

DUTCH SETTLEMENT IN CROOK, COLORADO IN 1893

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SEPTEMBER 1987

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Research on the Dutch settlement in Crook, Colorado, in 1893 deals with largely uncharted territory. Historical research is very scarce concerning the Dutch immigration to Logan County, in which the town of Crook is situated.¹ A history of the Crook community of 136 pages devotes only nine lines (one paragraph) to this settlement and places it in the years 1897 or 1898 instead of 1893.²

Attending a conference in Denver, Colorado, in June 1980 and with some free time available, my search for information on the Dutch immigration to Colorado was on. Alex Haley doing his research for his book, *Roots, The Saga of an American Family*, "... sat as if [he were] carved in stone." "My blood seemed to have congealed," he wrote, when he heard the griot in The Gambia, West Africa, mentioning the name, Kunta, the main character of his

¹ Dorothy Roberts, "A Dutch Colony in Colorado," *The Colorado Magazine* 18 (1940): 235. Jacob van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America, A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the United States of America*, ed. by Robert P. Swieringa, 2 vols. in 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 675. Henry S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America, Dutch Immigration to the United States and Canada, 1789-1950*, University of Michigan Publications, History and Political Science, 21 (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1955), pp. 433-434. Roberts devotes one page and van Hinte and Lucas only one paragraph to the Dutch settlement in Crook, Colorado.

² Buckley, Edgar A., "E. A. Buckley's Memories of early Crook" in *No Fuss and Feathers--Crook*, ed. by Dorothea Safford and Helen Taylor (Fort Collins: Economy Printing, 1977), p. 13.

book.³ My heart skipped several beats, when the office clerk in the County Court House of Sterling, Colorado, pulled a faded, folded piece of paper from a metal box full of other court records such as affidavits and lien statements. There was my first evidence that Dutch people had been in Crook. Written in long hand on a lined yellow legal size sheet, held together with scotch tape, were the incorporation papers of the Holland Christian Reformed Church dated May 18, 1893; time: 11.30 a.m.; cost: \$.50. The incorporation papers were signed by fifteen heads of Dutch families, the charter members so to speak.⁴ I was not the only one that was excited about this find, the ladies in the County Court House office were also. My first chance to look at that piece of paper was to peek over their shoulders. My first exclamation was that the English written in long hand was of Dutch penmanship. The material began to snowball with this discovery after many hours of futile searching for some kind of information on the Dutch immigration to Crook. Every opportunity over these last seven years has been used to visit libraries, archives, county court houses, and city halls in the United States and the Netherlands in search for materials.

The town of Crook is situated in the northeast corner of the State of Colorado in the South Platte Valley, about 150 miles northeast of Denver, very close to

³ Haley, Alex. *Roots, The Saga of an American Family*, A Dell Book (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1977), p. 719.

⁴ "Articles] of Incorporation" of the Holland Christian Reformed Church dated May 18, 1893, filed with the County Clerk of Logan County, State of Colorado. No. 13147. The "Articles of Incorporation" were signed by Andries J. Hof, Dirk Swier, Kier Coster, Frederik Aué, Cornelis J. Kooiman, Adriaan Gunst, Rijk Van Voorst, Jacob Vander Klooster, Pieter Kragt, Willemanus H. Van Schooneveld, Leendert Van Staalduinen, Jan B. Walhof, Koop Drok, Evert Ten Napel, and Jan Van Wijk Czoorn.

the Nebraska border. The railroad station built by the Colorado Central Railroad Company in the treeless plains in 1882, while pushing the railroad westward, was named after Major General George R. Crook (1829-1890) who commanded the Department of the Platte from 1875-1882. He took part in various campaigns against the Indians including the Apache and its chieftain, Geronimo (1829-1909). His fame as a soldier is best remembered as the "great Indian fighter."⁵ It was not till September 23, 1918 that the town of Crook was incorporated.⁶

The South Platte River, which runs south of the town of Crook, was the setting for the many settlements of Colorado in the 1860s and '70s. The immense irrigation projects of the 1880s brought more land under cultivation and resulted in the founding of new towns. Large canals for irrigation were constructed to carry water to thousands of acres north of the river.⁷

The South Platte River plays an important role in the first part of James A. Michener's bestselling novel, **Centennial**. Michener describes the river as

⁵ Taylor, Robert E., "General George Crook," in **No Fuss and Feathers--Crook**, pp. 1-3.

⁶ **The Colorado Magazine** 18 (1940): 140.

⁷ **Colorado and its people**, A narrative and topical History of the Centennial State. 2 vols. Ed. by LeRoy R. Hafen (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1948), 1: 426-427.

"the sorriest river," "too thick to drink, too thin to plow," "a mile wide and an inch deep," and "the braided river."⁸ Says Michener:

... there is the river, a sad, bewildered nothing of a river. It carries no great amount of water, and when it has some it is uncertain where it wants to take it. No ship can navigate it, nor even a canoe, with reasonable assurance. It is the butt of more jokes than any other river on earth, and the greatest joke is to call it a river at all. It's a sand bottom, a wandering afterthought, a useless irritation, a frustration, and when you've said all that, it suddenly rises up, spreads out to a mile wide, engulfs your crops and lays waste your farms. ... sometimes you can tell where that damned river is only by spotting cottonwoods that line its banks."⁹

Now how did those Dutch immigrants come to this area of Colorado, the vast grasslands of northeastern Colorado? At this juncture I should summarize very briefly, for those who are not familiar with the situation, what transpired before the immigrants came to Crook.

On August 17, 1892, the Holland-American Land- and Immigration-Company was incorporated as a limited company within the laws of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.¹⁰ Earlier in the summer this company had published a brochure promoting emigration, especially of farmers and laborers, to the San Luis Valley, Colorado, near a place called Alamosa, 200 miles south of

⁸ James A. Michener, *Centennial*, A Fawcett Crest Book (Greenwich: Fawcett Publications, 1975), pp. 22-23, 36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁰ "Statuten der Naamlooze Vennootschap: Nederlandsch-Amerikaansche Land- en Emigratie-Maatschappij," *Nederlandsche Staats-Courant*, 8 september 1892, pp. [6-8].

Denver.¹¹ Twenty-eight families with their one hundred sixteen children, and thirty-one single persons boarded the steamship "Dubbeldam" in Amsterdam on November 12, 1892. Under the leadership of Albertus Zoutman and Cornelis W. Van der Hoogt, who had met the immigrants in Hoboken, New Jersey, and accompanied them to Alamosa, they arrived there on November 30, 1892. Not too long after their arrival, the immigrants discovered that the dazzling prospects described in the brochure were diametrically opposed to the facts. They naturally felt swindled, robbed and betrayed. Word circulated among the immigrants that the Immigration Company did not have a square inch of land to its name in the San Luis Valley, although it was claimed in the brochure that they had bought cultivated land there. The Immigration Company was supposed to sell this land to the immigrants for farming. The president of the Immigration Company was Maarten Noordtjij, professor of Old and New Testament at the Theological School in Kampen, the Netherlands. A number of families were not willing to wait for the coming of Noordtjij to set things aright between the Immigration Company and Theodore Henry, the president of the Empire Land and Canal Company, from which the Immigration Company supposedly had bought the land in the San Luis Valley. These families went ahead and bought, directly from Henry, land south of Alamosa. The others waited for the arrival of Noordtjij. Upon his arrival the immigrants made it quite clear to Noordtjij that Zoutman and Van der Hoogt were the real cause of their difficulties. They had solid proof that Zoutman and Van der Hoogt were

¹¹ *De Emigratie van Landbouwers naar Noord-Amerika, San Luis Vallei, Staat Colorado* [Utrecht: De Nederlandsch-Amerikaansche Land-en Emigratie-Maatschappij, 1892].

unsuitable and incompetent for their assigned task. Noordt zij, however, turned a deaf ear to the pleas of the immigrants.¹²

In Denver Noordt zij conferred with the Governor of Colorado, the flamboyant Davis H. Waite, about the plight of the Dutch immigrants. Waite naturally showed his concern and suggested to Noordt zij that there was plenty of government land available in the northeastern part of the state¹³ without knowing much about the condition of the land or about the supply of water there.¹⁴ Noordt zij took Waite seriously and went to investigate the South Platte Valley with Van der Hoogt, Zoutman¹⁵ and Cornelis Sluijs, one of the

¹² See Peter De Klerk, "The Ecclesiastical Struggles of the Rilland and Crook Christian Reformed Churches in Colorado in 1893: a History," 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, ed. by Peter De Klerk and Richard R. De Ridder (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983. Pp. 73-98; Peter De Klerk, "The Alamosa Disaster: 'The boldest of Swindles,'" **Origins** 4 no. 1 (1986): 22-26; Peter De Klerk, "Dutch Immigration to Alamosa in 1892-1893," **The San Luis Valley Historian** 18 No. 4 (1986): 4-18; Peter De Klerk, "Maarten Noordt zij, the President of the Holland-American Land- and Immigration-Company," in **Proceedings of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies Conference**, September 1985. [Ed by Nella Kennedy], Orange City: Northwestern College, [1987], pp. 49-76.

¹³ "Verslag van de buitengewone Vergadering van Aandeelhouders en Commissarissen der Ned[erlandsch]-Amer[ikaansche] Land- en Emigratie-Maatschappij te Utrecht den 23 Feb[ruari] 18[93], met verkort Rapport van Prof. Noordt zij [sic] over zijn Verrichtingen in Noord-Amerika," **De Hope** 27 (19 April 1893): 6.

¹⁴ "Uit Alamosa, Colorado," **De Volksvriend** 19 (9 Maart 1893): 8.

¹⁵ "The Dutch Colony," **The Denver Republican**, January 29, 1893, p. 8.

immigrants. ¹⁶ There they investigated very carefully, as they supposedly had done in the San Luis Valley: ¹⁷ soil, products, yield, prices, markets for the products, and the water canal with its reservoirs and its irrigation. ¹⁸ From a Denver syndicate the Immigration Company bought 32,000 acres of land for \$450,000 on January 26, 1893, ¹⁹ and after the payment of \$1,000 it was given the right to possess it immediately, for, as Noordtzijs wrote, "the immigrants were longing for work." ²⁰ With a special train, the fare paid by the Immigration Company, fourteen families and six single men left for Crook on January 31, 1893. ²¹ Noordtzijs maintained that the departure from Alamosa had to be done in haste, otherwise nobody would have left the San Luis Valley. ²²

The news of the impending departure of the immigrants from Alamosa for Crook was not as enthusiastically received by those who had welcomed all

¹⁶ Cornelis A. Sluijs, "Brieven uit Amerika," (dated January 20, 1893) **Enkhuizer Courant** 24 (17 februari 1893): 2-3.

¹⁷ **Emigratie van Landbouwers naar Noord-Amerika, San Luis Vallei, Staat Colorado**, p. 5.

¹⁸ "Verslag van de buitengewone Vergadering van Aandeelhouders," p. 6.

¹⁹ "Dutch Colony," p. 8.

²⁰ "Verslag van de buitengewone Vergadering van Aandeelhouders," p. 6.

²¹ Ibid.

²² **Middelburgsche Courant** 136 (10 maart 1893): 1.

the immigrants to the city with a lavish meal on November 30, 1892.²³ The mayor of Alamosa, H. E. Johnson, a city commissioner, the banker, and four other prominent burghers of the city of Alamosa tried to show that their departure from Alamosa to the South Platte Valley would be a unwise move.²⁴ All the personal belongings of the immigrants had been loaded onto the railroad wagons, except those of Dirk Ballast and Pieter Kragt, which the workers refused to load.²⁵ They were shipped later on at extra cost to the Immigration Company. The doors and windows of the two Emigrant Houses in which the immigrants had lived for the first two months of their stay in the San Luis Valley were also loaded onto the train. Before the train was allowed to leave the railroad station, the sheriff, first, showed Van der Hoogt and Zoutman the medical bill of \$300 from the doctor, John Gale. He was the one who had cared for the children who had come down with scarlet fever and diphtheria. If this medical bill was not paid on the spot, the sheriff threatened them with the impounding of all their goods. Secondly, if they did not leave behind the doors and windows of the Emigrant Houses, Van der Hoogt would be imprisoned for non-payment.²⁶

²³ Cornelis A. Sluijs, "Brieven uit Amerika," (3) (dated December 1, 1892) **Enkhuizer Courant** 23 (30 december 1892): 2; Bastiaan Van der Wel, "Een Brief," **De Protestantsche Noordbrabanter** 14 (31 december 1892): 2-3.

²⁴ Arie J. Van den Heuvel, "Rilland," **De Wachter** 26 (1 Maart 1893): 3.

²⁵ [Maarten Noordtzi] **Hoor ook de ander Partij!** (No place, no publisher, [1893]), p. 3.

²⁶ Cornelis A. Sluijs, "Brieven uit Amerika," (dated February 21, 1893) **Enkhuizer Courant** 24 (15 maart 1893): 3.

About ten days later Arnaud J. Van Lummel and Andries Bruintjes, immigrants from the Empire Farm near Alamosa, visited their fellow Dutchmen in northeastern Colorado. They found the colonists there in a wretched condition, some of them still living in railroad cars of the Union Pacific arranged on a side track.²⁷ With a population of about 135 people (according to the 1890 census), Crook did not have much extra housing space available. The dwellings of all the colonists were spread over a large area, some of them as far away as Iliff, sixteen miles southwest, and others as far away as Red Lion, eight miles northeast of Crook.²⁸ During this period, Zoutman, the manager, lived in a tent near the railroad station in Crook.²⁹ Van der Hoogt and his wife, Neeltje, occupied a room in the section house at the station.³⁰

On Monday, March 20, 1893, all the immigrants were notified and expected to come to the schoolbuilding for a very important meeting.³¹ Here in the presence of S. A. Burke, a lawyer, Zoutman and Van der Hoogt presented

²⁷ "New Netherland Items," **San Luis Valley Courier** 5 (February 25, 1893): 4.

²⁸ Andries J. Hof, "Rev. C. Bode," **De Wachter** 26 (2 Augustus 1893): 3.

²⁹ This information is taken from the testimony of Cornelius J. Driscoll in the divorce proceedings of Neeltje Roest Van der Hoogt vs. Cornelis Willem Van der Hoogt in the District Court of Arapahoe County, State of Colorado. This testimony is dated November 9, 1893. The documents are to be found in the State Archives, Denver, State of Colorado.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Cornelis A. Sluijs, "Brieven uit Amerika" (dated June 18, 1893) **Enkhuizer Courant** 24 (14 juli 1893): 2-3.

them with a lengthy document drawn up in response to the report of Charles A. Merriman, District Attorney of the Twelfth District in Colorado, who had been appointed by Waite, the Governor of Colorado, to investigate the matter of the reported swindle that had taken place in the San Luis Valley by the Immigration Company.³² Merriman was very critical of the Immigration Company in his report.³³ "The report is so damaging," the Netherlands Ambassador, Wilhelm F. H. von Weckherlin of Washington, DC., wrote to his Foreign Minister, Gijsbert van Tienhoven, in The Hague, the Netherlands, "that I am compelled to draw Her Majesty's Government's serious attention to its content."³⁴ Van der Hoogt and Zoutman's document was a rambling account of what really had happened in the San Luis Valley from their biased point of view. To this document was attached a kind of sworn affidavit in which, in short, the immigrants testified that the Immigration Company was under excellent management and that it had the full

³² The original document, dated March 20, 1893, is to be found among the papers of the State Department, National Archives, Washington, DC.

³³ Charles A. Merriman's report is dated February 11, 1893. The governor's office in Denver received it on the 13th of February 1893. This office in turn forwarded it to the Secretary of State, Washington, DC., on the 16th of February 1893. A copy of it is to be found among the papers of the State Department, National Archives, Washington, DC. A published version of Charles A. Merriman's report in **The Denver Republican**, February 17, 1893, p. 2.

³⁴ See Wilhelm F. H. von Weckherlin's letter to Gijsbert van Tienhoven dated February 25, 1893 with a copy of Charles Merriman's report attached. This letter and a copy of Charles A. Merriman's report are to be found among Gijsbert van Tienhoven's papers, Rijksarchief, 's-Gravenhage.

confidence of all the immigrants.³⁵ Pieter Kragt and Andries J. Hof raised questions about the phrase "they are perfectly well satisfied with the management of that company." They argued that so many promises had been given in the past and that there was no evidence of any results. Van der Hoogt got up from his seat, and said: "Dear friends, forget what is behind you, and reach out to the cheerful future. In the course of this week you will all get horses, plows, and wagons, etc., etc. The circumstances were such that we were unable to provide you with these things."³⁶ After this promise by Van der Hoogt, although hesitantly, all those present signed the document and were requested to raise their right hand to swear that the document was true.³⁷ These documents were then sent on to Waite, the Governor of Colorado, in Denver. He in turn forwarded them on to Walter Q. Gresham, the Secretary of State, in Washington; the papers were sent on to von Weckherlin, the Netherlands Ambassador, in Washington, then on to his Foreign Minister, van Tienhoven, in The Hague, the Netherlands; van Tienhoven sent them on to the Dutch Minister of Justice for his information or his action.³⁸

³⁵ The original documents are to be found among the papers of the State Department, National Archives, Washington, DC.

³⁶ Sluijs, "Brieven uit Amerika" (dated June 18, 1893), pp. 2-3.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The original documents are to be found among the papers of the State Department, National Archives, Washington, DC. Copies of these documents are to be found among van Gijsbert van Tienhoven's papers, Rijksarchief, 's-Gravenhage.

About a week later Cornelis Sluijs, who wrote about seven extensive letters which were published in the *Enkhuizer Courant* describing his experiences in Alamosa and in Crook, put into writing a listing of the implements which were promised by Van der Hoogt at the March 20, meeting. He gave this piece of paper to Zoutman. Zoutman, turning around, while tearing this request to pieces, dressed Sluijs down for his unmannerly behavior in front of the other immigrants. Undisturbed Sluijs told Zoutman, "I have only asked for those implements which were promised us. Help us! There is not much time left. If we do not sow now, there is no chance that we can harvest any crops." ³⁹ Still nothing happened. In the meantime Sluijs wrote to Utrecht, the headquarters of the Immigration Company, about their situation. He wrote again on the 4th of April, for their situation grew worse day by day. On the 5th of April, that is, two months after their arrival in Crook, finally 18 horses and a few plows were delivered. ⁴⁰ Noordt zij had reasoned that "the immigrants were longing for work," ⁴¹ while Zoutman and Van der Hoogt were unwilling to put them to work.

During this time period Van der Hoogt came to see Sluijs, and asked him, whether he was dissatisfied. Sluijs told him in no uncertain terms the whole truth. Van der Hoogt, according to Sluijs, became so distorted with acute agony ("tot stervens toe benauwd"), that he laid stretched out on the ground for some time. When he came to himself again, he dropped the subject

³⁹ Sluijs, "Brieven uit Amerika" (dated June 18, 1893), pp. 2-3.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "Verslag van de buitengewone Vergadering van Aandeelhouders," p. 6.

matter and started to talk about other things.⁴² On Sunday, April 16, Zoutman summoned Sluijs to come to his office. There Zoutman asked Sluijs whether he had written to the Netherlands about him. Sluijs answered: "Yes, I have done so. I have written to them that you are totally unsuitable to be the head of the Immigration Company. So long as you remain the head of this company, it will go to pot." With a devilish smile on his face Zoutman told Sluijs that he had till Tuesday to get out of his house. If he did not comply, Zoutman would contact the sheriff to put him out.⁴³ The irony of all this is that it was Sluijs (now asked to leave the protection of the Immigration Company) who had done his utmost to keep the immigrants with the Immigration Company in Alamosa and to wait for the arrival of Noordtzij, at the time that the other immigrants had started to buy land from Henry, bypassing the Immigration Company. Sluijs had become the spokesman for them and told Noordtzij their side of the story of what had happened. Noordtzij had thanked Sluijs for all the work that he had done for keeping the rest of the immigrants together, and had asked him to accompany Van der Hoogt, Zoutman and himself on the trip to investigate the land in northeastern Colorado, because he had wanted to have a farmer with him.⁴⁴

A few days after their encounter Zoutman, probably sensing that he had really wronged Sluijs, sent word to him, that his temper had gotten the best of him and that he was sorry, and asked whether Sluijs and his family would

⁴² Sluijs, "Brieven uit Amerika" (dated June 18, 1893), pp. 2-3.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Cornelis A. Sluijs, "Brief aan Nanne Groot Szoen, Enkhuizen." This letter was dated July 18, 1928.

like to come back. It was Sluijs' wife who received this message, and she shot back the reply that they "had no plans to return. They were very happy to be free." This was quite a turnabout for her. She had been with her husband when Zoutman had told them to leave the colony. Sluijs described his wife as "not easily perplexed," (in his letter Sluijs underlined these words). After leaving Zoutman's office she cried out to him, with tears in her eyes, "What must we do! We are eight thousand miles from our family, in a land where we do not know the language, thrown out of the colony with no prospect of getting food or money and the day after tomorrow thrown out of our home."⁴⁵

She was quite correct in saying that they were happy to be "free." The Immigration Company provided for everything. It provided them with food,⁴⁶ with land, with horses and implements, with lumber, with sugar beet seed, etc. Noordt zij considered the Immigration Company as a philanthropic organization.⁴⁷ But it was actually a business organization. The immigrants had to buy all of the above mentioned items from the company. They were in the employ of the company receiving wages and board. If they bought land or a horse on terms from the company, the company charged them interest on the payments. Few of the immigrants that had stayed with the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bastiaan Van der Wel, "Een Brief," **De Protestantische Noordbrabanter** 14 (5 maart 1893): 2-3.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Buitengew[one] Vergadering van Curatoren der Theol[ogische] School gehouden te Kampen den 20 en 21 April 1893 (hand written). Minute book of Curatorium is to be found in the Gemeente Archief, Kampen.

Immigration Company from Alamosa had much money in their pockets when they arrived in Colorado, and whatever they had with them was gone by now. Since the Immigration Company was Zoutman and Van der Hoogt, the immigrants were in their clutches. And Van der Hoogt and Zoutman were manipulators. It is no wonder then that Mrs. Sluijs, having overcome her perplexity, shot back that they "were very happy to be free."

Apparently the immigrants' distressing situation contributed to a stream of letters. **De Standaard**, the Dutch newspaper, received so many of these immigrant letters that it could not publish them all.⁴⁸ Andries Hof wrote to the Reverend Cornelius Bode about their wretched state that if he had "wings of an eagle," he would leave the place and asked him if he had any good advice, "for we are getting very despondent."⁴⁹ The Consul of the Netherlands in St. Louis, Missouri, Mr. B. Haagsma, received a letter from Cornelis Kooiman dated July 12, 1893. Kooiman had come to Crook from the Netherlands on March 13, 1893. He wrote to Haagsma: "The promise was made to us that we could work for the Immigration Company immediately after our arrival for one dollar a day with board. We have worked on the irrigation canal since March 13 and have earned thirty dollars so far and have only received three dollars."⁵⁰ According to Kooiman, their condition was deplorable and that their future was very bleak, since they had to have

⁴⁸ "Colorado," **De Standaard** 22 (14 april 1893): 1.

⁴⁹ Hof, "Rev. C. Bode," p. 3.

⁵⁰ A copy of Cornelis Kooiman's letter, dated July 12, 1893 to B. Haagsma is to be found among Gijsbert van Tienhoven's papers, Rijksarchief, 's-Gravenhage.

money if they hoped to go to a different state to look for work. In his letter Kooiman also asked whether there was a possibility that Haagsma could do something for the immigrants.⁵¹

By March 20, 1893, about two months after their arrival at Crook the immigrants had not yet worked their lands. A few days earlier a steamplow had arrived. Later on a second one was acquired. The two plows could turn over sixty acres a day at a cost of sixty cents an acre. The Jacob Price Field Locomotive steamplow⁵² carried twelve shares turning fourteen inches each. The breaking of the soil was done at eight inches deep. The machine weighed 14,000 pounds and cost \$4,500.⁵³ The smaller one was a Peerless Traction Engine steamplow⁵⁴ and cost \$2,500.⁵⁵ Two men were required to run each machine, while a third person had to haul the water.⁵⁶ In the end the steamplows proved to be a real headache. First one part broke, then another. The soil was too dry, making the work very hard. It had not rained for about three months and the irrigation ditches were dry. The immigrants had broken about 180 acres of grassland and seeded these with sugarbeets.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Chattel Mortgage, No. 13358, dated July 1, 1893. This document is to be found in the Court House of Logan County, Sterling, State of Colorado.

⁵³ **Field and Farm** 8 (April 29, 1893): 2.

⁵⁴ Chattel Mortgage, No. 13079, dated May 4, 1893. This document is to be found in the Court House of Logan County, Sterling, State of Colorado.

⁵⁵ **Field and Farm** 8 (April 29, 1893): 2.

⁵⁶ Price, Jacob, "Steam plowing a success," **Field and Farm** 7 (May 7, 1892): 1.

The strong winds blew away the dry soil, laid bare the seeds and therefore just a small portion of the seed took root.⁵⁷ The Immigration Company had, however, signed a contract with the Oxnard Beet Sugar Company of Grand Island, Nebraska, to plant 1,500 acres of sugarbeets for 1893 and 1894. If the Immigration Company would bring 5,000 acres of land under cultivation, Oxnard would build a sugar beet factory nearby. Otherwise the sugar beets had to be shipped by rail to Lehi, Utah.⁵⁸

Soon after their arrival in the South Platte Valley from the San Luis Valley in February 1893 lumber had arrived, so that the immigrants could build their own homes.⁵⁹ Along Rural Route 58, which is still known today as the Dutch road, the immigrants had contracted land from the Immigration Company and started building their homes and stables (and, of course, their outhouses) on a corner of their forty acre plots of land. Frame dwellings of one and half stories (18 by 30 feet) with a kitchen one story high attached (12 by 18 feet) were erected by the immigrants with the help of several carpenters from the surrounding area. After a while twelve of these structures dotted the landscape several miles west of Crook.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Cornelis A. Sluijs, "Brieven uit Amerika," (dated September 17, 1893) *Enkhuizer Courant* 24 (4 october 1893): 2.

⁵⁸ "Uit Colorado," *De Grondwet* 33 (11 April 1893): 1.

⁵⁹ Cornelis Sluijs, "Brieven uit Amerika," (dated February 10, 1893) *Enkhuizer Courant* 24 (1 maart 1893): 2-3.

⁶⁰ Known of having built a home were Dirk Ballast, Hendrik P. Bout, Kier Coster, Hendrik A. Evers, Adriaan Gunst, Hendrik W. Heusinkveld, Andries J. Hof, Jacob Hols, Pieter Kragt, Hannes Uit den Boogaart, Gerrit J. Westerveld and Derk Wichhart.

Near the railroad station in Crook the Immigration Company constructed its headquarters, a two-story building, 40 by 40 feet with an attached wing of 19 by 28 feet. ⁶¹ It was also the intention to use part of this building as a hotel, to provide a place where the new immigrants could find shelter after their arrival there. By April Van der Hoogt and his wife resided on the first floor and Zoutman with several of the carpenters slept on the still unfinished second floor of this building. ⁶²

The only newspaper at that time serving the Crook area was **The Logan County Advocate** published in Sterling. Issues for the years 1891, 1892 and 1894 are available on microfilm, but copies do not exist anymore for the year 1893. That is the crucial year for our investigation. The newspaper might have reported on this Dutch settlement and on the doings, good or bad, of Zoutman and Van der Hoogt. For a number of months now rumors had been floating around that there was some hanky-panky going on between Zoutman and Mrs. Van der Hoogt. In the divorce proceedings between Mrs. Van der Hoogt and her husband, she and Zoutman hotly denied those allegations. Van der Hoogt had witnesses who had seen them together frequently. On March 4, 1894 the court decided that "the bonds of

⁶¹ See court records to be found in the District Court of Logan County, Sterling, State of Colorado.

⁶² This information is taken from the testimony of Cornelius J. Driscoll in the divorce proceedings of Neeltje Roest Van der Hoogt vs. Cornelis Willem Van der Hoogt in the District Court of Arapahoe County, State of Colorado. This testimony is dated November 9, 1893. The documents are to be found in the State Archives, Denver, State of Colorado.

matrimony heretofore subsisting between [said parties] be dissolved and from henceforth held for naught." ⁶³ My hunch was that there was something more behind the divorce proceedings. A Certificate of Marriage revealed that an Albertus Zoutman married a Neeltje Roest [Van der Hoogt] in Denver, Colorado, on April 11, 1894. ⁶⁴

A year earlier in April 1893 Van der Hoogt had left the Dutch settlement for Brooklyn, New York. Zoutman left early in May 1893. ⁶⁵ Soon afterwards all kinds of swindles and scandals of Zoutman and Van der Hoogt came to the fore. The bubble of deceit also finally burst in Crook, as it had in Alamosa a few months earlier. Only a very small part of the acquired goods and services had been paid for, ⁶⁶ and so all the possessions of the Immigration Company were seized. ⁶⁷ With the resignation of Noordt zij, the president of the Immigration Company, at the end of May, ⁶⁸ the company functionally ceased to exist. Its liquidation was imminent.

⁶³ The divorce proceedings of Neeltje Roest Van der Hoogt vs. Cornelis Willem Van der Hoogt in the District Court of Arapahoe County, State of Colorado. The documents are to be found in the State Archives, Denver, State of Colorado.

⁶⁴ Certificate of Marriage is to be found in the State Archives, Denver, State of Colorado.

⁶⁵ Evert Breen, "Onze Gemeente Bethel," *De Wachter* 26 (31 Mei 1893): 2.

⁶⁶ Sluijs, "Brieven uit Amerika," (dated June 18, 1893), pp. 2-3.

⁶⁷ Kooiman's letter to Haagsma, dated July 12, 1893.

⁶⁸ *Acta der Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, gehouden te Dordrecht in den Jare 1893* (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1893), pp. 33, 38.

The creditors went to court and filed liens against the Immigration Company and the immigrants. The first ones to file suit for back wages were the carpenters.⁶⁹ They claimed that the Immigration Company owed them \$448.10. Next were W. F. Thompson who had supplied lumber and other building materials for the amount of \$2,898.51, and George A. Henderson, who had supplied building materials for \$654.57. E. H. Edgerton filed a claim for \$170.40 (he had delivered merchandise such as eight sets of double work harnesses); the Oxnard Beet Sugar Company for \$2,619.93; and the American National Bank of Denver for \$2,874.68. The claims totaled \$9,666.19.⁷⁰

The sheriff, Charles F. Fitch, by virtue of his authority, laid claim on all the possessions of the Immigration Company and the immigrants to pay off the creditors. Whatever amount of their own money the immigrants had put into their homes, etc., was gone. After the proper notices were placed in **The Logan County Advocate**, the county newspaper, the sheriff auctioned off twenty-two horses and seven colts and some other merchandise on August 16, 1893 and the homes with the stables of the immigrants and the Holland-American Land- and Immigration-Company's headquarters on August 18,

⁶⁹ The carpenters were Joseph C. Deremer, Cornelius J. Driscoll, Joseph L. Flickenstein, J. O. C. Goodwin, M. R. Goodwin, John Miller, C. P. Neal, E. M. Wagner and G. J. Westerveld. Westerveld's claim was disallowed in court. (I assume because he was one of the immigrants.) Driscoll's and Neal's back wages are not included in the total dollar figure, because the Immigration Company paid finally their wages. Westerveld's claim is not included also.

⁷⁰ See court records to be found in the District Court of Logan County, Sterling, State of Colorado.

1893.⁷¹ By this time most of the immigrants had been resettled by the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the Reformed Church in America in the State of Iowa.⁷²

Why did such an exciting undertaking have to end in such a pathetic and dismal failure for the immigrants? The blame rests squarely on the shoulders of Zoutman, Van der Hoogt, and, to a great extent, on the shoulders of Noordtzijs, the president of the Immigration Company. The three of them did not know enough about colonization or agriculture to be reliable guides for such a monumental enterprise. In addition, Van der Hoogt and Zoutman made promises with no intention of fulfilling them. They were dishonest entrepreneurs with no skills in managing a colony, with no desire in looking after the welfare of the immigrants, and with no interest in alleviating their pain and suffering in any way. They were the cause of all the aggravation which the immigrants experienced. Maybe I should have entitled this paper, "The Crooks of Crook."

September 1987

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Henry Bode and Gerrit Berkhof, "Eene Stem uit Colorado, een Noodkreet om Hulp," *De Wachter* 26 (26 Juli 1893): 1; Herman Vander Ploeg, "Eene Stem uit Colorado, eene noodkreet om Hulp," *De Hope* 27 (26 Juli 1893): 5.