of post-secondary education because it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a job without that extra eucation.



Pete De Kam

Pete said that while he highly values his liberal arts education, he can see that it is not for everyone. “I like it best when a student can find a useful place to serve,” Pete said. In his opinion that is more important than attending a four-year college.

He recalls that when he was young, attending high school was considered to be highly educated. Many of his classmates quit school after the 8th grade. In our modern times, even a bachelor’s degree is considered commonplace.

> “I like it best when a student can find a useful place to serve.”

While at Calvin College, Pete studied history, English, German, and education. After teaching for 7 years in Fremont, Michigan, he came home to Leota and taught 7th and 8th grade for the next 25 years.

Pete’s work at Leota Christian was certainly not commonplace. His position there was and is a rarity. Most schools have a separate principal, but Pete was both the principal and the 7th and 8th grade teacher for 25 years. This is a concept used in small schools with multi-grade classrooms.

At Leota Christian, there were five classrooms. One each for kindergarten, first and second grades, third and fourth grades, fifth and sixth grades, and seventh and eighth grades.

The curriculum included music and art, but not physical education, which was added in the early years of Pete’s work in Leota. In the 1990’s, Spanish instruction was added.

Sometimes, PE was simply the students doing jumping jacks or other ordinary exercises in the classroom. But eventually it evolved into or-

Class of 1970 - Front: Ivan Schelhaas, Ron Vander Lugt, Dave Hamm, Randy Lubben. Middle: Mr. Peter De Kam, Laura Van Dyke, Myron Hulstein, Arla Vis, Douglas Van Peursem, Beth Vander Ziel, Delton Sas. Back: Mark Sas, Anne Koelewyn, Keith Esselink, Verlyn De Kam, Mark Gunnink, Colin Feikema, Verna Rozeboom, Brad Mouw.

Class of 1995 - Rebecca Schuller, Darin Beckering, Jeremy Van Dyke, Mr. Pete De Kam.

Above - Pete and Esther De Kam on their wedding day.
Below - Pete and Esther De Kam, 1985

ganized basketball, softball, soccer, track, and tumbling activities.

Pete said he had to learn these sports by reading about them in order to teach the basic skills. In 1972, Leota added a gymnasium to the school to support the work of the teachers.

Whether the subject to be taught was literature, English, Bible, history, math, or science, Pete enjoyed them, but if he had to choose a favorite it would be history. But he quickly pointed out that he learned a lot when he had to teach subjects that were not his strong suit.

Throughout his own college education and his teaching career, Pete had the love and support of his wife Esther. Esther stayed home with their children in the beginning, but eventually took a job working at Edgebrook Care Center. Later she worked as a cook at the school before returning again to work in activities at Edgebrook.

"She loved her work at Edgebrook,"Pete recalls. She was superb with our children. She was a kind and happy mother." He appreciated all that she did for their family while he was so busy teaching.

In the couple's autumn years, Esther was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. She was able to live at home until she suffered a fall in 2009. She then moved into the Edgebrook Care Center and passed away in March 2012.

The couple's five children mostly live nearby. Ron lives in Watertown, S.D., and Evonne Bierlink lives in Lynden, Wash. Jan Fey lives here in Edgerton. Sharon Giese lives in Slayton, and Debra Buys lives in Chandler. Pete has 16 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

Now in his later years, Pete is one that is still always reading and learning. He enjoys watching birds and knows many by sight. He also enjoys gardening and even makes his own wine. Traveling, biking, woodworking, and watching sports on television are also in is his field of interest.

The White Girl and the Indians ... *Kathryn Kok*

By Faith De Kam

Editors Note: At the historical time of these events, Native Americans were called Indians. The main character in our story was friends with the Indians and they had no problem with her calling them such, as long as the term "Indian" was used with respect.

Come with me on a journey. Not just an ordinary journey but one with many twists and turns. This is my mother, Kathryn Schaap Kok's story. I doubt any of you knew her or even heard of her. Some years back Bertha Baker, Lance Van Dyke, and Gerrit and Dorothy Esselink and a few others from our community knew her in Hills, Minnesota. She lived in Hills for a time, after marrying my dad, Rev. Gareth S. Kok.

My mother died when I was 13 years old. She was 39. It's a pain in my story that always feels fresh, no matter how many years have passed. But I also feel joy in remembering her, because her short life story is so rich with adventure, love and compassion for those around her.

Kathryn was born in 1911 to John and Jennie Schaap who farmed in Iowa. Kathryn's grandfather, Jacob Schaap, was a "land agent" or a "speculator." He encouraged John and Jennie to take their six children and move to Timber Lake, South Dakota. The Homestead Act was in effect and there was good land to be had. The family moved. The following years there was a serious drought. For three years there was no rain and no crops. The Schaap family then moved to Rowena, South Dakota.

Kathryn stayed behind in Timber Lake to graduate from the Timber Lake High School in 1928. After graduation she attended Sioux Falls College and was offered a teaching position at the White Horse Trading Post, in Dewey County, South Dakota, on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation.

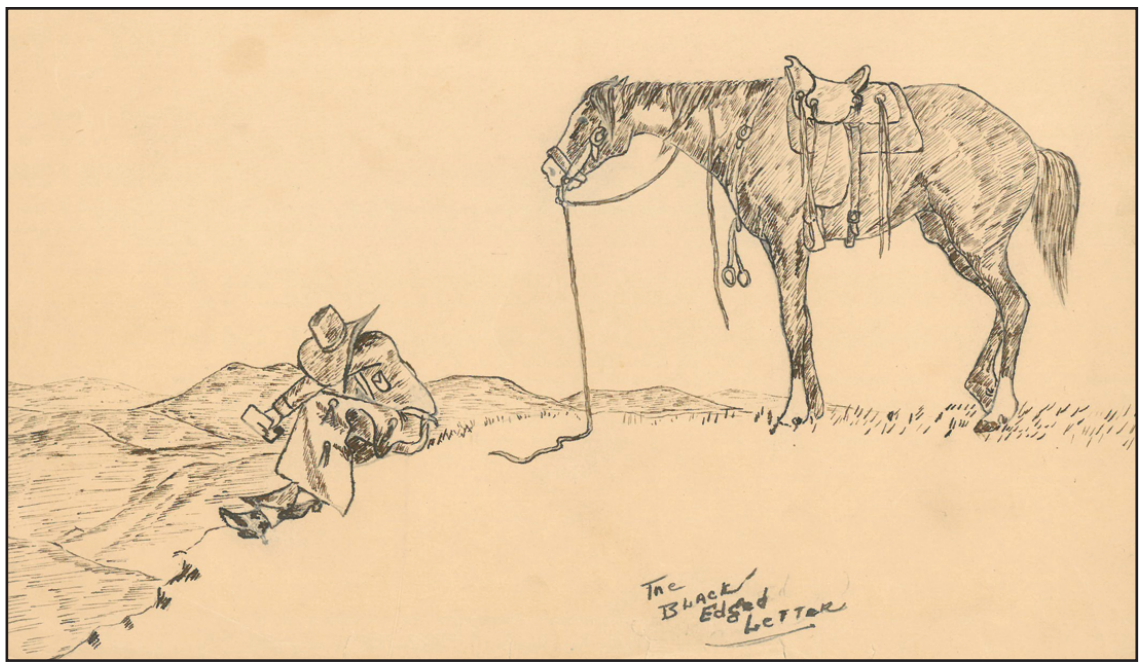
Kathryn's parents were fearful for their young daughter, a white girl, to be alone on the reservation, so they sent her seven year old brother, Raymond, to stay with her for some time and attend school there also. Raymond helped her with the school chores such as stoking the stove, tying up the horses for the students, cleaning the schoolhouse, helping with the lunch and, of course, protecting his sister, Kathryn. Actually she was safe, the native Americans loved her and would not have harmed her.

Kathryn Schaap Kok

Kathryn wrote a series of articles for the Hills, Minnesota Crescent newspaper in 1934. These are excerpts from those writings. Along with these stories there were many hand drawn pen and ink and colored drawings by young Indian boys of White Horse. These pictures depict the lives of cowboys and Indians. For the most part these stories and pictures have been stored in a manila envelope, stuck in closets and drawers, and moved across country several times for over 80 years.

Here begins my mother's story of her life on the Indian Reservation. The year was 1931.

"Let's go to the Indian Trading Post, White Horse, South Dakota. We will travel from Timber Lake, SD for a seventeen mile trip to the southeast where White Horse is located. The road is no longer gravel; it's a dirt path and is very narrow and winding. The only life you see along these prairie roads is a



The four pictured drawings and watercolor print were done by Kathryn's students. Her family tried to find the original artists to no avail.

Gareth and Katheryn Kok

prairie dog town, a few cowboys, a group of coyotes in the distance and some monstrous jack rabbits among the bushes and cactus."

The Indian Reservation School

"The one room schoolhouse is facing south with many windows on the east side. Attached to the west side is the Teacherage, which is the teacher's private home. It has a living room, which is small and cozy with two large windows, a Congoleum rug on the floor, a library table, a large leather rocker, a bookcase and ordinary chairs. The tiny kitchen had a gasoline range and other kitchen furniture. My bedroom has a single bed, dresser and chair. The pot belly stove nicely warms my rooms. Thus you see my home was quite comfortable."

The classroom

"Now step with me into the classroom. It is class time and all the children are in their places. My students are many ages starting at age 6 through age 18. Perhaps you would like to meet some of the children. I cannot introduce you to all of them for there are about thirty in all".

"This little lad seated by the window is Elmer On The Tree, and there is Lucy Takes The Knife, in the front seat is Julia Eagle Star, others are Henry Good Bear, Leona Swift Foot, Timothy Swan, Eugene Iron Bird and Lewis Eats Plenty. These are not nicknames, but real Indian names."

"It's almost lunch time. When I first came to White Horse it struck me that the children did not take lunches to school but only a lollipop or other candy. It seemed to me, however, the children needed more substantial food if they were to do well at their studies, and for that reason I started playing mother to them."

As long as I was there I served hot lunches during noon hour. Uncle Sam was a great help to me for the government soon agreed to furnish the groceries as long as I would do the work. The children soon learned to like macaroni, tomatoes, prunes, cocoa and hard tack. This was one of the reasons they were quite faithful attending school."

Indian Children At Play

"The children play "hide and go seek" and other made –up games. Baseball is their favorite game. The girls were equally good at playing this game as the boys were. At the county Rally Days the White Horse school would take the baseball banner."

"One day I noticed a great many lasso ropes in the boy's cloak room. The Indian boys loved to play cowboy, and early learn to use the lasso and are quite expert at roping. However, there were an unusual number of lassos so I knew something was up. At noon hour, lo and behold, there they were taking turns at trying to lasso the galvanized ball at the end of the schoolhouse roof. One boy was straddling the roof to unfasten the ropes. This was considered a wonderful game and when permitted to play it, they would never tire."

On rainy days the boys would spend noon hour making marbles of the sticky gumbo, then lay them on boards to dry for several days. They used the gumbo marbles and sling shots to target shoot. Sometimes they play peaceably and then again they were quite war-like."

The Indian Home

As we approach the Indian home you notice the Indian Squaws and children are basking in the sunshine, for when weather permits they love to squat in the sand. They are well covered with clothing and shawls. The women are very shy and when a stranger draws near they pick up their papooses and hurry into their homes. We are no longer strangers and Mrs. Takes The Knife invites us into her home. Her home consists of one room about 15 feet by 30 feet. This room serves as a kitchen, living room, dining room, and work room. Very few homes have two rooms. The walls are plastered with mud and the roof is made of branches covered with mud. The windows are few and very small. In the winter they are covered with hides to keep out the cold. The floor is made of rough boards, in other homes they are merely dirt.

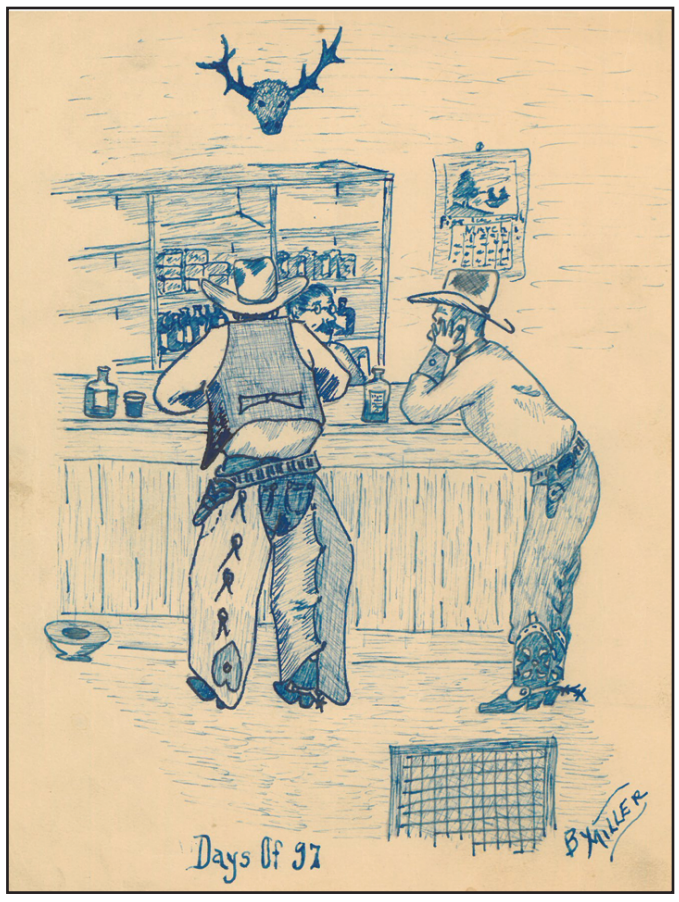
Now, what is Mrs. Takes the Knife going to do? I know it is supper time. You wonder what we may expect for supper. Well, that is hard telling. You might get something you wouldn't think of eating. The

Indian eats the meat of such as skunks, prairie dogs, coyotes, common dogs and animals found dead in the pastures. I notice the soup kettle is on the stove. Shall we stay?"

The Health of the Indian

"When you read about Indians in story books, you often picture them as a hard and strong race of people. You think of them as crafty and stalwart. The Indians among whom I lived were far from true to such pictures. They are not strong and healthy, for the greater part they are not robust. They were compelled to live under conditions ideal for disease.

The most prevalent disease found on the reservation is the dreaded tuberculosis. It can well be called a plague; it simply mows the Indians down.



Not a few children have the disease themselves. Sometimes such children will be sent away to receive special care which the government provides free of charge, but very often the child is kept at home where recovery is out of the question. He no longer goes outside and when you call at the home you will find the child in bed wasting away and perhaps before the last flower of summer has faded you will notice a new grave on the top of the Butte. Tuberculosis has another victim. Thus young and old are menaced by this enemy.

I had to be ever on the watch for Trachoma, a contagious eye disease. It is not fatal but often leaves the eyes permanently injured when not given medical care."

An Indian Funeral

The Indian funeral service has a short sermon in the Lakota language, the audience sings and a prayer is said. The cemetery is on a high Butte not far from the school. The procession is very slow. The hearse is, in many cases, nothing but an ordinary lumber wagon or an old Model T Ford. The Indians have not gotten away from all the ancient superstitions. Often food is placed in the coffin, sometimes a saddle or a gun or other valuables are buried with the person. Some of the older Indians believe they will need these things when they come to the Happy Hunting

Grounds."

"The mourning begins in earnest soon after sunset, when the women go out upon a hill or Butte to weep and wail; they crawl in the dust and almost bury their heads with dirt thus giving expression to their sorrow.

The Indians may not mourn like we do but their mourning is just as sincere."

Easter Day with the Indians

"I had planned to go home for Easter but due to bad roads I was forced to stay at the Teacherage. The gumbo was so sticky that walking was practically impossible. And for a car coming through there was no chance at all Yet, I simply couldn't stay home, so I decided to hitch hike to the Indian church. I knew that the Indians would go with their horses and wagons. Soon I was riding Squaw fashion on a lumber wagon to church.

Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Makes Life were very sociable on the long two mile trip.

After the service I was ready to return to the teacherage but the Indians were of a different mind. They had brought meals and were spending the day visiting and decorating the graves with all kinds of handmade paper flowers. The graves were covered with flowers until the wind sweeps them away."

Tom O'Day

"One of my neighbors at White Horse was a mysterious white man who lived by himself in a shack he himself had built. He must have been about seventy years of age, was quite bald and had an ugly scar on the top of his head. Although this man lived not far from the school, I knew very little about him than that he had lived there for years and he gave his name as Tom O'Day.

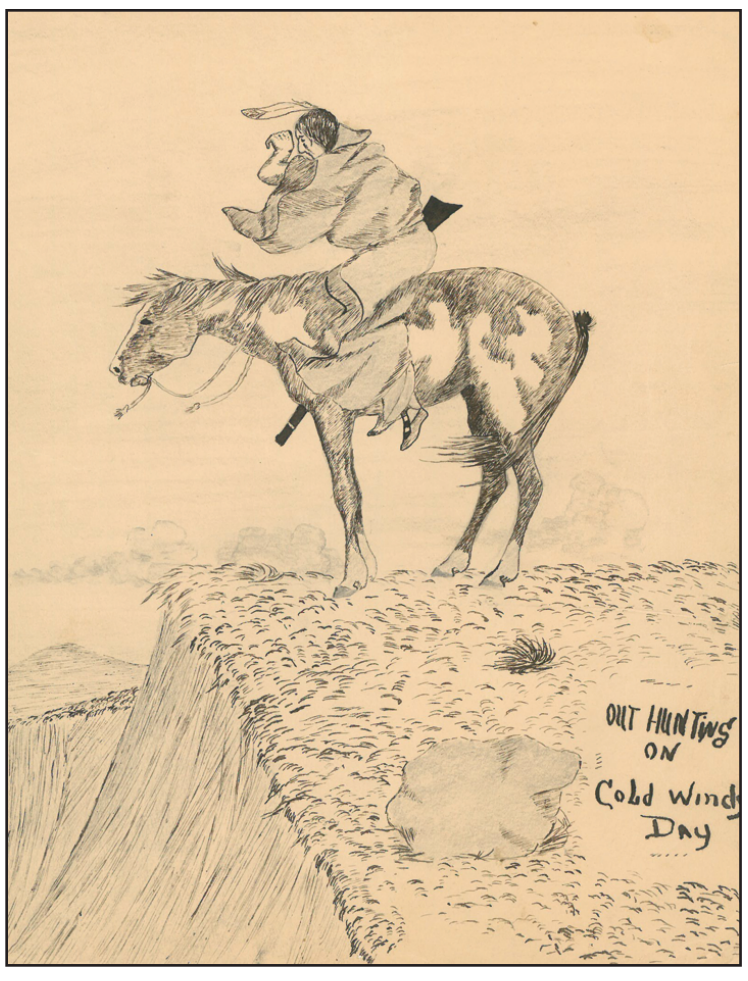
"One day after a blizzard a passerby discovered that Tom O'Day's shack was deserted. They found his body frozen stiff on the prairie. No doubt he had gone out in the blizzard to look after his herd and had become lost."

"Having found his body everyone became curious to know more about this man. His shack was searched but all they found was a trunk containing family pictures. Notices were placed in several leading newspapers. When there was no response, Tom O'Day was buried on the reservation. He was buried with his secrets."

"Some time later a woman from Omaha, Nebraska sent a letter to the storekeeper, Mr. Miles. She wrote that she was an O'Day and that one of her brothers had run away from home many years ago and not been heard from for years. She thought Tom O'Day might be her lost brother. She soon came to White Horse and with little difficulty she proved that Tom O'Day really was her brother and she had his body moved to the family plot in Omaha."

"When the lady came, much of our curiosity was satisfied and a great deal of the mystery surrounding Tom O'Day was cleared up. We discovered that Tom O'Day had been an outlaw, a member of the famous "Hole in the Wall" gang. This gang terrorized the residents of the Black Hills with their coach holdups for some time. The gang was eventually captured due to the fact that Tom O'Day fell asleep while he was supposed to be the lookout for the police. I do not know how many members there were in the gang, but they were all placed in jail. Tom O'Day's cellmate committed suicide and Tom managed to make a get-away. It is reported that Tom was the last living member of the "Hole in the Wall" gang."

My mother's work on the reservation was more than just a job. It was a calling. She loved the Indian people she met there and they loved her. It's an inspiring legacy.



The artistic spark is within her -

leaving behind a lasting legacy. . . Dorothy Esselink

by Greg Masselink

There are a few abilities and talents of which I've always been a little bit jealous. For example, every time I watch the Olympics, I wish I had the physical strength and prowess of those athletes as they run, jump and swim their way to Olympic gold. I'm also a little jealous of anyone who has the mental discipline and creativity that is required to write a novel. And, last but not least, I've always been jealous of anyone with artistic talent. Ask anyone who knows me, and they'll tell you that my version of high art involves drawing clothes on my stick people. Anything beyond that is beyond me. Dorothy Esselink, however, is capable of doing much more than simple stick figures, and the paintings she has hanging around her apartment are evidence to that fact.

Born in 1925, Dorothy spent much of her childhood helping out around the farm and doing household chores with her mother. Her family's farm near Beaver Creek, MN, was very near to the train tracks, and she remembers the hobos that would frequently stop by looking for a hot meal or a little bit of work. Her mother would never turn any of them away, Dorothy says, and if they needed a place to stay for the night, they were welcome to sleep in the barn.

Dorothy attended school through the eighth grade, but art was not a subject that was given much time or importance in the curriculum of the day. She was always interested in art and beauty, however, and she remembers spending a lot of time fixing other girls' hair as a creative outlet. She wanted to learn more about art and painting, however, and she credits her uncle with first opening that door for her.

After immigrating to the United States from the Netherlands where he had also worked as a painter, her uncle found work in Michigan painting houses and finishing or painting the woodwork. He taught her about paints and colors, and the value of an artistic flourish. Her favorite technique for painting woodwork involved putting down a base color, staining the wood, then taking a dry paint brush and scraping over it before applying a finishing top coat of varnish. This would give the finished product the appearance of flames under the varnish, and Dorothy says she always really enjoyed experimenting with the different colors, patterns and finishes.

For several years after learning her uncle's painting techniques, Dorothy says she didn't really have the time to devote to developing her talent much further. In 1960, she and her husband moved their family out to a farm near Leota so her oldest daughter could attend Southwest Christian High School. Busy raising her four children and supporting her husband on the farm didn't leave much time for anything else. "You were a wife and a mother first, and that was that. That's just the way that it was" Dorothy told me. That's not to say, however, that she didn't still spend some of her time painting. Instead of using canvas or paper as a medium, however, she spent most of her time painting designs and small pictures on pillowcases and shirts.

It wasn't until the 1980's, in fact, when Dorothy was in her mid 50's, that she and Phyllis Brouwer started taking art classes in Sioux Falls once a week for about an hour each class. It was through these classes that Dorothy learned how to paint with oils and canvas, and it was there that she really started to develop her skills.

Dorothy Esselink with one of her favorite paintings.

As it happens, Dorothy discovered that she had a knack for painting landscapes, and she began finding scenes around her Leota farm that would catch her eye. One set of three paintings, currently hanging on her wall above her couch, depicts her farmhouse, barn and cattle yard in the winter. Another painting that she showed me was that of a corn field in late summer with golden sunlight shining off the tasseled stalks. Each painting would take more or less four hours to complete, or about four classes with her art instructor in Sioux Falls. Of course, what would a trip to Sioux Falls be without a little shopping, so Dorothy and Phyllis would often spend a little time rummaging before heading back home. Then, on their trip back to the Edgerton area, they would also stop at the Tastee-Freez for an ice cream cone.

Dorothy continued to paint over the next several years. Although she mostly stuck to her first love of painting landscapes, she also painted the portraits of her four oldest grandchildren. Most of her paintings are hanging on the walls around her apartment, however she also gave several of them away to her sisters. Inspiration was to be found in all sorts of places for her next project, and she

Pictures of Dorothy's farm house in Leota, done in the early 1980's.

Dorothy painted this from a picture of her grandmother in the Netherlands.

painted whatever she thought would make a nice picture. Once they moved to town, though, she no longer had a room in her house that would work well for painting. "You need to have good light," Dorothy says, "natural light."

Eventually, Dorothy's eyesight began to fail though, and she moved to her apartment in Pipestone. Even today, though, the artistic spark remains within her. She continues to find scenes that she would love to paint, and one in particular has stuck with her. Through the window of her apartment, you can clearly see the Pipestone Christian Reformed Church. During the winter-time, the way that the snow lays on the rooftop of the church is beautiful, Dorothy says, and she wishes that she was still able to paint it.

The paintings that Dorothy produced over the years will leave a lasting legacy of her life and talent for her family for years to come. Many of them are sure to become treasured family heirlooms. Beautiful moments and memories, captured on canvas by an artistic mother and grandmother, that will be enjoyed for years to come.

Long life keeps family together

Written by Linda Vanderaa in 1986

Aart and Egbertje Bleyenburg would very likely be proud of their family, if they could see how they have flourished throughout the years. They would probably not be too surprised however, to see that nine of their twelve children have reached such ripe ages. After all, they reached 93 and 100 years respectively, before they passed away.

But for many of us, it is a bit unusual to see a family that has so many living children, with the youngster of the family being a mere 75 years old.

Although, many of the brothers and sisters now live in the immediate area, they did not originally settle here, when they emigrated from the Netherlands.

The family explained, "We came across in 1912. We were all born in the Netherlands except for our sister Tracy and brother Henry. Art was only five months at that time. Hattie (the oldest) was 13."

Jennie, who had been twelve at the time, reminisced, "We had no money. And then with ten children – they felt we had to try to get started over here. They were too poor to support a big family there. They just didn't see any future in the Netherlands."

Hattie reflected, "They didn't like that I would be a slave there. The standards were so high then. For example, the help didn't eat at the same table with those they worked for. And you would have to marry within your own style, marry your own kind."

Aart and Egbertje had dreams for a better life for their children and those children, who now have great grandchildren of their own, deeply appreciate the efforts their parents made on their behalf.

Hattie Ver Hey, now 87 years old, had seven children of her own and can now count up 45 great grandchildren in addition to her immediate grandchildren. She has lived in Edgerton for 65 years.

The Bleyenburg family shortly after they emigrated to the Edgerton area.

Jennie Doctor is next in line at 86 years of age. She raised four children and was often her dad's right-hand man.

Dorothy Brands, also of rural Edgerton, is now 84 years old. She and her husband raised nine children.

Abby Doctor, who married a brother of Jennie's husband, resides in Jenison, Mich., where she cared for a busy family of eight. She is now 82.

Albert Bleyenburg, a bachelor in Wyoming, Mich., is 81 years old.

His younger sister, Christina Vander Wolde, Edgerton, is the most recent arrival in the 80's bracket. She just turned 80 in September. She and her husband had four children.

Dick Bleyenburg, Edgerton, is 78 years old and he has nine living children.

Allie Tillema, 77, is the mother of nine and lives in Chino, Calif.

John Bleyenburg was next in line, but passed away a number of years ago at age 62.

Art Bleyenburg is now 75 years old and has 11 children.

Henry was next, but died as a very young baby.

Tracy, the last child, lived to be 58 years old and had two children of her own.

Altogether the family had 65 children from the brothers and

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Aart and Egbertje Bleyenburg.

Aart and Egbertje (Kraght) Bleyenburg emigrated from the Netherlands to the United States, Feb. 18, 1912

Hattie Ver Hey	Jennie Doctor	Dorothy Brands	Abbie Doctor	Albert Bleyenburg	Christina Vander Wolde	Dick Bleyenburg	Allie Tillema	John Bleyenburg	Art Bleyenb(e)rg	Henry Bleyenburg	Tracy Vanden Berg
B. 12-24-1898 Married James Ver Hey 2-12-1920	*B. 5-7-1900 Married Bert Doctor 1-15-1931*	*B. 5-10-1902 Married John "Bert" Brands 2-7-1923*	*B. 1-1-1904 Married John Doctor 2-11-1926*	~Bachelor~ no info found	*B 9-14-1906 Married Marinus Vander Woude 1-5-1936*	*B. 2-7-1908 Married Cora Tuininga 1-2-1935*	*b. 2-13-1909 Married Dick Tillema*	~Bachelor~ no info found	*B. 9-13-1911 Married Carrie Menning 12-3-1936*	~infant death~	*B. 5-25-1915 Married Luke Vanden Berg in Feb. 1939*
Dena Schnyders Ann Miersma Adrianne Hofstee Art Jeanne Jabaay Jean (infant) Arie	Grace Evelyn Harold Elmer	Gerrit Arthur Evert Elberta Hop John Henrietta Gritters Harold Ronald Robert	Henry Grace Hoekwater Art Alvina Bakker Hillie Hoekstra Al Bert Hennie		Trudy Dickerson Reeny De Boer Arlyn Bruce	Art Arlene Hulstein Henry Bernie Larry Esther Claris Jan Lanting Dennis (2 daughters named Gladys died)	Jeanette Rietkerk Art Dick Jim Harold Dan Diahne Reitsma Betty Diepersloot Dorothy Visser		Ethel Steenstra Arvin Arnold William Betty Ann Bleyenberg Carla Kane James Robert Art Jr. Eugene Gary		Wanda Vander Nat Anna Joy
23 Grandchildren 79 great grandchildren 5 great, great grandchildren at the time of her death, Feb. 22, 1998	16 Grandchildren 14 great grandchildren at the time of her death, June 5, 1997	47 Grandchildren 43 great grandchildren at the time of her death, Dec. 15, 1997	46 Grandchildren 120 great grandchildren and 4 great, great grandchildren at the time of her death, March 31, 1999		10 Grandchildren 15 great grandchildren at the time of her death, Oct. 8, 2000	38 Grandchildren 16 great grandchildren at the time of his death, March 20, 1991	25 Grandchildren 36 great grandchildren at the time of her death, June 12, 2001		67 grandchildren; 152 great grandchildren at the time of his death Nov. 7, 2009		no grandchildren at the time of her death Jan. 23, 1974

This information was gathered from the obituaries of Aart and Egbertje's children, where they could be found. Using these numbers only (there were more grand children born after their deaths, we calculate that they had 65 grandchildren, 272 great grandchildren and 475 great, great grandchildren. Modern estimates could come out to many more decendents than that, as many of the grandchidlren listed here had large families, too.

Bleyenburg family tree compiled by Jill Fennema in 2016

Bleyenburg descendants, cont.

Many of the Bleyenburg/Bleyenberg progeny gathered for a family reunion in Edgerton in June 2010. These are just a few of the hundreds of descendants of Aart and Egbertje Bleyenburg, who emigrated to the United States in 1912.

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sisters.

The family remembers life as being difficult in the Netherlands. They reflected, "We were so poor there… Yet, we were always healthy. Mom said we could be grateful for that. We ate lots of dried beans and potatoes, with gravy from potato water."

They continued, "We would eat out of one pan." They laughed, "The one who could eat the fastest would get the most." They remember sadly how sometimes the rich would flaunt their wealth then and light their pipes with paper money.

But they added, "Our dad came here and by doing that made it possible for each one of us to farm one day. People were so good here. They gave us chickens, hogs, bacon, flour – they knew we were a big family. Even a wash machine."

The older sisters remember the long boat ride to the U.S., and eating crackers out on the deck because they were seasick. Eventually, they arrived in Ellis Island where they were examined for lice and various diseases.

They remember boarding a train and a kind man offering biscuits and drink to the entire family and their father trying to explain with his hands how they had no money to buy it. But he gave it to them anyway.

They remember spending the night in the Chicago depot sleeping on benches and entering the Sioux City depot where people were throwing candy over a balcony and the children would all scramble to find them. They were also interviewed by the newspaper and the reporter was sure that some of them must be twins or triplets.

They finally arrived in Sioux Center, Iowa, and resided for a week in their sponsor's home. Then their dad obtained 80 acres by Hull, Iowa, and worked the land for a year. After that they moved to Steen and worked there for a number of years. Hattie met her husband by Steen and eventually they moved to Edgerton, the home of her in-laws. A year later, Aart and Egbertje took the rest of the family here as well and continued to farm here as long as they were able.

The sisters remembered that their dad worked hard at learning the language. "Dad caught on quick. If he made a mistake, he would just laugh right along with the people. I remember one time when he talked on the phone fand he called us squirrels instead of girls."

The girls can't really explain how all of them seem to reach such significant ages. Abby laughed, "Maybe it was lots of buttermilk pop." Christina smiled and concluded, "I think it is probably because we were always happy and content. People always called our family a happy bunch."

Next year promises to be an exciting time for the family. Some of the younger relatives are planning a Bleyenburg gathering at Inspiration Hills. The numbers are not exact yet, but they speculate that the family has now grown to include 500-700 members. They hope to have a more accurate count by that time.

This article, written by Linda Vanderaa, appeared in the September 24, 1986 edition of the Edgerton Enterprise. All of the generation mentioned in the article have since passed away, but have left behind hundreds of descendants. Many of the grandchildren of Aart and Egbertje Bleyenburg are still living. Their first grandchild, Dena Ver Hey, now Dena Schnyders is a resident at Edgebrook Care Center.

The youngest grandchild, Gary Bleyenberg, is still a resident of Edgerton.

You will notice that we spell Bleyenburg two different ways. The story goes that Aart's son Art and his wife, Carrie, also had an Art. Art and Egbertje's son, Dick, also had a son named Art. With so many Art Bleyenburgs in town, Carrie decided to begin spelling their name with an "erg" rather than the "urg.' To this day, although cousins, the families spell their names differently.

One could take a count and try to figure out how many descendants there are from these two immigrants. With eleven children of whom several also had large families of 10 or so, the line of descendants quickly reaches into the hundred. Perhaps you know some of them?

Tracy, Christina, Abbie, Egbertje, Dorothy, Hattie, Jennie; Allie not pictured.

Back: Dick, Art, John, Albert. Middle: Allie, Abbie, Jennie, Dorothy, Christina. Front: Tracy, Egbertje, Aart, Hattie.

Bowling -

a forgotten pastime

The Edgerton bowling alley was built in 1960 by Gary Lindahl of Ruthton. Aqua Lanes was located on Mill Street, across the street from the Edgerton city pool.

This team of bowling champs *(pictured on the right)* was photographed in 1964, we think. Pictured are Dr. Rolland Beckering, Carroll "Coke" Fey, Gene Verdoes, Dan Schnyders, and Walter "Snap" Schnyders.

The bowling alley was a popular place in those days and up through the 80's and 90's. In 1995, when Bob Grafing owned it, there were 62 teams – men, women and junior leagues – that were participating in league bowling.

Lindahl sold the business to Nick Veenhof and Dean Gruys around 1966. In the mid 70's, a pub was added, where 3.2 beer was served.

Randy Fey purchased the business in 1977.

In those days the lanes were filled with bowlers every night of the week and the restaurant and pub were always busy, too. It was also a popular place for teens to hang out and play arcade games. Fey ran the business for a little over six years and sold the bowling alley to Bob Grafing in 1984.

Grafing made some changes to the business in 1998, adding a char broiler to the kitchen. The next year, he sold the business to Del Spronk. Spronk also made some changes, including new cupboards behind the bar, and an automatic scoring system for the bowling lanes.

In 1997 or '98, Grafing had received a set-up license, meaning he could mix drinks for patrons, but not sell the alcohol. Customers had to store a bottle of alcohol behind the bar. Spronk also had a set-up license. However, that changed when Spronk was able to convince the Edgerton City Council to rethink it's "no strong liquor" ordinance.

In June 2007, he applied for and received a license to sell on and off sale strong liquor. The next year, Spronk sold the business to Eric Elgersma, who only stayed in the business about a year before selling the operation to Randy and Susan Lammers. They changed the name from Aqua Lanes to Mill Street Lanes. However, the popularity of bowling had long since waned. Lammers closed the establishment in January 2011.

Later the property was sold to the Chandler Feed Company who use much of the building for storage. A portion of the building is now used by Hope Haven for fixing wheel chairs.

Pictured left to right: Rolland Beckering, Carroll (Coke) Fey, Gene Verdoes, Dan Schnyders, Walter (Snap) Schnyders.