

**RE-CREATING IDENTITIES:
POSTWAR DUTCH REFORMED IMMIGRANTS IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA**

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents and my husband's grandparents who immigrated to Canada from various countries and whose stories inspired this project.

Abstract:

This thesis examines how postwar Dutch immigrants who came to southern Alberta re-created their self-understanding in light of their new situations. Oral history interviews which I conducted with nine of these postwar Dutch immigrants are the main sources for this study and are integral throughout. Because the nine individuals whom I interviewed were all members of Calvinist Reformed churches, both in the Netherlands and in southern Alberta, my study focuses on that segment of the Dutch immigrant population. I argue that, despite the dislocation they felt and the steep learning curve they experienced after immigrating, the nine individuals whom I interviewed re-created their identities in southern Alberta by firmly grounding themselves in the various Reformed churches and church communities which they joined and created.

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*All photographs are in the possession of the respective interview participants and have been reproduced with permission.

List of Abbreviations:

CRC – Christian Reformed Church
NRC – Netherlands Reformed Church
RCA – Reformed Church in America

Introduction:

Of the 105,000 Dutch immigrants who came to Canada in the decade after World War II, 17,200 settled in Alberta concentrating in central and southern Alberta where other Dutch families had settled previously.¹ Historians Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer point out that the postwar Dutch immigrants were the third largest immigrant group coming to Alberta at that time.² The small Dutch population already in southern Alberta was certainly a drawing factor for some of the new postwar immigrants as was the fact that those pre-war immigrants had established Dutch Reformed churches. For many Dutch immigrants, religion was a defining factor in their lives in the Netherlands. Dutch religious scholar Jan Platvoet states that church attendance in the immediate postwar Netherlands was as high as 75 percent. This was due in part to the way Dutch society was organized and divided into four distinct “pillars.” The postwar Dutch immigrants whom I interviewed and who inform this thesis were all members of the Calvinist Reformed pillar and their strongly-held religious beliefs heavily influenced their migration experiences. Several scholars who have written about the postwar Dutch immigrant movement to Canada argue that, contrary to most postwar immigrant groups, religion was much more important to the postwar Dutch Reformed immigrants than was their ethnicity (being Dutch).³ In line with these scholars, I argue that through the difficult dislocation created by immigration the nine postwar Dutch immigrants to

¹ Anthony Sas, “Dutch Migration to and Settlement in Canada: 1945-1955”, (PhD. dissertation, Clark University, 1957), 64.

² Only the British and German immigrant groups were larger. Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, “The Religious Ethic and the Spirit of Immigration: The Dutch in Alberta,” in *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity*, eds. Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985), 159.

³ Stuart MacDonald, “Presbyterian and Reformed Christians and Ethnicity,” in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 171; Palmer and Palmer, 164, 166, 169-70.

southern Alberta whom I interviewed re-created new identities for themselves which were firmly founded in familiar, Dutch, Reformed Christianity.

Identity is a dynamic concept. Canadian migration scholar Vijay Agnew contends that identity “is socially constructed and it changes with time, place, and context.”⁴

Therefore, immigration which is a moving of people to a new place and context strongly affects identity. In fact, the dynamic process of identity formation becomes more difficult when an individual or group decides to immigrate because immigration itself necessitates a large amount of adjustment. Immigrants can no longer be the same persons they were in their home country because their context has changed. But neither do they fit seamlessly into the new host culture. Migration scholars Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Vivienne S.M. Angeles note that migration is also not a moment-in-time event; it is a continuing process which affects an individual’s view of the world and of him/herself.⁵ Further, they observe that immigrant identity re-creation is a two-way give-and-take between the new country and the old home country.⁶ Modern migration studies indicate that the best approach for immigrant adaptation is a holistic and two-dimensional process which maintains old traditions while adopting new ones.⁷ As immigrants work through the process of adapting to a new country, they re-create themselves by choosing which old-country traditions and ways to continue (and which to drop) and which new-country

⁴ Vijay Agnew, “Language Matters,” in *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home*, ed. Vijay Agnew, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 28.

⁵ Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Vivienne S.M. Angeles, Introduction to *Gender, Religion, and Migration: Pathways of Integration*, eds. Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Vivienne S.M. Angeles, (Toronto: Lexington Books, 2010), 1.

⁶ Bonifacio and Angeles, 5.

⁷ Jean S. Phinney, et al., “Ethnic Identity, Immigration, and Well-being: An Interactional Approach,” *Journal of Social Issues* 57, no. 3 (2001), 495; Laura Zimmermann, et al., “Ethnic Self-Identification of First-Generation Immigrants,” *International Migration Review* 41, no. 3 (Fall 2007), 769.

ways to adopt (and which to ignore). By making these choices they create new identities for themselves which combine elements of both their old and new cultures.

The postwar Dutch immigrants to southern Alberta whom I interviewed certainly participated in a give-and-take process during their first few years in Canada. Many aspects of their lives had to change once they arrived in southern Alberta: language, work methods, living conditions, transportation methods, etc. But the immigrants also worked strenuously to maintain traditions which were most important to them. For my nine interview participants, their Reformed churches were the fundamental basis of their identities in the Netherlands and their Reformed churches in southern Alberta became an important place of belonging which enabled them not only to survive the immigration experience but to thrive in their new situations. Historians Palmer and Palmer state that the Dutch immigrants who came to Alberta were uniquely suited to Alberta's postwar economic and social landscape. They argue that the compatibility between the values of the Reformed Dutch immigrants and the needs and values of postwar Alberta enabled the immigrants to adapt easily and succeed quickly.⁸ While Palmer and Palmer are right in noting that the postwar immigrants from the Netherlands did not face some of the problems (such as racial discrimination) to the same extent as other immigrant groups, it is erroneous to claim that their adjustment was easy. Chapter Two of this thesis addresses some of the many struggles and problems which the Dutch immigrants experienced as they negotiated a variety of new circumstances and expectations, both internal and external, to re-create their identities in a southern Alberta context.

This thesis looks at the experiences of five men and four women who migrated from the Netherlands to Canada during the postwar period and with whom I conducted

⁸ Palmer and Palmer, 172.

oral history interviews. It explores the developing identities of these postwar Dutch immigrants in southern Alberta. In doing so, this thesis deepens the scholarship on the Dutch in Canada which only a few scholars have studied and it complicates the simple, generalized story of an easy and successful postwar Dutch immigration and integration. The life-stories of the nine immigrants who inform this thesis portray a variety of experiences. They show some of the complexities of re-creating identity within a new cultural framework and they illustrate both cohesion and diversity. Ultimately though these life-stories explain how these nine postwar Dutch immigrants created a new understanding of themselves and their communities in southern Alberta.

Methodology

This study was inspired by my interest in ethnic and minority groups which was heightened during my undergraduate history degree through studying “race relations” between blacks and whites in the United States as well as the issues faced by indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States. These minority groups sparked my interest in the experiences of other ethnic groups which may be less visible. In 2010, I married into a Dutch-Canadian family and became part of another ethnic group of which I had been previously unaware. Listening to my husband’s Opa’s (Dutch for “Grandpa”) stories of his postwar immigrant life in Canada planted the seeds for this thesis project. In the fall of 2011, I wrote a paper comparing the postwar Dutch and Hungarian immigrant experiences for an undergraduate course on the history of western Canada. That paper invigorated my interest in the topic and I decided to pursue my Master of Arts degree choosing postwar Dutch immigration as the topic for my thesis.

It is necessary to explain that as a researcher I inevitably approached this study from my own perspective as a quasi-insider because I married into the Dutch-Canadian community. Since I am not ethnically Dutch, I do not think of myself in these terms; however, most of my interviews began with my interview participants asking how I was related to so-and-so, members of my husband's extended family. Also, though I have no formal affiliation with the Dutch Reformed church denominations in southern Alberta, I am loosely connected with them. I am an active member of the Presbyterian Church in America which has several church congregations throughout Alberta and holds strongly to Reformed doctrine. My Presbyterian Church congregation consists mainly of people who formerly attended various Dutch Reformed churches in southern Alberta. Therefore, I am loosely connected to the Reformed churches through denominational similarities and personal relationships. These connections, perspectives and subjectivities certainly influenced the way I conducted this study and the way in which I have chosen to write this thesis (more on this below).

In conducting this study I had to set some boundaries. I chose to limit the scale of this study to the decade and a half after World War II ended (1945-1960). This timeframe included the full wave of postwar Dutch immigration though the later immigrants were motivated by different reasons than the earlier postwar immigrants and, because of the difference in time, had a somewhat different experience. Since the timeframe I am working with was 55 - 70 years ago many of the first generation of postwar immigrants have died. Thus the immigrants with whom I conducted interviews were necessarily young people at the time of immigration – the youngest two were twelve years old at the time of immigration. I also chose to limit my research to southern

Alberta which I define, for the purposes of this study, as the area of Alberta south of Calgary. This removed from my study the larger urban centers to which many immigrants came and focused my study on the more rural and agricultural areas south of Calgary. Scholars have generalized the experiences of Dutch immigrants in southern Alberta as agricultural workers in the beet fields; however, my study shows that their experiences were more varied than this. Lastly, this study focuses on the experiences of the nine Dutch immigrants whom I interviewed all of whom adhered to variations of the Dutch Calvinist Reformed faith. Palmer and Palmer observe that the Dutch population of southern Alberta is heavily weighted to the Reformed faith which reflects the strongly religious, “sectarian” demographic of the rural Netherlands from which the majority of immigrants came.⁹ There were many branches of the Reformed faith in the Netherlands and these divisions continued among the Reformed Dutch immigrants in southern Alberta. The experiences of Dutch Catholics and non-religious Dutch are not looked at in this study and they certainly deserve more thorough investigation and analysis.

The central sources for this thesis were interviews I conducted with immigrants who came from the Netherlands to southern Alberta between 1945 and 1960. I applied for, and was granted, permission to interview by the Human Subject Research Committee of the University of Lethbridge. I initiated contact with my interview participants by phone followed by a letter which outlined my study, their potential role in it, and their rights as an interview participant. Individuals were informed that they were under no obligation to participate in this study and they had a right to leave the study at any point. At the time of the interview, participants signed a form which outlined their rights as participants again and documented their consent to be interviewed.

⁹ Palmer and Palmer, 163.

I conducted six interviews with nine participants as well as two further follow-up interviews. I connected with my interview participants in various ways: Gerard Schalk is my husband's grandfather. Alice Van Spronson Tams and Hugo Van Seters are currently members of the Presbyterian congregation to which I also belong. The other six participants are relatives of my friends and acquaintances. These Netherlands-born immigrants were all born between 1929 and 1940 and they immigrated to Canada between 1948 and 1957. At the time of immigration, my interview participants were between the ages of twelve and twenty-six. Seven of my interview participants were born and raised in rural areas of the Netherlands. Another, Johanna Guliker Grisnich, was born and raised in the university city of Leiden. Lastly, Alice Van Spronson Tams was born in a small town but grew up in several different cities due to her father's position in the Netherlands' military.¹⁰ My participants and their families were involved in many different forms of work both urban and rural before and during World War II. After arriving in southern Alberta, half of my interview participants worked in the beet fields, two others worked in other farming sectors, the two youngest attended school, and one found a job in the automobile industry. In the Netherlands, my interview participants attended various different Reformed church denominations and upon immigrating they became members in four different Dutch Reformed church denominations in southern Alberta. Educational levels among my interview participants varied. Because of the form of education in the Netherlands which required students to begin following specialized tracks in their early-teen years, there is no easy equivalent to the North

¹⁰ In our interview, Alice Van Spronson Tams mentioned that her family lived in Bergen Op Zoom and s'Hertogenbosch in the province of North Brabant as well as the city of Apeldoorn in the province of Gelderland. Alice Van Spronson Tams, interview by author, Coaldale, AB, (June 24, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 2-3.

Table 1: My Interview Participants

Name	Year of Birth	Place of Birth	Family Occupation	Education	Year of Immigration	Age at Immigration	Location in Alberta	Occupation in Alberta	Church Membership
Peter Bosker	1929	Groningen	Farmer	Agricultural School	1949	20	Granum	Farmhand	CRC
Ann Wielinga Bosker	1935	Friesland	Marine Sailor / Farmer	Grade 7 (Canada)	1948	12	Picture Butte	School	CRC
Gilbert Grisnich	(1932?)	Hoofddorp, S. Holland	Dairy Farmer	Grade 7 (Netherlands)	1948	16	Iron Springs	Beet Worker	Netherlands Reformed
Johanna Guliker Grisnich	1933	Leiden, S. Holland	Chicken Farmer	Private Sewing School	1951	17	Picture Butte	Beet Worker	Netherlands Reformed
Gerard Schalk	1933	Nieuw Vennepe, S. Holland	Grocer / Chauffeur	Agricultural School	1951	18	Coaldale	Beet Worker	CRC
Alice Van Spronson Tams	1932	Schoonhoven, S. Holland	Military Mechanic	MULO School	1951	19	Coaldale	Beet Worker/ Housekeeper	Canadian Reformed
Cornelius Van Pelt	1933	Ridderkerk, S. Holland	Machinist / Motor Draftsman	Agricultural School	1953	19	Lethbridge	Farmer – Research Station	RCA
Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt	(1941?)	Moriaans-Hoofd, Zeeland	Carpenter / Contractor	Grade 9 (Canada)	1953	12	Lethbridge	School	RCA
Hugo Van Seters	1931	Dirksland, S. Holland	Miller	Upper Vocational School	1957	26	Lethbridge	Auto-body Repair	Canadian Reformed

American grade system. However, of my seven participants who completed their education in the Netherlands, one completed his education at the beginning of this specialization, five others continued through the specialization process while one more continued her education at what she called “private sewing school.” My two interview participants who continued their education in Canada finished after grade seven and grade nine respectively. This information is all detailed in Table 1.

The nine individuals described above shared their stories with me through oral history interviews. Oral histories have become an accepted form of history-telling. As with any form of history, the sources of that history are selective and subjective. Each individual who participated in an interview with me told me his/her life-stories in a particular way with particular motives and each story they shared with me was a complicated construction of their own memories and those of others – family members, friends, or the general group narrative. As the interviewer, I have my own life-experiences and background and since I was interacting with them as they told me their stories my interactions inevitable shaped the context of our interview.¹ Oral historians readily agree that interviews create a subjective version of history, but they point out that subjectivities are also found in every written historical source as well. Therefore, while admitting the weaknesses of the oral history approach, there are also many strengths which make oral histories a very useful means of understanding the past.

One strength of oral histories is that they allow us into the thought process of a historical source in ways that written sources do not. As oral historian Alessandro Portelli explains, “Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to

¹ Freund, Alexander and Alistair Thomson. “Introduction: Oral History and Photography,” in *Oral History and Photography*, eds. Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 10, 13.

do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.”² Oral sources provide details which are often left out of written sources because the written sources, such as memoirs or journals, show the final product of the thought process whereas interviews record the full process of thought as it flows.³ Another strength of oral history, and perhaps the most obvious one, is that it includes people whose stories are often overlooked by the prevailing historical narrative such as women, children, ethnic minorities and others. Oral history provides a way for these people to share their perspectives. Often, life-history stories show a different world from the history that is emphasized and propagated in textbooks.⁴ Alistair Thomson points out in his article, “Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia,” that the general textbook story is never true of every individual which it claims to include.⁵ Yet, textbook history is based in and composed from generalizations which scholars draw out of the collection of many individual life-stories. Rather than trying to create generalizations, this thesis uses the stories of the nine individuals I interviewed to show how these nine specific immigrants navigated their immigration experiences.

I approached my interviews with Netherlands-born, postwar immigrants as conversations rather than question-answer dialogues and as a process of knowledge co-creation rather than information gathering. Conversational interviews aim at unearthing information through dynamic conversation in which the interviewer encourages the interview participant to share information through personal story-telling. These stories

² Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different,” in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 36.

³ Eva M. McMahan, “A Conversation Analytic Approach to Oral History Interviewing,” in *Handbook of Oral History*, eds. Thomas L. Charlton et al., (New York: AltaMira Press, 2006), 337, 339.

⁴ Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson, 9; Kim Louise Walden, “Photo-Reminiscence Project: The Time of Our Lives,” *Oral History* 19, no. 1 The Sea (Spring, 1991), 57.

⁵ Alistair Thomson, “Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia,” in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., 244.

reveal what is/was important to the participant and create a deep pool of information from which the interviewer may draw connections and conclusions. Because my participants and I were actively involved in the interview as story-teller and listeners in turn we all contributed to the information that was shared and to the *ways* in which it was shared and understood. Oral historians Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack explain that an oral history interview “demands a shift in methodology from information gathering, where the focus is on the right questions, to interaction, where the focus is on process, on the dynamic unfolding of the subject’s viewpoint.”⁶ This approach gives the interview participant the freedom to share what they want to share.

However, the interview and the resulting information and knowledge are bounded by both the interviewer and the interview participant. The interview process – the interactions between interviewer and interviewee – inevitably shapes and directs the way the interviewee’s perception of the past is told as well as the way the interviewer receives the spoken (and unspoken) information.⁷ Both interviewer and interviewee participate in the exchange of information and creation of meaning. Both are also situated in their own pasts and presents which ultimately colour the story-teller’s intended meaning as well as the listener’s understanding of the stories which are told and heard.⁸

I conducted four of my six interviews with married couples which meant that there were actually three of us together for the interview and one of those interviews also included the daughter of the couple as well. Oral historians Stacy Zembrzycki and

⁶ Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack. “Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analysis,” in *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 23.

⁷ Joanna Bornat, “Remembering and Reworking Emotions: The Reanalysis of Emotion in an Interview,” *Oral History* 38, no. 2, Emotions (Autumn 2010), 45.

⁸ Carly Adams, “(Writing Myself into) Betty White’s Stories: (De)constructing Narratives of/through Feminist Sport History Research,” *Journal of Sport History* 39 no. 3 (2012), 411.

Alexander Freund each discuss the benefits and challenges of interviewing multiple people together. Zembrzycki describes the invaluable help she received from her grandmother, “Baba,” by collaborating with her in interviewing members of the Ukrainian Catholic community in Sudbury, Ontario. While having a third person present in the interview context complicated some aspects of their interviews, Zembrzycki and her grandmother came to an agreement which Zembrzycki describes as “shared authority” in which the two women worked together to engage with their interview participants in the telling of their life-stories. The benefits of this arrangement, as Zembrzycki describes, included the connections and personal knowledge of the community which her grandmother had, the trust that was already established because of her grandmother’s presence, and her grandmother’s ability to draw out experiences and stories because of common life experiences which Zembrzycki did not have.⁹ In a different context, Alexander Freund describes how he intentionally uses multi-generational family interviews to learn how family memories are shared, understood, and constructed differently by different members of the family.¹⁰ He states: “Family interviews demonstrate that our narrators are positioned in complex webs of experiencing and remembering that undermine any notion of the autonomous individual.”¹¹ Both Freund and Zembrzycki also discuss instances in their interviewing when their participants elicited new stories from other participants or provided different perspectives on a story that had been shared by another participant.

⁹ Stacey Zembrzycki, “Sharing Authority with Baba,” in *The Canadian Oral History Reader*, eds. Kristina R. Llewellyn, Alexander Freund, and Nolan Reilly, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ Alexander Freund, “A Canadian Family Talks about Oma’s Life in Nazi Germany: Three-Generational Interviews and Communicative Memory,” in *The Canadian Oral History Reader*, eds. Kristina R. Llewellyn, Alexander Freund, and Nolan Reilly, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015).

¹¹ Freund, “A Canadian Family Talks about Oma’s Life in Nazi Germany,” 176.

In my own interviewing, I encountered several things. First, I found that the four interviews I conducted with married couples had an evident power dynamic between husband and wife. This was more pronounced in some interviews than in others. Usually the husband was more eager and open in his discussion and story-telling, while the wife played a background role in the interview, as a sounding board for the husband when he had trouble remembering specifics. However, when I directed questions to the women in these interviews about their own experiences, they switched roles with their husband, who became the (perhaps more vocal) sounding board while the woman shared her own stories and experiences. These interactions within the interview context illustrate the ways my participants formed the memories they chose to share with me, and they indicate the subjective nature of memory construction. Secondly, in any relationship, there is an understanding about what will be shared with outsiders and what will be kept private and I am sure there were some things which my participants chose to not share with me for that reason. Interestingly, in the interview I conducted with Gilbert Grisnich and Johanna Guliker Grisnich it was the inclusion of their adult daughter Edith Grisnich in the interview which elicited a few stories which Gilbert and Johanna had chosen not to mention, such as Johanna's mother's "nervous breakdown." Edith also encouraged her parents to share a wealth of detail which to that point I had not heard from my interview participants. Perhaps it was Edith's relationship as a daughter which encouraged her parents to share more details or perhaps it was her persistent questioning but the descriptions of daily life which the Grisnichs shared because of their daughter's prodding were very helpful to my understanding of their experiences.

Sally Chandler points out that the age and generation of both the interview participant and the interviewer as well as the differences between the two also influence what is told and understood. She observes that when young adults interview seniors, as I have done, there is a tendency for the young adult to interpret the stories of the senior in terms of what is significant to the life-stage of the young adult. In particular she mentions that identity-formation is a function of young adulthood and therefore the young adult researcher tends to understand the interview participant's life-story and the telling of it as a story of identity-formation.¹² Paradoxically, she also asserts that self-understanding is dynamic throughout life.¹³ Chandler's observation addresses my interest in identity-formation. As a young adult myself, hearing stories of others' journeys through this stage of life is interesting to me. My attention to situations with which I can relate has certainly coloured my interviews and this thesis and it is important to acknowledge that. However, because the topic of this thesis revolves around the time in my participants' lives when they were young people themselves, identity-formation is an applicable topic of analysis and has in fact been addressed by Dutch historian Anne Van Arragon Hutten in regard to the postwar Dutch immigration to Canada.

Keeping in mind the knowledge co-creation process of a conversational interview I conscientiously situated the interviews in particular ways to help me and my interview participant be comfortable. As Tim Rapley notes, the context of the interview affects the interview itself.¹⁴ Having given my participants the freedom to choose the time and place of our interview, in all but one instance the participants invited me to come to their

¹² Sally Chandler, "Oral History Across Generations: Age, Generational Identity and Oral Testimony," *Oral History* 33, no. 2 (2005), 54.

¹³ Chandler, 52.

¹⁴ Tim Rapley, "Interviews," in *Qualitative Research Practice*, eds. C. Seale et al. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004), 17.

homes. Often, our interview time included coffee and cookies just as any visit with Dutch seniors likely would. Further, I chose to use my iphone to record the interview rather than a cassette recorder which has been the standard in oral history until recently. I felt that the unobtrusiveness of the small iphone helped to create a space which allowed for more easy conversation since there was very little to remind either my participants or me that we were being recorded.

In my interviews, I aimed to find a balance between my agenda as a researcher – what I thought was important – and what my interview participants felt was important.¹⁵ Although I had a list of questions which I provided to my interview participants several weeks before our interview I did not start the interview with question one and work down the list. Rather, I began the interview by asking my participants to tell me about their background in the Netherlands and their experiences of World War II. My goal in starting the interviews this way was to encourage my participants to take the lead and to begin telling their life-story in their own way without the pressure of answering my (the researcher's) specific questions. As their stories unfolded, I did my best to engage fully in what they were saying and ask whatever questions came to mind just as I would do in a conversation. Thus, my goal as a researcher was not to specifically and rigidly get answers to each of my questions but rather to encourage my interview participants to share their life-stories freely and to emphasize what they felt was important in their own story.

Throughout each interview I worked on improving my listening skills. Many oral historians discuss the importance of listening well, by which they mean fully engaging in

¹⁵ Sherna Berger Gluck, "What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History," in *Women's Oral History: The Frontiers Reader*, eds. Susan H Armitage et al, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 7.

what the interview participant is saying (both verbally and non-verbally) and allowing the participant the space and time they require to express themselves.¹⁶ At the same time, I did not try to be a “neutral” interviewer. As an active member of the conversation, I inevitably and knowingly contributed to what was being shared by my participants and my contributions influenced the direction of the conversation.¹⁷ Sometimes my contributions were helpful to my participants and to the flow of the conversation and sometimes they were not helpful. My successes and mistakes while being an active participant in the interview conversation are part of learning to listen well and improvement came with practice. Each interview began with my participants hesitantly sharing a few stories but, as the conversation moved along, I could sense the tension and nervousness dissipate as we all contributed to the conversation and to the information and stories which we shared together. In fact, in each one of the six interviews I conducted, I felt like I had become a sort-of adopted grandchild by the time we finished and parted ways.

Oral historian Valerie Yow, in her article “ ‘Do I Like Them Too Much?’: Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa,” describes many ways the inter-subjectivities and subjects of an oral history interview play on and influence each other. One of those ways is transference: when one person transfers to another person some attribute which actually applies to a different situation (usually from the past). Yow emphasizes that this can have either positive or negative results.¹⁸ In regard

¹⁶ Adams, 410; Anderson and Jack, 12; SherryThomas, “Digging Beneath the Surface: Oral History Techniques,” in *Women’s Oral History: The Frontiers Reader*, eds. Susan H Armitage et al., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 58.

¹⁷ Rapley, 19-20, 22.

¹⁸ Valerie Yow, “ ‘Do I Like Them Too Much?’: Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-versa,” in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., 75-78.

to my study, this occurred when my interview participants began to relate to me as a daughter or granddaughter and I to them as grandparents. For the purposes of this study, the results of this transference were all positive. By relating to me as a granddaughter, my interview participants trusted me and became more willing to share their stories with me (though the awareness of me as a researcher may have remained in the back of their minds working as a filter).¹⁹ These transferences also diminished the power dynamic of me as the researcher asking my participants questions which I expected them to answer. Rather than an intimidating and unknown researcher I became to them a curious family member who was interested in their past. My interview participants may also have assumed that I shared their religious values and perspectives. Though these transferences were partially imagined, for my part they were also partially true as I was genuinely interested in their lives and have continued to be concerned for them, asking about them when I interact with common acquaintances or family members.

There are faults and complications within any interviewing method and I fully recognize this as an interviewer. In some cases, the conversational-style interview I employed resulted in missing information such as a birth date which I would have easily procured if I had used a question-answer method. At other times, the interview conversation went in directions which did not add anything to my research but did assist me in building what oral historians call “rapport” with my participants. Further, despite my goal of putting my participants at ease to share their stories in their own way many of my participants expressed some level of uncertainty in whether their stories were of any

¹⁹ Valerie Yow also addresses the issue of how the idea of a wider audience may influence what an interview participant is willing to share on record in an interview. I had a few instances where my participants requested that I stop the recording. They wanted to share a story with *me* but did not want it to become public knowledge. Yow, “‘Do I Like Them Too Much?’”, 77.

use to me which illustrates an underlying anxiety to perform “correctly” though none of us could have defined that standard of “correctness.” Though these disadvantages of a conversational-style interview created some missing information and a few “rabbit trails” during my interviews they did not negatively affect the goal of this thesis.

When I sat down to transcribe my interview I approached this task as thoughtfully as I could. In his work, *InterViews*, Steinar Kvale explains that transcribing an interview “involves translating from an oral language, with its own set of rules, to a written language with another set of rules. Transcripts [...] are interpretative constructions that are useful tools for given purposes.”²⁰ With this in mind, I began my transcription process by writing down how I intended my research goals to affect the way I transcribed. For instance, in writing this thesis I wanted to quote my interviewees’ words from my transcripts. Therefore I chose to make my transcription as clear as possible for the reader. For example, I chose to leave out of the transcript my affirmative murmurings which served only as an indication that I was listening to what my participants were saying and would have disrupted the flow of the transcript if I had included them. Further, I performed a degree of “translative” work by smoothing out stumbles in our speech. This sometimes meant leaving out words when one of us started to say something and then immediately stopped to correct or change what we had initially begun to say. If it was a case of self-interruption to change the meaning of the sentence I indicated this in the transcript with an ellipsis (...) but when it was a verbal stumble over words I left out these words since they were not important to my research objectives.²¹ I

²⁰ Steinar Kvale, *InterViews*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 165. See also Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different,” in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., 34.

²¹ When an ellipsis occurs within a quote inside of square brackets, [...], it indicates that I have left out part of the quotation.

attempted to make these decisions conscientiously as I was advised.²² My decisions to transcribe in this way created transcripts that are fairly easy to read, flow smoothly and, I hope, add constructively to this thesis.

Using quotes from interview transcriptions raises another problem common to oral histories – how does the researcher portray the interview participant’s words in a way that is faithful to how the participant would wish to be portrayed? There are several problems within this question and I readily admit that I am only at the beginning of a journey in understanding the implications of them. First, is the problem of how to represent an interview participant’s words. Second is the issue of knowing or understanding how that interview participant would wish to be portrayed. Third is how to reconcile any differences between the two.²³ Historian Joan Sangster points out in her work on oral history and feminism that, although it is the historian’s job to analyze and come to conclusions based on the information provided by the interview participants, sometimes the conclusions do not reflect the interview participants’ self-understanding.²⁴ These conflicting views of researcher and participant have no easy resolution. In this thesis I have attempted to deal with the first two problems in two ways: After transcribing the interviews, I provided the interview participant(s) with a copy of the transcription and asked them to make any changes they felt were important. Some participants made very few changes while other participants made major changes or requested that I not use large sections of our interview. In every case I respected my participants’ wishes. Secondly,

²² Cindy M. Bird, “How I Stopped Dreading and Learned to Love Transcription,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 11 (2005), 244.

²³ Bird, 228; Katherine Borland, “‘That’s Not What I Said’: Interpretative Conflict in Oral Narrative Research,” in *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice*, eds. S. N. Hesse-Biber and P. Leavy, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 530-532.

²⁴ Joan Sangster, “Telling our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History,” in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History*, eds. Veronica Strong-Boag, et al., (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2011), 226.

in my writing I have endeavored to represent as faithfully as possible what I understood my participants to mean. Although I have tried to be as true to my own understanding as I am able, I recognize that my understanding of what was said may not be what my interview participant meant, as discussed above. I sincerely apologize for any misunderstandings I have created. I trust my interview participants and my readers will be gracious.

I asked my interview participants, if they were willing, to select a few photos from their first years in southern Alberta if they had any. Some participants shared photos and others chose not to or had none to share. The idea of using photographs in an interview setting was introduced to me through an article on photo-elicitation by Marisol Clark-Ibanez. He describes how looking at his interview participants' photographs provided information which he could never have gotten without this interviewee-directed method. He explains that he did not have the relevant background information to be able to create questions which would have provoked his participants to discuss these important aspects of their lives without the participants' initiative. Further, Clark-Ibanez discusses how photographs provide interview participants with a measure of control over the interview because they choose what to show and what to tell.²⁵ The photographs can also provide something for the interview participant to focus on which can enable him/her to relax and share more openly.²⁶ To my surprise, most of my interview participants pulled out their photo albums and began talking freely about the photos, who took them, and the stories behind them. Many interesting stories came out of these times. After looking through their albums together, I requested permission to take pictures of a few of the

²⁵ Marisol Clark-Ibáñez, "Framing the Social World with Photo-Elicitation Interviews," *American Behavioral Scientist* 47, no. 12 (2004): 1512-1515, 1524.

²⁶ Clark-Ibanez, 1521.

photos and include them in this thesis. In most cases participants very willing gave written consent for me to use their photos in this study and they are included in the following chapters.

Using photographs in history-telling is not a straightforward process either. As with any historical source, photographs have motivations and subjectivities. Most photographs are posed and are therefore a performance of a life-situation.²⁷ They don't tell the truth any more than a written or spoken history does. And sometimes the story behind the photograph conflicts with the apparent image in the photograph.²⁸ What is useful about photographs for the purpose of this study is the stories they elicited and illustrated for my interview participants. Because in most cases we looked at photographs and albums at the end of the interview, the photographs often served as illustrations of the stories that had been told previously. In some cases the interview participant shared the story again using different words and sometimes emphasizing different details.²⁹ At other times the photos reminded participants of stories they had not mentioned earlier.

Lastly, a few notes about the ways I have chosen to write this thesis. First, I refer to my interview participants by first and last name (both maiden and married when applicable) as they chose to sign their forms of consent. Many immigrants have adopted English equivalents of their Dutch name: Alice instead of Alida, for example. I use their

²⁷ Freund and Thomson, "Introduction: Oral History and Photography," 8-9.

²⁸ Freund and Thomson, 5.

²⁹ Freund and Thomson, 5. The issues of dynamic memory and the ways we remember are a subject of study which this thesis does not address. See, for example, Bornat, "Remembering in Later Life"; Anna Green, "Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates," *Oral History* 32, no. 2 Memory and Society (Autumn, 2004); Lynda Mannik, "Remembering, Forgetting, and Feeling with Photographs," in *Oral History and Photography*, eds. Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); Alistair Thomson, "Memory and Remembering in Oral History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

first and last name(s) the first time I mention them in any context. In subsequent discussion within each paragraph I have chosen to use first names in order to avoid ambiguity and lengthy naming. Secondly, in quotations from my interviews an ellipsis inside square brackets indicates that I have omitted words in my quotation. However, if the ellipsis occurs without square brackets this indicates a (self-) interruption in the interview; I have quoted my interview transcripts exactly. Thirdly, any errors in the spelling of names in this thesis are my own.

Historiography

Only a few scholarly works have been written about the postwar Dutch immigrant experience in Canada and most of them have focused on the Dutch immigrant communities in Ontario. These have all been authored by members of the Dutch-Canadian community. Some work has been done by other scholars from the perspective of Alberta as the destination for immigration in general; however, these studies look at a wide variety of immigrant groups coming from a multitude of countries. This thesis addresses the gap by focusing on a particular group of postwar immigrants who settled in a particular part of Canada: the immigrants who came from the Netherlands to southern Alberta. This group of immigrants had their own set of experiences which were different from other postwar immigrant groups and also different from the Dutch immigrants who settled elsewhere in Canada.

In 1957, Anthony Sas wrote a PhD dissertation in geography on the postwar immigration movement from the Netherlands to Canada.³⁰ His work focuses on the

³⁰ Anthony Sas, "Dutch Migration to and Settlement in Canada: 1945-1955." (PhD dissertation, Clark University, Toronto, 1957).

reasons for immigrating and the movement of people between the Netherlands and Ontario. It is more quantitative than qualitative in that it uses statistics rather than life-experiences to explain the postwar Dutch immigration. It also lacks the big picture perspective which only time can bring since he researched and wrote while the postwar immigration was still tapering off.

In 1977, sociologist and anthropologist K. Ishwaran conducted a case study of Holland Marsh, a postwar Dutch immigrant community in Ontario. He argues that the Holland Marsh community created its own “moralistic” culture anchored in community, family and kin-groups which existed separate from the surrounding Canadian culture. Some aspects of this book have been useful to me in understanding the postwar Dutch immigrants.

A decade later, two Dutch-Canadian historians wrote a more complete narrative of the postwar immigration to Canada; however, they (almost) overlooked (or perhaps they assumed uniformity of) the Dutch immigrants who came to southern Alberta. Albert VanderMey’s work, *To All Our Children: The Story of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada*, is a large volume illustrated by many photos.³¹ It tells the immigration story from the perspective of the adults/parents who made the decision to immigrate and it includes the stories of the Dutch immigrants in southern Alberta as nine pages out of its more than 500-page volume. Rather than a scholarly analysis, it is a sort of collective memoir as the title suggests.

³¹ Albert VanderMey, *To All Our Children: The Story of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada*, (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia Press, 1983).

Herman Ganzevoort's monograph, *A Bittersweet Land: The Dutch Experience in Canada, 1890-1980*, is a good, textbook overview of the Dutch immigrant experience.³² A fairly brief volume considering its length of time and geographical scope this work tells the story of the Dutch postwar immigration to Canada as part of the broader Dutch migration movement between 1890 and 1980. Only passing mention is made to anything specifically southern Albertan. Ganzevoort also generalizes the group experience to the point of completely obscuring the individuals who made up the group and with whom he conducted interviews. However, both Ganzevoort and VanderMey's works have been very helpful to me in providing a framework in which to understand and interpret my interview participants' life stories.

In 1998, Frans J. Schryer published a monograph entitled *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario: Pillars, Class and Dutch Ethnicity*.³³ In it he argues that postwar Dutch immigrants in Ontario, Canada replicated social structures from the Netherlands even though they did not maintain the Dutch language or create a strong ethnic identity. His work is both sociological and historical in its approach. He provides a detailed explanation of mid-twentieth-century society in the Netherlands, particularly the pillarized social system which shaped the lives of the Dutch people during that time, and he explains how this system was partially re-created in Ontario among the Dutch immigrants. He also tackles the question of how the immigrants identify themselves in terms of nationality and whether that conscious identification concurs with or deviates from their actions and self-representations in relationship with other people.

³² Herman Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land: The Dutch Experience in Canada, 1890-1980*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988).

³³ Frans J. Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998).

Anne van Arragon Hutten's book, *Uprooted: Dutch Immigrant Children in Canada 1947-1959*, follows in VanderMey and Ganzevoort's footsteps. However, Hutten goes into much more depth and detail about the personal lives of the immigrants particularly the experiences of the children who immigrated as a result of their parents' decisions.³⁴ Her work is also more complete than VanderMey and Ganzevoort's work in that she looks at the immigrants' background, influencing factors such as the culture and society of the Netherlands before and during World War II and she also touches on how the immigrants fit into (or did not fit into) postwar Canadian society. She looks at the role played by church and family in the immigration experience. She also analyzes the emotional trauma which the Netherlands-born immigrant children experienced through the immigration and adaptation processes. She argues that all these factors contributed to and limited the immigrant children's development as they moved into adulthood.

In particular, Hutten's examination of the emotional development and sense of self among Dutch immigrant children has been very helpful for me in my study. While my interview participants hinted at some of the emotional and psychological challenges of immigration, they emphasized the success-over-adversity story which has informed the Dutch-Canadian identity for decades. Although this well-told story is true, it does not make room for stories of hurt, deep disappointment, gut-wrenching frustration, and depression which were also part of the Dutch immigrants' experiences. These stories run parallel throughout the immigration experience and Hutten courageously and purposefully weaves them together.

³⁴ Anne Van Arragon Hutten, *Uprooted: The Story of Dutch Immigrant Children in Canada, 1947-1959*, (Kentville, N.S.: North Mountain Press, 2001).

However, her work strongly concentrates on the Dutch-Canadian communities in eastern Canada. As her main source, Hutten used a questionnaire survey, followed by personal interviews, which included roughly 170 respondents.³⁵ As far as I can tell from her writing, only a handful of these respondents were from southern Alberta. Although her work is insightful in a number of ways and I have referred to it throughout my thesis, it is not very helpful when it comes to the particular experiences of Dutch immigrants in southern Alberta. Further, some of her analysis and conclusions seem to be strongly influenced by her personal experiences and perspectives of emigrating from the Netherlands to Canada as a child and these subjectivities colour her research throughout the book.

Besides the above works, all authored by Dutch-Canadians, some work has been done on Alberta as a destination for postwar immigrants. Historian Howard Palmer has researched in this area and published several articles on the Dutch immigrant experience as well as co-authoring a book with his wife, Tamara Palmer, entitled *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity* which looks at many of the immigrant communities within Alberta.³⁶ Their chapter, “The Religious Ethic and the Spirit of Immigration: The Dutch in Alberta,” like Ganzevoort’s work, tells a generalized, impersonal and in some ways simplistic story of the Dutch in Alberta and emphasizes the success-over-adversity story. Palmer and Palmer argue that for the postwar Dutch immigrants in southern Alberta religion was more important than ethnic traditions and language retention. Their chapter on the postwar Dutch in Alberta is still the only academic work focusing on this group of

³⁵ Hutten, 295.

³⁶ Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, “The Religious Ethic and the Spirit of Immigration: The Dutch in Alberta,” in *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity*, eds. Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985).

people. It was again republished in 2009 in an anthology on immigration and settlement in western Canada edited by Gregory P. Marchildon.³⁷

Lastly, members of the Reformed Churches in southern Alberta have published some reflective works on their people's history in commemoration of the various churches' anniversaries. I was able to get a hold of two of these, both edited by Gertie Heinen, on the Nobleford and Iron Springs' Christian Reformed churches. These compilations include some stories written by postwar immigrants about their first few years in southern Alberta as well as numerous anecdotes, poems, sermons, speeches, photos and other commemorative works by the members of the churches. These books tend to celebrate the accomplishments of the immigrants and their triumphs over hardship which, as already noted, is an important story. However, though these books portray an often-told perspective of the immigrant story they are not an analytical look at the immigration experience.

Thesis Outline:

The first chapter of this thesis sets the stage for my following analysis of the Dutch immigration to and adaptation in southern Alberta. It provides an important context by discussing how the events of World War II influenced the childhood of my interview participants. It goes on to give an overview of Dutch society that the immigrants left behind and discusses the "pillarization" which divided Dutch society and emphasized religious belonging. The chapter then explores factors which influenced my interview participants and their families to leave the Netherlands and immigrate to

³⁷ Marchildon, Gregory P., ed. *Immigration and Settlement, 1870-1939*. (Regina: University of Regina Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2009).

Canada and it follows them through the initial immigration process until their arrival in southern Alberta.

Chapter Two picks up where Chapter One ends. Using the concept of belonging, this chapter shows how the first several years in southern Alberta were very dislocating and difficult for my interview participants. It explores the everyday themes of home, family, work and language to show how my interview participants' familiar identities were lost through dislocation and lack of belonging in southern Alberta. I then explore a few ways in which my interview participants negotiated some of these aspects in order to begin creating new identities for themselves.

Chapter Three addresses religion as the foundational aspect of my interview participants' identities both before and after immigration. It looks at the Reformed churches' roles in assisting the new immigrants in coming to Canada and the churches' vital importance during the immigrants' initial adjustment period. This chapter also discusses my interview participants' experiences of how religious commitment created divisions between the postwar Dutch immigrants and also kept them apart from Canadian Christians. My argument culminates in this chapter by asserting that it was the commitment to their specific Reformed church which provided my interview participants with a new sense of belonging and identity in southern Alberta.

Chapter One: Context is Vital – Who They Were and How They Came

To understand my interview participants' stories of immigration and adaptation during their first few years in southern Alberta it is necessary to understand a little about their backgrounds. This chapter first looks briefly at a few of my interview participants' many stories about their experiences during World War II. It then uses scholarly literature to provide an overview of the societal structures which characterized the Netherlands during the immediate postwar period. Next, this chapter explores the reasons my interview participants gave for their own and their families' decisions to immigrate to Canada. I also look at some broader factors discussed in secondary sources which may have influenced their decisions. Lastly, I recount the difficulties expressed by my interview participants of leaving home and of the voyage across the Atlantic and then across Canada to southern Alberta. All of these things heavily influenced the identities and perceptions of the people who arrived at train stations in postwar southern Alberta to begin a new life.

I started my interviews by asking my interview participants to tell me when and where they were born, and what their families did. For many of my interview participants, this led them into a description of their experiences and their families' situations during World War II and the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands which lasted five years. Gerard Schalk explained to me that, as the war progressed, all commodities became scarce.¹ Life was especially threatened during the "hunger winter" of 1944-1945 which resulted in tens of thousands of deaths.² Alice Van Spronson Tams described her

¹ Gerard Schalk, Interview by Author, Cranbrook, BC, (July 24, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 2.

² Peter Moogk, "The Netherlands and Canada: A Wartime Love Affair," *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 3.

family's difficulties during the Nazi occupation. The Van Spronson family lived in the city of Apeldoorn, Gelderland during the war. Alice's father had been a military mechanic for the Netherlands' army but, once the German forces occupied the Netherlands, he went into hiding to escape being forced into working for the Germans as many Dutch men were. Alice described how the German soldiers would systematically commandeer Dutch men and send them to Germany where they were forced to work for the Germans to aid the Nazi war effort. During the day, Alice's father worked in the back of the post office where few people saw him and at night, if he got word through the Dutch resistance movement that the Nazis were looking for him, he would hide in the attic of their home. Alice recalled being instructed that if anyone asked where her father was she was to tell them he was not at home.³ During the "hunger winter," the Van Spronson family did not have enough food to feed their family of nine (father, mother, Alice and six younger brothers). Alice's mother would often go by bicycle to the farmers in the surrounding area to try to procure food for her family. Alice recalled that she and her brother were sent to the community soup kitchen to get food. However, as Alice explained, "that food was terrible. It's just that you had pea soup what was water; it had a few peas floating in it."⁴ Alice's one-year-old brother died during the war of malnutrition combined with an infection.⁵ Tragedies such as these were common and they are seared on the memories of those who experienced them.

Others of my interview participants also discussed the deprivations that they experienced during WWII. Cornelius Van Pelt described how his father built a false wall

³ Alice Van Spronson Tams, interview by author, Coaldale, AB, (June 24, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 3.

⁴ Tams, 3-4.

⁵ Tams, 3.

in their attic behind which the men could hide to escape being commandeered by the German army. His family was also hungry and resorted to eating sugar beets for sustenance. Cornelius also described how his family stole German anti-aircraft spikes to use as firewood because coal for heating their home had become unattainable.⁶ Gerard Schalk described how fuel for vehicles was scarce and even if someone was able to procure fuel the Nazi army had confiscated nearly all vehicles for their own use. Gerard explained that his father owned a horse and an old carriage which he normally used to deliver groceries to outlying customers. However, during the war, eleven-year-old Gerard was sent out with the delivery horse and carriage to act as a chauffeur for those who needed to make longer trips to surrounding towns.⁷ Peter Bosker described how the Nazi forces occupied his *MULO* school near Den Helder, North Holland to use as a barracks for the troops.⁸ Then, near the end of the war, the Nazis broke the dykes in several areas of the Netherlands and flooded the land and homes of two of my interview participants.⁹ It was from this enemy occupation that my interview participants were liberated when Canadian forces entered the Netherlands in May of 1945. Of course, the devastation and destruction incurred by the war and Nazi occupation continued to affect the lives of the Dutch people long after liberation.

Despite all these things, much about Dutch culture and society remained the same after World War II. Most prominently, the “pillarized” social structure of the pre-war period continued to organize postwar Dutch society. Dutch historians James C. Kennedy

⁶ Cornelius Van Pelt and Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, (June 3, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 1.

⁷ Schalk, 4.

⁸ Peter Bosker and Ann Wielinga Bosker, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, (June 21, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 10-11.

⁹ Bosker and Bosker, 12-13; Van Pelt and Van Pelt, 24.

and Jan P. Zwemer point out that pillarization was a very complex system and that the pillars did not all function in the same way due to various political and social factors.¹⁰ Keeping this in mind, the brief outline I give below provides a basic understanding of the Netherlands' social structures which my interview participants left. Pillarization (or *verzuiling* in Dutch) was the division of Dutch society into four distinct groups which operated parallel to but separate from each other. Kennedy and Zwemer point out that this system worked well in part because of the decentralized political system which governed the Netherlands.¹¹ These four pillars were established along religious and political lines and included members of all classes and social backgrounds.¹² The four pillars were: Roman Catholic, Reformed Calvinist, socialist, and neutral/non-denominational. The last of these included the large Dutch Jewish population, Dutch intellectuals and radicals among others, all of whom had strong influence in the nation.¹³ The Reformed Calvinist pillar was stridently divided into two main sub-pillars: The mainstream *Hervormde* Calvinist sub-pillar and the orthodox, *Gereformeerde* Calvinist sub-pillar which encompassed several more conservative splinter groups as well.¹⁴ Historian and sociologist Frans Schryer explains that the *Hervormde* sub-pillar was more liberal and was moderated by a strong humanist tradition founded the teachings of Desiderius Erasmus while the *Gereformeerde* sub-pillar was stricter and more puritanical;

¹⁰ James C. Kennedy and Jan P. Zwemer, "Religion in the Modern Netherlands and the Problems of Pluralism," *BMGN Low Countries Historical Review* 125 no. 2-3 (January 2010): 256-261.

¹¹ Kennedy and Zwemer, 250.

¹² Stuart MacDonald, "Presbyterian and Reformed Christians and Ethnicity," in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008): 180.

¹³ Frans J. Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 24.

¹⁴ Herman Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land: The Dutch Experience in Canada, 1890-1980*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 69.

it was founded in the teachings of John Calvin.¹⁵ Among the nine Dutch immigrants to southern Alberta whom I interviewed, two had belonged to the more liberal *Hervormde* sub-pillar while the other seven belonged to various groups within the *Gereformeerde* sub-pillar.

This system of pillarization was formed when the divisions between liberal and orthodox members of the Reformed Calvinist segment of Dutch society reached a critical breaking point in 1886. In that year, Dutch journalist and politician, Abraham Kuyper led a group of orthodox Calvinists in seceding from the established *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk* which they viewed as too liberal. In 1892 this faction joined with another group which had seceded half a century earlier, in 1836. These two groups together became the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*.¹⁶ Kuyper encouraged his followers to establish their own set of institutions including political parties and education at all levels which would be based on their understanding of Biblical principles and separate from the established *Hervormde* institutions.¹⁷ In response to this organized differentiation, the Dutch Roman Catholics solidified their own set of Catholic institutions. However, these two religious entities did not include everyone and so two further pillars emerged. The socialist pillar was made up of mainly lower class labourers who were not strongly connected with the above forms of Christianity and had created trade unions to make themselves heard in opposition to their employers. The last group of people to organize themselves into a pillar were mainly upper-class members of Dutch

¹⁵ Schryer, 25.

¹⁶ Jan Platvoet, "Pillars, Pluralism and Secularisation: A Social History of Dutch Sciences of Religions," in *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church: Studies in its History, Theology, and Ecumenicity: Presented in Honor of John Henry Kromminga at his Retirement as President of Calvin Theological Seminary*, eds. Peter De Klerk and Richard R. De Ridder, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 86. See also Kennedy and Zwemer, 252-253.

¹⁷ Platvoet, 93.

society who did not wish to belong to any of the above three pillars.¹⁸ Dutch religious scholar, Jan Platvoet estimates that the voting strength of each pillar during the first half of the twentieth century was: 20 percent for the Protestants, 40 percent for the Catholics, 20 percent for the socialists and 20 percent for the neutral/liberals.¹⁹ This system of social organization lasted from the 1880s until the mid-1960s. During this time, it created a stable way for ideologically diverse people to function together as a whole.²⁰

Since each pillar had its own full set of social institutions including political parties, newspapers, radio and television stations, etc., there was no need for a Dutch person to make contact with anyone outside of his/her social pillar. Michael J. Wintle explains how this social system demarcated social boundaries and defined everyday life for Dutch people during this period. He says,

The object was that Catholics could exist within an almost exclusively Catholic world, and indeed they attained a reputation in this period for being ‘more Catholic than the Pope’. Dutch socialists, meanwhile, could lead a socialist life ‘from the cradle to the grave’. Dutch orthodox Calvinists could exist in their own world, being born in a Calvinist maternity ward, attending a Calvinist nursery, primary and secondary school, a Calvinist college or university, joining Calvinist clubs, probably working for a Calvinist employer and joining a Calvinist trade union, voting for the Calvinist parties, listening to Calvinist radio, reading a Calvinist newspaper, entering a Calvinist retirement home and eventually being laid to rest in a Calvinist graveyard. Only the fourth pillar, the neutral or liberal one, was less internalized: it tended to be the place where those who could not be accommodated in the Calvinist, Catholic and socialist pillars ended up, and in that sense might even be referred to as a pile rather than a pillar.²¹

While this pillarized social system may have encouraged tolerance among the divided Dutch people it did not encourage acceptance. The pillars, especially the churches of the two religious pillars, indoctrinated their members with their particular ideology and the

¹⁸ Platvoet, 94; Michael J. Wintle, *An Economic and Social History of the Netherlands, 1800-1920: Demographic, Economic and Social Transition*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 262.

¹⁹ Platvoet, 94-95.

²⁰ Wintle, 262-263; Platvoet, 113-114; Kennedy and Zwemer, 250.

²¹ Wintle, 262.

divided education systems promoted their respective pillar's views and beliefs.²²

However, the divisions between pillars did create a strong sense of group belonging among members of each pillar which resulted in high rates of identification with the various churches across the Netherlands. Jan Platvoet states that the national church attendance rate was as high as 75 percent in the 1947 and 1960 national censuses.²³

Although each pillar of society cut across class distinctions and the people of the Netherlands associated mainly with others from their pillar, class differences were still extremely important to the Dutch. Historian and sociologist Frans. J. Schryer explains that farm labourers were not allowed to eat at the same table as their farm-owning employers.²⁴ Historian Anne van Arragon Hutten describes how the dialects of rural, lower class people were despised by urban city people even when the two were close family.²⁵ Schryer explains that the differences in speech clearly delineated where an individual was from and to which class he/she belonged.²⁶ Interactions between individuals at different levels on the social/class hierarchy and between younger and older people were very formal and were represented in the language used to address each other. Hutten describes the childhood anxiety she experienced about doing and saying the "wrong thing" in the presence of her family's minister.²⁷ Further, as Schryer and Hutten both point out, when someone didn't adhere to the pillarized and classed social rules social sanctions ensued.²⁸ Yet at the same time it was considered socially incorrect

²² Platvoet, 115.

²³ Platvoet, 115.

²⁴ Schryer, 30.

²⁵ Anne Van Arragon Hutten, *Uprooted: The Story of Dutch Immigrant Children in Canada, 1947-1959*, (Kentville, N.S.: North Mountain Press, 2001), 20.

²⁶ Schryer, 30.

²⁷ Hutten, 20.

²⁸ Schryer, 30; Hutten, 21.

to speak about class or class distinctions in public.²⁹ The benefit of these strict divisions and formality, as both Schryer and Hutten explain, was that everyone knew their place.³⁰ Hutten states, “In Holland we knew who we were and where we belonged.”³¹ The following chapter discusses how this understanding of identity and sense of belonging was devastated by immigration to a new place.

There were many other factors which influenced the Dutch postwar emigration. The physical and economic devastation of World War II played a role in encouraging people to leave. Then there was the reconstruction effort which moved too slowly for some people and all the “red tape” involved with decision making at the governmental and private levels.³² Gerard Schalk, who immigrated in 1951, described to me what he felt was the general attitude after the war:

Well, economic conditions in Holland were so bad after the war. During the war, so much damage was done and so much disorganization was left, you know, that people were just... they couldn't do nothing. You couldn't get permission to do anything. There was no materials to rebuild. There was so much had been destroyed in the country, and the government [... during] the first number of years after the war became very socialistic and they were all in favour of doing more for the people socially, you know - make sure that you're going to get a pension, that you're looked after if you're sick or whatever. Which wasn't bad, but wasn't the thing that people wanted to really see too much money spent and not have damage repaired or that.³³

Reflecting Gerard Schalk's assessment, historian and sociologist, Frans J. Schryer notes that resentment over what he calls “creeping socialism” was particularly pronounced among deeply religious orthodox Calvinists.³⁴

²⁹ Schryer, 30, 40.

³⁰ Hutten, 21; Schryer, 30.

³¹ Hutten, 21.

³² Ganzevoort, 62-64.

³³ Schalk, 6-7.

³⁴ Schryer, 49.

Besides the social and economic conditions of the Netherlands in the immediate postwar period, my interview participants described a variety of other reasons for their decisions to emigrate. Peter Bosker, who immigrated in 1949, wanted to own his own farm. The postwar possibility of buying or renting farmland in the Netherlands was next to zero, especially after the flooding and other damage incurred by World War II.³⁵ As the youngest son of a small-scale Dutch farmer Peter felt that “They didn’t really need me” on the farm and he hoped that his chances would be better in Canada.³⁶ Alice Van Spronson Tams explained to me that her family decided to leave the Netherlands in 1951 to avoid her brothers’ mandatory term of service with the Netherlands’ army which her father felt was too “Americanized.” He hoped to make a better future for the boys in Canada.³⁷ Then there was the Schalk family who emigrated in order to keep the family together. At the age of eighteen, Gerard Schalk and his older sister’s fiancé John were determined to immigrate to Canada. However, after some discussion the whole family immigrated in 1951. Gerard described it this way:

So, when it got closer to that time, my dad started to say, “Yeah, but what’s going to happen? Because, you guys are going. But then pretty soon, Corrie,” my sister, “will follow because she’ll want to get married to John. And then when you guys are there for a while, maybe Casey will think, ‘Yeah, maybe that’s not a bad idea, I’ll go there where they are.’ And also go too. So pretty soon, I’ll have no family... or half a family left here. Why don’t we all go together.” So, we decided, yeah, ok. We’ll all go together.³⁸

³⁵ Schryer, 48.

³⁶ Bosker and Bosker, 13.

³⁷ Tams, 4-5. The exact quote from Alice is: “So, you know, he thought, for the future of the children, he would like to come to Canada.” Although Alice worded this explanation in an ungendered way, it was obvious from the rest of our discussion and from her translation of the letters which her father wrote to the fieldman in Alberta that his interest in immigration centered around his concern for his boys’ future. Alice showed no signs of resentment about this, although historian Anne Van Arragon Hutten, explains that many female children did resent their parents’ preferential treatment of brothers. Hutten, 34.

³⁸ Schalk, 7.

While this explanation is obviously simplified and does not include Gerard's mother or siblings' contribution to the discussion it does show Gerard's initiating role in his family's decision to immigrate.

A further incentive for Dutch emigration occurred in 1953. In the spring of that year, a violent storm over the North Sea broke the chain of dykes which kept the sea out of several provinces of the Netherlands. This flood was a major disaster for the country, causing more than 1800 deaths and flooding large portions of several provinces of the Netherlands.³⁹ This disaster also resulted in a second wave of emigration from the Netherlands. Lena Van Wesstenbugge Van Pelt recalled how her family's home south of Zierikzee, Zeeland was destroyed by the flood in 1953 though she and her family were all safe. This was the second time her family had lost their home because they had also been victims of the floods caused by the Nazi army's destruction at the end of World War II. Rather than rebuilding their home for the second time in less than ten years Lena's parents decided to emigrate.⁴⁰

In my interview with Hugo Van Seters he explained what he saw as an alternative side of the immigration story. In his opinion, the reasons which immigrants gave verbally for leaving the Netherlands were not always the whole story. Speaking generally about "people" he said,

[W]hen people emigrate there are often reasons they will not disclose. Either trouble in their marriage or trouble in the family or trouble in the church. And they were trying to [escape]. Or the husband had either a gambling problem or a drinking problem. And then they figured if we go away from the family and, you

³⁹ Herman Gerritsen, "What Happened in 1953? The Big Flood in the Netherlands in Retrospect," *Philos Trans A Math Phys Eng Sci* (June 2005): 1271-9, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16191650> accessed February 27, 2016.

⁴⁰ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, 24-25.

know, that will improve it. But it often didn't because they take themselves [*sic*] along.⁴¹

Historian and sociologist Frans J. Schryer also notes these types of silences in life-story narratives. He wonders, "How many jilted lovers or children who could not get along with their parents emigrated to Canada?"⁴² If any of my interview participants had such reasons for immigrating they chose not to share them with me.

The Van Seters and Van Pelt families knew they wanted to emigrate but they spent some time deciding on their destination. Cornelius Van Pelt, who immigrated to Canada with his parents and two siblings in 1953, told me that his father "always had in mind that he wanted to be somewhere else."⁴³ In fact his father had wanted to immigrate to Canada in the 1920s but Cornelius' mother had resisted the idea. After World War II however, the idea of emigrating came up again:

Then, after the war, Dad started this again and he wanted to emigrate in the worst possible way. So, he inquired about South Africa, and that didn't work too good. Then he offered the idea, should we go to the States, the United States of America. Well, we looked into that a little bit, but [by] that time my brother and I would be of age where we would be recruited into the army. That would leave Mom and Dad all by themselves. So that didn't work. [...] So, then we decided to come to Canada.⁴⁴

Hugo and Elizabeth Van Seters looked into several destination options as well before deciding to come to Canada in 1957. For them, the options included Australia and Tasmania but they decided on Canada in part because Hugo's brother and sister had immigrated to Alberta a few years previously.⁴⁵ Scholar Peter Moogk discusses a few other factors which may have encouraged the Dutch to consider Canada as their

⁴¹ Hugo Van Seters, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, (May 26, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 14.

⁴² Schryer, 48. Schryer cites the following: Aritha Van Herk, "Writing the Immigrant Self: Disguise and Damnation," *In Visible Ink* (Crypto-frictions) (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1991), p. 185.

⁴³ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, 3.

⁴⁴ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, 3.

⁴⁵ Van Seters, 4.

immigration destination. These factors included the positive sentiment created by the Canadian liberation of the Netherlands at the end of the war and the fact that the Dutch crown princess Juliana and her two daughters lived in Ottawa, Ontario during the war years and a third daughter was born there.⁴⁶ Dutch Canadian historian Herman Ganzevoort asserts that Canada was really the only sensible option for potential Dutch emigrants and that, having made the decision to move to Canada, the migrants then rationalized their decision by various means.⁴⁷

Canada also had a strong pull on the Dutch emigrants because of its postwar situation. After World War II ended, Canada experienced an economic boom and a shortage of labourers.⁴⁸ The Canadian agricultural sector was one of these areas particularly in need of more labourers.⁴⁹ This need, combined with the Canadian immigration policy's preference for white, Protestant, northern European immigrants, created a huge pull for Dutch emigrants whom Canada viewed as suitable.⁵⁰ In 1948, the Canadian and Netherlands governments concluded an agreement which provided for the placement of 15,000 sponsored, Dutch "farm labourers" in Canada with the understanding that these families would procure their own farms as soon as possible.⁵¹ This was only the beginning of the postwar Dutch migration movement to Canada. A few years later, the Canadian government revised its immigration policy to allow non-

⁴⁶ Moogk, 4, 2.

⁴⁷ Ganzevoort, 65-66.

⁴⁸ Palmer and Palmer, 158; Harold Troper, "Canada's Immigration Policy since 1945" *International Journal* 48, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 258-259.

⁴⁹ Albert VanderMey, *To All Our Children: The Story of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada*, (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia Press, 1983), 50.

⁵⁰ Schryer, 44; See also Troper, 260; Daiva Stasiulis, "The Political Economy of Race, Ethnicity and Migration," in *Understanding Canada: Building on the New Canadian Political Economy*, ed. Wallace Clement, (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1996), 50.

⁵¹ Anthony H. Richmond, *Post-War Immigrants in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 10; Freda Hawkins, *Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1988), 91, 435.

agriculturalists into the country.⁵² Ganzevoort estimates that between 1947 and 1970 Canada accepted nearly 185,000 immigrants from the Netherlands.⁵³

A few of my interview participants mentioned governmental incentive programs for emigration. During the postwar period, incentive programs were established by both governments to encourage emigration from the Netherlands and immigration to Canada. For example, in 1950 the Netherlands government began providing subsidies for those who wanted to emigrate but could not afford to do so.⁵⁴ By 1956, the Netherlands covered the full cost of the journey for all emigrants.⁵⁵ Alice Van Spronson Tams recalled that the Netherlands government helped with the cost of her family's immigration in 1951. She explained: "For some reason, the [Netherlands] government would pay for your trip to Canada, wherever you went, because there was, I don't know exactly the reason, but if your family was suitable to immigrate to Canada, then they would [help to] pay for the trip."⁵⁶ In 1951, the Canadian government also began offering an "Assisted Passage Loan" to help immigrants come to Canada if their skills or services were particularly needed in Canada. This loan had to be repaid within 25 months after arrival.⁵⁷ These incentives were helpful for many prospective immigrants; however, for others, like Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt's family, who immigrated in

⁵² VanderMey, 49.

⁵³ Ganzevoort, 72.

⁵⁴ VanderMey, 49.

⁵⁵ Schryer, 46.

⁵⁶ Tams, 4.

⁵⁷ Alan G. Green, "Canadian Postwar Immigration Policy," in *Immigration and the Postwar Canadian Economy*, Alan G. Green, (Toronto: McMillan of Canada, 1976), 26; Patrick Stewart, "Assisted Passage Movements," https://www.pier21.ca/wp-content/uploads/files/First_75_Years/research_assisted_passage.pdf (Accessed, 5 January, 2016).

1953 after the flood disaster which destroyed her family's land and home, the promised financial assistance for flood victims never materialized.⁵⁸

While there is scholarship on postwar Canadian attitudes toward the waves of immigrants coming into the country, there is essentially nothing written about the specific views of Albertans toward the newcomers. Thus, the research on Canadians, which is heavily biased toward the eastern provinces, must stand in for Albertans until more research has been done. Realizing that the Canadian economy was thriving and that there was plenty of room for immigrants in the job market, Canadians welcomed the postwar immigrants whom they felt were acceptable. Acceptability was based on mid-century ideal Canadian values which preferenced white, northern European or American, Protestant people. However, as historians of postwar English immigrants to Canada Marilyn Barber and Murray Watson discuss, racial prejudices existed among Canadians even against those who fit the "acceptable" standards.⁵⁹ Historian Franca Iacovetta explains that postwar Canadians were divided in their desire to welcome immigrants. Some were enthusiastic supporters; others did not want the immigrants at all.⁶⁰ Iacovetta describes how Canadian "gatekeepers" – Canadians who held official positions in regard to immigration both in the government and in social agencies – encouraged new immigrants to adopt Canadian customs and to mould themselves after Canadian middle-class ideals.⁶¹ These ideals covered nearly every aspect of life including work, home, parenting, food, transportation, religion, language, etc. Yet at the same time, ethnic

⁵⁸ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, 25.

⁵⁹ See Marilyn Barber and Murray Watson, *Invisible Immigrants: The English in Canada since 1945*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015).

⁶⁰ Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 10.

⁶¹ Iacovetta, 11-14.

diversity was celebrated in postwar Canada; immigrants and Canadians were encouraged to mingle and appreciate each other's cultures. The goal of these gatekeepers however, as Iacovetta explains, was to appreciate diversity without fundamentally changing Canadian culture.⁶² Thus Canadians' acceptance of immigrants came with qualifications. My interview participants only discussed their interactions with Canadians in terms of their sponsors and employers and in most cases their interactions with these Canadians were positive. This is discussed more fully in the following chapter.

The Dutch-Canadian communities however, did as much as they could to assist the new immigrants. Recognizing shortly after the end of the war that many Dutch people were thinking about immigrating to Canada, the various Reformed churches in Canada became heavily involved with the Dutch immigration process. In 1947, the Christian Reformed Church (established in Canada in 1905) formed the "Immigration Committee for Canada."⁶³ In 1950, the Reformed Church in America (RCA) also established an immigration committee for Canada.⁶⁴ My interview participants also indicated that there was a structure established by the Netherlands Reformed Church (NRC) to help immigrants.⁶⁵ These committees worked alongside the Canadian government to find sponsors for prospective immigrants, answer questions which the immigrants had, and ensure that they were cared for upon their arrival. The person in charge of these things on the Canadian side was Dr. A. S. Tuinman, agricultural representative at the Dutch embassy in Ottawa.⁶⁶ Tuinman's office received the

⁶² Iacovetta, 75-76.

⁶³ VanderMey, 53; Schryer, 51-52.

⁶⁴ Schryer, 52.

⁶⁵ Gilbert Grisnich and Johanna Guliker Grisnich, interview by author, Fort MacLeod, AB, (June 23, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 5.

⁶⁶ Schryer, 52.

immigration requests from Dutch emigrants. The files then worked their way down to the local fieldmen who, in the case of each of my interviewees, belonged to one of the various Reformed churches in southern Alberta.⁶⁷ The fieldman would find a sponsor for the prospective immigrant and then notify the Immigration Service of the Department of Mines and Resources. Following proper protocol, the immigrants themselves would eventually be notified of their acceptance and called to The Hague, the Netherlands for their mandatory medical examination.⁶⁸

Alice Van Spronson Tams explained to me how this process went for her family. In January of 1951, her father wrote a letter to the Christian Reformed Church in Canada asking some questions about immigrating, life in Canada, and what kind of situation his family would face if they were to immigrate. He received a reply in March from a fieldman in southern Alberta named John de Haas who answered his questions and assured him that there was a sponsor waiting for him and his family to come work in the beet fields beginning in May of that year. The family quickly completed all the paperwork and their medical examinations at The Hague in the Netherlands. They boarded the ship, *The Volendam* on May 15th, 1951 and came to Coaldale in southern Alberta.⁶⁹

Peter Bosker described to me what he remembered of his application process in 1949 which went much more quickly than he had anticipated. Peter, who was twenty years old, had the advantage of a connection in southern Alberta so he did not have to go through the fieldmen to find a sponsor. He said,

⁶⁷ Frans J. Schryer notes that the field men were, indeed, all men. Schryer, 52.

⁶⁸ Schryer, 52.

⁶⁹ Tams, 4-7.

And I still remember, Box 10, Granum, Alberta. That was [Mr. Poelman's] address. And so, I wrote him a letter if he was willing to sponsor me and that I was the son of so and so and he knew my dad. And he right away, well, we got a letter to sponsor me. Because in those days, you did need a sponsor, [...] He sponsored me and surprisingly, I went much faster than I thought I would. I went to The Hague for my medical. And I passed it right away and now, now I was planning, of course, going home and my medical was ok. But I was called back in the office and the man called me back, he said [...], "We have a spot open [on the *Tabinta*] and this is the last boat for this year." This was in July... to go to Canada. And he said, "There is a spot open, and if you want to go, we have a spot." So he said, "Think about it, but I have to know today." So, I thought about it, "Ok. I can't ask my mom and dad. Yeah. I plan to go to Canada. Why don't I go." So I said, "Ok. Put my name down." And that's what they did.⁷⁰

Understandably, Peter's mother was very upset when he told her that he would be leaving in only a few weeks. But she helped him do some final shopping and then as Peter said, "I stepped on the boat and I came to Granum."⁷¹

Leaving their families and close friends behind was, in many cases, a traumatic experience. Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt expressed how difficult it was on her grandparents to have their only grandchildren taken away.⁷² Gerard Schalk's extended family came together to say goodbye the last weekend they were in the Netherlands because, he said, "we were all convinced that we would never see each other again, you know."⁷³ Ann Wielinga Bosker described her experience of leaving the Netherlands in 1948 at age 12. She said,

But, it was hard to leave Holland, for me, because you had to say good bye to your friends. Yeah. It was hard. And, you know, when... the last night we spent in Rotterdam where my mom's brother lived and from there we took the *Tabinta*, the boat, the next day that took us to Canada. And when the boat left the shore, I saw Mom cry. And then I really realized how difficult it was for Mom and Dad to leave Holland, to leave all their family behind. Yeah. That was not easy.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Bosker and Bosker, 14.

⁷¹ Bosker and Bosker, 15.

⁷² Cornelius Van Pelt and Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, (August 18, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 50.

⁷³ Schalk, 18.

⁷⁴ Bosker and Bosker, 3.

Alice Van Spronson Tams, who was 19 when her family left the Netherlands, expressed the emotions she and her mother experienced. Her mothers' parents had come to the pier to see them off and it was very difficult for her mother to say goodbye to them. Alice explained, "Because when we left, so far away, we thought we'd never see them again, right? It was goodbye forever."⁷⁵ The Dutch national anthem was played and Dutch people lined the pier waving good-bye as the ship pulled away. I asked Alice whether she cried because I certainly would have and she responded that she did. The experience, she said, was "very moving."⁷⁶ Anne Van Arragon Hutten and Albert VanderMey both document numerous immigrant stories of the grief of leaving loved ones behind which echo the stories told by my interview participants.⁷⁷

My interview participants crossed the Atlantic on several different ships, all of which had been used as troop transport ships during World War II and had been converted for the migration movement.⁷⁸ Sleeping arrangements lacked privacy being large spaces with canvas bunk-beds in rows three or four high.⁷⁹ Sanitary conditions were terrible and sea sickness made it worse. The men were lodged together separately from the women and children which meant that families were separated and fathers were unable to help care for their sea sick wives and children.⁸⁰ Peter Bosker described the *Tabinta* which brought him to Canada in 1949 as "not a nice boat. Not at all."⁸¹ Alice Van Spronson Tams described her voyage on board the *Volendam* in 1951. She said, "in

⁷⁵ Tams, 13.

⁷⁶ Tams, 10.

⁷⁷ Hutten, 44-51 ; VanderMey, 77-92.

⁷⁸ Bosker and Bosker, 14; Hutten, 55-56; Museum Victoria Collections, "Item HT 16096 Accommodation Plan - Netherlands Ministry of Transport, SS Groote Beer, SS Waterman & SS Zuiderkruis, 1957," <http://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/1255197> (Accessed 23 December 2015).

⁷⁹ Hutten, 54.

⁸⁰ Hutten, 52.

⁸¹ Bosker and Bosker, 14.

the canal, Holland, England, there was no sea sickness, then the dining room was full yet and the food was delicious. But then we were on the Atlantic and we went through a real storm. It was a big ship, but oh! you could not stand straight. The dishes went all over the place and it was horrible. And, you know, most people were sick.”⁸² Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt’s family came on the *Waterman* in 1953. Her mother was



Photo 1: The Van Westenbugge family aboard the *Waterman*, 1953.

pregnant with her younger sister at the time and had a terrible time with sea sickness. At one point the doctor was called because they were very concerned about mother and baby. Lena’s older sister was also very sick and Lena described having to get her out of bed when the boat docked in Halifax.⁸³

⁸² Tams, 10.

⁸³ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, (August 18, 2014), 36-37.

Johanna Guliker Grisnich, who was on board the same voyage as Alice Van Spronson Tams' family, had more pleasant memories of her ten-day voyage on the *Volendam* in 1951. She recalled making friends with the other young people on board and she and her sister even found "boyfriends" whom they never saw again after disembarking.⁸⁴ They also enjoyed the church services on board: "And that [indicating a photo] was the minister on the boat. We had church on the boat. Two times each Sunday. We were [on board] two Sundays. And we sang the Dutch Psalms. Very nice. And we had a choir. And this whole group was in the choir."⁸⁵ Church on board ship followed the social divisions of the Netherlands. Alice Van Spronson Tams explained further: "And a lot of Dutch people [on board the ship] were church-going people so on Sundays, in the dining room, they had several different church services. You know, you can have that hour and, that group that."⁸⁶

Upon landing in Canada, there was more paper work to do, another medical exam to pass and then trains to board. My interview participants came through the ports at Halifax, Nova Scotia and at Quebec City, Quebec. From there they took trains to southern Alberta. At this point in their journey two of my interview participants, Cornelius Van Pelt and Gerard Schalk, described that their families discovered their destination had been changed. In both cases the Ontario farmer who had originally sponsored them no longer needed them so, rather than staying in Ontario as they had originally arranged, both families were sent on to southern Alberta.⁸⁷ Johanna Guliker Grisnich's family lost track of her young brother Harry just before boarding the train.

⁸⁴ Grisnich and Grisnich, 12-13.

⁸⁵ Grisnich and Grisnich, 13.

⁸⁶ Tams, 10.

⁸⁷ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, (June 3, 2014), 4; Schalk, 8.

She explained, “This [picture] was on the train. And then my little brother was lost. [...] Just, and everybody was looking for him. We were going to make a picture and Harry wasn’t there. But yeah, he was in the neighbourhood but... we found him again.”⁸⁸



Photo 2: About to board the train for Alberta, the Guliker family cannot find little Harry. 1951.

This part of the journey took several days as well, and was only slightly more comfortable than the ocean voyage had been. Ann Wielinga Bosker recalled her experience of the train ride west from Quebec City in 1948. She said:

We landed in Quebec, Quebec City and then we had a three day train ride to Medicine Hat. And after that we took another train to Lethbridge. So, and... so three days you were on the train and you also had to sleep in your seat. There were no beds, so we were pretty tired when we got to Picture Butte.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Grisnich and Grisnich, 13.

⁸⁹ Bosker and Bosker, 2.

Alice Van Spronson Tams described to me what she remembered of her train ride to Lethbridge, Alberta and a few of her first impressions of Canada formed through the train windows:

And the train was not bad, but, was not... wooden seats and we'd sleep on top, but on a hard mattress. So, we were three days on the train. We first... we went to Winnipeg and then we had to go to another train and go to Lethbridge. Ok, and then while we were in the train, we seen, oh! nice cars, you know. Because in Holland, we, well, not very many people had a car yet. That was in 1951, you know.⁹⁰

Exhausted, sore, and overwhelmed, they were welcomed to southern Alberta by a fieldman or their sponsor who met them at the train station.

The next chapter explores many of the challenges of the initial adjustment period, beginning with my interview participants' arrival at their new accommodations in southern Alberta. They had left home behind and arrived in their new location but the results of this geographical re-location continued their immigration experience for years to come. The deprivations and fears of war and living in Nazi-occupied territory moulded the identities of my Dutch immigrant interview participants. So did the pillarized society of the Netherlands which continued through World War II and into the postwar period. Whatever the reasons for immigrating, all of the immigrants whom I interviewed were shaped by their culture and experiences in the Netherlands and they brought these with them when they immigrated to southern Alberta. While Canada was open to immigrants, Canadians expected newcomers to adapt to Canadian society and work toward assimilation. In many ways, the postwar Dutch in southern Alberta did just that. However, as the following chapters show, my interview participants' search for a

⁹⁰ Tams, 10-11.

new identity in Canada was complicated by their sense of dislocation from what was familiar and their intense loyalty to their particular Reformed church.

Chapter Two: Dislocation and Belonging in Southern Alberta – Everyday Life

Immigration displaces migrants in many ways. The most obvious of these is geographical location but relationships and self-understanding are also affected in significant ways. Dislocation threatens immigrants' identity and sense of belonging; it forces them to re-create themselves in a new context and in relation to new people. This chapter explores the stories of the nine postwar Dutch immigrants whom I interviewed to show how my interview participants experienced dislocation through immigration, a lack of belonging in their new context, and a few of the ways in which they re-created their self-understanding in southern Alberta. It leads into the next chapter which addresses the religious foundation of their new identities in southern Alberta. In this chapter, I first look briefly at sociological theories of belonging and how belonging becomes dislocated through immigration. Next, I explore the importance of re-creating home as a place of belonging for my interview participants and the pivotal role of their families in creating a group of people with whom they belonged. The third section of this chapter focuses on the many daily ways these postwar Dutch immigrants became dislocated because of their immigration. I discuss language difficulties, daily work for both men and women, including the unfamiliar work methods and the tools they were required to use, cultural expectations which were incompatible with their new situations, and the resulting emotional "break downs" incurred by too much stress. I look at a few of the ways the postwar Dutch immigrants whom I interviewed navigated the differences between "us" (Dutch immigrants) and "them" (Canadians), emphasizing ways in which my interview participants negotiated cultural expectations to increase their sense of belonging. Lastly, I look at how increased agency, social mobility and acceptance by Canadians influenced

and were influenced by my interview participants' growing sense of belonging in southern Alberta.

Sociologist Vanessa May argues that belonging is central to identity because where and with whom we belong determines how we understand ourselves as well as how the people around us identify us.¹ She claims that our self-understanding, or “identity,” is based in our sense of belonging with one or more groups of people.² “We identify *with* (self-identification), while others identify us *as* (categorization).”³ Because belonging is always in relation to other people, May claims that identity is relational; it is embedded in society and culture.⁴ We see ourselves as “belonging” with one group of people, but not with another. May also claims that understanding who we *are not* is necessary for understanding who we are.⁵ For the postwar Dutch in the Netherlands, the pillarized social system of the Netherlands helped to clarify where they belonged by creating several large-scale categories of “us” and “them” within Dutch culture. Since all of my interview participants belonged to the Calvinist Reformed pillar in the Netherlands, it is not surprising that religion was foundational to their self-understanding, as discussed in the following chapter.

But belonging also has to do with specific people, places and material objects. Vanessa May defines belonging as “the process of creating a sense of identification with, or connection to, cultures, people, places and material objects.”⁶ May contends that

¹ Vanessa May, *Connecting Self to Society: Belonging in a Changing World*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 3.

² May, 79, 96.

³ May, 4 [emphasis in original].

⁴ May, 4.

⁵ May, 79.

⁶ May, 3.

places and material objects are part of our sense of belonging because we live in sensual bodies and continually experience life through our senses.⁷ She says,

Our embodied and sensory connection to the material world of places and objects is of crucial importance to our sense of self. In addition, social changes are acutely experienced on the material level. Changes in the material landscape have a profound effect on the self and our connection to the world because belonging is partly based on the familiarity of our sensescapes or sensory geographies.⁸

We do not usually notice our sense of belonging because when we belong in a place or with a group of people, things are familiar. However, we do notice when we no longer feel that we belong – when we become dislocated. Dislocation can occur because the self has changed or because the surrounding world has changed.⁹ Obviously, the latter occurs during immigration and influences the former. The changes in the surrounding “culture, people, places and material objects” disrupt the immigrant’s sense of belonging and therefore his/her self-understanding or “identity.” After immigration, the immigrant is forced to re-create this sense of self by finding or creating new places, things and groups with which to belong as well as finding new ways to connect with the people who are left behind.¹⁰

In coming to Canada the postwar Dutch immigrants left behind all the familiar places with which they belonged. Places such as “home” hold significant meaning for many people and in immigration these places are lost. Several of my interview participants discussed how they and their families worked toward re-creating “home.” Seven of my nine participants immigrated to southern Alberta with their parents and siblings (including adult children). One of the first surprises which created a jarring

⁷ May, 133-138.

⁸ May, 148-149.

⁹ May, 6-7.

¹⁰ May, 107.

sense of dislocation was the housing which some of their sponsors provided. Gerard Schalk shared with me a oft-told story about his family's arrival at their first house near Coaldale, Alberta:

So, and then we come to a place and the truck started to slow down and we already see, "Yeah, it looks a nice place coming up." All trees on one side and the front. And then we come to an entry and we drove in, and here is a nice house there on the side, and along the other side there is all trees and in the back there is all trees, it's just totally surrounded by huge trees in green and it's all, you know, it's like, hidden away. And this nice little house there. And then, on the other side, there's another nice little house there. "I wonder if that's our house." No, no, nicely painted and everything. No. And the truck keeps on going, and we're going past some graineries and we're going past a big barn [...] and on the other side there is a cow barn and we keep on going. And then we come to the end, and he goes right through it and out of the trees and here we're out in the field and then, ahead of us, there is a little house, not painted, or there's no paint on it or nothing, it's just bare. And he drives up along there, "Ok, here, you're home."¹¹

As Gerard indicated, a small unpainted house in the middle of a prairie field was not a nice welcome for the new immigrants who, in many cases, had left behind a much nicer home in the Netherlands.

Others of my interview participants shared similar descriptions of their first house in southern Alberta. Ann Wielinga Bosker described her family's first house near Iron Springs and how they used the resources they had to improve it:

And so we ended up there [Iron Springs] and we had a small home and our furniture was [shipped from the Netherlands] in these big wooden crates or whatever you called them. We had three of them. And one of those, we used as a porch to the house 'cause it was a small house we lived in. A beet house, we called it. [...] But a lot of immigrants lived in little houses like that. And so, that's what we did, the first year, we worked there in the sugar beets.¹²

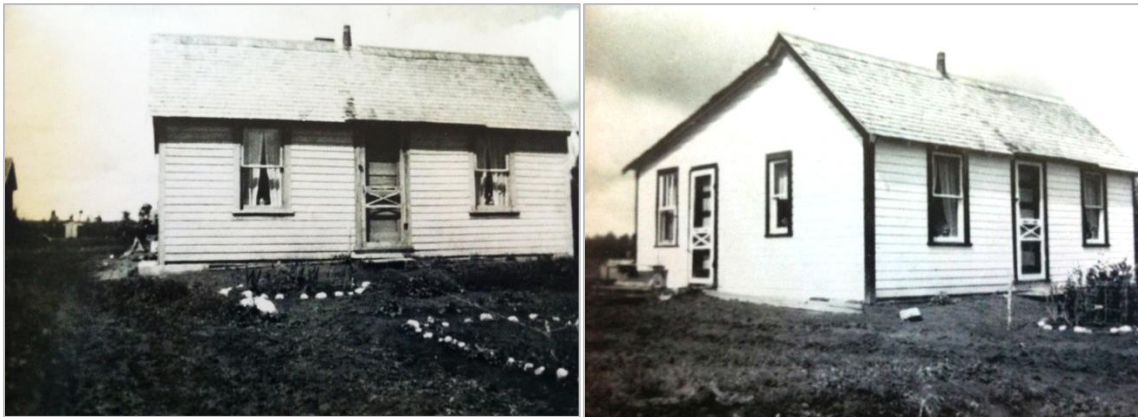
Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt's family had accommodations in Lethbridge when they first arrived but their house was not a single family dwelling. It was sort of a boarding

¹¹ Gerard Schalk, interview by author, Cranbrook, BC, (July 24, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 8-9.

¹² Peter Bosker and Ann Wielinga Bosker, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, (June 21, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 2.

house in which several families lived. As Lena explained: “We lived upstairs and we had two tiny bedrooms with Father and Mother and four kids and then there were... across the hall from us there was a little old man, he had one little room. And then there was one bathroom that was shared with three suites downstairs and all of us upstairs.”¹³

Making a “home” out of these living situations took some creativity, hard work, and a few familiar items from the Netherlands. Johanna Guiliker Grisnich explained that their sponsor at Iron Springs kindly supplied them with paint and wallpaper to spruce up their little “beet house.” She quite proudly showed me the before and after pictures of how they used that paint, along with some rocks, flower seeds and tulip bulbs which they brought from the Netherlands, to turn their “beet house” into a home.¹⁴ Those seeds and bulbs from the Netherlands made a big difference in the re-creation of “home,” according to Johanna.



Photos 3 and 4: The Guliker family’s “beet house” before they painted it (left) and after (right).

The inside of their first houses quickly became very cramped as the large Dutch families sorted out sleeping arrangements. Often the house was only one level, divided

¹³ Cornelius Van Pelt and Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, (June 3, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 25.

¹⁴ Gilbert Grisnich and Johanna Guliker Grisnich, interview by author, Fort MacLeod, AB, (June 23, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 13-14.

on one side into the living and eating area while the other side of the house was the sleeping area. The Guliker family of eleven managed in their little four-room house pictured above because there was a separate “bunk house” where the six boys slept.¹⁵ Gerard Schalk explained how his family squeezed their eleven members into three bedrooms: one room for the parents and baby boy, one room for the five oldest boys (two of whom were adults) and one room for the two girls (the oldest was also an adult) and the second youngest boy. The five oldest boys had the biggest bedroom which, Gerard explained, had two double beds which just fit into the room. “[B]ut in order to get into bed, you have to climb over [the footboard] because there is no room between the beds. [...] And if you want to make the bed, then you have to sit on one bed and then make the other one. And then sit on that bed and make that one because that’s the only way to do it.”¹⁶ Somehow the five Schalk young men managed to make it work for two years.

Living in such tight quarters with so many people was difficult; however, having left behind so much of what was familiar, family became very important as the one stable factor in the immigrants’ lives. Family provided a place to belong when everything else in their lives was unfamiliar. Sociologist Steph Lawler asserts that families “are at the heart of understandings of identity both through the ‘doing’ of family relationships and through understandings of kin groups and one’s place within them.”¹⁷ Sociologist and anthropologist K. Ishwaran, writing about a postwar Dutch immigrant community in Ontario describes the Dutch immigrant family as “a cohesive and well-knit group” which he says “acts as a social security system, taking care of its members when sick or in financial trouble or in some other kind of crisis.” Ishwaran concludes that “The family,

¹⁵ Grisnich and Grisnich, 5.

¹⁶ Schalk, 9.

¹⁷ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 49-50.

therefore, is the most important single institution in Dutch life. It provides the context in which most people spend their lives.”¹⁸

Only one of the immigrants whom I interviewed immigrated without his family. As the youngest son in a family of nine children, Peter Bosker felt he was not really needed on the family farm so he decided to emigrate in 1949. He came to southern Alberta by himself, at the age of twenty.¹⁹ Sociologist Vanessa May asserts that it is often an immigrant’s ability to establish a new connection with those vital relationships across the geographical distance created by immigration which determines how well an immigrant is able to adapt to his/her new country.²⁰ Of course, all the immigrants I interviewed missed their home in the Netherlands and the family they left behind. Peter Bosker’s situation was unique among the immigrants I interviewed because he did not have any family in southern Alberta to ease the dislocation which came by moving so far away from everything familiar. The other eight immigrants I interviewed, who migrated together with their families, experienced at least some continuation of what was familiar and their families continued to provide a sense of belonging. Historian Anne Van Arragon Hutten writes that, for herself as an immigrant child, her family provided “a comforting security. Everything around us had changed, but our parents remained the same, and family dynamics continued unchanged for many years.”²¹

For several of the Dutch immigrants I interviewed, their first several months in southern Alberta involved a lot of time spent working together with their families. Five

¹⁸ K. Ishwaran, *Family Kinship and Community: A Study of Dutch Canadians: A Developmental Approach*. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977), 30-31.

¹⁹ Bosker and Bosker, 13.

²⁰ May, 115.

²¹ Anne Van Arragon Hutten, *Uprooted: The Story of Dutch Immigrant Children in Canada, 1947-1959*, (Kentville, N.S.: North Mountain Press, 2001), 182.

of my interview participants were in their mid- to late- teen years at the time they and their families immigrated. Thus they were a big help to their families both by earning wages and by maintaining the family by working at home. Johanna Guliker Grisnich was seventeen years old when she and her family immigrated. She worked alongside her brothers in the beet fields which she emphasized was hard work. Then there was also the house work to be done which was more than her mom could do alone especially with the added complicating factor of learning to cook on a wood stove (more on this below).²² On rainy days when she could not work in the fields, Johanna was in charge of mending since she had taken four years of schooling at what she called a “private sewing school.”²³ She explained, “the sewing machine [was] on the table and I had to mend all day.”²⁴ This was no small task considering the wear which her family’s clothing experienced through their work in the beet fields. The majority of the house work was the women’s responsibility; however two of my interview participants, including Johanna, mentioned that their fathers often helped their mothers in the home as well.²⁵ The Guliker family therefore worked together as a team in the beet fields and at home.

Sometimes families had to come up with creative solutions to help each other, working together both physically and metaphorically. Alice Van Spronson Tams’ experiences during her first year in southern Alberta illustrate two different ways her family worked together. Alice immigrated to southern Alberta in 1951 at the age of nineteen. She came with her parents, five younger brothers and two younger sisters. At first, she worked with her father and brothers in their sponsor’s beet fields as they had

²² Grisnich and Grisnich, 6.

²³ Grisnich and Grisnich, 4.

²⁴ Grisnich and Grisnich, 7, 25.

²⁵ Grisnich and Grisnich, 7, 17.

agreed to do in their contract. However, the work was hard and she was not physically able to maintain the pace so she and her family came up with a solution. Alice explained:

I did do hoeing the beets, but, it was such hard work that, when I came home, I just went to bed. I couldn't eat. I just went to bed. And then my mom and dad said, "Ok, you and Mom will take turns." Because I had two little sisters, one two years and one four years. So [some]one had to stay home. So my mom said, "We'll take turns. You babysit one day; I go in the beets." And that's how it went.²⁶

The Van Spronson family worked together physically in the field, and they worked together as a team to help each other accomplish the task. Once they realized that Alice was unable to sustain the work pace they invented a solution which allowed them to meet the requirements of their contract with their sponsor while still caring for the rest of the family's needs. For Alice, working at home was less physically demanding than working in the beet fields but there was no lack of work to be done at home. There was no electricity and no running water in their first little house so cooking, cleaning, and washing for a family of ten was an enormous task. Besides this work, there were the two small girls who needed care and attention. That fall, when it came time for the beet harvest the Van Spronson family obtained permission from their sponsor for Alice to leave the family contract and work as a housekeeper in Lethbridge. Although she no longer worked with her family, she continued to act as an important member of her family by going home each weekend and by contributing to the family income.²⁷

The families who worked in the beet fields were not given individual wages but were rather paid as a group – usually after each segment of work was done though some were not paid until after the fall harvest. The parents took these earnings and used them

²⁶ Alice Van Spronson Tams, interview by author, Coaldale, AB, (June 24, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 12.

²⁷ Tams, 9.

as they deemed best. Dutch-Canadian historians Herman Ganzevoort and Anne Van Arragon Hutten both explain that even when adult children earned their own wages most Dutch immigrant parents collected these wages as well.²⁸ Ganzevoort makes clear that many children were given pocket money from their earnings while the rest of the money was pooled into a family “kitty” which would “buy the family’s independence.”²⁹ This statement was supported by three of my interview participants who discussed their contributions to their respective families’ financial “kitty.”³⁰ Hutten views this arrangement negatively and portrays the group effort as a usurpation of the children’s rights.³¹ Both she and Ganzevoort also discuss that some Dutch immigrant parents took their children’s earnings simply from greed and a desire to further their own interests without thought to what their children would want.³² However, my research did not support these assertions. Among the three Dutch immigrants I interviewed who discussed how they pooled their wages into the family “kitty,” none of them indicated that they bore any resentment toward their parents over this matter. It seemed to be just a fact of life.³³

For example, before the Schalk family immigrated the older children promised to help their parents get established in their new country before they would do anything on their own. It was mutual dependence – the grown, or nearly grown, children handed over their earnings to their parents and the parents then provided the family with food and

²⁸ Herman Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land: The Dutch Experience in Canada, 1890-1980*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 82; Hutten, 168.

²⁹ Ganzevoort, 82.

³⁰ Schalk, 7; Bosker and Bosker, 5; Tams, 9.

³¹ Hutten, 169-170.

³² Hutten, 170; Ganzevoort, 108.

³³ Hutten acknowledges that, as the immigrant children grew older, they developed a better understanding of what their parents experienced through the immigration process which helped to ease the resentment and bitterness of handing over wages that they had experienced. Hutten, 174.

clothing. Gerard Schalk explained: “[O]nce we got to Canada and we started to work, whenever we made money, everything went to Mom. And if we needed anything, if we needed clothes, or an overcoat, or it doesn’t matter, she would buy it and look after us that way.”³⁴ This continued for more than three years until his mother realized that Gerard and his girlfriend Jenny (who was also giving all of her earnings to her Dutch immigrant parents) might need some money if they were going to start a life together so she told him to keep what he earned. Gerard and Jenny were married six months later.³⁵ While this family cooperation may have created resentment among some family members as Hutten describes, it also illustrates the ways family members felt they belonged together whether the emotional results were positive or negative. The impression I got from my interview participants’ descriptions of the family kitty was that they felt this was a reasonable form of family cooperation.

Although families continued to serve as a vital place of belonging for my interview participants much of the rest of their daily lives in southern Alberta during the first few months was unfamiliar and discordant. For all of the immigrants I interviewed language played a key role in their sense of dislocation in southern Alberta. As sociologist Vanessa May asserts knowing a language is imperative to feeling at home in a culture.³⁶ When I asked Peter Bosker, who immigrated on his own in 1949, whether he missed home he replied that he did not really miss home until Christmas time. He said, “I did miss it the first Christmas and New Years. Yeah. Then you miss your old home, you know? Your familiar Christmas songs and stuff like that. And, well, they were all Christmas songs here too, but for me, it was all English yet and I didn’t understand all of

³⁴ Schalk, 7.

³⁵ Schalk, 7.

³⁶ May, 101.

these words that you were singing.”³⁷ Many things were unfamiliar about his first Canadian Christmas but what stood out in his memory was the English language and the English Christmas carols which were so different from home.

The immigrants I interviewed dealt with the language problem in different ways. Gerard Schalk took an “English as a Second Language” course during his first winter in Alberta. This course gave him thirty hours of language instruction and practice together with other new immigrants.³⁸ Other immigrants used their jobs as a way to improve their English. Alice Van Spronson Tam’s first job was as a housekeeping assistant at a Catholic rectory in Lethbridge. Her employers were four priests and a blind housekeeper who was no longer able to do the housekeeping work but was still fully in charge and knew exactly what needed to be done. She gave the orders. Alice explained that her employers were very gracious with her as she learned to communicate in English. Although she had studied English in school in the Netherlands, she explained that it was British English and the English spoken in southern Alberta was “a little different.”³⁹ She recalled one humorous incident of her stumbling attempts to use English and her employers’ gracious response. She was making breakfast for the first time at the rectory – eggs, bacon, etc., which was very different from the breakfast she was used to in the Netherlands – bread and a cup of tea. She tried to ask how they wanted their eggs and bacon cooked but she couldn’t come up with the right words. Their response was very gracious, Alice explained: “I can still see them sitting there looking at each other: ‘What are we going to do?’ [...] And then, one of them spoke up and he said, ‘Do you mind, that if you do make a mistake in the way we talk English, that we correct you?’ And I

³⁷ Bosker and Bosker, 19.

³⁸ Schalk, 25.

³⁹ Tams, 8.

said, ‘Please do! That’s the only way I can learn.’⁴⁰ Although she indicated how embarrassed she was at not being able to communicate clearly during that breakfast, Alice was very grateful to her first employers for their assistance in her language development, emphasizing that “they were so good to me.”⁴¹ Other immigrants found that their employer was not as helpful in teaching them English as they had thought he was. Gilbert Grisnich explained that his family’s sponsor was Hungarian and didn’t speak English well either. Since this man was their primary non-Dutch contact, Gilbert laughingly recalled that his father began speaking English with an Hungarian accent.⁴²

At other times, the language barrier could cause serious problems. Peter Bosker discovered after his one-year contract with his sponsor was over that his limited ability to communicate in English made finding a job much more difficult.⁴³ Johanna Guliker Grisnich learned that language problems could complicate interactions with healthcare practitioners. When Johanna was expecting her first baby, she became very sick. The Canadian doctor told her she had toxemia⁴⁴ and sent her home on strict bed rest. She and her husband did not know what “toxemia” was until after their baby was born and they had company from church visiting. The man exclaimed, in Dutch, that Johanna had been very sick with *nier vergiftiging* – kidney poisoning! Now Johanna understood what had been wrong. Fortunately, she had followed the doctor’s instructions. Though the baby was born several weeks early, after some time in the hospital both mother and baby were fine.⁴⁵ Language challenges such as these created dissonance in my interview

⁴⁰ Tams, 8-9.

⁴¹ Tams, 9.

⁴² Grisnich and Grisnich, 9-10.

⁴³ Bosker and Bosker, 15.

⁴⁴ Toxemia, now called “pre-eclampsia,” is a potentially life-threatening complication of pregnancy and is much more involved than merely “kidney poisoning.”

⁴⁵ Grisnich and Grisnich, 38-39.

participants' lives and underscored their lack of belonging in southern Alberta. However, as their ability to communicate in English increased the language-related problems decreased.

Two of the Dutch immigrants I interviewed learned to speak English at school. They were both twelve years old when their families immigrated to southern Alberta so they continued their schooling in Canada. Ann Wielinga Bosker and Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt's parents placed them and their younger siblings right into local Alberta schools. Both girls were put back several grades from where they had been in the Netherlands because they couldn't communicate in English but as they caught on to the language they were bumped up to a higher grade. Ann described her experience of learning English at school:

And I actually went to school there in Iron Springs. We went to school... the bus picked us up and went to school - in grade one because we didn't know a word of English. And then, later on we got into grade three. The way we learned the language, we had some pictures and words and we had to put the right pictures by the words [...] And that's the way we learned, slowly on. Then we got [bumped up] to grade three. But I think the teacher was, maybe, quite frustrated with all the immigrant kids.⁴⁶

Since Ann was twelve years old when she arrived in Canada and turned thirteen one month later, being put into grade one with the much younger children was certainly frustrating. Dutch Canadian historian Anne Van Arragon Hutten claims that Dutch immigrant children's first experiences of school were often traumatic. It was not that anything went dramatically wrong at school rather that with their world turned upside down through immigration, being forced into an unfamiliar school environment with the

⁴⁶ Bosker and Bosker, 2.



Photo 5: Ann Wielinga Bosker's first class in Iron Springs. Ann is just right of centre in the light coloured sweater, 1949.

sounds of an unfamiliar language everywhere, these children were completely overwhelmed.⁴⁷ Lena was more fortunate because her school in Lethbridge had a class for immigrant children to learn English.⁴⁸ She also described herself as a very outgoing child who was eager to try the language even if she made mistakes.⁴⁹ As Ann and Lena learned the language and became more comfortable with Canadian culture their sense of belonging in southern Alberta grew. Lena was able to finish grade nine and Ann finished grade seven. Both girls were then in their mid-teens.⁵⁰ At that point, their parents took them out of school so that they could start working full-time and contribute to the family income.

⁴⁷ Hutten, 89-90.

⁴⁸ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, 20.

⁴⁹ Cornelius Van Pelt and Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, (August 18, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 54, 55.

⁵⁰ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, (June 3, 2014), 23-24; Bosker and Bosker, 6.

The type of work which my interview participants did on a daily basis and the material objects with which they interacted also shaped the way they understood themselves. Particularly for those immigrants who worked in Alberta's beet fields the material surroundings, the tools, the methods and often even the work itself were different in southern Alberta from what they had known in the Netherlands. Of the nine postwar Dutch immigrants I interviewed, four of them worked in the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta when they first arrived. While most Dutch immigrants who immigrated as agricultural labourers had some experience with agriculture, and although sugar beets were grown in the Netherlands, this did not mean that they had hands-on experience working in beet fields. Among the immigrants I interviewed, one family had been dairy farmers in the Netherlands, another family were chicken farmers, the father of another family had been a military mechanic but *his* father had owned a greenhouse. Further, Dutch Canadian historian Herman Ganzevoort explains that even if Dutch immigrants had been farmers in the Netherlands, Canadian farming methods were different. Alberta's farmers ploughed less deeply (to prevent the strong winds from blowing the dirt away), and Canadian farmers made less use of manure which the Dutch considered a highly valuable resource.⁵¹

The work involved with sugar beet crops was labour intensive and involved many tools and methods which were new to my interview participants. There were three hoeing phases during growing season and then the harvest. The first hoeing was the most labour intensive because it was for both weeding and thinning out the small beets plants and the work was done with a hand-held hoe, a small shovel, or with the hands. Alice Van Spronson Tams explained: "Because the beets were just sown in a row. And we had

⁵¹ Ganzevoort, 88.

little shovels like that. [Indicated six inches in size.][...] Little shovels, yeah. And then you had to have, I guess, a foot in between [each plant], something like that. So you have to go in between. But these two or three were too close. You had to bend down and pick them by hand.”⁵² The next two hoe phases were mainly weeding. Then harvest came. Johanna Guliker Grisnich, whose family worked in the beets for four years, explained that their sponsor had a beet lifter machine which loosened the beets in the ground. Then she and her family pulled the beets up, shook off the dirt, and laid them in rows.⁵³ Later they had to pick them up again, chop off the leaves, and load them into trucks. Gilbert Grisnich explained a little more from his experiences:

We had a beet knife. You know, there was actually a plow that would lift the beet up but it fell back in the hole. So, they were loose. So then we came along and grabbed two beets and just throw them all [into rows]... half a mile and then back again. And then the farmer had a bit of a stone boat. He leveled the ground a bit and then we had a knife with a little hook on there. And you pick up the beet. Grab the beet. Chop the leaves off. Throw them in the middle. And then the farmer loaded them all.⁵⁴

Gilbert and Johanna went on to explain that chopping the leaves off of the beets could be quite dangerous. For women with smaller hands, it was often difficult to hold onto the large sugar beets which could be the size of a football. And, with the effort required to chop off the leaves, any fingers or thumbs which got in the way could be chopped off too. I asked Gilbert and Johanna whether anyone ever lost a thumb and Gilbert responded, “Yes. Oh yeah. It happened.”⁵⁵

⁵² Tams, 8.

⁵³ Grisnich and Grisnich, 7, 8.

⁵⁴ Grisnich and Grisnich, 8.

⁵⁵ Grisnich and Grisnich, 8-9.



Photo 6: The Guliker family working in the beet fields. Johanna is third from the left. No date.

Farming in southern Alberta also involved irrigation which was not a common practice in the Netherlands. Gilbert Grisnich explained in detail how he flood-irrigated the beet fields before irrigation machinery was introduced. It was a time-consuming process. Although they only irrigated the beets twice in a summer, it took a full month to irrigate just one quarter section of beets (and then there were other crops to irrigate as well). The irrigation canals brought the water to the field and there was a “ditch digger” machine which created channels for the water across the field; however, ensuring that the water actually got to the plants was done entirely by hand, shovel, and gum boots.⁵⁶

The means, methods and tools of farming grain were also different in southern Alberta. Gilbert Grisnich explained a farming mistake his father made when he first

⁵⁶ Grisnich and Grisnich, 54-56.

rented his own land in southern Alberta because he assumed that Alberta's farming practices were the same as in the Netherlands. Gilbert explained that

[I]n Holland you only seed about an inch deep because there is lots of moisture, eh. And you get your rain on time. So, Dad did the same thing here. Usually my older brother got some advice from Ano Neiboer [...]. But that, I guess, they didn't ask, so when the crop came up, it was uneven because they only seeded it an inch deep, eh. What was in the moisture came up, the other not. So that was an uneven crop. And luckily we got some rain so then it caught up, right.⁵⁷

Inexperience and lack of advice sometimes created problems, as the Grisnichs discovered. Gilbert also mentioned that when his father started farming his newly rented land, they plowed with horses as they had done in the Netherlands.⁵⁸ While the farm machinery used by southern Alberta's farmers may have been exciting for some immigrants, their inexperience with it also highlighted that they were new to the area.⁵⁹

When Peter Bosker arrived in southern Alberta, he worked as a farm hand as he had done back home in the Netherlands for his father. Since his sponsor, George Poelman, didn't actually need extra help on his farm near Granum, Alberta, Peter found work with his neighbour, Bert Hildebrandt, for six weeks and then with other



Photo 7: Peter Bosker with Bert Hildebrandt's combine harvester, 1949.

⁵⁷ Grisnich and Grisnich, 52.

⁵⁸ Grisnich and Grisnich, 52, 19.

⁵⁹ Mrs. H. Schuld in *Iron Springs Christian Reformed Church, 1949-1974: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary*, ed. Gerty Heinen, (Lethbridge: Herald Printers, 1974), 11.

farmers in the area.⁶⁰ Peter had never seen a combine harvester in the Netherlands or a John Deere tractor, but Bert Hildebrandt had a combine and Peter operated it.⁶¹ The use of a combine shows that grain harvesting was a less labour intensive process on the Hildebrandt farm than on the Bosker farm in the Netherlands where the reaping, threshing and winnowing would have been done separately. The harvest results were also different. Peter explained that the Bosker family farm in the Netherlands produced rich, heavy crops. When he arrived in southern Alberta in August of 1949, however, it had been a dry summer and the crops were average, at best:

[W]hen I came there, yeah. That was harvest time, August. The grain was yay-high [indicates quite low]. You can see the ground, the dirt. And I said to them, “What is this considered, a good crop or a poor crop.” I don’t know. He said, “Average. Average crop.” [...] So they had a very average crop. 20, 22 bushes to an acre. That is pretty poor.⁶²

Peter’s opinion at the end of this explanation shows that he was comparing the southern Alberta crop with his experience of crops in the Netherlands. This is a natural way for new immigrants to orient themselves in a new place. Yet, as historians Marilyn Barber and Murray Watson point out immigrants begin to feel settled only when they can adopt the new country’s reference systems, making comparisons with what they know and have experienced in Canada, rather than comparing Canadian experiences with their home country.⁶³

Not all Dutch immigrants worked in agriculture. Among the Dutch I interviewed, two families worked in other sectors and were able to continue in the career for which they had trained. Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt’s father was a carpenter in the

⁶⁰ Bosker and Bosker, 15.

⁶¹ Bosker and Bosker, 21.

⁶² Bosker and Bosker, 18.

⁶³ Marilyn Barber and Murray Watson, *Invisible Immigrants: The English in Canada since 1945*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 132.

Netherlands. The Van Westenbugge family immigrated to southern Alberta in 1953 after their home was destroyed when the dykes broke in Zeeland, the Netherlands. They were expecting to work in the beet fields but when they arrived their sponsor had found other workers and no longer needed them. This created a lot of joy, as Lena expressed, “pheww, was I happy because we didn’t have to work in the beets.”⁶⁴ Their fieldman found the Van Westenbugge family housing in Lethbridge and Lena’s dad found work with a construction company. When he was laid off that winter, he jumped at an opportunity to start his own business. Lena’s husband, Cornelius, told the story:

[Dad Van Westenbugge] wasn’t working. He had to go to the doctor clinic for something. [...] And the doctor said, “What kind of work do you do?” Well, he said, “I’m a carpenter but I have not enough to do at the moment. I was laid off at Oland Construction.” Well, the doctor said, “There’s a door that needs planing because we can’t close it.” “Oh,” Dad said, “I’ll look after that.” After that, Dad never was in want of any work. He worked for doctors and lawyers and all, remodeling houses, remodeling. And he started like that.⁶⁵

The Van Westenbugge family’s situation had advantages and disadvantages. One advantage was that Mr. Van Westenbugge was able to continue working in his field of expertise which meant that he (and his family) experienced less dislocation than other families whose daily work was new to them. However, his employment was not guaranteed during the first year in Canada as it was for those immigrants who had a contract with a sponsor. There was surely some stress on the family when he found himself without a job that first winter although, fortunately, his unemployment did not last long.

When Hugo and Elizabeth Van Seters were looking into emigrating from the Netherlands in the mid-1950s, they were interested in going to Alberta because Hugo’s

⁶⁴ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, (June 3, 2014), 25.

⁶⁵ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, (June 3, 2014), 32.

brother and sister were already there. However, many people urged them to look elsewhere. Hugo told the story this way: “And they all said, ‘Don’t go to Alberta. [...] Unless you want to go into the agriculture business and unless you want to hoe beets. Don’t go there.’ And I said, ‘Well, why not? They have cars down there.’ ‘Yeah.’ I said, ‘I repair cars.’⁶⁶ It was with this determination to continue working in the automotive industry that Hugo and Elizabeth and their baby boy immigrated to southern Alberta in 1957. Hugo’s brother helped arrange a job for him as a “body man” at the Hillman automobile dealership which was a familiar setting for Hugo even if it was a step down in the business hierarchy.⁶⁷

At this point it is important to explain that the Van Westenbugge and Van Seters families immigrated in different migration waves than the immigrants I interviewed who worked in agriculture. In 1952, the Canadian government relaxed its immigration policy a little allowing non-agricultural people to immigrate into Canada.⁶⁸ The time of immigration had a large influence on the experiences immigrants had during their first few years in southern Alberta. One important result, as discussed above, was that some immigrants who immigrated later were able to continue working in their field of expertise and therefore to maintain a little more of what was familiar to them, in comparison to the immigrants who worked in the beet fields. The six immigrants I interviewed who arrived in Canada before 1952 all spent a year or longer working in agriculture. The three immigrants I interviewed whose families immigrated after 1952, Cornelius Van Pelt, Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt, and Hugo Van Seters, were involved in other

⁶⁶ Hugo Van Seters, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, (May 26, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 4.

⁶⁷ Van Seters, 7-9.

⁶⁸ Harold Troper, “Canada’s Immigration Policy since 1945,” *International Journal* 48, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 262.

industries. Among the immigrants I interviewed, therefore, their time of arrival in Canada may have influenced their ability to work outside of the agriculture industry.

The working experiences of Dutch immigrant women in southern Alberta were similar to the men's experiences in some ways and different in others. Both Johanna Guliker Grisnich and Alice Van Spronson Tams (at first) worked actively alongside their fathers and brothers in the sugar beet fields and both women expressed how difficult working in the beets was for them. Both Johanna and Alice also discussed in their interviews the work they were responsible for at home. Housework was familiar to these women, but the tools they had at their disposal and the house itself were new and in many cases very foreign. The Dutch immigrants brought with them to southern Alberta only what they could carry in suitcases or pack into the large wooden crates which were shipped on a different vessel than the one on which they travelled. Therefore, many possessions were sold or left behind including household appliances. Vanessa May points out that because belonging is partly tied to material objects, their removal can be damaging to one's identity and increase the feeling of dislocation which immigration creates.⁶⁹ Two of the men I interviewed expressed repeatedly that they felt immigration had been particularly hard on their mothers.⁷⁰ When I asked them what they meant, both men talked about the changes in house work tools and methods which their mothers (and older sisters) faced.

Cooking, cleaning and washing all had to be done differently. In the Netherlands, according to my interview participants, most women cooked using gas stoves, many (if not most) had running water and flush toilets in the home, and the women washed

⁶⁹ May, 148-149.

⁷⁰ Schalk, 10-11; Grisnich and Grisnich, 17, 26, 50.

clothing using some form of washing machine.⁷¹ Anne van Arragon Hutten claims that many Dutch women also had at least a Saturday maid who helped with weekly chores and bathing children.⁷² My interview participants' situations in Canada were not simply different from what they had known in the Netherlands, they were a step back in time. When they arrived in Canada, the women I interviewed (and the mothers and sisters of two of the men I interviewed) had a wood or coal stove with which to cook and bake, no running water in the home, an outhouse instead of a toilet, a washing board for the clothes, and no maid.⁷³ Add onto this the very heavy, dirty work which, in many cases, most of the family was doing in the fields each day and it becomes easy to understand why Gilbert Grisnich stated repeatedly that "the mothers had it the toughest."⁷⁴

Cooking and baking with a wood or coal stove was a new experience according to my interview participants. Gerard Schalk described his mother's experience with the coal stove in their first Canadian home:

Here she [Mom] comes with that big furnace, but she's never seen a coal furnace in her life. We had a coal and wood stove [in the Netherlands] that was used in the winter for heating in the front rooms and so on, but for the rest, cooking was done on a gas thing, you know. So, she had to learn, and yeah, we all did, of course, to, first of all, get that thing started. This big monster, you know. And

⁷¹ Tams, 16-17; Grisnich and Grisnich, 5; Schalk, 2, 10.

⁷² Hutten, 106.

⁷³ It is important to note that while the Dutch immigrant women had many modern appliances in their homes in the Netherlands, these appliances were not necessarily the norm in Canada during the postwar period. Joy Parr's analysis of the production and sale of household appliances such as gas or electric stoves, refrigerators and electric washing machines during World War II and the decade following shows several trends. First, Parr shows that, through the war years, more Canadians were purchasing wood stoves than gas or electric ones and that wringer washing machines (these could be powered by hand or by gas or electricity) were the standard purchase until 1966 when automatic washing machines finally surpassed them. Second, she explains that, during the war, electric stoves and refrigerators were a luxury item, not something that all Canadians had. Third, Parr shows that production of these items lagged behind the demand for them in Canada throughout the postwar period. This last point indicates that many Canadians continued using the older versions of household appliances through the postwar years. Thus, although the Dutch immigrants may have felt deprived of important conveniences, their Canadian sponsors and neighbours may not have seen the situation that way. Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 27-29, 67-69.

⁷⁴ Grisnich and Grisnich, 17, 26, 50.

then, how to keep it going and how to make sure that the dampers were open and that you didn't get smoked out and that there was water in the reservoir on the side of it [...].⁷⁵

Gerard's expression, "this big monster" indicates the extent to which the wood cook-stove disrupted the family's feeling of familiarity and "home." The stove was a constant reminder of difference and dislocation. During my interview with Gilbert Grisnich and Johanna Guliker Grisnich, we spent some time discussing how Johanna baked bread with a wood cook-stove. Johanna explained that the stove was not just a fire box but was an old-fashioned stove in which the wood and fire went in one compartment of the stove and next to that there was an oven which the fire heated. There was a dial on the oven which indicated how hot the oven was so, once the mixing, kneading and rising was done and the oven was the right temperature, the bread would go in to bake. Johanna affirmed that it took a while for her and her mother to learn how to bake bread on that wood stove.⁷⁶ After the explanation of how to bake bread, Gilbert added that the old fashioned stove also made life physically uncomfortable. Even during the summer when temperatures could reach 30 degrees Celsius, the stove still had to be lit and the women had to cook the meal.⁷⁷ Until they became confident in using it, the wood cook-stove was a constant reminder to the Dutch immigrant women and men of their dislocation and lack of belonging.

One further connotation of the wood or coal cook-stove in southern Alberta was brought up by Gerard Schalk. During World War II in the Netherlands, gas for cook-stoves became scarce and some households were forced to do their cooking on small wood stoves which were normally used just to heat rooms. Gerard Schalk explained that,

⁷⁵ Schalk, 10.

⁷⁶ Grisnich and Grisnich, 6, 25-26.

⁷⁷ Grisnich and Grisnich, 26.

during the war, his mother was forced to use their room-heating wood stove to cook meals. Other families, he claimed, invented small little stoves with only one burner on which they could cook meals by keeping a small fire lit with little pieces of wood and paper.⁷⁸ Primitive conditions, therefore, were not an entirely new experience for the Dutch immigrants. However, the experiences they had during World War II in the Netherlands were difficult and threatening. Facing similar experiences in their new home in southern Alberta was not reassuring.

Sometimes the hard work, pressure, stress and the unfamiliarity of things became too much to cope with. Three of my interview participants discussed ways in which normal cultural expectations in the Netherlands were incompatible with their new location in southern Alberta. For instance, the immense value which the Dutch placed on household cleanliness was, in some ways, an inappropriate value for the realities of southern Alberta. Gerard Schalk recalled that his mother faced an emotionally intense conflict one day over ruined work and ingrained expectations that were too hard to meet in southern Alberta with the antiquated tools that she had. As usual since their arrival, she had washed dirty clothes for eleven people by hand in a tub with a washboard .

Gerard explained:

And a Dutch woman is as clean as can be as far as that wash had to be just white like snow, you know. That's what you expect. That's what you've learned, you know. And so, she stands there by the hour, scrubbing on a scrub board, trying to get stuff clean, you know. And then hanging it out on the clothesline. [...] And, so then she had Dad's nice white shirt, Sunday shirt, you know, had it washed and so then she wanted to iron it, of course. And so, we've got these ironing irons and yeah, you've got to put them on the stove [to heat] and so. She'd used them before but that time she forgets to wipe them down. And so she goes on Dad's nice shirt and here she's got soot from the top of the stove on that nice white shirt and here she's got to go through the whole thing and wash it again.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Schalk, 2-3.

⁷⁹ Schalk, 10-11.

Gerard admitted that the frustration of ruined work that day brought on a flood of tears for his mother. The very first purchase for the Schalk family was a used washing machine. As Gerard explained, “it just was impossible for Mom to keep that up.”⁸⁰

Johanna Guliker Grisnich’s mother also found that the stresses of dislocation and ingrained Dutch expectations which could not be met in southern Alberta could sometimes just be too much to handle emotionally. Gilbert Grisnich explained that his mother-in-law was a very clean woman: “Everything had to be spick and span in the house.” But that was simply impossible when caring for a family of eleven people, who worked in the beet fields, and lived together in a small, cramped house.⁸¹ As Johanna’s daughter, Edith Grisnich explained, Johanna’s mother had a “nervous breakdown.”⁸² Edith also explained that Johanna’s mother insisted that her six sons have polished black shoes each Sunday for church. However, this expectation was also ill-suited to southern Alberta where the dust clung to those beautifully polished black shoes, ruining the mother’s expectations.⁸³ Although Gilbert and Johanna chose not to mention these stories, their daughter Edith felt that these stories were an important part of her grandmother’s experiences and challenges in southern Alberta. While Gilbert and Johanna seemed reluctant to engage in these stories and Johanna did not comment, Gilbert provided the above explanation which he felt was important. The deep-rooted expectations of cleanliness combined with outdated tools for house work and the unfamiliar routines they required added to the stress of feeling dislocated from the people and places the immigrants knew and loved.

⁸⁰ Schalk, 11.

⁸¹ Grisnich and Grisnich, 50-51.

⁸² Grisnich and Grisnich, 50.

⁸³ Grisnich and Grisnich, 50.

As discussed earlier, the age of my participants at the time they immigrated influenced the types of experiences they had during their first years in southern Alberta. Ann Wielinga Bosker, who immigrated at the age of twelve and attended school in southern Alberta for three years, experienced another form of dislocation when she finished school and began working in her mid-teen years. Ann attended school in Iron Springs and then later in Raymond, southern Alberta. When she was fifteen, her parents removed her from school and she began working as a housekeeper for the parents of the girls with whom she had been going to school. While she stated that “it was ok,” her tone of voice as well as other comments she made intimated that being downgraded from equal status with her classmates to being their parents’ maid was a humbling experience. She was also very quick to add how glad she was that her children were able to pursue higher education and obtain better jobs.⁸⁴ Historian Anne Van Arragon Hutten claims that for rural families in the Netherlands, especially before 1950, it was very common for parents to remove their children from school in their early teen years and send them to work. Hutten says that this home-country expectation often continued in Canada among immigrants from rural areas.⁸⁵ Ann Wielinga Bosker worked for her neighbours for one year and then found a job as a live-in housekeeper for a lawyer named Mr. Davidson in Lethbridge.⁸⁶ Moving to Lethbridge allowed her to distance herself from the awkwardness of working for her classmates’ parents. She was also able to earn a little more money - \$45.00 a month on top of room and board, though she still contributed to the family income.⁸⁷ Several others of the Dutch immigrants I interviewed discussed

⁸⁴ Bosker and Bosker, 6.

⁸⁵ Hutten, 175.

⁸⁶ Bosker and Bosker, 6.

⁸⁷ Bosker and Bosker, 5.

how they or their sisters worked as housekeepers.⁸⁸ In fact, as historian Herman Ganzevoort attests, it was very common for Dutch immigrant young women to work as housekeepers.⁸⁹ Yet, as Ann Wielinga Bosker's story illustrates the experience sometimes created an unhappy sense of not belonging and highlighted the differences between "us" and "them."

The differences between "us" (Dutch immigrants) and "them" (Canadians) were very pronounced during the immigrants' initial year or two in southern Alberta and it was the acceptance of Dutch friends and family which created a place of belonging for the postwar immigrants. As discussed at length in the following chapter, the various Reformed churches of southern Alberta became the basis of self-understanding and belonging for many Reformed immigrants. At church people knew and understood each other. Outside of church, the immigrants viewed the people with whom they came in contact as "other." Alice Van Spronson Tams provided an example of feeling very different from the "other" – Canadian young people. Alice recalled that at her first job as a housekeeper in Lethbridge her employers felt that she needed some things for herself because she gave all of her wages to her parents. So, they gave her some money to buy a swimming suit, exercise clothes, and gym shoes and they provided her with a pass to the YMCA so that she could go out in the evening and "mingle with other young people."⁹⁰ As Alice shared this story with me it was apparent that, while she didn't resent giving her wages to her parents, she deeply appreciated her employers' generosity. When I asked her about her activities at the YMCA her response dealt with issues of belonging. She said, "I did go, but I did not feel comfortable going because I was not used to that. But I

⁸⁸ Grisnich and Grisnich, 26-27; Schalk, 15; Tams, 8.

⁸⁹ Ganzevoort, 102.

⁹⁰ Tams, 9.

liked swimming because that's what we did in the *MULO* [school in the Netherlands] [...] And gymnastic I did too. I did that, but mingle with other young people, I did not feel comfortable with.”⁹¹ As a new immigrant, having only been in Canada for a few months at this time, Alice did not feel that she belonged with the Canadian young people – they were the “other” – and so she kept her distance. However, swimming and gymnastics were activities with which she had a connection from previous participation at her *MULO* school in the Netherlands. Here she was more comfortable and felt that she could maybe belong, at least with the activity. While Alice's use of the YMCA facilities was unusual for a new Dutch immigrant, it was connections like these which began the process of creating a new sense of belonging and a new identity for the immigrants.

Minimizing visible and audible differences was another way to lessen the gap between “us” and “them.” While the Dutch immigrants were similar to most Canadians in terms of physical colouring (“whiteness”), there were other visible and audible differences. Even as the Dutch immigrants learned to speak English, their Dutch accents still set them apart. Historians Marilyn Barber and Murray Watson point out in relation to postwar English immigrants to Canada that even though immigrants may be “invisible” in terms of physical appearance they can still be “audible” as soon as they begin speaking.⁹² One visible and audible difference which one of my interview participants discussed involved the traditional Dutch wooden shoes. Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt explained that her family brought to southern Alberta all their wooden shoes from their home in Zeeland, the Netherlands. They had intended to continue wearing them for work around the yard as they had done at home in the

⁹¹ Tams, 9.

⁹² Barber and Watson, 102.

Netherlands. However, not only did the shoes stand out visibly since Canadians did not wear wooden shoes, but the noise made by wooden shoes while walking was also unusual in Canada. Lena only wore her wooden shoes one time after immigrating. She explained:

Dad always sent me out to do errands if there was something to be done because he knew I'd come home with the right thing. But the first time I went to mail a letter, I went in my wooden shoes to the post office but, that only happened once because every step I took, somebody'd [demonstrated how people looked around and stared.] [...] I went up town with them once, that was the end of it. None of us kids wanted to do it.⁹³

The sound of the wooden shoes on the sidewalk was so unfamiliar to Canadians that many of them looked around to find the cause of the sound. Having found its source, the audible difference became a visible difference as well. Once Lena realized how much she stood out from the Canadians around her while wearing her wooden shoes, she refused to wear them again. For Lena, the need to belong within the new culture ended her connection with wooden shoes.

Once the immigrant families were able to re-negotiate their contract with their sponsor or find new employment, they could make more decisions for themselves. Making decisions, such as where to live, increased their sense of belonging in southern Alberta. For example, the Wielinga family left their sponsor's farm as soon as they were able. Having found employment with a dairy farmer near Raymond, south of Lethbridge, they moved closer to his farm. A few years later, the Wielingas bought a farm in Ontario and moved there. However, Ann Wielinga Bsoker and her older sister stayed in Lethbridge because they had jobs as housekeepers and their boyfriends were in

⁹³ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, (August 18, 2014), 55.

Lethbridge.⁹⁴ These two girls had come to feel that they belonged in Lethbridge with their Christian Reformed friends and boyfriends more than they belonged with their parents and siblings, especially when faced with the possibility of moving again.

Other immigrants also chose to move to another part of the country. Similar to the Wielinga family, the Guliker family moved on in search of a better place to belong. Johanna Guliker Grisnich's family worked in the sugar beet fields for four years before moving to the Fraser Valley in British Columbia where they rented a dairy farm. The climate there was similar to the climate in the Netherlands and there was better access to conveniences such as running water in the home.⁹⁵ Johanna moved with her parents promising to help her mother who was not well for one more year before she married Gilbert Grisnich and moved back to southern Alberta and the Grisnich dairy farm.⁹⁶ Like Ann Wielinga, Johanna's sense of belonging was shifting from belonging with her immediate family to belonging with the man who would become her husband. For Ann and Johanna, the people with whom they belonged were much more important than the spaces in which they lived, although those spaces still played a part in their sense of belonging.

Decisions about what type of work to do also helped some immigrants increase their sense of belonging. The Schalk family worked in the beet fields for two years and then moved into the city of Lethbridge. The men and older daughters found employment wherever they were able. Gerard's sisters worked as housekeepers; his younger sister lived with an older lady in Lethbridge who needed help and a companion. Gerard and his

⁹⁴ Bosker and Bosker, 2.

⁹⁵ Grisnich and Grisnich, 53.

⁹⁶ Grisnich and Grisnich, 7. Gilbert and Johanna later moved back to the Fraser Valley where they raised all their children.

father worked on road construction crews for a couple summers and in the winter they found other odd jobs.⁹⁷ Gerard explained that he was always able to find some work somewhere:

Always try and find something, yeah, yeah. You find a labour job. You work in a construction, until you find something better, you know. [...] Never say die, just... you got two good hands that the Lord's given you, use them. You know. And if there's nothing else to do, then you go and help some neighbour or a friend or so, you know, doing something or fixing something.⁹⁸

This positive attitude and stubborn determination helped many postwar Dutch immigrants continue when things became difficult. Even if the options were limited, Gerard chose the active option rather than the passive option. Gerard's ability to act and make decisions within Canadian society illustrates his increasing sense of belonging in his new country.

Several of my interview participants also discussed their increasing sense of belonging in southern Alberta through terms of social mobility. Once her family moved to Lethbridge, Alice Van Spronson Tams began working at Lee's Food Market, a Chinese grocery store in Lethbridge's north side, until she was offered a job at the Imperial Bank through her brother's new connections there.⁹⁹ Working at a bank was certainly a step up from housekeeping and unskilled labour at a grocery store. Another woman who secured a higher status job was Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt. She left school after four years, having finished grade nine, and found a job working for the Alberta provincial government.¹⁰⁰ Lena explained her good luck this way: "And then I got a job at the government. You had to write a civil service exam in those days, and me

⁹⁷ Schalk, 14, 15-16.

⁹⁸ Schalk, 18.

⁹⁹ Tams, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, (June 3, 2014), 23; Van Pelt and Van Pelt, (August 18, 2014), 57.

comes right out of school, there was lots of questions that was fresh to me. [...] So, then I got the job.”¹⁰¹ The ability to obtain better-paying and higher-status jobs illustrates how these two women had become more connected to and more comfortable in Canadian society.

One last influential factor for all immigrant families was how they were treated by Canadians. Acceptance by Canadians went a long way in helping all postwar immigrants feel that they belonged. Alice Van Spronson Tams told me about how thankful her family was for their sponsor, a Mennonite man named Henry Allart, who was very generous to them. Many times, he went out of his way to help them. First, he allowed Alice to leave the family contract to work as a live-in housekeeper in Lethbridge during their first year in southern Alberta. Then, once the family’s one-year contract was up, he encouraged Alice’s father Joseph Van Spronson to look for work as a mechanic in Lethbridge, since this is where his training lay. Joseph took that advice and found a job the first day he began looking. The sponsor also found them a better house to live in that second year, still older, but a big improvement on the beet workers’ house. Then, only a little while later Allart found a suitable house in Lethbridge which he purchased on behalf of the Van Spronson family and then allowed Joseph Van Spronson to pay him back as he was able.¹⁰² This level of generosity was unmatched among the other stories which I heard from my interview participants about their interactions with Canadians. Henry Allart’s generosity to the Van Spronsons, therefore, had a vast impact on the family’s ability to improve their situation which in turn increased their connection to and sense of belonging in southern Alberta.

¹⁰¹ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, (June 3, 2014), 23.

¹⁰² Tams, 13-15.

All of these stories indicate an increasing sense of belonging and of identification with various aspects of life in southern Alberta. Some immigrants got onto their own farms. Others found new jobs. Some even grew proficient enough in the English language in a few years' time to hold banking and government jobs. While these accomplishments in no way negate the difficulties these immigrants faced in creating a new identity for themselves, they do show the immigrants' ability to adapt and find new places and new ways of belonging in southern Alberta. Their developing sense of self combined with growing familiarity with the language as well as more freedom to move, work and purchase as they wished gave the postwar Dutch immigrants a feeling of belonging and helped them re-create their identities in southern Alberta.

Through migration, the postwar Dutch immigrants I interviewed left behind the familiar people, places and things which informed their sense of belonging and therefore their old identities. Belonging and identity had to be re-created in southern Alberta. The first place with which they began their identity re-creation was their new home. Though at first it caused an isolating sense of dislocation some of the immigrants I interviewed were able to turn that house into a home with some hard work and familiar objects which they brought with them. Those immigrants who migrated together with their families also found that they were not entirely dislocated. Their families became the axis around which their lives revolved and the members of the family provided a sense of security, continuity and belonging which they all so deeply needed. All immigrants faced the challenges of adapting to a new culture and learning a new language. Some of my interview participants also dealt with the challenges of unfamiliar work, methods, and tools. As the postwar Dutch immigrants I interviewed grew accustomed to life in

southern Alberta, and as they gained the ability to act in meaningful ways by taking charge of their place, work, and relationships, their sense of belonging increased.

Ultimately though, their growing sense of belonging demonstrated that they were coming to understand themselves in a new way in light of their new situation. However, the one central and definitive area of their lives in which my interview participants refused to re-create themselves and by which they continued to measure themselves and others was their Dutch Reformed religion.

Chapter Three: Re-Creating Identities – A Reformed Foundation

Among the Dutch immigrants I interviewed there was an assumption that faith in God and membership in a church community were fundamentally important. Eight of my nine interview participants emphasized how vitally important their church communities were for them and how encouraging it was to meet together with other Dutch immigrants for Sunday church services especially during their initial transition period after immigrating to southern Alberta. That does not mean however that the stories which they shared with me were all idyllic. In fact, a few of my interview participants shared stories of hurt and division which they experienced among church members. In this chapter I first look broadly at the importance of the Reformed Christian communities in developing new identities and providing places to belong for the postwar Dutch immigrants during their initial period of adaptation in southern Alberta. Next, I explore how differences divided the immigrants along theological lines while reinforcing narrower senses of group belonging and I discuss some ways in which this narrow sense of group belonging limited the interactions of members. Thirdly I look at how, despite my interview participants' commitment to their specific Reformed congregation, there were still conflicts within each group. Lastly, I briefly address the establishment of Reformed Christian schools in southern Alberta as a culmination of the immigrants' commitment to Reformed theologies and traditional Dutch ideological separations. This chapter argues that the postwar Dutch Reformed immigrants whom I interviewed firmly founded their new identities in southern Alberta upon familiar, postwar, Reformed values which emphasized community support and theological purity. While the differences between the various Reformed church denominations were very important to the immigrants I

interviewed, there were also many similarities of experiences among them. When there is a denominational differentiation to be made I point this out. However, throughout this chapter when I refer to something which was common among the immigrants I interviewed and stretched across the various Reformed denominations of southern Alberta, for lack of better terminology, I refer to the “Reformed” or “Dutch Reformed” churches or immigrants.

As addressed in Chapter One the church community with which an individual or family identified was foundational to their way of life in the pillarized society of the pre- and postwar Netherlands. Thus, as immigrants left the Netherlands and came to Canada the importance of their church communities and of theological differences which were embedded in their culture came along with them to their new home.¹ Dutch-Canadian historian and sociologist Frans J. Schryer argues that, while the postwar Dutch immigrants to Ontario whom he studied did not emphasize the maintenance of the Dutch language or form Dutch social clubs (two markers which anthropologists and sociologists use to determine how well immigrants have adapted and integrated into their new culture) many of them continued to follow the pillarized social rules which governed Dutch society.² This quasi-pillarization in Canada emphasized the importance of religion and what each group considered to be correct theology. Schryer argues that among Dutch Reformed immigrants in Ontario it was important to establish or join existing Dutch Reformed churches and eventually to establish other “Christian” institutions such as

¹ Because the Dutch immigrants whom I interviewed for this study all belonged to the Reformed pillar in the Netherlands, this chapter inevitably discusses only the Reformed peoples and churches of southern Alberta, though there were certainly members of the other Dutch pillars who also immigrated to southern Alberta during the postwar period.

² Frans J. Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 23-24.

Dutch Reformed banks, labour unions, farmer organizations and primary, secondary and even post-secondary schools.³ It is this traditional view of the importance of theological purity and religious separation from other Dutch and Canadian church denominations which formed the basis for my interview participants in re-creating their identities.

For many postwar Dutch immigrants their Christian beliefs and faith in God were a guiding force as they faced the immigration process and the life-changing transitions which immigration to a new country would inevitably bring. The emotions of leaving everyone and everything familiar behind were overwhelming for many immigrants yet as Gerard Schalk explained he believed that God would give him the strength he needed:

We left Holland and the last weekend we were all together with family. And all the family was gathered to say goodbye to us because we were all convinced that we would never see each other again, you know. [...] [W]e felt like Abraham going out and not knowing where you're going to end up. And just going because God directs you to. And just trusting him and just... every step of the way, just go with him, you know. Just leave it up to him, yeah. And he's never let us down. He's always worked, you know. It's amazing.⁴

Such a personal belief in a loving and faithful God became a stabilizing force in the immigrants' lives. Krystyna Bleszynska and Marek Szopski's study of Polish immigrants in California concluded that the immigrants they studied who personally believed in God were better able to cope with the strains of migration than those with no personal religious beliefs. They state: "[Belief in God] brings hope and a sense of security, develops a distance from one's experience and places this experience within the framework offered by the religious doctrine."⁵ Thus Gerard Schalk compared himself

³ Schryer, 129.

⁴ Gerard Schalk, interview by author, Cranbrook, BC, (July 24, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 18.

⁵ Krystyna Bleszynska and Marek Szopski, "Polish-Catholic Religiosity in California," in *Gender, Religion, and Migration: Pathways of Integration*, edited by Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Vivienne S.M. Angeles, (Toronto: Lexington Books, 2010), 191-192.

with the Biblical patriarch Abraham who left his homeland to go to a distant land which God promised to show him.⁶ While Gerard used the language of personal faith in God, most of my interview participants did not speak of a personal faith in those words, rather they framed their faith in terms of church (the weekly services and sacraments) and the church community.

Church communities became the life-blood of the Dutch immigrants I interviewed during their initial adaptation period in southern Alberta. The first year in particular was often a struggle. There were so many things to learn and so much of their daily lives involved new and unfamiliar tasks, tools and situations. However, at church they met with others who were learning the same things and had the same frustrations which they were experiencing.⁷ Several of my interview participants discussed how the anticipation of meeting with fellow Dutch people on Sunday sustained them through the work week. For example Ann Wielinga Bosker revealed the importance of church to her family in answer to my question about the hardships of their first year in Iron Springs, southern Alberta. She said, “Well, probably that first year was the hardest, I would think. We managed. And, of course, you went to church on Sundays. [...] You know, you look forward to that because you met with other [Dutch] people and other [Dutch] kids, and that.”⁸ Ann glossed over the difficulties of her family’s first year and focused instead on how her church community supported each other. Johanna Guliker Grisnich described how thankful she and her family were for their church community: “We were very happy that we could go to church on Sunday to hear the word of God but also to meet some

⁶ Genesis 12:1-6.

⁷ Riet Scheffer in *Iron Springs Christian Reformed Church, 1949-1974: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary*, ed. Gerty Heinen, (Lethbridge: Herald Printers, 1974), 18.

⁸ Peter Bosker and Ann Wielinga Bosker, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, (June 21, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 3.

[Dutch] people.”⁹ For Johanna, the people at church were just as important as the spiritual teaching she received there. Among the Dutch immigrants I interviewed there was a common sense of deep gratitude for the communities and mutual support which they found in the Reformed churches of southern Alberta.

The relationships which my interview participants formed through gathering together on Sundays often lasted through the rest of their lives. Several of the Dutch immigrants I interviewed shared stories from their first years in southern Alberta and then followed up these stories with a description of what those people were doing now, where they lived, or when they had passed away. While relationships come and go with time this continued knowledge and awareness of these people demonstrates the way the network of relationships from their first few years has continued through the present time. Gerard Schalk explained how he and his family formed these vital relationships. He explained that when his family came to Canada they attended the First Christian Reformed Church in Lethbridge. There they found a community of people with whom they came to feel a sense of belonging:

So then after the morning service, there was Sunday school [...] And then there was catechism classes and so, and the rest the people, they just milled around, outside or inside, and talked and talked and talked and catch up and see where you're from. "Where are you from and what do you know?" you know. And "Where are you at and what are you doing?" [...] Everybody's stranger when you come but in the end, you're so tightly connected that you're like family, you know.¹⁰

For the newcomers church services were much more than a time of worshiping together. Sunday church was a time for communing together with people whose home country and current experiences were similar to their own. It was also a time when the immigrants

⁹ Gilbert Grisnich and Johanna Guliker Grisnich, interview by author, Fort MacLeod, AB, (June 23, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 6.

¹⁰ Schalk, 13.

could express themselves and be understood in their own language.¹¹ Alice Van Spronson Tams pointed out that church on Sunday was the only time during the week that she and her family were able to meet and mingle with fellow Dutch immigrants.¹² Historian Albert VanderMey has also documented the importance of the Reformed churches to the Dutch immigrants. He quotes one of his sources who stated plainly: “We needed the church, but we needed the company of the people even more.”¹³ During the week, the immigrants I interviewed were surrounded by things that were unfamiliar and difficult, but on Sundays they experienced fellowship in church communities which became an anchor for them and gave them the courage and hope to continue through another week of adjustments and challenges.

The benefits and importance of religious communities to new immigrants have been documented by a variety of scholars. Migration scholars Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Vivienne S. M. Angeles explain that immigrant churches provide a place for immigrants to worship God in familiar ways with people who share national similarities.¹⁴ They state that “the church becomes a place where love of God, love of country and nostalgia converge.”¹⁵ Sociologists Wendy Cadge and Elaine Howard Ecklund argue that immigrants also use religious gatherings as a means of re-creating an ethnic and/or

¹¹ Anne Van Arragon Hutten, *Uprooted: The Story of Dutch Immigrant Children in Canada, 1947-1959*, (Kentville, N.S.: North Mountain Press, 2001), 118, 126. It should be noted that for some of the Dutch immigrants who came from rural areas which spoke a regional dialect, or those immigrants from the province of Friesland whose dialect is now recognized as its own language, Dutch was actually a second language though it was still much more familiar to them than was English.

¹² Alice Van Spronson Tams, interview by author, Coaldale, AB, (June 24, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 21; *Nobleford Christian Reformed Church, 1905-1980*, ed. Gerty Heinen, (Lethbridge: Ronalds Western Printing, 1981), 49.

¹³ Henry Jentink in Albert VanderMey, *To All Our Children: The Story of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada*, (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia Press, 1983), 207.

¹⁴ Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Vivienne S.M. Angeles, “Building Communities through Faith: Filipino Catholics in Philadelphia and Alberta,” in *Gender, Religion, and Migration: Pathways of Integration*, eds. Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Vivienne S.M. Angeles, (Toronto: Lexington Books, 2010), 258.

¹⁵ Bonifacio and Angeles, 263.

religious identity.¹⁶ In fact for the postwar Dutch immigrants religious identification was more defining than their ethnicity. Religious scholar Stuart MacDonald argues that “In the [Dutch-Canadian] Christian Reformed Church, theology and religious values function in ways similar to the ways ethnicity often functions in other churches, in that they act together as the touchstone for group identity and solidarity.”¹⁷ Schryer also states that the postwar Dutch immigrants he studied in Ontario tended to represent themselves in terms of religion rather than ethnicity or political ideology.¹⁸ Similarly, Alberta historians Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer argue that the Dutch Reformed immigrants’ “main expression of cultural identity” were their churches.¹⁹ The Dutch Reformed immigrants whom I interviewed affirmed these scholarly arguments by emphasizing how important their Reformed churches were to them. Thus the Reformed churches, their theological doctrines and their communities of people were pivotal to the immigrants’ survival and self-understanding as they adapted to their new life in southern Alberta.

The Reformed churches in southern Alberta informed the identities of the Dutch immigrants in a large way by setting the immigrants apart from other Christian groups. There were many churches in southern Alberta during the postwar period yet the Dutch immigrants preferred to establish their own churches rather than join an existing Canadian church. Religious historians Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau state that in

¹⁶ Wendy Cadge and Elaine Howard Ecklund, “Immigration and Religion,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007), 363, 364; See also Helen Rose Ebaugh, “Transnationality and Religion in Immigrant Congregations: The Global Impact,” *Nordic Journal of Religion & Society* 23, no. 2 (November 2010), 106-107.

¹⁷ Stuart MacDonald, “Presbyterian and Reformed Christians and Ethnicity,” in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 171.

¹⁸ Schryer, 317.

¹⁹ Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, “The Religious Ethic and the Spirit of Immigration: The Dutch in Alberta,” in *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity*, eds. Howard and Tamara Palmer, (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985), 164.

the 1940s and 1950s, “the majority of Canadians and recent immigrants continued to see the church as fundamental to their individual and collective identities.”²⁰ Statistics also show that in 1946 sixty percent of Canadians who identified as Protestants claimed to attend church services regularly.²¹ Further, the general religious culture in Alberta was very Christian during the postwar period. Scholar Clark Banack argues that “evangelical” Protestant Christian thought heavily influenced Alberta’s political leaders between 1935 and 1968 as well as the policies they implemented.²² It is easily inferred from this argument that the voting public who elected them was also strongly Protestant. Despite the surrounding Protestant society and the variety of Protestant churches in southern Alberta, all of the immigrants I interviewed chose to attend a Dutch Reformed church rather than a Canadian church. As Dutch-Canadian historian Anne Van Arragon Hutten observes, attendance at one of the Dutch Reformed churches separated the immigrants from Canadians and isolated them in their Dutch, postwar ways.²³ This religious isolation played into the development of the immigrants’ individual identities by strongly preserving particular, postwar Dutch Reformed theologies and traditions.

The one short-lived exception among my interview participants to this preference for attending a Dutch Reformed church was Cornelius Van Pelt. He and his family were members of the more liberal *Hervormde* church in the Netherlands (see Chapter One). He recalled that for the first year after his family immigrated to southern Alberta in 1953,

²⁰ Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *Christian Churches and Their Peoples, 1840-1965: A Social History of Religion in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 180.

²¹ Christie and Gauvreau, 180; Robert Choquette, *Canada’s Religions: An Historical Introduction*, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), 366.

²² Clark Banack, “Evangelical Christianity and Political Thought in Alberta,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 48, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 71, 73-75.

²³ Hutten, 232.

they attended the First United Church in Lethbridge where his father played the organ.²⁴ Schryer explains that until 1950 the *Hervormde* church in the Netherlands encouraged its emigrating members to join Canada's United Church whose theology was similar to that of the *Hervormde* church.²⁵ While the Van Pelt family immigrated a few years after the *Hervormde* church stopped this recommendation, the United Church may have seemed a better option than the more conservative and orthodox Christian Reformed Church which was active in Lethbridge at this time. As Cornelius explained however, once Hope Reformed Church was organized as a congregation of the Reformed Church of America (RCA) denomination the family began attending there.²⁶ Undoubtedly the opportunity to worship in their own language and visit with others who also spoke that language played into their decision; however, the Van Pelts' preference also highlights the importance which the postwar Dutch immigrants placed on theology.

Although their Dutch Reformed religious communities were vitally important to the new immigrants, the importance of what each individual and family believed was "correct" theology was even more important. Religious convictions ran deeply in the Netherlands as evidenced by the strict social and political pillarization and these convictions and the divisions they created immigrated along with the postwar Dutch immigrants and settled with them in southern Alberta. Though some immigrants overlooked these differences in theological beliefs during the initial adaptation process as they struggled through the steep learning curve of a new country and found their footing,

²⁴ Cornelius Van Pelt and Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, (June 3, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 10.

²⁵ Schryer, 96-97.

²⁶ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, 10.

in time these theological differences began to resurface.²⁷ Dutch-Canadian historian Albert VanderMey explains the various Reformed denominations in southern Alberta: The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) established its first congregation in Canada in 1905. That congregation was located in the Granum/Nobleford, Alberta area.²⁸ Other CRC congregations began in other southern Albertan communities as the Dutch population grew. In 1950, the Canadian Reformed Church was established in Lethbridge/Coaldale. It was transplanted to Canada following the 1944 split (over church Article 31 regarding the doctrine of baptism) from the *Gereformeerde* church in the Netherlands.²⁹ There were also two other smaller groups which were more conservative. They were the Free Reformed Church and the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC).³⁰ Lastly, there was also the more liberal Reformed Church of America (RCA) which was established during the postwar era through Dutch-American missionary efforts.³¹ The 1944 “Article 31” split was still fresh in the minds of some immigrants when they were looking into emigrating. Among my interview participants, both the Van Spronson family and the Van Seters family chose to come to the Lethbridge/Coaldale area in part because a Canadian Reformed Church had already been established in Coaldale.³² Schryer explains that often for the postwar Dutch small theological details became so important to their identities and group loyalties that they were unable to (re-)unite with other Dutch Reformed groups.³³ The theological differences which separated

²⁷ Herman Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land: The Dutch Experience in Canada, 1890-1980*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 99; Hutten, 232-233.

²⁸ VanderMey, 302.

²⁹ VanderMey, 304. Also see Schryer, 125-126.

³⁰ VanderMey, 304.

³¹ Ganzevoort, 100-101.

³² Tams, 5; Hugo Van Seters, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, (May 26, 2014) interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 5.

³³ Schryer, 138.

these church denominations originated in the Netherlands and continued to be important to the Dutch immigrants after their immigration to southern Alberta.

Schryer also argues that the postwar Dutch immigrants' devotion to what they believed was a historical characteristic of the Dutch people. He states that the Netherlands has a reputation for being tolerant of people who hold different fundamental beliefs; however, he points out that this "does not mean one has to like the opposing point of view, nor that people holding the same basic view cannot quibble endlessly over minor nuances."³⁴ Stating that this generalization applies to Dutch of all religious, political or philosophical persuasions, he goes on to affirm that "The Dutch have strong opinions, a trait closely related to individualism and independence. Yet, 'arguing' or disagreeing does not break the ties of loyalty that bind family members, a religious faction or the same political party together."³⁵ This argument explains why the postwar Dutch immigrants who came to southern Alberta, including my nine interview participants, perpetuated the theological divisions of the Netherlands rather than joining together to create a larger network of Reformed Christians.

This denominational separation influenced areas of life outside the church walls. One example of this was described by Gerard Schalk in his discussion of how he met his wife Jenny. He enthusiastically described that he fell in love with his wife because she was pretty; he then added that she attended the same church as he did, "which was important."³⁶ He explained that "it's much better if you belong to the same church. That's why it's good if Young People's [church youth groups] get together with other Young People's from your same denomination or so and find a mate there and then you

³⁴ Schryer, 39.

³⁵ Schryer, 40.

³⁶ Schalk, 27.

don't have any haggling that already starts when, before you're married [...].”³⁷ Since, as Schryer explains, the postwar Dutch held strong opinions and were not afraid to disagree Gerard felt it was best to choose a wife from among members of his own CRC church and thereby avoid “any haggling.”

Theological differences were so important to some of my interview participants that if there was no church community readily available with which they could theologially agree they would begin their own church. When the Grisnich family arrived in southern Alberta in 1948 there was as yet no Netherlands Reformed Congregation (NRC) in the area. However, being more theologially conservative than the Christian Reformed Church which had several congregations nearby, the Grisnich family held church services in their home together with a few other like-minded families. Within a couple years, they had established themselves as a Netherlands Reformed Congregation, they had found a minister, and their little community was able to build a small wooden church building in Coalhurst.³⁸ Thus the importance of theologial differences resulted in multiple Dutch Reformed denominations in southern Alberta.

While their theologial differences divided the larger postwar Dutch immigrant group their devotion to and attendance at their chosen church denominations remained strong. As Cornelius Van Pelt explained, attending church was an unquestioned part of life: “It [attending church] was never as question. It wasn't a hard and fast rule that you say, [thumps fist on table] ‘We got to go to church today!’ We just got up on Sunday morning and we got dressed and we went to church. There was never, never any

³⁷ Schalk, 28.

³⁸ Grisnich and Grisnich, 41-42, 6.

argument about it.”³⁹ Even though many of the new immigrants did not have proper transportation for getting to church their commitment to attend Reformed church services remained clear. In the Netherlands most people were able to walk or bike wherever they needed to go. However, in southern Alberta the longer distances made some larger form of transportation necessary. Since most immigrants did not have any means of transportation except their own feet when they first arrived they were often isolated. This was especially true for the immigrants who worked as agricultural labourers. However, they used whatever means they could find to get to church. My interview participants described how they and others they knew travelled to church. Some immigrants like the Van Spronson family were able to borrow a truck from their employer on Sundays; others borrowed a horse.⁴⁰ Some immigrants walked or biked long distances to wherever services were being held.⁴¹ Ann Wielinga Bosker recalled that when her family first arrived in Iron Springs in 1948 another local family came to their house for church. She said:

In the very beginning, we had church in our house. Dad read the sermon and we had this family, Karsten, come from Coaldale on their bike[s], to our place, and we had church in our house. Later on the school bus picked us up and more immigrants too, ‘cause we didn’t have no car in the early days. We had nothing. So, they took us to [the Christian Reformed] church [...] in Iron Springs.⁴²

In the area around Iron Springs the Dutch immigrants who made up the Christian Reformed Church organized a way to bring the new immigrants to church. As Ann

³⁹ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, 27.

⁴⁰ Tams, 11, 21.

⁴¹ Hutten, 123.

⁴² Bosker and Bosker, 3.

described above, many of them were picked up in a school bus and brought to church by more established immigrants.⁴³

Because getting to church was so difficult many immigrants brought a lunch along and they all ate their lunches together between the morning and afternoon services. Gerard Schalk described Sunday lunch at the First Christian Reformed Church in Lethbridge:

[E]verybody would get into the back of the building and they had benches, wooden benches set up and wooden picnic tables. And everybody would sit there and there would be coffee on. And you'd have brought your lunch with you. And everybody would sit there and have their lunch... eat their lunch, and talk and then you'd go out and talk some more.⁴⁴

Eating together after morning services gave the immigrants more time to visit. And then there was always a second service to attend. Two services each Sunday was simply the way church was done in the Dutch Reformed communities and of course it provided more time for visiting.⁴⁵ The commitment to attending Reformed church services twice on Sundays as they had done in the Netherlands illustrates one way in which my interview participants continued familiar Dutch Reformed religious patterns in their new context. And though not everyone ate their lunches at church, the two services also provided more time for the immigrants to form friendships.

The support which these communities provided for my interview participants was vital. Gilbert Grisnich who immigrated with his family in 1948 recalled how he and his family intentionally did what they could to help the immigrant families who arrived after them.⁴⁶ Johanna Guliker Grisnich explained that her hair cutting skills were highly

⁴³ Heinen, *Nobleford Christian Reformed Church*, 49.

⁴⁴ Schalk, 13-14.

⁴⁵ Van Seters, 29.

⁴⁶ Grisnich and Grisnich, 18, 48.

sought after among the Dutch postwar immigrants. When I asked her whether she was paid for her hair cutting services, she said, “No, no! You didn’t even think about money. Just help each other.”⁴⁷ The ministers of the various churches also did a lot to assist the newcomers. Alice Van Spronson Tams who attended the Canadian Reformed Church in Coaldale explained that “[Rev. Pieffers] was so good for first immigration minister [*sic*] because nobody had a car yet, so if the women or one of the children were sick in the congregation that had to go to the doctor, he had a car and he would drive them to the hospital.”⁴⁸ Gerard Schalk also appreciated his minister’s work:

But we had a Reverend Hoekstra who was a home missionary, had been sent by the CRC out of the States [...] And that man did a lot of work. I’m telling you. He drove all over. He went Medicine Hat, Milk River, up to High River or so, you know. [...] And so they were always available. That man did so much work! Unbelievable, you know. And, twice on Sunday, preaching, you know.⁴⁹

Because there were few qualified Reformed ministers in Canada, many of the early ministers of the various Reformed churches in southern Alberta were sent by Dutch Reformed churches in the United States. These “home missionaries” came to Canada with the financial backing of their American Dutch Reformed churches to help establish Reformed churches among the postwar Dutch immigrants.⁵⁰

Such connections with Dutch Reformed churches in the United States also helped the new immigrants in other ways too. Gilbert Grisnich, Johanna Guliker Grisnich and Gerard Schalk all recalled how they benefited from the used clothing sent by the American churches.⁵¹ Gerard explained: “And they [the Hoekstras] would get used clothes sent from the States, boxes and boxes and boxes of them. And they had an area

⁴⁷ Grisnich and Grisnich, 11.

⁴⁸ Tams, 21.

⁴⁹ Schalk, 13.

⁵⁰ MacDonald, 179.

⁵¹ Grisnich and Grisnich, 29-30 ; Schalk, 13.

that they would hang all those clothes up and the immigrants could go in there and if they saw something that fit them or so, they could have it.”⁵² Johanna remarked that “it was very nice because you didn’t make that much money to buy new clothes.”⁵³ Migration scholar Charles Hirschman observes that immigrants have high needs and few resources. Therefore, churches or other religious organizations that offer practical help are a huge benefit to immigrants.⁵⁴ Though many of the Reformed churches in southern Alberta had few resources, as my interview participants explained, the members did their best to help each other whenever they were able.

Besides providing mutual support, those friendships which began with weekly interactions on Sundays often became an important replacement for the family which immigrants had left behind in the Netherlands. Although many Dutch people immigrated as a nuclear family group, the parents of that family left behind their own families and their support systems – their friends, siblings, and often aging parents. Gilbert Grisnich emphasized several times throughout our interview how difficult he thought immigration was for the parents of families, mothers especially. He said, “I was 16 years old when I came across. For us as boys, it was an adventure, of course. You know, we go to a different country. You have no worries about nothing. But for the mothers I say it was always the toughest. [...] I’m always amazed at those older people, that they moved yet.”⁵⁵ For the older immigrants in particular the new friendships which they made through the Reformed churches of southern Alberta were important substitutes for the family support and sense of belonging which they left behind in the Netherlands. Gerard

⁵² Schalk, 13.

⁵³ Grisnich and Grisnich, 30.

⁵⁴ Charles Hirschman, “The Role of Religion in the Origins and Adaptation of Immigrant Groups in the United States,” *The International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2004), 1225-1226.

⁵⁵ Grisnich and Grisnich, 17.

Schalk related one way in which new friends at the First CRC in Lethbridge became like family for his middle-aged parents:

If Mom or Dad or so had a birthday... well, in Holland, when you have a birthday, your family or your neighbours or your friends all come down and have a party with you on your birthday, you know. So, [in Alberta] if Mom or Dad had a birthday, [...] people would come down, or Mom and Dad would go someplace, and they would visit and talk and so on and then go home. But the people were like brothers and sisters because they didn't have no brothers and sisters left here [*sic*], you know.⁵⁶

Hirschman argues that churches often serve as community support for immigrants in a similar way to a family support network.⁵⁷ And sociologist Vanessa May explains that when an individual does not experience belonging in their biological family unit for whatever reason, including if they move far away from family, that individual will usually “seek ‘alternative’ groups of intimate belonging that are ‘family like’.”⁵⁸

It was with these same communities of Dutch Reformed people that my interview participants enjoyed their times of fun and relaxation. Three of the immigrants I interviewed talked about their Christian Reformed Church's Young People's groups. These gatherings were a time for Dutch teenagers and those in their early twenties to socialize and study the Bible together. Gerard Schalk explained that the Young People's group at his Lethbridge CRC congregation was organized and run by the young people themselves. As a group the young people elected an executive committee who took leadership of the group. Then each week the young people took turns to lead a study. These studies, Gerard explained, included a presentation on a faith-based topic followed by a group discussion. The emphasis of these discussions according to Gerard was for the group to compare what had been presented to what they knew the Bible said on the

⁵⁶ Schalk, 18.

⁵⁷ Hirschman, 1207.

⁵⁸ May, 115.

subject and then to discuss their own thoughts concerning it. Gerard emphasized that there were no church authority figures present at Young People's meetings which allowed the teenagers and young adults to share ideas and opinions more freely. He also highlighted that these studies encouraged and laid a foundation for personal study of the Bible.⁵⁹ Following the study and discussion the Lethbridge CRC Young People's group would have a time of fun and socializing.

CRC Young People's groups also hosted special times of fun for the young people. Peter Bosker mentioned that the Lethbridge CRC Young People's group went on a special outing to Waterton National Park where he was very impressed by the Canadian Rocky Mountains since, as he explained, he had "never seen mountains" before.⁶⁰ Although Young People's groups usually involved only the young people from one congregation, sometimes one CRC Young People's group would invite other CRC congregations' young people to an event. Gerard Schalk described the spontaneous, if unconventional, fun that these gatherings sometimes created. He explained that his father had purchased an old hearse as the family vehicle and had installed some benches in the back. Gerard and his siblings together with other young people from their area would take this unusual means of transportation to Young People's gatherings:

And then we young people, every so often, maybe in Taber or Iron Springs or Nobelford had some special going on and Young People's from the area were invited to come down. Well, we'd load up the hearse and we had wooden benches in it and I think we had as many as 16 people in it, I think. No seatbelts, no nothing, of course. [...] We had the most fun and sing and go down there and drive home again, you know. Just crazy, but lots of fun. We had a lot of good times, our Young People's.⁶¹

For Gerard, memories of Young People's gatherings were very positive.

⁵⁹ Schalk, 19.

⁶⁰ Bosker and Bosker, 24.

⁶¹ Schalk, 19.

Several of the immigrants whom I interviewed also discussed how they became acquainted with their future husband or wife at Young People's gatherings and other church-related activities.⁶² Amidst a great deal of teasing back and forth Peter Bosker and Ann Wielinga Bosker explained that times such as Young People's groups as well as lunch after church with Ann's family or at someone else's home provided them with opportunities to get to know each other.⁶³ Gerard Schalk recalled similar experiences of interacting with his future wife at Young People's and at church choir practice.⁶⁴ Cornelius Van Pelt also explained that he got to know his future wife Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt at the young people's society of his RCA church. Of the approximately fifteen or twenty young people who attended, he said "quite a few of them got together and became couples."⁶⁵ As mentioned above, for some immigrants it was very important to marry someone from the same denomination. Hence, as my interview participants discussed, Young People's youth groups and other similar events for church members provided a meeting place for eligible young people as well as affording some good times.

Young People's groups served several purposes in the lives of my Dutch immigrant interview participants. The groups served as a sounding board for the young people who were in the process of developing their identities as Reformed Christians, adults, and Canadians. As Gerard Schalk described, at Young People's they compared themselves, their ideas and experiences with their Dutch Reformed immigrant peers. Therefore these meetings created a standard for what was "normal" on many fronts.

⁶² Bosker and Bosker, 20; Schalk, 17.

⁶³ Bosker and Bosker, 19-20.

⁶⁴ Schalk, 17.

⁶⁵ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, 14.

Young People's groups also served as a place to belong and provided an acceptable pool from which to choose a marriage partner. However, Young People's was also a place of separation. Reformed churches' Young People's groups were intended for Dutch immigrant young people and while they didn't explicitly exclude others my interview participants did not discuss any ways in which the Young People's groups they attended sought to include young people from other Dutch Reformed denominations or non-Reformed young people. My interview participants also did not mention that Young People's worked to involve their Dutch Reformed young people in the larger Canadian society. Although they provided the opportunity for friendships, marriage partners, good times and were a positive thing in many respects, Young People's was not a group which engaged with Canadian society. For the three of my interview participants who discussed their involvement with Young People's the groups illustrate how my interview participants worked toward re-creating their identities along familiar Dutch Reformed lines and in keeping with the pillarized social system of the Netherlands.

The Reformed churches also initiated other forms of recreation for their members. Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt described a church bazaar put on by Hope Reformed Church (RCA) in Lethbridge. The bazaar included coffee, refreshments, singing, and all manner of performances and entertainment.⁶⁶ It was at this event that she first noticed her future husband who performed a song on his guitar. She said, "Then he sang a song at the church bazaar, 'The Wedding Bells will Never Ring for Me.' I thought, 'Poor fellow.'"⁶⁷ Lena also described the fun her younger brother had at the annual RCA summer picnic picking up the peanuts which the adults threw around for the children in

⁶⁶ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, 14.

⁶⁷ Van Pelt and Van Pelt, 8.

the “peanut scramble.”⁶⁸ Many of the Reformed churches held annual picnics in the summer at some outdoor location nearby such as Park Lake and often congregations of the same denomination joined together at these times which created even more excitement. Local chronicler Gerty Hienen records that the Christian Reformed Churches of Nobleford, Granum and Monarch met together for their annual picnics and the Young People’s groups of each church were very involved in the planning, executing and clean-up of the event.⁶⁹

While the various Reformed churches provided times of fun and entertainment they also worked as a community keeping their members accountable to behave properly. Several of my interview participants discussed the role of their church in censuring the behaviour of members through official “house visitation.”⁷⁰ Hugo Van Seters explained that at the Canadian Reformed Church in Coaldale these visits were performed by the church-appointed elders who each had a list of church members whom they oversaw and visited annually. During “house visitation” the elders would inquire how things were going for the family and whether there were any problems the family was experiencing. The elders also observed the home which sometimes supplied further revelation about the family’s circumstances, and may have caused some stress for the women who were in charge of maintaining it.⁷¹ Hugo remembers these formal visits as a positive thing for his family. However, he also generalized that they may not have been a pleasant visit for all immigrants, particularly if the members in question were not living up to the standards of

⁶⁸ Cornelius Van Pelt and Lena Van Westenbugge Van Pelt, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, (August 18, 2014), interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author, 42.

⁶⁹ Heinen *Nobleford Christian Reformed Church*, 69.

⁷⁰ Van Seters, 18; Grisnich and Grisnich, 47; Tams, 19-20.

⁷¹ Tams, 20.

the church.⁷² By providing behavioural boundaries, the oversight of the church leadership reinforced my interview participants' identities as Dutch Reformed Christians. Those who complied with the church's expectations were accepted and approved as part of the group while those who did not conform may have experienced tension in their ability to be fully accepted as members of the group.

On the other hand, one of the Dutch immigrants I interviewed expressed her non-conformity on one matter at the same time as she confirmed her intentional identification with the Christian Reformed Church. Ann Wielinga Bosker described how she honestly explained to her CRC elders that she would not conform to their behavioural expectations. She was preparing to do Profession of Faith which would confirm her membership at Lethbridge's First CRC. The preparation process included an interview with the elders of the church. Ann explained: "I know, when I did Profession of Faith, I was eighteen years old, and then you're interviewed by the elders, right? Before hand. And I told them that I was not going to promise that I wouldn't go to a movie. Because it [going to the movies] was kind of looked down upon in those days."⁷³ Ann did not explain how the elders responded to her declaration, but she did her Profession of Faith and became a member of the CRC to which she still belongs. Although the church leaders oversaw the members and did have a role in enforcing the accepted code of conduct for CRC members, Ann's story shows that there was some room for deviation.

However, at other times deviation from the acceptable standard of behaviour met with reproof from the elders. Reflecting Frans J. Schryer's assertion that the Dutch hold

⁷² Van Seters, 14.

⁷³ Bosker and Bosker, 20-21.

strong opinions and are not averse to conflict, Gilbert Grisnich described a humorous series of conflicts in the Netherlands Reformed Congregation (NRC) church in Coalhurst:

But, it was awful hot [in the church building] in the summer time and cold in the winter. So, there was one man, if it was too hot, then he opened the window. There was a sliding window. [...] So, and then it started to draft and the other man closed it. He, the one man, opened it again. And it went back and forth. So, the next Sunday, this man wants to open the window again, but there was a nail in there. In the meantime, this guy, during the week, he put a nail in there. [...] And then he couldn't open it, so what he did, he put a hankie around his arm, around his fist and he says, 'Bing!' He knocked the glass out. [...] Yeah, the window was broke. So, yeah. Then of course, they [the church elders] told him not to do that anymore.⁷⁴

In this case the disagreement was rather minor and resulted in only a broken window and a reproof from the NRC church elders. This type of minor conflict can serve to promote group belonging. As historian Anne Van Arragon Hutten explains of her own experience as a Dutch immigrant in Canada, "On Sundays we met with *like-minded people* who spoke our language in the most literal sense. We worshipped with them, drank endless cups of coffee with them, gossiped *and bickered with them*."⁷⁵ The people with whom the immigrants chose to "bicker" were members of their denominational group. As Schryer states, in Dutch culture there were social rules only about "when and with whom you can argue"; arguing in itself was accepted as normal.⁷⁶

Working through minor differences strengthened group identity for the members of each congregation. For instance, church traditions varied by region in the Netherlands; however, once the immigrants came to southern Alberta they had to deal with these conflicting regional differences. Johanna Guliker Grisnich, a member of the NRC in Coalhurst, explained that in her church "there were people from [the] north of Holland

⁷⁴ Grisnich and Grisnich, 48-49.

⁷⁵ Hutten, 118. Emphasis is mine.

⁷⁶ Schryer, 40.

and [the] south of Holland and everybody has his own ideas in the church. ‘We were used to this.’ ‘But we were used to that.’ So there was friction sometimes.”⁷⁷ Yet, these differences did not splinter the congregation in the way that theological differences separated the Reformed immigrants. This supports Stuart McDonald’s argument that the Dutch in Canada identify more strongly with their religion than with their ethnicity.⁷⁸ Over time the NRC church in Coalhurst found solutions to these differences of tradition which helped to solidify a new group identity in southern Alberta.

Tensions within Reformed church congregations also resulted from inter-personal comparisons. Hugo Van Seters pointed out that while some immigrants, such as himself and his brothers, were able to set up their own businesses and became prosperous rather quickly other immigrants worked equally hard but did not see the same results. Within a few years this inequality created jealousy and resentment between them and other members of their Canadian Reformed Church.⁷⁹ Hugo recalled that he and his brothers were accused of being “crooks” by others in their church because, as he explained, they thought that Hugo’s business success had come too quickly to have been done honestly.⁸⁰ Hugo and his brothers ignored these accusations though the tension and resentment in the church remained. Hugo credited his success to a strong desire to get ahead. He explained, “when we left Holland, you [*sic*] were accustomed to a certain amount of possessions and when you came down here, you basically had nothing so there was always that push to get back to where you were before and when you had reached that

⁷⁷ Grisnich and Grisnich, 49.

⁷⁸ MacDonald, 171.

⁷⁹ Van Seters, 14-15; See also VanderMey, 244.

⁸⁰ Van Seters, 24-25.

stage, then there was a push to go beyond that.”⁸¹ Historian Herman Ganzevoort discusses this intense drive to get ahead which Hugo described. He states that it was common among postwar Dutch immigrants and he goes on to explain that success for the postwar Dutch immigrants was measured by material possessions and personal accomplishments – a vehicle, a farm of one’s own, or starting one’s own business.⁸² In some cases as Hugo Van Seters explained to me immigrants who did not experience the success they had hoped for stopped attending their Reformed church to escape the constant pressure of comparisons. They chose to end their identification with their Dutch Reformed heritage rather than continue to feel that their immigration had ended in failure.⁸³ However, this is the perspective of someone who stayed in the Canadian Reformed Church despite its problems. Had I gotten the chance to interview someone who left the church in those early years after immigration their story would likely be different. Historian and sociologist Frans J. Schryer observes that among the postwar Dutch in Ontario whom he studied, those who quickly improved their situation were from more privileged backgrounds in the Netherlands. Class and its privileges such as education, capital and social connections played an important role in their ability to succeed in Canada.⁸⁴ Hugo Van Seters’ family does seem to have been part of the middle class, though Hugo did not use those terms to describe his background, and he did have the highest level of education among my interview participants.

The church’s strong influence on Dutch immigrants’ identities was magnified by the traditional Dutch Reformed insistence on Reformed Christian education which grew

⁸¹ Van Seters, 24.

⁸² Ganzevoort, 108.

⁸³ Van Seters, 15.

⁸⁴ Schryer, 180.

out of their pillarized social structure in the Netherlands. Several of my interview participants sent their children to Reformed Christian schools which were established by the postwar immigrants. In southern Alberta the CRC denomination established Immanuel Christian School in Lethbridge in 1962 and, following denominational differences, the Canadian Reformed Church in Coaldale established Coaldale Christian School in 1974.⁸⁵ Hugo and Betsy Van Seters, members of the Canadian Reformed Church, sent their nine children to Immanuel Christian School in Lethbridge when it opened but later transferred their children to Coaldale Christian School.⁸⁶ Peter Bosker and Ann Wielinga Bosker bought a house near Immanuel Christian School so that their children could walk to school from home.⁸⁷ Alice Van Spronson Tams mentioned that she worked as a teacher's aid at Coaldale Christian School for several years as well.⁸⁸ Scholar Harro W. Van Brummelen argues that the Dutch immigrant parents he worked with in his study of Reformed Christian schools in the United States often founded these schools because of their pillarized upbringing in the Netherlands and also because of a perception that "public schools were ungodly."⁸⁹ For several of my interview participants, when they became parents it was important to them to send their children to a Reformed Christian school because being Reformed was foundational to their self-understanding. Reformed Christian schools assured them that their Dutch Reformed roots continued to inform their self-understanding and that of their children.

⁸⁵ Immanuel Christian School, <http://www.immanuelchristian.org/historyandgovernance.cfm> (Accessed July 27, 2015); Coaldale Christian School, <http://www.christiancu.ca/community/schools/84> (Accessed July 27, 2015).

⁸⁶ Van Seters, 17-19.

⁸⁷ Bosker and Bosker, 18.

⁸⁸ Tams, 27.

⁸⁹ Harro W. Van Brummelen, *Telling the Next Generation: Educational Development of North American Calvinist Christian Schools*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 247, 263-264.

The Dutch Reformed religion and its various church denominations in southern Alberta were integral to the postwar Dutch immigrants' development of new identities in Canada. My interview participants' personal relationships with God and broader relationships within the Dutch Reformed communities of southern Alberta created stability and a place to belong through the immigration and adaptation process. At church the Dutch immigrants I interviewed connected with other immigrants who were dealing with the same senses of dislocation and many of the same adjustments and hardships which they faced daily. At church they were also able to express themselves freely in their own language. Church communities therefore were the life-blood of the Dutch immigrants whom I interviewed. Yet the pillarized society of the Netherlands continued to influence them in their new home. The emphasis my interview participants placed on what they deemed correct theology caused them to create a strong identification with one church denomination and its members while excluding members of other Dutch Reformed and Canadian churches. However, these strong group identities did not override my participants' deeply-held opinions. There were still many conflicts within the individual congregations. The postwar Dutch immigrants I interviewed maintained a steadfast commitment to their understanding of Reformed theology and to the stridently divided social system of the Netherlands throughout the postwar period. The culmination of their commitment evidences itself in the Reformed Christian schools which the postwar Dutch immigrants established in southern Alberta to perpetuate these commitments among their children and grandchildren.

Conclusion:

The postwar Dutch Reformed immigrants to southern Alberta whom I interviewed created new identities for themselves which were rooted in traditional Dutch Reformed religious practices and communities of people. The commitment to their religious traditions and the support which the Reformed church communities provided were a huge help to the immigrants I interviewed through their immigration and adaptation processes. While so much of their daily lives involved unfamiliar places, people, tools, methods, and language, especially during those first few months and years in southern Alberta, the Reformed churches and their communities of people assisted my interview participants in creating a new sense of belonging.

At church, they could communicate with each other in their own language and there they received and provided mutual support and encouragement. Church communities also provided a group of people with whom they could disagree, which Frans J. Schryer asserts was a standard part of Dutch culture.¹ Many, though not all, of the customs involved with the church services were familiar, including the two services – morning and afternoon. Further, seven of my nine interview participants emphasized how important it was for them to attend a church with whose doctrine they agreed. The great importance of what each individual and family considered to be theologically “correct” stemmed from the culture of the Netherlands. From the late nineteenth century through the postwar period in the Netherlands, the Dutch people were stridently divided in almost every aspect of daily life based on their religious and political beliefs and affiliations. My interview participants, who were all members of the Calvinist Reformed

¹ Frans J. Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 39-40.

pillar in the Netherlands, also illustrated the divisions within that pillar and how those divisions, at least in terms of church communities, were transplanted to southern Alberta. Thus, the Reformed churches and church communities of southern Alberta reflected traditional Dutch Reformed values which were based in the pillarized social system of the Netherlands.

As my interview participants worked through the initial adaptation process in southern Alberta, they re-created their identities to reflect the influences of both their old home country and their new country. Through their immigration to southern Alberta, their sense of belonging was uprooted in many ways.² The one thing which remained constant for eight of my nine interview participants was their nuclear family with whom they immigrated. Outside of those relationships, however, nearly everything they came in contact with was foreign. While the postwar immigrants from the Netherlands were privileged immigrants in some ways, my interview participants described many challenges which they experienced during their first few years in southern Alberta. However, despite the numerous challenges which my interview participants discussed with me during our interviews, in many cases they chose to downplay these challenges or gloss over them; to them these were not the most important things about their immigration experiences and perhaps were not what they wished to focus on in their memories and stories. Instead, my participants emphasized the good times they had, their successes, and their relationships with people which gave them a new place to belong in their new context.

² Vanessa May, *Connecting Self to Society: Belonging in a Changing World*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 79.

It is important to recognize again that, as the interviewer, I was involved in the process of knowledge creation together with my interview participants. The information we created and recorded was shaped by my perspectives, responses and questions during the interview as much as by my participants' perspectives, memories and experiences over time. Had I directed my questions and responses in different ways, the resulting information may have been different from what I have recorded and transcribed. This does not invalidate the interviews I conducted or the information which resulted from them. Rather, this process of creating knowledge together reveals unique perspectives which are corroborated by other research but can never be duplicated exactly. Thus, as any honest historian must admit, I have certainly influenced my own research.

This thesis addresses a few foundational aspects of Dutch immigrants' first few years in southern Alberta. It also reveals many areas which would benefit from further study. For example, this project was limited to members of the Netherlands' Calvinist Reformed pillar. What were the immigration and adaptation experiences of Dutch immigrants from other pillars who came to Canada during the postwar period? In what ways were they similar to or different from the experiences of my interview participants? This study also makes only one brief mention of how the Reformed immigrants' established Reformed Christian institutions in southern Alberta. However, I am aware that they created more social and political institutions than just the primary and secondary schools which my interview participants mentioned and which this thesis discusses. These institutions in southern Alberta and their connections to the pillarized social system of the Netherlands would be grounds for an interesting study. Lastly, though certainly not limiting the scope of future research, there are no studies to my knowledge which

address the second, third, and now fourth generation of Dutch immigrants who migrated to Canada after WWII. What have their experiences been? How do they understand their parents' and grandparents' stories? Since this study argues that the Reformed churches were the basis of my interview participants' new identities in southern Alberta, it would be interesting to know whether their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren have continued to identify with these churches.

As can be inferred from the dates of birth, ages at immigration, etc. which I provide in the introduction to this thesis, my interview participants were all in their late 70s and early 80s when I conducted my interviews during the summer of 2014. At that time, they were all living in their own homes and while we discussed some of their health problems they were all doing very well. Only one of my participants had lost a spouse previous to our interview. Since that time, one of my interview participants has passed away and another has lost his wife. These losses make it clear that the stories of the postwar immigrant generation need to be recorded now. These people, their experiences and *their understandings* about what was important in their lives are invaluable to our knowledge of Albertan and Canadian history. In this thesis, I have attempted to provide critical analysis of the knowledge which my interview participants and I created during our interviews while also reflecting to the best of my ability what my participants thought was important about their own stories.

My interview participants came to understand their own identities strongly in terms of their religious affiliation, being Dutch Reformed Christians of various theological persuasions. While the importance of their faith throughout the immigration and adaptation experiences did not overcome the pillarized barriers which they had

known in the Netherlands their faith combined with the support of their Reformed church communities gave my interview participants the encouragement and hope which they needed during this transitional time of their lives. As they worked toward adapting to Canadian culture, unfamiliar daily work, the English language, and various other transitions which their migration required they also re-created their identities in Canada through a newly found sense of belonging with one of southern Alberta's several Dutch Reformed churches.

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