

‘We Have Come to Love Them’: Russian Mennonite Refugees in the Netherlands, 1945-1947

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“We hebben ze lief gekregen” (“We have come to love them”), wrote Hendrika G. Zijlstra, pastor of the Dutch Mennonite congregation in Ternaard, the Netherlands, in her annual congregational report of 1947. Zijlstra was referring to the Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union who had stayed in her Frisian village for about a year and were departing for Paraguay in late January 1947.¹ Undoubtedly, she spoke for many Dutch host families who provided shelter and comfort for these Mennonite refugees after they crossed the Dutch border in 1945-46, just ahead of the advancing Soviet forces that tried to recapture and force them to return to their Communist “paradise.” These refugees were part of a tragic and painful Mennonite exodus from the Soviet Union, a story that is well known.² This article focuses primarily on the refugees’ temporary stay in the Netherlands on their way to Paraguay, Canada, and the United States. It is based on many interviews, archival materials and published sources.

Mennonite Exodus, 1943-45

Most of the early Mennonite settlers who first came to Imperial Russia after 1788 were of Dutch descent and came from the Vistula River lowlands in West Prussia (earlier and later, northern Poland), where they had lived since the Protestant Reformation. Here they were known as *Holendrzy*, Hollanders. In the course of time some married Polish, German, or Russian citizens, thus obtaining non-Dutch surnames. Most became Germanized and some Germanized their

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Dutch surnames. Yet many remembered their Dutch origins and were quick to remind Dutch border guards in 1945 of that ancestry.³ Little or no contact had occurred between Dutch and “Russian” Mennonites until the 1850s when the latter began to support Dutch mission work in the Netherlands East Indies, today Indonesia.⁴ When in 1917-18 and through the 1920s Russian Mennonites suffered as a result of civil war, starvation, and Communist oppression, Dutch Mennonites remembered these followers of Menno and assisted them in their migration to Paraguay, where they established Fernheim Colony in 1930.⁵

This was the generous response from one group of Mennonites to another that had just faced unprecedented persecution. Perhaps in no other episode in Mennonite history did so many, pursued by a mighty army seeking to capture and return them to the Soviet Union, suffer so much in their search for freedom. Towards the end of the war thousands of these Mennonite refugees had arrived in Germany. At the Yalta Conference in February 1945 the Allied powers had agreed to Soviet Union’s insistence on the return all refugees to their native land. In the beginning the Allies were willing to oblige and often forcefully returned Russian citizens to the Soviet Union. Mennonites and others were terrified by the prospect of such a return to Stalinist rule, and many – an estimated 12,000 of the 35,000 who fled in 1943 – were caught by the advancing Red armies and sent back. Many others perished during their trek to the West or were captured by the Red Armies, many of whom, like those arrested in the 1930s, disappeared in the Gulag mist never to be heard from again.⁶

In 1945 many Soviet citizens lived in the Netherlands. Many of them were soldiers who had volunteered their service for Nazi Germany. Others were slave laborers and some were displaced persons. Some 14,000 were repatriated, often with the assistance of Dutch authorities. Much of this repatriation was organized by SHAEF, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, which initially diligently tried to comply with Soviet wishes by locating and returning Russian nationals. After 1 August 1945 such repatriation became much more of a Dutch concern.⁷ Much to the chagrin of the Soviet Union, the Dutch foreign ministry opposed forced repatriation of these Russian citizens and later of Russian Mennonites who had sought refuge on Dutch soil. The result of this policy will be discussed below.

Arrival in the Netherlands

On 1 August 1945 Dutch border guards near Maastricht, a city in the southern part of the Province of Limburg, reported the arrival

of a group of thirty-three “Ukrainian” inhabitants who belonged to the sect “Simon Mennon,” and whose Dutch ancestors, they alleged, had moved from Prussia to Russia some 150 years ago. They spoke a sort of “Plat Netherlandish” or Frisian and had Dutch names, border officials reported. The group was allowed to cross the Dutch border, and was followed by an additional 400 in the succeeding months. Like many other Mennonites who left Russia in 1943, this group had initially arrived in the western part of Germany and Austria, a long trek from the village of Nieder-Chortitza in Chortitza Colony, the home of most of the group. When they left the Soviet Union in September 1943 they had numbered 614.⁸

This group of thirty-three was a close-knit and fortunate one. Most were relatively young, even though the adults looked much older than their biological age. The group was also balanced in gender – eighteen males and fifteen females – making it unrepresentative among the refugees in the Netherlands and Germany, where females far outnumbered males.⁹ The thirty three included Anna Günther, age 36, who at her mother’s urging had left her and a sister behind on the train to the Soviet zone, and also her three children, Helena, Jacob, and Peter (Anna’s husband Peter had been arrested in 1938 but survived the Gulag and rejoined his family in Canada in 1966). Two brothers, Jacob and Hans Bergen, whose father Johann was arrested in 1938 never to be seen again, would later be reunited with their mother Katharina in Canada. Maria Ham was 50 and accompanied by three children, Jakob, Justina, and Peter. Jacob and Adelgunde Pauls were 49 and 53 respectively, and they arrived with their children, Anna, Franz, and Tina. Also with them were Jakob and Viktor Krugel, children by Adelgunde’s first marriage. Susanna Siemens, age 20, had lost her soldier husband Johann in the war, but with her was her infant child Hans. Jacob and Maria Redekop were 41 and 46 and they arrived with their children, Maria, Jacob, Johann, and Peter, as well as with Jacob’s niece and nephew, Tina and Jacob Redekop. Then there were six members of the Giesbrecht family: parents Jacob and Susanna, both age 39, and their children, Peter, Maria, Susanna and Lena. The Redekops and the Giesbrechts were two exceptional Mennonite families without any losses before and during the flight from the Soviet Union. Most of the thirty-three, except for the Hams and the Paulses, were related to each other either by blood or marriage.

In the summer of 1945 the group of thirty-three had found themselves in Austria, but remembering their Dutch ancestry they were determined to proceed to the Netherlands. In July 1945 the group was near Rastadt, Austria, where they were forced to embark on a train that would take them to the Russian zone of occupation. However, in Liezen, except for two individuals, they were all able disembark and

run for their lives. In nearby Salzburg they met a Dutch government official who kindly provided them with food and transportation. Most likely this official believed them to be refugees of Dutch ancestry. By truck they went to Mannheim, where Americans provided them with papers to go to the Netherlands. They arrived there on 1 August. Here six officials examined two of them, Jacob Giesbrecht and Jacob Redekop, to determine if they were indeed of Dutch descent. They passed the test. Later language experts confirmed they were indeed of Dutch ancestry.¹⁰

These refugees arrived at a very unpropitious time. In 1945 the Netherlands was trying to recuperate from the terrible ravages of war suffered during the German occupation between 1940 and 1945. The Dutch economy was in ruins, many cities devastated and vast areas inundated. The entire occupation had been a time of serious food shortage. Thousands of citizens, among them almost the entire Jewish population, had lost their lives, while many had been incarcerated in German concentration camps or prisons.

Many of the survivors of these ordeals were still trying to return home in the summer of 1945. Other citizens had been incarcerated for their collaboration with the enemy and were awaiting their fate in various prisons and camps. In August 1945 the Dutch government was still in a state of disarray. It had resided five years in exile in London and upon return to Dutch soil in June 1945 it was replaced with a new cabinet, headed by Willem Schermerhorn and Willem Drees. It was overwhelmed, however, with numerous complicated problems.¹¹

In spite of these hurdles the country wanted to continue its traditional asylum policy. For many centuries the Netherlands had welcomed or tolerated refugees from abroad. Many Portuguese and East European Jews had found a safe haven in the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century. Dutch Mennonites had assisted their brothers and sisters persecuted abroad since the early eighteenth century when they assisted persecuted Swiss Mennonites to the New World by organizing the *Commissie voor Buitenlandse Noden* (Committee for Foreign Needs). And they had organized a similar committee in the 1920s to help Russian Mennonites.

After World War II MCC was among the first relief organizations to extend assistance to the suffering Dutch population. Canadians Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, who had previously served with MCC in England, arrived in Amsterdam in early June 1945 with large supplies of food and clothing.¹² They were soon followed by other relief workers and additional supplies. In Amsterdam their principal contacts were Tjeerd O.M. H. Hylkema and Herman Craandijk. Hylkema was pastor of the large and influential Amsterdam Mennonite congregation and the founder of de *Vereniging voor Gemeentedagen* (Society of Con-

gregational Retreats), which tried to reinvigorate Dutch-Mennonite life. He was also responsible for establishing the Mennonite retreat center Fredeshiem near Steenwijk, and was active in the *Doopsgezinde Vredesgroep*, the Mennonite Peace Society. In previous years he had been very much interested in "Russian" Mennonites and had assisted them in the 1920s in their efforts to emigrate to North and South America. Craandijk was president of the *Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit* (ADS), the General Mennonite Conference.¹³

In early August 1945 Hylkema was informed by a newspaper clipping and letter of the presence of Mennonite refugees in Maastricht. The letter writer stated "they are most certainly those Russian Mennonites about whom I have read in your booklet."¹⁴ This was tremendous news for Hylkema as it was the first message the Dutch had received from "our people" in Russia after all those years of war. As soon as possible Hylkema, Peter Dyck and MCC relief worker Elma Esau left for Maastricht, where on 7 August they arrived after a long and arduous trip through devastated areas. They found the refugees in a large schoolbuilding that housed many others as well.¹⁵ For Dyck, himself a refugee from Russia in the 1920s, meeting these refugees was an unforgettable moment. The refugees, however, were rather suspicious of these three individuals who they thought might be government authorities trying to persuade or even force them to return to the Soviet Union. Hylkema first addressed the refugees in Dutch and German without a response. When Peter, however, spoke to them in Low German their faces lit up. Hylkema wrote later that it was impossible fully to describe that "stirring meeting" between Peter and the refugees who surrounded him. They laughed and cried and could not wait to tell their stories of suffering during the 1930s and their arduous trek to the West. At the end of the meeting they worshipped together and sang the hymn "Ist's auch eine Freude Mensch geboren sein?" ("Is there joy in being born a human being?"), and at their departure they sang, "Gott mit euch, bis wir uns wiederseh'n," ("God be with You till We Meet Again)."¹⁶

Upon their return home Hylkema and Craandijk persuaded Dutch authorities in The Hague to allow the refugees to stay, provided MCC and ADS would feed, clothe and house them. It is possible that Dutch authorities agreed to allow the Mennonites to enter because of MCC's impressive relief work in the Netherlands in 1945. They might also have felt sympathy for these refugees, who were, as Hylkema has stated, "pure" members of "Dutch stock," and a "true example of old Dutch virtue and resilience."¹⁷ Coincidentally MCC representatives in Germany used the same Dutch-ancestry argument in persuading the International Refugee Organization (IRO) officials to grant Russian Mennonites special status. As German citizens, which they had become

in 1944, they did not qualify for IRO assistance. Nor did they qualify as Russian citizens, but for some reason the IRO accepted the argument that they were Dutch.¹⁸

Soon after the arrival of the group of thirty-three, and their settlement at the Mennonite retreat at Fredeshiem, Dutch authorities agreed to allow more refugees to enter. Problems ensued when apparently that assurance was not approved by or even relayed to the Dutch cabinet, nor communicated to the minister of justice, Henri A.M.T. Kolfschoten, the head of the border guard, Colonel H. van Everdingen, and perhaps the *Rijksvreemdelingendienst*, the State Alien Registration Service. MCC and Hylkema, however, felt confident the Dutch government would allow many more to enter, and in anticipation of a possible wave of refugees ordered the printing of some 5,000 so-called Menno Passes, a document that would allow a refugee of "Dutch descent" to enter the Netherlands. The Menno Pass, Hylkema believed, could be compared to the Fridtjof Nansen passports issued by the League of Nations to refugees after World War I. But a Menno Pass was not an official document issued by the Dutch government.¹⁹

The initial group of 33 were just the first of a total of 437 refugees who would enter the Netherlands in 1945-46. Most of the subsequent refugees also came with stories of remarkable escape. Among the second group, for example, were Justina Neufeld and her brother Gerhard (as well as his spouse Anya, and daughter Lina), two of the ten children of Dietrich Neufeld and Anna Sawatzky. The Neufelds had attempted to leave Russia in 1929 but were barred when the borders suddenly closed to further emigration. They survived collectivization and the reign of terror in the 1930s, but the father, Dietrich, was arrested in 1941 and like so many other Mennonite men disappeared. In October 1943 Justina Neufeld, her mother, three of her brothers and an aunt left the village of Gnadental to begin their long trek to the West. They resided for some time in Poland, but in the fall of 1944 the family decided to have Justina and her brother Dietrich go to Thionville, France, to join brother Gerhard and family, who had lived there for some time. It was very difficult for Justina to leave her mother behind, who, true to her fears, was later captured by the Red Army and exiled to the Soviet Union. In September 1945, when the Neufelds were still in Thionville, they were visited by Peter Dyck, who persuaded them to go to the Netherlands in his car where they arrived on 2 October 1945.²⁰

The entry of additional refugees to the Netherlands, however, was not automatic. Pastor Hylkema, for example, had located other Russian Mennonites in Germany and asked border guard head, Van Everdingen, to allow these Mennonites of Dutch descent also to enter the Netherlands. Apparently, Van Everdingen knew nothing of earlier Dutch promises to permit the entry of these refugees, but agreed after

Hylkema assured him that they would very soon proceed to Canada. It is unlikely that Hylkema misled Van Everdingen and other Dutch officials in giving such assurances as the Canadian government had made no such promises.²¹ Yet, Hylkema's knew that the Canadian government had allowed the entry of numerous "Russian" Mennonites in the 1870s and 1920s and it was logical to conclude Canada again would allow Mennonites to enter.

As a result of Van Everdingen's decision, in early February 1946, some four hundred refugees trekked to Gronau, near the Dutch-German border. At first, Dutch authorities barred their entry, Van Everdingen not having notified either the border authorities nor the government in The Hague. Two or perhaps more refugees, including a woman, Margarete Rempel, were then smuggled across the border by a local Baptist preacher (who demanded a "fee" for his "services"). He referred them to the Enschede Mennonite pastor, Jelle Keuning who quickly contacted Hylkema in Amsterdam. He in turn obtained permission from The Hague to let the refugees enter provided Dutch Mennonites and MCC would house and feed them.²²

When the gate was finally opened, someone described it as "the gate to heaven" opening up. At first most of the refugees went to a nearby monastery where these "bedraggled" and "shabby-looking vagabonds" were served soup and sang a hymn of praise in four-part harmony. Here they were also scrutinized to ensure that no undesirables were admitted. This task was assigned to Keuning and a distinguished local Catholic Redemptionist monk, Anton ter Winkel, known for his war-time assistance for Dutch citizens sought by the German authorities. Those considered suspect, and confirmed as such by Mennonite refugees, were sent back to the border. Although some exceptions were made, only Low-German speaking individuals were admitted and given a Menno Pass, a document Keuning considered the "strangest" official document he had ever seen.²³ But it did allow the refugees to enter.²⁴

The problems, however, were not over. The Dutch government remained in a quandary over the issue of Mennonites entering as Dutch descendents. On the one hand it was eager to accommodate MCC, the generous provider of relief to Dutch citizens. And although faced with the problem of resettling many of its own citizens, the government had faith in the promise of MCC and Dutch Mennonites to assume responsibility for housing and feeding the refugees. However, the Minister of Justice Kolfshoten feared the arrival of many more individuals, and one point ordered the return of some forty-six refugees.²⁵ When the Dutch cabinet discussed the matter on 4 and 11 March 1946 most of the ministers felt that the refugees should not be returned. However it was decided not to admit additional refugees as the Soviet ambassador had expressed indignation over the Dutch government's decision to admit

these refugees in the first instance. With the help of the Baptist smuggler a few more were able to enter to be reunited with relatives.²⁶

Soviet Reaction

The Soviets had been very successful in recapturing Russian nationals in Germany and elsewhere. They were concerned about the Soviet Union's popular image: what must the world think of the Communist "paradise" if so many Russian citizens insisted on staying in the West? The presence of many anti-Communist Russians living abroad, able to stir up anti-Soviet sentiment, was also a concern. At first forced repatriation had been supported by the American and British military, but by early 1946 the Allies insisted on voluntary return.²⁷ The question remained whether a small exhausted nation such as the Netherlands would be able to resist the powerful Soviet pressure to force repatriation of a small number of Russian refugees who showed no desire to return to the "motherland?" Such pressure was soon forthcoming.

Relations between the Soviet Union and the Netherlands had been strained for many years. It was not until July 1942 that the Netherlands established diplomatic relations with the Soviet regime, and even then it took more than a year before a Dutch ambassador arrived in Moscow. Matters worsened when in early 1946 the Soviet Union criticized the use of British forces against Indonesian nationalists. Furthermore, at about the same time the Netherlands strongly supported a United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution rejecting forced repatriation.²⁸ In 1946 Vasili Valkov, the Russian ambassador to the Netherlands, and other Soviet officials repeatedly filed complaints with the Dutch government about the presence of Soviet citizens on Dutch soil. They demanded their repatriation and claimed to have been misled by the allegation of a "mister Hylkomma" [sic] that the refugees were Dutch. They insisted that these so-called Dutch were Russian citizens, that the young men, especially, were needed to help rebuild the Soviet economy, and that they had a real "concern" for unaccompanied refugee children.²⁹

The aggressive Soviet Repatriation Commission in the Netherlands often tried to intimidate local authorities by demanding to see a list of names of refugees residing in their communities. In this effort they were sometimes aided by local Dutch communists. For instance, in the village of Veenwouden, Friesland, the *burgermeester* (mayor) was contacted in a "rather rude" manner by Russian officers, who demanded to know about the presence of Russian Mennonite refugees in the community. The *burgermeester* refused to give them any information.

However, the Russians did learn in a local tavern about the presence of refugees at the home of Arend J. van der Sluis, the local Mennonite pastor. A servant allowed two Russian officials and an interpreter to enter the house, where they asked Mrs. Van der Sluis if she had any Russians in the house. When she replied that she had two German refugees staying with her, the Russians left.³⁰

Despite the Dutch government's March 1946 decision to allow the refugees to stay (provided they were not war criminals or collaborators), it yielded to Soviet pressure and halted further entries. It also allowed the Soviet Repatriation Commission to interview the refugees. Such interviews were conducted in June 1946 at Roverestein, the residence of many refugees. The Mennonite refugees, however, had a clear strategy; they simply were unresponsive to the Repatriation Commission members' questions, often pretending not to understand Russian. The Soviets soon realized the futility of their efforts and discontinued the interviews, accusing Dutch and MCC officials of having influenced and/or coached the refugees. Yet, the interviews caused significant fear among the refugees, who kept their children indoors on the days of the Russians' presence.³¹

The Dutch refusal to force repatriation of Mennonite and non-Mennonite refugees, however, came with a cost. It made it very difficult to persuade the Soviet government to release a few hundred Dutch citizens still on Russian-controlled territory. At the end of the war in 1945 some 17,000 to 22,000 Dutch citizens, were in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; most of whom were forced or slave labor, although many had also served in the German armed forces on the Eastern front. Most of these Dutch citizens had been allowed to return by 1946, but then the matter of the Netherlands' unwillingness to force repatriation of various Russian citizens arose. Only in 1957 was the last Dutch citizen allowed to return home.³²

Housing, Feeding, and Clothing the Refugees

As indicated above, in 1945 the Netherlands was not in a position to accommodate many refugees. The country was still suffering acutely from the ravages of war, with serious shortages of food, clothing, and housing. Thus MCC and the Dutch Mennonites took responsibility to care for the refugees and to prepare them for further migration to South or North America. On 6 August 1945 MCC's executive committee resolved to take charge for all "displaced Mennonites in Europe whom we are able to contact and make arrangements for and to provide for them until they can be settled in a prominent location." ADS agreed to assist in finding suitable housing.³³

A total of 437 refugees crossed the Dutch border in 1945-46. During their stay in the Netherlands from 1945 to 1947 seven children were born, making it a total of 444. For three of these seven, no father was mentioned, and most were born into female headed households (of the 444 persons, 297 were female and 147 male). While most were able bodied – 41 in their fifties; 37 in their forties; 53 in their thirties; and 84 in their twenties – a number were elderly and many more under the age of 20. One of the refugees was eighty-four, 6 were in their seventies and 22 in their sixties. At the other end of the age spectrum, 114 were in their teens and 85 under age ten.³⁴ Fortunately for the service providers there were no “large” Mennonite families. Several consisted of one or two parents and four children, while the largest family, that of Abraham and Katharina Arendt, had six children, one of whom was born in Utrecht in August, 1946.³⁵

To meet their needs, the refugees were scattered throughout the Netherlands. While, the first 33 refugees were settled in the Mennonite retreat center Fredeshiem, located in the north-central part of the Netherlands, twenty-one eventually moved to other locations until their departure for the Americas. Some were temporarily moved to Bussum, Dordrecht, St. Annaparochi, Sneek, and the Mennonite retreat in Bilthoven.³⁶ All of those were later moved to other locations. The largest group, consisting of 193 individuals, was housed in a very large country estate, Roverestein, near Maartensdijk, in the province of Utrecht. Twenty-six were housed with families in Amsterdam, some at the MCC facility. One hundred and forty one went to Friesland where they were adopted by different Mennonite families. This province was well prepared to accommodate refugees; it had cared for many who fled the southern province of Limburg in 1944. Sixteen went to Berlikum, twenty-two to Damwoude, thirteen to Grouw, thirteen to Holwerd, twenty-nine to Irnsum, six to Leeuwarden, ten to Oudebildtzijs, ten to Terherne, nine to Ternaard, and thirteen to Veenwouden. A group of sixteen, most from the village of Gnadenfeld, went to Borne, and twenty-five went to the town Graft near Amsterdam, where they lived in a Reformed Church orphanage, conveniently located close to a Mennonite congregation in nearby De Rijk.³⁷

The Graft-De Rijk experience is an example of how the refugees’ survived and organized their lives. MCC provided some food and clothing, and likely paid the rent for the building. The local De Rijk congregation helped to collect furniture and other household necessities and to find employment. Most of the households were female headed, with 21 of the 26 refugees being female. The refugees here knew each other, most having come from the village of Gnadenfeld. Led by Justine Sawatzky, they organized themselves in somewhat the same way as those in Roverestein. They ate together in a dining

hall, shared common household tasks and pooled their income, which was administered by the De Rijp Mennonite pastor, Pieter Keuning. In early December 1946, much to the delight of the refugee children (five of whom were under the age of sixteen), but also the adults, the Keunings, including their son Hans and daughter Bep and a local social worker, helped to organize a Sinterklaas party, a traditional Dutch festivity during which Saint Nicholas, aided by his helper Black Pete, distributes presents and candy to those who have been good. Two unpleasant events did occur here. Children attending a local Catholic school threw rocks at some of the refugee children and called them *rot moffen* (rotten Krauts). After one of the refugee children was struck by a rock Rev. Keuning complained to the local priest, who resolved the problem. Furthermore, Sara Dirks, the 68 year old widow of Johann Sawatzky, died on 5 April 1946 and was buried in a local cemetery. As far as we know, she was the only Mennonite refugee who died in the Netherlands in the period 1945-47.³⁸

Unfortunately, we have only a general picture about the refugees' stay with their Dutch hosts. However, we can assume that most Dutch Mennonite host families took one or two refugees. The Keuning family in Irnsum initially had four. Herman Keuning was the pastor of the local Mennonite congregation in that Frisian village. He and his spouse An Tichelaar had done much to shelter and protect many Dutch citizens sought by the German occupation authorities during the war. Staying with them were Katharina and Abram Bräul and their daughters Margarete and Nelly, who were age 26 and 18 respectively. Abram suffered from tuberculosis, a condition that was not discovered until after he had infected two of Mrs. Keuning's relatives. Subsequently, Abram was returned to Roverestein and hospitalized until he left for Paraguay in January 1947.³⁹

One of the challenges facing the hosts was the presence of many orphans or female headed households among the refugees. In Terherne, Frederik H. Sixma, pastor of the local Mennonite church, was especially helpful in finding suitable homes for the orphans and sponsoring families for the single mothers. Examples abound. Katie (Käthe) Dirks, age 26, and her mother Susanne, first stayed with the Van der Meer family and later with the Van Dams.⁴⁰ Abram and Heinrich Wölk, age 21 and 18, found a home with the family of Harm and Anna de Vries. These two had lost their father before the trek to the West, while their mother died in Poland, where they buried her by the side of a road.⁴¹ Walter and Erna Huebert, 18 and 17, stayed with the Koopman family.⁴² Young Johann Peters stayed with the family Huizinga in Ternaard, while his mother Anna and sister Maria moved in elsewhere in the same village.⁴³ Also in Ternaard were five members of the Dahl family: mother Helene and her four young sons

Albert, Hans, Heinrich, and Jacob; Hans later moved to Ferwerd to work on the Bierma farm, while his sister Mika stayed in Amsterdam.⁴⁴ Maria Bräul and her two children, Käthe and Heinrich, stayed with the Hornstra family in the village of Rauwert, where they recalled being treated with much love and care. Ten-year-old Käthe attended a local elementary school and learned to speak fluent Dutch, but not Frisian.⁴⁵

Sometimes families were temporarily separated. Eighteen-year old Walter Bräul was “affectionately taken in” by the Hoekema family in Grouw. His mother Helene stayed with the Van Straalen family, his sister Sara with the local Mennonite pastor Frans H. Pasma, and his younger sister Käthe with the Leistra family. Käthe attended the local elementary school and learned to speak fluent Dutch.⁴⁶ Walther and Linda Janzen were temporarily separated when the Westras in Veenwouden could not accommodate the entire family, compelling Walther to leave Linda and son Hugo and find refuge with a different family.⁴⁷

An exception to these arrangements were the young women who stayed with families in Amsterdam. There most of the refugees in fact were young women, most of whom served as domestics who adjusted themselves very quickly to their new environment. Here the young refugee women met every Thursday afternoon at the home of MCC worker Magdalen Friesen for worship and fellowship and enjoyed much of what the interesting city of Amsterdam and environs had to offer.⁴⁸

No major problems between host families and their guests have been recorded. Perhaps the most serious incident occurred in Terherne. Here Käthe Dirks and her mother Susanne became *personae non gratae* when Käthe’s German boyfriend, who had sneaked across the Dutch border, suddenly appeared. Although the boyfriend was urged to return quickly by the host family, the Van der Meers were not pleased. Anti-German sentiment was very intense at the time.⁴⁹ They soon let Käthe and her mother know they were now no longer needed on the farm. Subsequently, the Dirkses moved in with the Van Dam family, where, allegedly, they had a very good time. In Irnsum some refugees complained about their hosts and new ones had to be found.⁵⁰ In Berlikum the two teen-age boys Willie and Johann Epp stayed with the Lettinga family. But for some reason guests and hosts did not harmonize and the two had to be taken in by the Wiersma family.⁵¹ In Veenwouden the Van der Sluis family complained about their two guests who refused to bathe.⁵² Near Utrecht the Hager family found their housemaids, Tina Dyck and Käthe Pauls, so quarrelsome, the young women were finally moved back to nearby Roverstein.⁵³

Cultural misunderstandings could be expected. One wonders what Dutch hosts would have thought if they had known that some of their

guests had served in the German army and some had even supported the Nazi regime?⁵⁴ We do know that while young refugees did interact with Dutch-Mennonite youth, no serious romantic relationships developed. In Terherne two Dutch girls were said to have been very much interested in Wilhelm Janzen, but one local father opposed any kind of romantic relationship.⁵⁵ We know little about the refugees' reaction to Dutch church services and theology. Dutch Mennonites were known for their rather "liberal" theology and progressive views of women in the worship services, such as openness to female pastors. In Borne, where several refugees were staying, Helena Leignis Bakhoven was the pastor, while Ternaard also had a female pastor, Hendrika G. Zijlstra. Yet, in Berlikum, about one half of the refugees joined the church as members.⁵⁶ Dutch Mennonites did appreciate the refugees' piety and were deeply moved by their beautiful singing. They wondered how the refugees could sing with so much conviction and fervor after having experienced so many terrible ordeals. In the end, many host families hated to see the refugees depart; they "had come to love them."⁵⁷

After the refugees' departure Dutch host families were sometimes disappointed that their former guests made few efforts to keep in touch. However, some notable exceptions existed. The Keunings in Irnsum still communicate with Nelly and Margarete Bräul in 2007. The Westras in Veenwouden stayed in touch with the Janzens, including Linda Janzen's brothers Otto and Robert Schultz, and visited them in Canada in 1969. Their daughter Grietje de Jong still communicate with the Janzens and Schultzes in 2007. She is very thankful that her parents cared for the Janzens. Käthe Dirks and her children visited her former host families in Friesland four times. Käthe Bräul and her husband visited the Hornstras in Rauwert. Tjisse van der Weg kept contact with Heinrich Koop in Winnipeg, Canada, who stayed with the Van der Wegs in Oudebildtzijsl.⁵⁸

Life at Roverestein, where the largest group of refugees, 193 at one time, illustrated these opportunities for both misunderstanding and friendship. Roverestein was a large country mansion built in 1884 in a beautiful, wooded area. It was a perfect place for the soul, mind, and body to heal. Since 1912 Roverestein had belonged to the family of Pieter Adolf van Oosterwijk Bruyn and his spouse Antoinette Sara Carolina van Rappard, prominent members of the Utrecht Mennonite church. During the war the family was forced to vacate Roverestein (moving into a nearby coach house) when German and later Canadian soldiers were quartered in the mansion. Pastor Hylkema, who had been pastor of the Mennonite congregation in nearby Amersfoort from 1929 to 1936, apparently knew the Van Oosterwijk Bruyn family and presumably asked whether Roverestein could be made available to

the refugees. The family thus remained in the coach house and did not involve themselves in the day-to-day activities at Roverestein. Mrs. Van Oosterwijk Bruyn, however, is said often to have brought flowers to cheer up the refugees.⁵⁹

The Roverestein mansion, however, did not afford much family life and hurdles existed. The MCC staff made sleeping facilities for the refugees in the attic and on the second and main floors. Women and children lived on the second floor, men and boys on the third. Two big rooms on the main floor were used as the dining area and for Bible studies and Sunday school, while worship services were conducted in the spacious hall just off the entry to the house.⁶⁰ A number of the refugees were elderly (twenty were in their 60s and 70s, one of whom, Johann Toews, age 71 was completely blind), many others quite young; 54 under the age of 10, and these required education, especially instruction in the Mennonite faith as Communist authorities had not permitted religious activities to the young. Then, too, there were special requirements for the care of the very small children, five of whom had been born in difficult times in 1945. A few refugees, one of whom was a mother of four, had severe mental problems. There was also a room for the sick where Abram Bräul stayed for some time.⁶¹

Life among so many refugees in one building could be stressful. Some refugees were very critical and some grasping. Tension increased when the time to emigrate drew near. The majority wanted to emigrate to Paraguay, a country that would accept almost anyone. Fear of the Soviet Union motivated them to leave as soon as possible. But many preferred to go to Canada, where they had relatives and friends who had moved there in the 1920s. But Canada had stricter immigration policies and required a longer waiting period. Refugee Maria Bergen wrote later of a division that slowly developed "between our friends and us, those holding out for emigration to Canada and those thinking Paraguay was the better option."⁶² Still, daily devotions and Sunday services were held and a number were baptized. Daily devotions usually ended with the refugees' favorite song, "Guter Mond, du gehst so stille." (Good moon, you move so quietly).⁶³ Especially meaningful was the 1946 Thanksgiving service where Peter Dyck and MCC representative Sam Goering spoke; the refugees sang Hylkema's favorite hymn, "I Feel the Winds of God Today," and celebrated Elfrieda Dyck's birthday.⁶⁴

Able bodied refugees at Roverestein and elsewhere performed a variety of tasks. Many of them did household work for nearby Dutch Mennonite families. Many men, but also some women such as Käthe Dirks, milked cows and did farm work. As farm workers they were very much appreciated and some Frisian farmers tried to persuade them to stay. One refugee assisted a local barber, another a butcher, and some

in Irnsum worked in a local clothing factory. At Roverestein many were assigned specific tasks. Others often worked for local families. Some came home in the evening, others on weekends. Peter Günther worked for a local dairy farmer where he was treated as a member of the family. Maria Redekop first worked for a local farm family where she was well treated and did a lot of spinning. The family of Jacob and Neta Bergen worked for a Mennonite medical doctor's family, the Zwaardemakers, in Bilthoven. When the Bergens left for Paraguay Maria Redekop and others moved in with the Zwaardemakers. Here they had a very good time and helped one of the Zwaardemakers' daughters celebrate her wedding. For Maria Bergen this was the "happiest time" she spent in Europe.⁶⁵ Justina Neufeld and others, such as Hans Bergen and Wilhelm Schmidt, worked for MCC in Amsterdam. Later Hans worked for a local greengrocer in Maartensdijk. In 1947 some refugees worked at Heerewegen, an MCC home for undernourished children near Zeist.⁶⁶

Departure

In the meantime, Peter and Elfrieda Dyck and other MCC representatives had been busy trying to persuade Allied and Soviet authorities to allow Mennonite refugees to leave Germany. Permission was finally obtained and a thirty-year-old Dutch vessel, the *Volendam*, was chartered. It was to leave Rotterdam and sail for Bremerhaven to pick up several refugees there and then sail for Paraguay. Early in 1947 those refugees in the Netherlands who had agreed to go to Paraguay were notified to be in Rotterdam on January 28 for embarkation.⁶⁷ On that very cold day 329 refugees embarked for Paraguay. Apprehension accompanied the departure. It had been quite an effort to notify all the refugees urging them to be on time.⁶⁸ Some refugees left, disappointed that their Canadian immigration papers had not arrived, and later learned that they indeed arrived days after the *Volendam's* departure for South America.⁶⁹ Among the refugees was 84 year-old Mrs. Susanna Koop, who was carried on board in a semi-conscious state and later died on board the ship. Also included was a tiny baby that had just been taken from a hospital.

However, when the *Volendam* left Bremerhaven at 5 p.m. on February 1 with 2303 refugees on board, it did so amidst thanksgiving. Indeed, it was clear that a bond had been created between the "Russian" and the Dutch Mennonites. On deck the refugees sang one of their favorite hymns: "So nimm denn meine Hände und führe mich" (Take Thou My Hand, Oh Father, And Lead Thou Me). Those standing on the shore responded by singing "Blest Be the Tie that

Binds.” People seemed to agree, as it was noted at the time, that “no one will ever forget those moments.”⁷⁰ They would arrive in Buenos Aires three weeks later.⁷¹ The remaining refugees in the Netherlands would leave for Canada and the United States in the months following. The first North America-destined group of thirty left on October 20; of those, sixteen went to Canada while the others were bound for the United States. Included was the blind seventy-six year old Johann Toews, who passed Canadian immigration requirements, and leader Justina Neufeld, who would go to the United States. The other refugees followed later that year.⁷²

In the end, only one Mennonite, mentally ill Katharina Funk Doerksen, a young mother to four children who were taken to Paraguay by their grandparents, stayed on stayed at Roverestein.⁷³ Eventually she was hospitalized and then transferred to Germany to be cared for by her daughter. Of those who went to the hot and desolate Chaco, many went on to Canada, others re-crossed the Atlantic to Germany, but none returned to the Netherlands. Could they have stayed in the Netherlands in 1947? Perhaps. But fear had motivated most of them to leave Europe as soon as possible.

The presence of some 444 “Russian” Mennonite refugees had presented Dutch Mennonites with an uncommon challenge. While still recuperating from the ravages of war they did not hesitate to extend aid to these brothers and sisters in need. With the generous assistance of MCC they organized an unprecedented relief effort to house, feed and clothe the refugees. They did not consider the refugees a burden; on the contrary, they became a source of great joy and even today many Dutch Mennonites remember with great satisfaction and fondness the presence of these unfortunate but grateful refugees in their midst. They would have been glad to accommodate many more.

Notes

- ¹ Jaarverslag (Congregational Annual Report) 1947, Archief Gemeente Ternaard, Ternaard, Netherlands. Copy to author by Joute de Graaf.
- ² Frank Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, MB: Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, 1962); passim. Some good personal accounts are cited in Harry Loewen, ed., *Road to Freedom: Mennonites Escape the Land of Suffering* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2000). Among other personal accounts are: Mary Bergen, *Journey to Freedom: The Story of Jakob and Maria Redekop* (N.p.: n.p., n.d.); Walter Bräul to author, 24 Jan. 2003; Hans Dahl, “Memories and Experiences of Past Times,” unpublished document in possession of author; Gerhard Fast, *Das Ende von Chortitza* (N.p.: n.p., 1973); Katie Friesen, *Into the Unknown* (Steinbach, MB, n.p., 1986); Anna Günther, “Meine Lebensgeschichte,” unpublished document, copy from Chris Rümke (part of Anna Günther’s memoirs are in Loewen, *Road to Freedom*, 74-78; Elisabeth Klassen, “My Experiences and my Flight from Russia,”

unpublished document, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg (hereafter MHC); Justina Neufeld, *A Family Torn Apart* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003); Susan Toews, *Trek to Freedom: The Escape of Two Sisters from Soviet Russia during World War II* (Winkler, MB: Heritage Village Publications, 1976). A very good recent secondary account is, Marlene Epp, *Women without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

- ³ The story of Mennonite settlement in Poland, later West Prussia, can be found in: Benjamin H. Unruh, *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Karlsruhe: n.p., 1955); Horst Penner, *Die ost- und westpreussischen Mennoniten in ihren religiösen und sozialen Leben in ihren kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Leistungen*, Vol. 1 (Weierhof, Germany: Mennonischen Geschichtsverein, 1955); Horst Penner, *Ansiedlung mennonitschen Niederländer im Weichselmündungsgebiet von der Mitte der 16. Jahrhunderts bis zum Beginn der preussischen Zeit* (Weierhof, Germany: Mennonischen Geschichtsverein, 1963). The story of Mennonite settlement and experiences in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union had been told in various works such as John B. Toews, *Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1982) and *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press 1982); James Urry, *None but Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1989). Some Mennonites from the Vistula delta area and also from Southern Germany settled in other parts of Poland such as Volhynia. Those from Southern Germany were mostly of Swiss extraction. The areas in which they settled, such as Volhynia, became part of Imperial Russia during the Second and Third Partitions of Poland, 1793 and 1795. Like many other Mennonites in Imperial Russia most of those living in Volhynia left in 1874.
- ⁴ Alle Hoekema, *Dutch Mennonite Mission in Indonesia. Historical Essays. Occasional Papers, no. 22* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2001); Waldemar Janzen, "Foreign Mission Interest of the Mennonites in Russia before World War 1," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 42 (1968): 56-67.
- ⁵ Janet van Woerden-Surink, "Hollandsch Doopsgezind Emigranten Bureau, 1924-1940," (Proponent Thesis, Amsterdam: Doopsgezind Seminarium, 1999).
- ⁶ See note 2 and *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 4:386-389; *Mennonite Historian*, 24:3 (1968), 1. Mennonite conduct during the German liberation or occupation was not always exemplary. Some became ardent supporters of the new regime. Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), *passim*. See especially the very disturbing picture on page 227.
- ⁷ Feiko Postma, *De repatriëring van Sovjet onderdanen uit Nederland, 1944-1956: Mythe en waarheid* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 2003), 33-48, 193-199, 217. Forced repatriation of Soviet citizens, often with American and British assistance, is discussed in Julius Epstein, *Operation Keelhaul: The story of Forced Repatriation from 1944 to the Present* (Old Greenwich: Devin-Adair, 1973). Of the total of approximately 350,000 Soviet Germans who fled to the West about 280,000 were recaptured by the Red Army and returned to the Soviet Union. About 70,000 succeeded in staying in Germany or elsewhere in Western Europe. Ingeborg Fleischhauer and Benjamin Pinkus, *Soviet Germans Past and Present* (London: Hurst, 1986), 101.
- ⁸ Günther, "Lebensgeschichte," 5ff.; Fast, *Ende*, 111ff; Mary Bergen to author, n.d.
- ⁹ The names appear on a "Detailed List of Mennonites from Russia under Care of the Mennonite Central Committee" in Evangeline Matthies Neuschwander Collection, folder 19, Archives of the Mennonite Church, USA, Goshen, IN (hereafter AMCUSA). Much information on the group of thirty-three came from Mary Bergen, Abbotsford, BC and Helen Schmitt, Kelowna, BC, who were both part of this group of thirty-three; these two and also C. Brüsewitz, Zwolle, the Netherlands, helped me to identify all individuals in the picture Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, *Up from the*

- Rubble (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 119. Information on Anna Günther came from her "Lebensgeschichte," 13 and 89.
- 10 Günther, "Lebensgeschichte," 5ff. It is possible that this group and later refugees were encouraged to proceed to the Netherlands by Benjamin H. Unruh. Unruh was born in Russia but later settled in Germany where he supported the Nazi regime. Unruh was the author of *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Karlruhe: n.p., 1955); *Mennonitisches Lexicon*, 3: 389-390.
 - 11 Conditions are discussed in the standard work by Louis de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, 12 vols. (The Hague: Staatsdrukkerij, 1969-1988), 11 and 12; F.J. F.M. Duynstee and J. Bosman, *Het Kabinet Schermerhorn-Drees, 24 juni 1945-3 juli 1946* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977).
 - 12 Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, 55ff.; Matthies Neuschwander Collection, folder 19, AMCUSA. Material aid to the Netherlands was a greater percentage of the total population than that of any other area receiving MCC relief. In 1946 it was estimated that about one million people had received some MCC aid. MCC World Books, Annual Reports 1946, IX-4-43, AMCUSA.
 - 13 *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 5: 409. Hylkema was the author of *De geschiedenis van de Doopsgezinde gemeenten in Rusland in de oorlogs-en revolutiejaren 1914 tot 1920* (Steenwijk: G. Hovens Gréve, 1921).
 - 14 T.O.M.H. Hylkema, *Fredeshiem. Herinneringen* (Steenwijk: Fredesheim, 1960), 69. In spite of a thorough search no local newspaper account of the arrival of the thirty-three has been found. Nor has it been established who wrote Hylkema about their arrival in Maastricht and sent him that paper clipping.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, 69; Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, 82-85.
 - 16 Hylkema, *Herinneringen*, 69-70; Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, 84; Robert Kreider, ed., *Interviews with Peter and Elfrieda Klassen Dyck: Experiences in Mennonite Central Committee Service in Europe, 1941-1949* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1988), 90-91; Bergen. *Journey*, 91-94.
 - 17 Hylkema, *Fredeshiem*, 70; Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, 85; Fast, *Ende*, 114-115; Hylkema to Minister of Justice Henri Kolfschoten, Feb. 24, 1947. Archief Rijksvreemdelingendienst, 5.023 dossier 2293, Nationaal Archief, The Hague, The Netherlands (hereafter, NA). It is not clear who granted permission to let the thirty-three refugees stay. Peter Dyck wrote later that it was the "Minister of Immigration." But that position did not exist. Perhaps it was Henri Kolfschoten, the Minister of Justice. Most likely it was an official of the ministry of justice or the head of the *Rijksvreemdelingendienst*, J. Grevelink. Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, 86.
 - 18 Ted Regehr, "Of Dutch or German Ancestry? Mennonite Refugees, MCC and the International Refugee Organization," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 13 (1998): 7-25.
 - 19 Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, 104. Fridtjof Nansen (1861-1930) was a Norwegian artic explorer and politician. After World War I he assisted in rescuing many prisoners of war still residing in Russia and became the first head of the League of Nations High Commission for Refugees. The so-called Nansen passports issued to refugees were accepted by most nations. In 1922 he received the Nobel Peace Prize.
 - 20 Neufeld, *Family Torn Apart*, 129ff.; Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, 70-79. The two accounts do not agree on the date of the Neufelds' arrival in the Netherlands. But the correct date is October 2, 1945. Thanks to Justina Neufeld for helping me verify the correct date.
 - 21 Postma, *Repatriëring*, 243-244.
 - 22 This valuable information comes from an undated account by Jelle Keuning, Mennonite pastor in Enschede in 1945. Copy to author from his brother, Hans Keuning. Hereafter cited as "Keuning Document".

- ²³ Hylkema, *Fredeshiem*, 71; Kreider, Interview, 96. The information on Ter Winkel came by telephone from Father Herman Zegger in Enschede, Sept. 21, 2005.
- ²⁴ Redekop to author, Sept. 2005.
- ²⁵ Kolfschoten to Minister President, Schermerhorn March 9, 1946, Archief Rijksvreemdelingendienst, 5.023 dossier 2239, NA.
- ²⁶ Keuning Document; Minutes Cabinet meeting March 4 and 11, 1946, 388, NA;
- ²⁷ Ibid.; Fleischauer and Pinkus, *Soviet Germans*, 29; Gerardus T. Witte, *Een verre vijand komt naderbij: De diplomatische betrekkingen van Nederland met de Sovjet Unie, 1942-1953* (Kampen: Mondiss, 1992).
- ²⁸ Ibid.; Postma, *Repatriëring*, 236-237.
- ²⁹ Much of the Dutch-Soviet controversy over the refugee question can be found in the archives of the *Rijksvreemdelingendienst*, NA; 726.41, box 83, Archief Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hereafter ABZ), and in Postma, *Repatriëring*, 244-245. On August 26, 1947, *Pravda* accused the Netherlands of hostile propaganda to the Soviet Union by blocking the repatriation of Soviet citizens. *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 27, 1947. A translation of the *Pravda* article can be found in Kreider, Interviews, appendix.
- ³⁰ 726.41, box 83, ABZ; Postma, *Repatriëring*, 250; interview with Mrs. I. van der Sluis, Aug. 11, 2005.
- ³¹ 726.41, box 83, ABZ; Bergen, *Journey to Freedom*, 107-109; Peter Dyck to Sam J. Goering, April 25, 1946, MCC Archives, IX-19-3 Basel Relief Unit; Günther "Lebensbericht," 79-80, AMCUSA; Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, 113-115. At Roverstein the refugees' cook served their Russian "guests" borscht. On the last day of the "interviews" one of the Russian interrogators said: "You make good borscht." Bergen, *Journey*, 109. When Anna Günther left her Russian "interviewers," she said to them in Dutch "dachhor" [sic]. "Dag hoor" means "Bye now." Günther, "Lebensbericht," 80.
- ³² Postma, *Repatriëring*, 258-259; Witte, *Verre Vijand*, 174ff.
- ³³ MCC Executive Committee Minutes, Aug. 6, 1945. MCC Files, IX-5-1, AMCUSA and Peter Dyck to MCC, Sept. 1945, MCC File IX- 9, England Relief, Holland, 1944-45, AMCUSA.
- ³⁴ All the statistical information is based on "Detailed List," *op.cit.*.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Refugee List Germany and Holland, MCC File, IX-19-16, box 11, folder 3. AMCUSA.
- ³⁷ "Detailed List," *op.cit.*, AMCUSA. MCC assumed the responsibility of transporting the refugees by truck, driven by MCC worker, later Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary history professor Cornelius J. Dyck, younger brother of Peter Dyck, to the various localities in the Netherlands. Several interviews with C.J. Dyck, 2005.
- ³⁸ Cor Booy, "Doopsgezinde vluchtelingen in het Grafter weeshuis," *Nieuwe Geluiden*, November-December 2005, 9-14 and January-February 2006, 7-11. Hans Keuning to author, December 2005.
- ³⁹ Also staying with the Keunings was Helene Wiebe who was born in 1894. Reputedly, her father, Dietrich Wiebe, was a prominent "bonesetter" who passed some of his medical knowledge onto his daughter who also served as midwife in the Chortitza village of Neuendorf. The Wiebes were quite wealthy and owned some 3600 acres of land. Dietrich died in 1913. Mrs. Wiebe, Helene Dück, suffered much during the years immediately after the Revolution of 1917. In the 1930s she was repeatedly arrested in order to extort gold from her. She died in 1934. Helene's four brothers were arrested in 1937 and were never heard from again. One was condemned to death because of his three-year study in Germany. An Keuning-Tichelaar and Lynn Kaplanian, *Passing on the Comfort: The War, the Quilts, and the Women Who Made the Difference* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005), 117ff. The information on Helene Wiebe came from immigration card, #5938 of the archives of the Canadian

Mennonite Board of Colonization, Winnipeg, and microfilm copy #1299 of the *Einwandererzentralstelle* [German Immigration Office], MHC. Conrad Stoesz, archivist at the Heritage Centre, kindly assisted me in locating the material; Judith Rempel, ed., "Village Report for Neuendorf Chortitza Colony, Russia, 1942," Web site, "Rempel Solutions."

⁴⁰ Friesen, *Into the Unknown*, 106.

⁴¹ Ibid., 107-108; Tjikke de Groot-de Vries, to author, March 3, 2004.

⁴² Friesen, *Into the Unknown*, 107-108; Mrs. Y. van der Meer-Leentjes, to author, Jan. 30 and March 16, 2004.

⁴³ Johan Peters to author, n.d..

⁴⁴ Interviews with Hans Dahl, 2003-2005.

⁴⁵ Interview with Kathy Reimer, Sept. 8, 2005.

⁴⁶ Walther Bräul to author, Jan. 24, 2003.

⁴⁷ The Westras and the Janzens established a lifelong friendship which has lasted this until this day, Mrs. Grietje de Jong-Westra to author, Sept. 2005, including a newspaper clipping. The author has many more host family names such as Idsardi, Sinnema, Hilverda, Koopman, Visser, Bylsma in Holwerd and Miedema and Bierma in Ternaard, etc. Many refugee names and Frisian host families are mentioned in Baukje Bosscha and Herman Kiestra, *De Menniste Gemeente Poppenwier: 150 jier under itselde dak, 1848-1998* (Leeuwarden: n.p., 1998), 84-89. Host families of the Veenwouden congregation were give financial aid by the Damwoude church. The latter contributed some 3,162.20 guilders to Veenwouden to help Veenwouden hosts. Damwoude congregation, Annual report , September 1946. Copy kindly sent by Rev. Leendert Knipscheer and Onijdes Sijtsma.

⁴⁸ Bräul to author, Jan. 24, 2003; Neufeld, *Family Torn Apart*, 161.

⁴⁹ Friesen, *Into the Unknown*, 111-112.

⁵⁰ Keuning-Tichelaar and Kaplanian, *Passing on the Comfort*, 119.

⁵¹ Onijdes Sijtsma to author, Oct. 19, 2005.

⁵² Interview with Mrs. I. Van der Sluis-Mulder, Aug, 11, 2005.

⁵³ Angelique Hajenius to author, Aug. 2, 2005.

⁵⁴ Friesen, *Into the Unknown*, 104.

⁵⁵ Van der Meer-Leentjes to author, Jan. 30, 2004.

⁵⁶ Sijtsma to author, Nov. 3, 2005

⁵⁷ Friesen, *Into the Unknown*, 108; MCC worker, Magdalen Friesen, attended a meeting of some two hundred refugees at Grouw, Friesland, in late 1946. Upon hearing a girls' choir her "heartstrings" were drawn at the sight of these people who had gone through so much suffering . Matthies Neuschwander Collection folder 19. AMCUSA.

⁵⁸ De Jong-Westra to author, Sept. 2005; interview with Katie Friesen, Aug. 12, 2005; interview with Tjisse van der Weg, May 2006; interviews with Kathy Reimer, Sept. 8, 2005.

⁵⁹ Klassen, "My Experiences," 35-37; Bergen, *Journey to Freedom*, 114; Friesen, *Into the Unknown*, 116.

⁶⁰ Much of the information on Roverestein came from Henriette Sygatauw van Osterwijk Bruyn, Aug. 17, 2005 to author, from an interview with her on Aug. 29, 2005, from the local historical society, "D'Oude School" and the website "Roverestein." The name Roverestein comes from the Italian *rovare* which means oak. Often Roverestein is confused with the neighboring mansion Eyckenstein. There is a brief article on the Van Oosterwijk Bruyn family in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 4:70.

⁶¹ Klassen, *Experiences*, 35.

⁶² Friesen, *Into the Unknown*, 116; Bergen, *Journey to Freedom*, 112. Klassen, "Experiences," 34-37. Further information on living conditions in Roverestein can be found in Matthies Neuschwander Collection, folder 29, MCC Files IX-6-3. Holland Office, and other MCC sources, AMCUSA.

⁶³ Bergen, *Journey to Freedom*, 111.

- ⁶⁴ Ibid, 114.
- ⁶⁵ European Relief Notes, Matthies Neuschwander Collection, folder 29, AMCUSA.
- ⁶⁶ Friesen, *Into the Unknown*, 112; Interview with Keuning-Tichelaar, Aug. 15, 2003; Bergen, *Journey to Freedom*, 114; Mary Bergen to author, Sept. 2005; interview with Peter Günther, July 13, 2005; De Groot de Vries to author March 3, 2004; Margarete Bräul to author, Aug. 2004. The author recalls Hans Dahl's stay on Wigger Bierma's farm in Ferwerd, the Netherlands in 1946.
- ⁶⁷ Neufeld, *Family Torn Apart*, 154-155; Bergen, *Journey to Freedom*, 114; Bergen to author, Sept. 2005; Friesen, *Into the Unknown*, 117-118.
- ⁶⁸ Negotiations over the release of the refugees in Berlin are discussed in Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, chapters 6 and 7.
- ⁶⁹ Bergen, *Journey to Freedom*, 114. Anna Rempel, who stayed with her four daughters in De Rijp, had a sister in Canada. But she did not dare to wait any longer for the immigration papers to arrive. She and her children left for Paraguay instead. Her daughter, Helen Neufeld, to author, Jan. 10, 2006.
- ⁷⁰ Neuschwander Collection, folder 1/48, AMCUSA; Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, 207; MCC file, IX-6-3 Holland Office, AMCUSA, Goshen IN.
- ⁷¹ Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, chapter 8.
- ⁷² Matthies Neuschwanger Collection, 1/48, AMCUSA; Neufeld, *Family Torn Apart*, 174-177; Friesen, *Into the Unknown*, 124. Postma, citing a *Rijksvreemdelingendienst* document, wrote there were still 124 Mennonite refugees in the Netherlands in 1954. Postma, *Repatriëring*, 252 and 255 note 81. Nothing is known about the presence of these Mennonite refugees in the Netherlands in 1954. Most likely, the *Rijksvreemdelingendienst* used 1946-47 data.
- ⁷³ Dyck, *Up from the Rubble*, 115. Anni Boschmann to author, Feb. 7, 2006. Peter Dyck refers to another refugee who married a Dutch citizen who stayed behind. According to Mary Bergen the latter might have been a refugee in Germany who married a Dutch relief worker. Abram Funk, ed., *25 Jahre Volendam, 1947-1972* (Paraguay: Kolonie Volendam, 1972), 9. The Arendt family at Roverestein was temporarily split up. Some of them went to the USA, but others stayed behind with a sick child. MCC file IX 6-3, Holland Office, MCUSA.