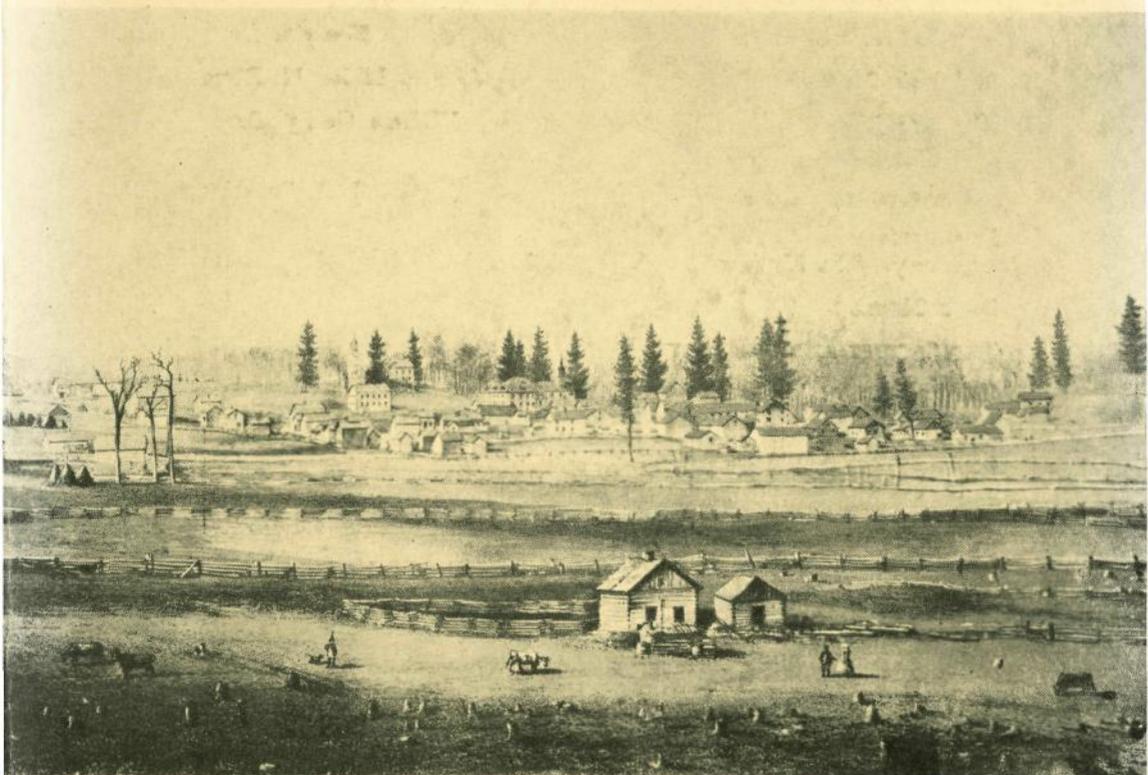


# WISCONSIN

MAGAZINE *of* HISTORY



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# WISCONSIN MAGAZINE *of* HISTORY

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## THE COVER

Little ST. NAZIANZ, MANITOWOC COUNTY, had its beginnings in the wilderness. The stumps in the foreground, the pines piercing the horizon, the snake fences in the clearings, the sturdy log houses all testify to the forest-region and to the backbreaking labor which chopped St. Nazianz out of the woods. A beehive of industry, the young colony fenced-out its cows and fenced-in its fields. Faith and work, never-ending, brought compensation to this Catholic community. The translation by the late Dr. Schlicher, found in the Document Section, provides additional information.

# The Founding of New Amsterdam in La Crosse County

By HENRY S. LUCAS

**A**MONG THE IMMIGRANTS who came to our country from the Kingdom of The Netherlands during the nineteenth century were several groups of Friesians, inhabitants of the province of Friesland. The fact that they were subjects of Holland and scarcely distinguishable from other Netherlanders has caused the Americans, not conversant with conditions in Friesland, to confuse these two groups. But the Friesians really constituted a separate group even though they emigrated in company with other Hollanders and usually settled in places where Netherlanders established themselves. They spoke the Friesian tongue, a branch of the Germanic linguistic family which possesses curiously archaic forms that suggest a relationship with the Gothic tongue of the days of Ulfilas. They also had some customs which marked them as being different from other Hollanders.<sup>1</sup> These people, like the Hollanders, formed settlements in the State of Wisconsin. This paper is the first attempt, at least in the English language, to tell something of their history, particularly of the group who in 1853 founded the Friesian community of New Amsterdam, about a dozen miles north of Prairie La Crosse.

The Friesians began to emigrate to the United States during the 1840's, following the leadership of the Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte who founded the large Dutch colony in western Michigan

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PROFESSOR HENRY S. LUCAS, a member of the University of Washington faculty, has recently contributed several articles on Dutch immigration to Wisconsin. This excellent sketch tells of the departure of a group of Friesians from the province of Friesland in February, 1853. After suffering shipwreck in the Bahama Islands, they sailed up the Mississippi River and established New Amsterdam in La Crosse County, Wisconsin.

<sup>1</sup>The United States government immigration statistics do not distinguish between Friesians and other Netherlanders.

in and around Holland and Grand Rapids in Ottawa, Allegan, and Kent counties. In the settlement at Vriesland in Ottawa County a group of Friesians from Leeuwarden and near-by points, under the leadership of the Rev. Maarten A. Ypma, established themselves during the summer of 1847.<sup>2</sup> Another group followed the Rev. Hendrik P. Scholte, founder of Pella, Iowa.<sup>3</sup> Still others, from the sections (*grietenijen*) of Het Bilt and Barradeel, left Friesland in 1847 but did not establish themselves as a separate colony. Finding employment in the cities along their route westward, they stopped at Albany, Toledo, and Lafayette, Indiana. In the latter place they were able to form a small Friesian community which subsequently attracted new immigrants from Friesland.<sup>4</sup> Especially interesting is the settlement of Friesians at Lancaster, Erie County, New York, made in 1849 and of which the eminent Worp Van Peyma, a farmer from Ternaard, was a conspicuous member.<sup>5</sup> This undoubtedly was the most prosperous of the first Friesian settlements made in this country. A Friesian named Leendert Kingma from Makkum who had traveled widely in the United States opened a brick factory and lime kiln at Wawarsing, south of Albany.<sup>6</sup> Finally to be noted is the establishment at New Paris near Goshen, Indiana, in 1853 of a group of Mennonites from Balk.<sup>7</sup> These people had come to avoid the military service required by the Dutch state. Conscience had moved this group to leave the land of their birth. The friends of Worp Van Peyma came for no economic reason but because of the prestige America enjoyed in Europe at that time on account

<sup>2</sup> See Thede Ulberg's account of this settlement in *Jaarboekje voor de Hollandsche Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord Amerika. Voor het jaar 1883* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1882), 65-79.

<sup>3</sup> Sjoerd Aukes Sipma, *Brief van Sjoerd Aukes Sipma aan de ingezetenen in West-dongeradael* . . . (Dokkum, 1848), and *Belangrijke berigten uit Pella in de Vereenigde Staten van Noord Amerika* . . . (Dokkum, 1849).

<sup>4</sup> J. Van Hinte, *Nederlanders in Amerika. Een Studie over de Landverhuizers en Volkplanters in de 19 en 20 Eeuw in de Vereenigde Staten van Amerika*, 1:127 (Groningen, 1928).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 172-77. See also H. P. Smith, *History of the City of Buffalo and Erie County*, 1:458, 755-56 (Syracuse, New York, 1884). *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Erie County, New York, from Actual Surveys and Records* (New York, 1880), 80, 82-83, 85 (of the platbook): *De Sbeoygan Nieuwbode*, Oct. 3, 1850.

<sup>6</sup> J. Van Hinte, *Nederlanders in Amerika*, 1:174.

<sup>7</sup> E. J. Potgieter, "Landverhuizing naar de vereenigde Staten, Een Brief uit Pella, door den Salamagundist," *De Gids*, 1855, Deel 1, 528.

of Washington, Jefferson and Franklin.<sup>8</sup> The other settlements, however, had very definite economic and religious motives.

The departure of these groups stimulated discussion throughout the province of Friesland of the desirability of emigration; but the numerous letters telling of the prosperous future before the settlers in the woods and on the prairies of the United States proved a veritable inducement for the poor and propertyless also to seek their fortunes in the wide and still vacant expanses of America. It is not surprising, therefore, that toward the close of 1852 there was much talk in the western parts of Friesland about emigration, especially among the poor. Oepke H. Bonnema, a grain dealer of some wealth who was oppressed by the spectacle of poverty among the people with whom he came in contact, decided to help his impoverished friends to America. Assisted by his bookkeeper, B. B. Haagsma, plans were perfected and on February 26, 1853, a group of ninety-two persons left Harlingen, a town in Friesland, situated on the Zuider Zee. Crossing the Atlantic, suffering shipwreck in the Bahama Islands, sailing by way of New Orleans up the Mississippi River, they reached Prairie La Crosse in Wisconsin on July 1.

The story of this interesting episode was retailed in a letter dated July 13, 1853, written by B. B. Haagsma from Prairie La Crosse to his friend P. Runia of Kinswerd. In accordance with an agreement made at the time when Haagsma came to Runia to talk over the projected emigration, Haagsma promised to write a letter shortly after his arrival in America giving a full account of his experiences. It was to be published in pamphlet form, the proceeds to help support Haagsma's father. This pamphlet, provided with a preface dated September 15, 1853, and signed by P. Runia was published by S. Houtsma in Harlingen.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For some of these ideas in Friesland, see J. H. Halbertsma, "Rinse Postumus, in Leven Kerkleeraar onder de Hervormde Gemeenten van Waaxens en Brantgum." *De Vrij's Fries*, 9:207-71 (1862), and "Hulde aan de Nagedachtenis van Rinse Postumus," *ibid.*, 272-94.

<sup>9</sup> *Lotgevallen van den Heer O. H. Bonnema en zijne Toggenooten op reis uit Friesland naar de Vereenigde Staten van Noord-Amerika. Beschreven door Zed's Boekbouders B. B. Haagsma (Voorheen ondermeester te Arum). Met eene Kaart. Uitgegeven ten Voordeele van den Vader des Schrijvers door P. Runia. Te Harlingen (S. Houtsma, Boek en Steendrukker), [1853].*

Supplementing the data of this rare pamphlet is another letter written on June 29, 1853, by one H. De Jager from Galena, Illinois. This person, whose earlier history seems impossible to trace, was one of a handful of Netherlanders who had settled in Galena being attracted to that place because of the opportunities it offered for business. While in the downtown section of Galena looking after his affairs, De Jager heard that during the previous night a group of Netherlanders had arrived by boat and were stopping at the docks. This proved to be the sorely buffeted band led by Oepke Bonnema. They told De Jager the story of their experiences and, it would appear, not very coherently. This lack of coherence is due perhaps to the fact that De Jager heard the story from various lips. At any rate, De Jager hastened to pen a long letter to the editor of *De Hollander* of Holland, Michigan. His account seems to have gained in confusion after he heard it from the Friesians who justly were outraged by the criminal conduct of the captain who basely deserted them in the dire moment of their shipwreck.<sup>10</sup>

Another letter containing some interesting quotations from a letter sent by P. Runia, written by Haagsma under date of October 14, also appeared in *De Hollander*.<sup>11</sup> A third letter, written by J. Bijlsma, dated June 22, contains a brief account of the shipwreck as it was told him by one of the group.<sup>12</sup> Though much briefer, it is a sober relation and more reliable. American papers also published accounts of the disaster, sometimes in exaggerated form before complete information could be obtained.<sup>13</sup>

In view of the difficulty of fitting the account from De Jager's pen to the facts contained in Haagsma's pamphlet, the statements contained in the latter will be followed here. This pamphlet gives a straightforward account of what happened and undoubtedly is

<sup>10</sup> *De Hollander*, July 13, 20, 27, Aug. 3 and 10, 1853.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 1853.

<sup>12</sup> *De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, July 12, Aug. 2, and Nov. 15, 1853.

<sup>13</sup> For example, the *Detroit Tribune* and the *New York Courier and Enquirer*. These obtained their accounts from the *Daily Picayune* of New Orleans. See *De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, Nov. 9, 1853.

quite reliable. Such facts of De Jager's letter as seem reliable have been used to piece out the history of the incident.<sup>14</sup>

There was much discussion, pro and con, in Harlingen, Kin-swerd, Wolvega, and other places when the project of emigration became known. Some people approved, seeing in it an opportunity for the poor to escape from the hardship of their lot. Others, however, emphasized the difficulties incidental to the emigrant's journey and the dangers of the sea on which many a ship with all on board had been lost. But such disapproving voices were in the minority, and so, on February 26, 1853, a group of ninety-two men, women, and children, in accordance with the plan they had made early in the month, boarded the "City of Norwich" at Harlingen, and departed at 9:00 A.M. Leaving their beloved Friesian fatherland was hard, and the last farewells provoked many a tear. A stiff northwest breeze drove them out into the Zuider Zee, and the low lying, snow-covered coast of Friesland sank out of sight. At 8 o'clock the next morning they reached Nieuwediep in the Province of Noord Holland where the vessel took on a cargo of cattle for the London market.

Crossing the North Sea proved tedious and unpleasant. A storm made nearly all the emigrants sick. Delayed by the wind, the ship did not reach Lowestoft, their destination, until early in the morning of the twenty-eighth. Transferred to a train, they traveled by way of Norfolk to Ely where the cattle were routed to London. At 5 o'clock in the morning of March 1 they arrived in Liverpool Station.

Too late to obtain passage on a boat that was to sail on March 2 and take them to Philadelphia,<sup>15</sup> they had to wait until the twenty-first before embarking. Meanwhile they visited points of interest in and near Liverpool. The women of the group attracted much attention because of their traditional Friesian caps which permitted no hair to show. Their silver ear pieces and the wooden shoes worn by the men and women alike also were an

<sup>14</sup> As this account follows Haagsma's pamphlet, it seems needless to give page by page references. Whenever facts are drawn from De Jager's letter, specific references are given in the footnotes.

<sup>15</sup> On this point see *De Hollander*, Nov. 9, 1853.

unusual sight. But the travelers soon found the police courteous and efficient in restraining rowdies. On their part, they were impressed by the calm of the English Sabbath.

Meanwhile they bought foodstuffs, cooking utensils, and other things they might need on their ocean voyage. In those days ships' companies as a rule did not provide emigrant passengers with ordinary necessities beyond water. The Friesians, however, contracted with the ship's company for half of their provisions. This activity must have been a novel experience for these Friesians, few of whom had ever traveled far from home. Haagsma was struck by the bustling activity of the harbor. There were many emigrants, bound not only for America but also for Australia. In a German paper he read that thirty-four ships were lying ready in Liverpool to transport emigrants. From June 16 to December 31, 1852, he learned that 221,068 emigrants had sailed from Liverpool. On March 2, the day on which they were to have sailed 11,000 ships were said to have been anchored in the harbor.

Finally, on March 21, the company of Friesians, now numbering 86, went on board the "William and Mary." Six of their group, Veijer Schaafsma with wife and four children, discouraged by the hardships experienced on their journey to Liverpool, decided to return to their home in Harlingen.<sup>16</sup> Bonnema paid for the passage of the entire group.<sup>17</sup> The ship was a three-master, of 500 English tons burden, reputedly a fast sailor, commanded by a Captain Stinson.<sup>18</sup> Its cargo was iron ore, in addition to the baggage and provisions for the passengers. Besides the 86 Friesians, there were 100 English and Irish<sup>19</sup> and 12 German passengers. Everything was in readiness in the evening of the twenty-second, and on the following morning the "William and Mary" after being pulled out of her berth and inspected by a doctor, set out to sea. On the twenty-sixth the emigrants lost sight of land, and the broad Atlantic spread out before them.

<sup>16</sup> The name of this family is given in the excerpt of Runia's letter, dated Oct. 14, sent by Haagsma to *De Hollander* where it was printed in the issue of Nov. 9, 1853.

<sup>17</sup> *De Scheyoggen Nieuwsbode*, June 21, 1853.

<sup>18</sup> De Jager writes "Spinson," but was not certain of the name for he also writes "Spenson." See *De Hollander*, July 20, 1853.

<sup>19</sup> De Jager states there were 175 Irish. See *ibid.*, June 29, 1853.

The voyage, until the third of May when the "William and Mary" ran on the Isaac Rocks in the Bahama Islands, proved uneventful. The Friesians were not favorably impressed by their Irish companions. One Irish lady, on March 26, gave birth to a daughter, attended by the physician J. K. Van der Veer and a midwife, both members of the Friesian party. Haagsma, an ardent prohibitionist, was shocked when the Irish lady replied to the doctor on the day after her ordeal, when asked what she would like, replied "Nothing," and was satisfied with drinking whiskey. "No wonder," he wrote, that "in England people refer to the Irish as cattle!" Another Irish lady gave birth to a daughter on April 11 when the ship was near the Azores. Although Haagsma recorded no particulars of this event, he wrote, "Those Irish, those Irish, what a strange people!" He was impressed, however, by the Sunday calm when the sailors observed the Sabbath.

There was some difficulty over the distribution of the ship's provisions. This took place weekly and proved so dishonest that on April 13 one of the Friesians called the first steersman a "thief" who thereupon moved to draw a knife but was restrained by the captain. The voyage, however, was not a pleasant one. Fourteen of the passengers died on the sea before the group reached New Orleans, many were seasick, especially when the ocean was rough. The captain paid some attention to the sick. Haagsma states he knew nothing about medicine but that he carried in his pocket a small book whose simple rules he consulted whenever he was about to visit the sick. In case of fever he invariably prescribed ham! Haagsma noted that the captain kept no liquor on board, something he strongly approved, for drinking was the "cause of many a shipwreck."

The "William and Mary" was in the waters of the Bahama Islands on May 2. Haagsma records that the ship had sailed too far south, and not making the New Bahama Channel, steered for the Northwest Providence Channel, south of Great Bahama Island. On the following morning, islands were to be seen on all sides. The ship which drew seventeen feet of water was at-

tempting to proceed through a channel only twenty feet deep. Finally at 9 o'clock in the evening, the ship's keel hit the sands of the Isaac Rocks. The gaping hole inflicted seemed to spell immediate doom. So violent was the shock that many of the passengers were thrown to their feet or hurled from their chairs.<sup>20</sup>

Consternation reigned, for the passengers thought they would perish immediately. Loud were their moans as they frantically crowded toward the lifeboats. They clambered into one of them, and the stout davits bent under their weight. Some climbed the mast, thinking thus to escape the waves. One of the boats was lowered, but the waves dashed it to splinters against the hull of the ship. A second boat was successfully lowered, and the first steersman and some sailors got into it and secured it with a line. Provisions were brought up from the hold into the cabin at the ship's stern to which the passengers were denied access. These articles were loaded into the boat. The captain told the passengers that this was necessary in order to preserve their provisions. When the boat returned, all passengers would be safely landed. In the meantime they were to pump vigorously to keep the ship afloat.<sup>21</sup>

Captain Stinson, as incompetent as he was villainous, had decided to desert the ship and its passengers. Distrusting his promise that he would be the last to leave the ship as well as his other claims, they kept him from entering the boat throughout the night. Meanwhile he had let out the anchors and secured their chains with bolts so they could not be cast away. The sails were abandoned, no distress signals were given. It is evident the captain planned criminally to abandon the ship, making sure of its destruction so that no trace of his cowardly conduct would remain. When morning dawned, he sought to quiet the passengers by pointing to the distant shores. Next he ordered a large boat in portside to be lowered, and four sailors clambered into it. Great was the confusion that rose at this moment. Three Friesians—O. M. Wagenaar from Heerenveen, Ulbe Bergsma from

<sup>20</sup> See De Jager's account, *ibid.*, July 20, 1853.

<sup>21</sup> It is at this point that the confused relation by De Jager becomes difficult to follow.

Kinswerd, and Izaak Roorda from Dantumawoude—leaped into the boat, followed by seventeen Irish and English. An aged Irishman followed but missed the boat. Frantically he clutched the edge of the boat, but the sailors chopped off his fingers. His daughter who had landed safely in the boat, seeing the miserable fate of her father, filled the air with piercing wails. Unable to quiet her, the sailors were base enough to throw her into the waves. While these things were happening, the captain leaped into the other boat and cut the line with an ax. From this boat the sailors waved a farewell to the frightened passengers. This was the last they saw of Captain Stinson.<sup>22</sup>

Abandoned in this manner the passengers determined to save themselves if possible. They pumped vigorously but were grossly annoyed by the four sailors the captain had not taken with him. They were evil characters; one of them accused of stealing was to have been put on trial in New Orleans. This person now promoted himself to the place of captain. These sailors soon were drunk, having gained access to the liquor of a German passenger who had drowned when he failed to reach the large boat that had been lowered in the portside. But the passengers worked vigorously. They cut the anchors and raised the flag of despair. The sailors who wanted to plunder the ship and so did not want to call attention of others to the plight of the passengers took it down and hid it in the cabin. One the Friesians, Jan Jansen, replaced it on the mast. A ship appeared in the distance but apparently failed to notice them. The sea became rougher, the wind howled, there was thunder, lightning and rain. Great fear came over the miserable group. An Englishwoman, whose husband in the panic had jumped into the large boat,

<sup>22</sup> One of the sailors, perhaps the Dane—the only member of the crew of the Friesians had a kind word for when they related their adventure to De Jager at Galena (see *De Hollander*, July 20, 1853)—according to the *Daily Picayune* of May 30, 1853, was responsible for the following statement: "that the faces of the passengers when the captain and sailors had left the ship will always be in his memory. The sight has ever since that time followed him and has caused the loss of sleep. Their commotion, their groanings and cryings were terrible. The captain (that hard boiled monster) did not cast his eyes on the ship from the moment he had left it." See *De Sbeborgan Nieuwsbode*, June 21, 1853.

now gave premature birth to a child. Thus passed the fourth of May.

The following day, May 5, was the Feast of the Ascension which they commemorated. Land still was visible, and they descried a ship whose attention they attracted by means of gunfire. It was the "Oracle" of the coast guard of the Bahama Islands, commanded by Captain Robert Sands, a Negro. The women and children were the first to be transferred, then followed the men. Many of them were brought to land by Negroes in small boats. By evening all were safely on Great Bahama. All day the "Oracle" sailed around the "William and Mary," abandoned except for the few hands that had been left to keep her afloat by pumping. The following day, May 6, more than twenty-four hours after the passengers had been removed, the "William and Mary" sank. The men left to manage the pumps escaped by jumping into a sloop.

Hospitably received by the colored folk who on their knees thanked God for this deliverance, the passengers spent the nights of the sixth and seventh under the open sky. The Negroes were poor, and could scarcely provide them with food, but they gladly divided their scanty provisions with their unfortunate guests. Meanwhile some of the passengers had reported their plight to the consuls at Nassau. The Negroes secured ships in which the shipwrecked were brought to Nassau where all arrived by May 13. The expenses of their stay were assumed by the shipping company to which the "William and Mary" belonged. The citizens of Nassau provided them with shoes and clothing, and upon their departure gave a dollar to each person. The group now broke up. The Irish and English sailed away in a schooner, and the Friesians on June 1 took passage for New Orleans. The self-styled captain who had taken charge of the "William and Mary" was arrested and accompanied them to New Orleans where he was to face justice.

Finally, on June 8, the ship sailed up the broad Mississippi. Next morning the captain informed the Friesians that the small boat, the second which had been lowered from the deck of the

"William and Mary" and which carried Captain Stinson and a few sailors, had reached safety in one of the harbors of the United States. Stinson had reported that the "William and Mary" had sunk in the waters of the Bahama Islands and that the passengers on board found their death in the waves. Only he and a few of the sailors had been able to save their lives, so fast did the ship sink. As soon as the Friesians heard this news, their captain reported in telegram to New Orleans that the passengers supposed lost were sailing up the river. On the evening of the ninth they reached New Orleans. The next morning they beheld the fair city lying "beautiful in the golden beams of the morning sun," as Haagsma wrote.

A German Society in New Orleans took keen interest in their welfare, treating them in the most brotherly fashion. They sent wagons to transport the group together with their scanty belongings to a steamship which was to carry them to St. Louis, provided them with fresh potatoes and other provisions which included twenty-one hams of the very best quality, paid their fare to St. Louis, and in addition gave to each member of the group the sum of \$5.50, a total of \$440. Finally the Society recommended them to the solicitous care of the Dutch consul in St. Louis. For this signal kindness the Friesians were most thankful. The help thus given made it possible for them to leave New Orleans on June 11.<sup>23</sup>

Resuming their journey by sailing up the Mississippi, the Friesians greatly enjoyed the prospect of fertile fields and thriving towns and villages. Early in the morning of June 21 they arrived in St. Louis. The unfortunates presented themselves before the Dutch consul, a man named Te Water, but his bearing contrasted sharply with the reception accorded them by the German Society in New Orleans. From the code he read to them a section relating to shipwrecked people to the effect that such persons might receive ten Dutch cents per hour, and thereupon asked them whether they were shipwrecked persons. Next he stated that if

<sup>23</sup> *De Hollander*, Aug. 3, 1853.

they wished to return to Holland, they might obtain help; if they wished to remain in the United States, he might be able to find some work for them. The consul undoubtedly acted according to his instructions, but the Friesians were disappointed in the reception given them. According to their statements to De Jager the consul had had rumors about them, and was critical of the fact that they as Friesians drank coffee at lunch and tea in the afternoon!<sup>24</sup>

Continuing up the Mississippi, they arrived at Davenport, Iowa, on June 28. In Friesian costume they had, as we have recounted, attracted much attention in England and undoubtedly also in New Orleans and while on their journey up the Mississippi. From the dock at Davenport, Iowa, some Friesian recognized them and most unexpectedly greeted them in Friesian, "*Wer komme jinne wei?*"

"*Ik bin fen Wolvega,*" replied one of the passengers.<sup>25</sup>

Early in the morning of June 29 they arrived at Galena, Illinois. There this sorely tried group, shaken by the hardships of their shipwreck, told De Jager with understandable confusion and some exaggeration the story of their misfortunes from which we have drawn some details. Deeply stirred by what he heard he hastened, on June 29, to acquaint the editor of *De Hollander* with the misfortunes of these people who had lost all their possessions, and so were in dire need. He called on clergymen to make collections and asked *Het Handelsblad* of Amsterdam and *De Friesche Courant* of Leeuwarden to cooperate in such collections and forward the moneys to *De Hollander*. He also called upon the Dutch ambassador in England to bring Stinson to trial. Meanwhile he would help the immigrants as much as he was able.

Thus this painful odyssey came to an end; but had their friends and relatives in Friesland heard of their experiences? Veijer

<sup>24</sup> This part of the account is drawn from De Jager's letter, *ibid.*, Aug. 10, 1853.

<sup>25</sup> To the meeting of the Classis of Holland, Michigan, held on Oct. 8, 1856, the Rev. A. C. Van Raalte reported that he "has visited the Hollanders along the Mississippi, at Muscatine, Burlington, and Keokuk...." See *Classis Holland, Minutes, 1848-1858* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1943), 221. That there should be a Netherlander in Davenport in 1853 is not surprising. That he should be a Friesian ready to greet fellow Friesians in their own tongue was a remarkable coincidence.

Schaafsma who returned to Harlingen with his wife and four children informed them of the sailing on the "William and Mary." During April and May, Runia eagerly scanned the news but not until June 2 did he learn of the shipwreck. *Het Handelsblad* carried a report that only twenty-five were believed to have been saved. On July 10 there was further report that the American bark "Polluck" had arrived in Liverpool with the three Friesians and other passengers—those who in the moment of panic had crowded into the boat lowered from the "William and Mary." On the eleventh the three Friesians gave a verbal report of all that had happened, but unfortunately, not knowing anything about the rescue, could offer little hope that the rest of the passengers were saved. Three days later came further information taken from a New York paper stating that only the captain and a few of the sailors had survived. Finally *Het Handelsblad* of June 16 brought the joyful news originating in a telegram from Savannah, dated May 30, and carried in a New York paper that all the passengers had been saved. Great was the joy among friends and relatives; and on June 19, one of the pastors of Harlingen while commemorating the victory at Waterloo in 1815, publicly gave thanks to God for the rescue of Bonnema's party.<sup>26</sup>

Bonnema's original plan had been to settle in Iowa. We are not informed as to what part of that state had attracted his attention, but it may very well have been Pella in Marion County where a flourishing settlement of Friesians had been established in 1847. Possibly the pamphlets of Sjoerd Aukes Sipma influenced him. What determined him first to move to Minnesota and next to Wisconsin the sources do not divulge.<sup>27</sup> Some of the group, including Bonnema, at once proceeded to Prairie La Crosse where they arrived on July 1. The rest, about half of the group, stayed in Galena for a few weeks, after which they rejoined their friends in Prairie La Crosse.<sup>28</sup>

"Seven years ago," wrote Haagsma, "there was nothing at

<sup>26</sup> See excerpt of Runia's letter in Haagsma's letter to *De Hollander*, Nov. 9, 1853.

<sup>27</sup> *De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, Nov. 15, 1853.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 2, 1853.

Prairie La Crosse." Every inducement for energetic pioneers—land, forest, and business opportunities! To Bonnema this place held a promising future. He became acquainted with a Jewish gentleman named Levi who had profitably invested in real estate and was in a position to give Bonnema such information as was necessary. Bonnema and some of his followers crossed the Mississippi to investigate the lands in Minnesota opposite Prairie La Crosse. There they found an abundance of excellent land still unsurveyed, however, and inaccessible to markets. A few days later, on July 9, Bonnema again went to Minnesota and bought an eighty-acre farm from a German, three miles west of the Mississippi River.<sup>29</sup> Later the families of Johannes Tuininga and Tjarling Tjalsma settled in La Crescent township in Houston County, nine miles west of Lake Crescent.<sup>30</sup>

Bonnema's attention soon was drawn to an attractive area about fourteen miles north of Prairie La Crosse. Covered with dense forests of oak, maple, birch, and elm, and bordering on the Black River, a tributary of the Mississippi, this region seemed to offer special advantages for a settlement. Hardly a white person had yet set foot in this area. Haagsma records that on July 13 he visited Onalaska (which he spelled Anna Lasky) and apparently made some investigation of the site proposed for settlement. Bonnema, Sjoerd Tjalsma, and Johannes Steenstra personally inspected it with the result that Bonnema bought about 800 acres in Onalaska and Hamilton townships. Later, the board of supervisors of La Crosse County in their meeting of November 13, 1857, created a new township, which was to include most of the Dutch settlement, and named it Holland township.<sup>31</sup>

"Our plan," wrote Haagsma, "is to move on the newly purchased land on July 15." Full particulars were sent to The Netherlands by Hendrik de Boer in a letter dated July 15, of which either the text or a digest was printed in *De Leeuwarder*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 15, 1853.

<sup>30</sup> Anna Tuininga Brown's *The Life Story of Johannes Tuininga* (in manuscript).

<sup>31</sup> *History of La Crosse County, Wisconsin* (Chicago, 1881), 709; *De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, Aug. 2, 1853.

*Courant*.<sup>32</sup> Thus auspiciously began the new settlement which must have given these sorely tried immigrants deep comfort. This was the fifth settlement to be founded in the State of Wisconsin by Netherlanders: that in Milwaukee to which the first Netherlanders had come prior to 1846 and in which we may include the near-by but later colonies at Franklin Prairie and Town Eight being the first; Alto in Fond du Lac County in 1846 the second; Oostburg and Cedar Grove in Sheboygan County in 1847 the third; and Little Chute in Outagamie County and Hollandtown in Brown County in 1848 the fourth. The settlement in La Crosse County first was named Frisia. But this name did not last long and there is reason to believe that it never was commonly used. Descendants of the first settlers seem to know nothing of such a name. We have references to it, nevertheless, by Haagsma in two letters which he wrote from "Frisia," one dated October 14, 1853, and the second, March 5, 1854.<sup>33</sup>

The settlers at once began building houses, and *De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* of November 15 reported five board houses had been constructed from lumber brought from Onalaska. In the group were two carpenters, a wagonmaker, and a smith, besides farmers. Soon Bonnema laid out the village of New Amsterdam, on the east bank of Black River. He never intended to establish a large town; probably the proximity of Prairie La Crosse deterred him. The village plat contains five streets running north and south and six east and west. The former were named Lulop, Jelle, John, George, and Cool, the latter Levey (after Bonnema's Jewish friend), Oepke, Harmon, Main, Sterford, and Baker.<sup>34</sup>

New Amsterdam enjoyed some prosperity from the very beginning. Bonnema was alert in business, practical, honest, reliable, somewhat reticent and retiring. He opened the first general store in the settlement in order to supply the settlers with necessaries. He also was the first postmaster. In 1856 he gave one acre of his land for a schoolhouse site. The original structure still stands on this lot. He opened up his first sawmill in New Amsterdam

<sup>32</sup> *De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, Nov. 15, 1853.

<sup>33</sup> *De Hollander*, Nov. 9, 1853, and *De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, March 21, 1854.

<sup>34</sup> For the plat see *Standard Atlas of La Crosse County, Wisconsin* (Chicago, 1906), 37.

on the banks of a branch of Black River, with a capacity of about 10,000 feet per day. The first timber for this mill was taken from Bonnema's land. The lumber was sold, much of it being floated down Black River. After this mill ceased operations in 1868, Bonnema opened a second sawmill built on the river bank just above New Amsterdam. It suspended operations about in 1877 when it passed into other hands and began the manufacture of picket fences. Bonnema's house stood on Main Street; opposite it were his hotel, barroom, and dance hall. His grocery stood near his first mill. For years Bonnema served as town clerk and was the leading force in the community.<sup>35</sup>

There were other businesses in New Amsterdam besides Bonnema's. Hendrik de Boer had a blacksmithy and a tavern; Johannes Mulder had a wagonmaker's shop; Byron Mulder a gristmill and a grocery store; William Haag ("Dutch Bill") a butcher shop; and Sietske Mulder a grocery with postoffice (about 1880.)

From the beginning there was a gradual influx of immigrants from The Netherlands. Nearly every year witnessed the arrival of people from Friesland, from St. Anna Parochie, Het Bilt, Minnertsga, and other communities. Among them were the Van Dyke, Rolsma, Roozendaal, Borger, La Feur, and Hoogenhuis families.<sup>36</sup> Harmon Bonnema, Oepke's brother and much like Oepke in character, but a farmer, also became a member of the community. Oepke Bonnema at first did some farming, and other Friesians who came from some of the most fertile agricultural parts of the Province of Friesland at once secured farms. As the years passed, practically the entire countryside was in the hands of Netherlanders. It was a prosperous community, and the village of New Amsterdam fared well. Its best years were past in 1880, however, when it numbered about 200 houses, all constructed of boards.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> For many of the following facts we are gratefully obliged to Mr. Jewett Chalsma (that is, Sjoerd Tjalsma) of La Crosse.

<sup>36</sup> Among those who arrived after the settlement had been established were the following families: Westerhuis, Hoeneveld, Van der Pan, Van der Water, Hofma, De Jong, Miedema, Winselaar, Kas, Rosendaal, Mulder, Van Loon, Van Dunk, Van Dyke, De Groot, Stellingwerf, Ploegsma, De Lang, Haag, and Tjepkema.

<sup>37</sup> Many of the pioneers of New Amsterdam lie buried in Green Mound Cemetery, north of the settlement. There also lie Oepke H. Bonnema born 1826, died 1895, and his brother Harmon Bonnema, born 1828, died 1892.

Being of the Reformed faith, these people had some religious services from the beginning of their settlement. But they apparently were not so firmly schooled in their religious convictions as were the Hollanders in the other settlements of Wisconsin. Haagsma complained that his friends were not nearly so faithful in their religious observance as were the sailors on board the "William and Mary." He and others of the group were deeply impressed by the simple piety of the Negroes who rescued them. The fact that Oepke Bonnema owned a barroom and a dance hall certainly does not argue a very firm devotion to Reformed (that is, Calvinistic,) conceptions. Not until 1877 did the Reformed Church in America establish a congregation in New Amsterdam. There was much dissension among the group from the first, and they had difficulty in bringing together enough money to build a church. Later, in 1884, this was accomplished with the financial help of the Presbyterian Church.<sup>38</sup> The congregation prospered and even produced a number of Presbyterian clergymen.

In general the attitude of these people toward social, political, and educational matters was moderate. Oepke Bonnema had taken up with the humanitarian conceptions current during the early part of the nineteenth century. The hardships of the life of his acquaintances had moved him to sponsor the emigration and even to pay the expenses of those who wanted to go. Haagsma, likewise imbued with humanitarianism, was an ardent prohibitionist, as we have noted. The benevolent zeal of the colored folk, revealed in their attempt to rescue the shipwrecked group and provide them with necessaries, appealed to the Friesians who carried with them their traditional Friesian love of self-reliance.<sup>39</sup> Small wonder, therefore, that when they secured their citizenship papers, which was done as soon as possible, they expressed a decided disapproval of slavery as it existed in certain states of the Union. Their political affiliation of course was Republican, which party was just coming into existence, at that time, and has re-

<sup>38</sup> E. T. Corwin, *A Manual of the Reformed Church in America, Formerly Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1623-1902* (New York, 1902), 992.

<sup>39</sup> For De Jager's enthusiastic comments, see *De Hollanders*, July 27, 1853.

mained such till the present day. During the Civil War a number of the young men of New Amsterdam served in the Union armies. One of them, Albertus Van Loon, born in The Netherlands in 1845, served throughout the war. He was severely wounded in the Battle of Nashville. Three brothers likewise served during the war, all of whom were Republicans.<sup>40</sup>

Like many another community in the early history of our country, New Amsterdam soon reached its greatest prosperity. It rose as the lumber industry developed, but when the forests were gone, in little more than one generation, the village declined. Most of its houses dated from the period of the Civil War. As prosperity vanished, some of the houses were abandoned. Some decayed and were torn down. Others were moved to the surrounding countryside. As the population moved away, the stores also disappeared. Only one small store still stands on the townsite, its old-fashioned fixtures clearly reminiscent of better days. Today only a handful of houses remains. For the most part their architecture betrays designs dating from the decade after the Civil War. Of recent buildings there are only a few; some of the older ones have been somewhat remodeled.

Gradually, as the older people died or moved away, the Dutch and Friesian languages also passed. For years these tongues were spoken in daily intercourse. The writer in a recent visit to New Amsterdam spoke with people who could gather some thought from fluent Dutch discourse but were unable to express their thoughts in either Dutch or Friesian. Today a few of the older people still speak the language of their fathers. Exposed to American influences, which poured into the community from every side, it was impossible to continue the old Friesian and Dutch ways. The cities exerted an irresistible attraction upon the younger folks who moved away. Old forms of life and thought faded and new ones were substituted. A new cultural amalgam came into being. In this way the history of New Amsterdam illustrates

<sup>40</sup> *Biographical History of La Crosse, Trempealeau, and Buffalo Counties, Wisconsin* (Chicago, 1892), see name, Albertus Van Loon.

what has taken place in innumerable immigrant communities of the United States.<sup>41</sup>

### EMIGRANT LIST

The following are the names of the persons who accompanied Bonnema. Absolute accuracy in this list seems impossible to attain.

(1) *Those who died while on the journey*: Gerrit Tuininga, age 3, March 30; Dirk Hofman, 26, March 30; Hendrik Spanger, 32, April 2; Antje Tuininga, 10, April 3; Trijntje Graafsma, 1, April 5; Sikke Sikkema, 3 months, April 7; Boutje Kooistra, 2½, April 12; Lijkle Tjalsma, 18, April 18; Marinus Kooistra, 1, April 18; Maaïke Sikkema, 3, April 29; Rinske Westerhuis, 4, May 2; Pieter Van der Tol, 35, May 11; Jacob S. Kooistra, 43, May 16; and Sjoerd Tjalsma, Jr., 3, June 26. Total, 14.

(2) *Surviving single persons*: Oepke H. Bonnema; Dr. J. K. Van der Veer; B. B. Haagsma; Jelle Gerzema; Gerrit Molenaar; Jan Jansen; D. Zwicht; Pieter Salverda; Hendrik Rienks; Bienze Rienks; Dirk Kuiken; Sjoerd Bekius; Cornelis Ploegsma; Bertus Hofstra; Jan Van der Ploeg; Maarten Van der Ploeg; Hendrik Kas; Tjipke Algera; Pietje Hollander; Sijske Heemstra; Grietje Jansonius; Metje Van der Ploeg; Boutje Van der Ploeg; and Maatje Van der Schaaf. Total, 24.

(3) *Names of families*: Arjen Westerhuis, wife and four children; Bouke Graafsma, wife and one child; Herke De Jong, wife and two children; Johannes Steenstra, wife and three children; Johannes Tuininga, wife and three children; Sjoerd Tjalsma, wife and five children; Widow Jacob J. Kooistra with three children; Rients Sikkema with wife; Jan Bolkstra with wife; and Hendrik De Boer with wife. Total, 40. Total of the group, 78.

There were 92 in the original group that sailed from Harlingen. Veijer Schaafsma with wife and four children turned back at Liverpool. Adding to them, and to the 78 listed by Haagsma, Ulbe Bergsma, O. M. Wagenaar, and Izaak Roorda we have a total of 87 persons, which leaves five persons unaccounted for. Their names may be supplied from De Jager's letter. They are Siberen Wesselius, with wife and three children.

De Jager states that Bouke Graafsma had two children. For De Jager's list see *De Hollander*, July 13, 1853.

<sup>41</sup> The writer wishes to thank Mr. Albert H. Sanford of the La Crosse County Historical Society, Mr. Jewett Chalsma and Mr. Gijsbert Van Steenwyck, all of La Crosse, for their kind help in making this study possible.