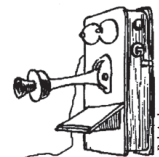


# Peoria Partyline



... connecting the extended Peoria community

Volume 10. No. 4

December 2014

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## Peoria Property Mystery Solved

For some time now, people have been asking “What do you think will happen to the Slykhuis place?” A good question since—for the past 40+ years—the shop at the foot of the hill in Peoria has looked like an abandoned, old building in various stages of disrepair. Long-time Peoria residents, however, see it differently. For them there’s lots of memories connected to the shop. Bob Deur remembers “sneaking” down there (against his mother’s wishes) and how much fun it was when Gerrit would let him turn the hand crank on his forge.

On November 21, 2009, the dilapidated building became the focus of a well-attended auction. Many antique items that had been used in Gerrit’s blacksmith and repair business were sold, including many hand tools—some still in their original packaging. At one time many of the larger, belt-driven tools in the shop had been steam powered. Later they were updated and hooked to electric power. That day the contents of the shop were sold and scattered, but no one seemed to know what would be happening with the old building and the property around it. Before the sale, the old house (uphill from the shop) had been torn down and removed. Questions were already circulating at that time. Who did it and was there someone who had plans for the property? Over time, answers to those questions took on a life of their own.



Since the sale, passers-by noticed that the grass on the property was regularly mowed and some of the dead trees were removed. It seemed someone was trying to tidy up the property. With a bit of sleuthing we found out that Bob and Pat Deur were doing the mowing, but it was still a mystery as to what the future was for the place.

Bob and Pat had been friends with Gerrit and Wilma Slykhuis since they moved to Peoria. Their girls loved Gerrit and would follow him around and chat constantly. Gerrit would stoop down, listen intently, and thoroughly enjoy their conversations. He once told Bob, “I just love it when they follow me around.” Once the girls were surprised and thrilled when Gerrit gave each of them a big bag of pop cans to recycle. No wonder the girls loved him! Bob and Pat even told Gerrit that if he ever wanted to sell his property they would be interested.

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## Skunk River—Our River (Part 2)

Bob Wichhart had heard a lot of stories that he shared with me about the dredging and straightening of the South Skunk River. In November 1909, a large group of land-owners from Jasper County secured official permission to proceed with a huge drainage project along the river. The river meandered through very rich cropland but uncontrolled, it placed all those acres at a perpetual risk for flooding. The plan was to straighten out the river—making it nearly half of its original length.

During the summer months of 1909, the Skunk ran at the highest levels in 40 years. Flooding was rampant and people in many parts of the state were forced out of their homes. Then three young boys drowned in some of the Skunk’s flood waters. Farmers talked about it like never before. It was determined that the Skunk—left as it was—was a danger to human life and crops. The argument was that “taming” the river would bring in more money and less flooding.

With plans in hand, the dredging project moved forward. Most important was finding a machine that could handle the job. A factory in Newton—that manufactured ditching machines—stepped forward. With a few alterations—to adjust to the shallow waters of

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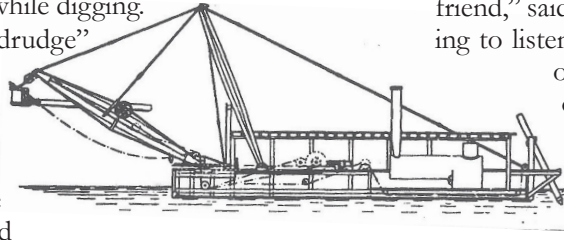
- *Skunk River—Our River Continued*

the river—they created a special dredge boat which was really just a steam shovel built on top of a barge. Powered by steam and run by a crew of 10, the huge single bucket could go up and down and side to side while digging.

Nicknamed “the dipper drudge” the machine excavated material from the proposed new river line, and deposited it on the river banks. That dirt in turn was made into levees. Coal and wood had to be brought to the machine to feed its hungry motor.

Quite the spectacle while working, people turned out to watch especially if the crew got things hung up in shallow water or had to deal with an existing bridge.

Over the next ten years the dredging fever spread from Jasper County to Marion, Mahaska, and even to farmers along



the North Skunk. Price for land shot up to \$317 per acre in anticipation of financial gains after each project was completed. There was a lot of focus on the Skunk River!

“I too have always found the river fascinating and a good friend,” said Bob after he finished with those stories. Continuing to listen, I found out that fishing was a favorite pastime of his, and that he had a flat bottomed boat of his own. He aimed to catch catfish, carp and bluegills. “One time walleyes made their way from the Mississippi to our area,” he said, “and ditty poles were a way to harvest unsuspecting fish looking for a bite to eat.”

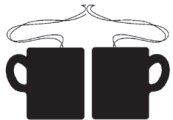
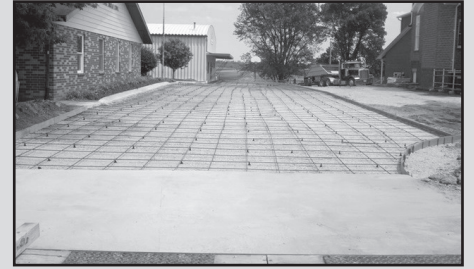
And so the river with the unfortunate name “Skunk” does have some charm in its own way. But don’t let that charm deceive you. Today we know—that despite all the attempts at controlling our river—it still has a mind of its own and we had best respect it. Bob would have agreed.

-Wilma Blom



## New Cement for Peoria Church and School

Early this summer a crew began work on replacing the old cement between the Peoria church and school. Diligent workers tore out the old and prepped the area for the new. Over time many of you will visit these grounds and when you do, be sure to appreciate and enjoy all the improvements.



**Neighbors are much more than just names!  
Grab a cup of coffee and let's meet the Den Oudstens!**

God answers prayer, but not always in the way we might expect. That was the case for Richarla Van Ee, who so loved coming to Iowa to visit her dad’s relatives that she wanted to marry an Iowa farmer. Instead, she married a farm boy from Canada and together they moved to Iowa.

That farm boy is Rev. George Den Oudsten, the new pastor at Peoria Christian Reformed Church. The oldest of four children, Pastor George grew up on the plains of central Alberta on a barley, canola, and cattle farm. He studied agriculture for two years at Dordt College before returning home to farm but, after a restless year, he felt God calling him into the ministry. He returned to Dordt to complete a degree in communication, then headed to Calvin Seminary in Michigan.

Accompanying him to Michigan was his wife Richarla, who grew up in Williamston, Michigan, with three older brothers. George and Charla met at Dordt where she was studying to become a nurse and earned an RN degree from St. Luke’s. She has worked at nursing homes in Orange City, IA, in a long-term acute care facility in Grand Rapids, MI, and in the dementia unit of the Holland Home there.

After George graduated from seminary, the Den Oudstens spent three years in Montana pastoring a church in Bozeman.

During that time, their prayers for a child were answered and they were blessed with a beautiful little girl, Hannah Joy. Hannah turned one year old this November.

The Den Oudstens arrived in Peoria in late August and have settled into the house next door to the church. They love living in the country and enjoy the view from their house and from the cemetery on the hill. Pastor George likes biking, hunting, and reading. Charla like to crochet, and they both enjoy hiking, gardening, and water skiing—anything outdoors. They also like cooking and grilling—ask them sometime how to grill venison backstraps.

Both Pastor George and Charla are glad to be here and are looking forward to getting to know the members of the congregation and the community. His desire is to “preach the Word and love God’s people” and we’re thankful that God has led this devoted family to walk alongside us here. Welcome to Peoria, Pastor George, Richarla, and Hannah!

-Deb Bruxvoort





## Flying High for Fun

As a kid, Bob Deur watched enviously as the neighboring Nibbelink boys flew their model airplanes, spinning round and round in the pasture holding tightly to their control lines. Bob's father, Mel Deur, was also interested in flying and on the pretense that it was for his sons—Bob and Dale—he purchased a model airplane. Then the Deur boys got their turn to spin round and round while trying to avoid crashing their plane.

When he was about 25 years old, Bob purchased a foam airplane that had a two channel radio control. No more spinning in circles holding on to a control line. Walking across the road to Vander Hart's pasture, he would see how long he could keep it in the air. It often crashed. So, back home, get out the epoxy, and try to get it flight worthy again. After many attempts he got better at it.

Later Bob and his brother Dale each purchased a \$40 Sig Kadet plane kit. They kept occupied that winter trying to assemble them. Those planes gave them hours of enjoyable flying time, but the models also sustained lots of damage from many crashes. They were covered with blobs of epoxy.

Then, for about 25 years, Bob focused on spending time with his young family and on his work. He had three model airplanes but they were sitting useless in the corner of his basement.

A few years back, when winter days were long and Bob sat home mindlessly watching TV, his wife Pat insisted that he get out of his chair and find a hobby. He tried working with model trains, but did not have a passion for that. Then Pat suggested

he get out his model airplanes again. And why not? He began to search for a place to fly them.

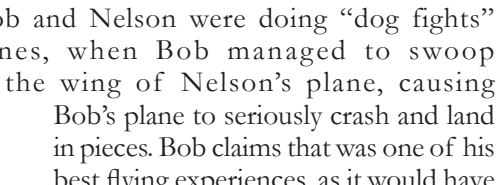
What he needed was an open area with no trees or electric wires, and a field of short grass with a long runway. He finally found the perfect place. It was near Newton where about 30 club members—called the Newton Sky Kings—practice and show off their piloting skills. The site has a 350 foot asphalt landing strip, and lots of open space. Bob says that he has only wrecked three planes there—so far anyway.

Has he had any bad experiences? Well, the time he stuck his hand into a propeller—resulting in deep cuts in 3 fingers—probably qualifies.

Bob enjoys flying planes with his brother Dale and his brother-in-law Nelson Nibbelink. Once Bob and Nelson were doing “dog fights” with their planes, when Bob managed to swoop down and clip the wing of Nelson's plane, causing



*Bob displays his airplane.*



*The boys having fun.*

Bob's plane to seriously crash and land in pieces. Bob claims that was one of his best flying experiences, as it would have made an amazing video and he thought it was really humorous. Nelson however was dismayed and thought it was really tragic. Different perspectives, right?

There is a huge price range for model planes – from \$8 for a battery operated foam model, to ones higher than \$8000 with digital controls that can be made to do remarkable maneuvers. Obviously, owners of the more expensive variety do not use them for “dog fights”! Members of the Sky Kings range in age from 20 to 90.

Flying model planes can be an enjoyable hobby for people of any age. Anyone interested?

-Doris Nibbelink

### -Peoria Property Mystery Continued

During that time, Wilma and Gerrit had moved to Pella, but as long as they were able they would still come to Peoria, sometimes bringing a picnic lunch to enjoy together, or giving Gerrit time to “tinker” in his shop. They enjoyed caring for their blackberry patch and also raised a huge garden there.

After Gerrit passed away, Bob asked Wilma if she wanted to sell the property, but she would say, “I know I need to sell it, but it just has too many memories.” She just couldn't part with it.

After Wilma passed away, the attorney for the estate contacted the Deurs and wondered if they were still interested in owning the property. Obviously they were, and in July that purchase was finalized. They are now the owners of the two-acre, former Slykhuis property. They have been mowing the grass, removing wood piles and dead trees, and collecting chunks of iron they've found hidden in the grass. It's starting to look like a park.

What are their plans for the future? There are some small, sturdy buildings on the property that Gerrit built—obviously he was also a good carpenter. “We'll let those stay for a while,” said Bob, “but the old blacksmith building—built back in 1921—will likely need to be torn down, as the foundation is crumbling and the low ceiling of the main floor doesn't allow for storage of vehicles with any height.” The well on the property will remain, but it will need to have the pump repaired before it can be used. The grassy area will remain a great place for the grandkids to play and explore.



We'll wait and see what else they decide to do.

So—happy ownership, Bob and Pat! And “hooray” the mystery has been solved!

-Doris Nibbelink

*“Thanks so much for all you do for the Peoria Partyline. Pass the word along to the rest of the team. The writers do a great job! We look forward to reading each new issue. Everyone thinks the paper is so interesting! Keep up the good work!”*

-a note from a happy reader



# ... heard about it on the partyline ...

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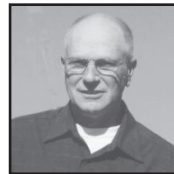
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## For Sale

**For Sale:** Hand-crafted gifts, deck furniture, quilt racks, windmills, and many other things. 625-4148, 1219 Hwy 102 (road to Pella).



**Charlotte (Chum) Deur** was born near Peoria, Iowa. When she was 18 months, her mother died, so her father moved his little family back in with his parents. Chum attended Cherry Grove county school and later school in Peoria. She lovingly cared for her father even after marrying Melvin Deur and having four children. A loving and talented woman, Chum often said the most important things in her life were her faith, her family, and her friends. There is a lot more to learn about Chum, so check out the rest of her story at this website: [www.vandykduven.com](http://www.vandykduven.com)



Born in Oskaloosa, **Jerry Van Wyk** (and his seven siblings) attended various schools in the Pella area. He was an Army soldier during the Vietnam war and later the Army Reserves. He met his wife Nancy while on a detasseling crew, and they raised four children in Pella and later on Nancy's family farm near Peoria. Jerry worked for Pella Corp for 27 years and raised quail and pheasants on his farm. He had a strong work ethic and his faith played a huge role in his life. Read the rest of Jerry's story at this website: [www.vandykduven.com](http://www.vandykduven.com)



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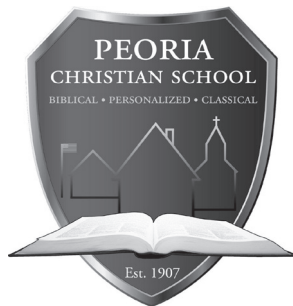
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## Chicken Comeback

If you grew up in rural Iowa—or were a part of the agricultural community as an adult—undoubtedly you remember the days when your farm would have been a paradise for Old MacDonald himself. There was a “moo, moo” here, an “oink, oink” there, and probably a “chick, chick” everywhere. You may also vividly remember the chores that accompanied all those voices. Virtually never a break, relentless. The social studies books called it “general farming.”

But then things began to change, slowly at first and then more quickly. Pretty soon all that could be heard was just a “baa, baa” or a “moo, moo.” Specialization was the trend and it seemed to make a lot of sense. Often, there were no animal sounds at all if raising corn or beans seemed the best way to experience financial success.

Our own farming adventure began with the Old MacDonald's model in place. Soon, though, the farewells began to happen. First to go were the chickens. After all, what fun are broody hens along with gathering and then cleaning the eggs? It was easier to buy eggs from a neighbor. Cleaning the chicken house was also high on the list of being a less-than-enjoyable activity. Let's just say it was good riddance from our perspective.

The farewells continued over the years until finally the familiar “moo moo” was about the only sound around. Of course one can not forget a few nervous cats and an overly-friendly dog that continued to be a part of the picture. Our farm had sort of become a non-farm.

And then it happened. As I recall it was with the family sitting around a bonfire roasting some hot dogs when a grandson said, “Grandpa, I wish you had some chickens.” Quick response from Grandpa—“Grandpa doesn't like chickens!” But somehow, although reluctantly, a seed was planted.

Did Grandpa relent or hold fast? Watch for the rest of the story in the next issue.

-Wilma Blom

