

The History of the Peoria Christian Reformed Church

As the quest for land sent the pioneers westward in their covered wagons, so also Dutch settlers with their horses and buggies crossed the Skunk River in search of farmland. The town of Pella, settled in 1847 by Rev. H. Scholte and a band of Dutch immigrants, had been the center of religious and social activities for the Dutch settlers. But as families purchased land "over the river" and because of the distance to travel it became quite difficult to attend church in Pella. There was a desire among these settlers to have a place of worship closer to where they were living. At first they met in a schoolhouse 5 miles northeast of Peoria, but a desire to have their own church building prompted a meeting in the Peoria town hall in the fall of 1893 for the purpose of organizing a new congregation.

Among those attending the meeting were members of both the Reformed and Christian Reformed denominations, so one of the first hurdles to cross was the decision as to which denomination they would affiliate with. Though there were 10 families from the Reformed denomination and only 7 from the Christian Reformed denomination, it seems that Rev. J. Manni, then pastor of the Dutch Christian Reformed Church of Pella, was more persuasive in the debate that ensued than Rev. Joldersma of the Reformed Church because the group decided to affiliate with the Christian Reformed denomination. During those early years of struggle, sorrow, and sometimes conflict, Rev. Manni provided encouragement and counsel to the young congregation and its consistory.

Besides the 17 families represented at the meeting, there were also 12 individuals who desired to be a part of the new congregation. After making profession of their faith, these individuals were welcomed as members:

Mr. Teunis Kelderman
Mr. Cornelius Kruseman
Mr. Gerrit Kruseman
Mr. John Kruseman
Mr. & Mrs. Matthys Oliver
Mr. Gerrit Van Gorp

Mr. & Mrs. Marinus Van Gorp
Mr. & Mrs. Bart Vander Wal
Mr. Johannes Swank

The following is a list of the families that made up the original membership of the Holland Christian Reformed Church of Peoria organized on the 11th of April, 1894:

Mr. and Mrs. Dries Brouwer
Mr. and Mrs. Gerrit Brouwer and two children
Mr. and Mrs. Jan Brouwer
Mr. and Mrs. Arie De Jong and three children
Mr. and Mrs. Albert Engbers and six children
Mr. and Mrs. Andries Geertsma and seven children
Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Grootnibbelink and two children
Mr. and Mrs. Stoffel Grootnibbelink and three children
Mr. and Mrs. Rijk Van Heukelom and four children
Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Kloosterman and eight children
Mr. and Mrs. Arie Kool and one child
Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Rus and one child
Mr. and Mrs. Pieter Rus and seven children
Mr. and Mrs. Gerrit Van Gorp and seven children
Mr. and Mrs. Marinus Van Gorp and seven children
Mr. and Mrs. Johannes Zwank and four children
Mr. and Mrs. Pieter Zwank and five children

The new congregation under the guidance of a classical committee made up of Reverend J. Manni, Reverend E. Breen, and elder Overbergen elected six men to serve as the consistory for this fledgling congregation. Frederick Grootnibbelink, Rijk Van Heukelom, and Gerrit Van Gorp served as elders; Pieter Rus, Cornelius Kloosterman, and Stoffel Grootnibbelink were the first deacons. Many difficult decisions faced these newly

elected leaders of the church. It was no small task that faced these early church leaders.

Desiring to have a pastor of their own, a call was extended to Reverend J. Groen of Zeeland, Michigan at a salary of \$650 per year plus housing and moving expenses. Having called a pastor, the consistory wrestled with the problem of paying his salary, since at that time the church had no funds. It was decided to ask families to make pledges for a salary fund.

Reverend Groen declined the call and a second call was extended to candidate Broekstra who had preached for the congregation during the summer months, and was well received by the people. Candidate Broekstra accepted the call and arrived in Peoria in October of 1894 with his wife and children.

At the same time that the congregation was seeking a pastor for their church, they were also investigating options for a permanent meeting place. When they found no satisfactory meeting place the decision was made to build a new church, and since there was no housing available for the pastor and his family, the plans also included building a parsonage. A two acre plot of ground at the edge of the town of Peoria was purchased from Martin Shene. This would be the site for building the edifice to house the Holland Christian Reformed Church of Peoria.

The report on the purchase of the land was made at the June consistory meeting, and amazingly by November of 1894, the congregation gathered to worship in their own church building. A janitor was hired for the church at a salary of \$2.00 per month in the winter and \$1.00 a month during the summer.

The congregation celebrated the Lord's Supper soon after the arrival of Reverend Broekstra. The communion service (the goblet and trays) was borrowed from the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella. However soon afterwards, a communion service for the new church was ordered from a Chicago company at the cost of \$20.00.

Some of the problems the new church struggled with were the delinquency on the part of parents in bringing young children for baptism and also irregular church attendance on the part of some,

which may be accredited in part to the distance some families traveled to church. Also there was difficulty in collecting money pledged for the pastors salary. Families were struggling financially at this time due to a financial depression in the country, as well as a drought which affected the congregation acutely since it was and remains to this day a farming community. In spite of financial struggles, expenses were met in 1895 with a balance of \$18.32 at the end of the year.

The year of 1896 began with turmoil within the congregation. Unable to resolve their differences, other pastors and consistory members were asked to come and mediate between the opposing factions. A resolution was proposed and accepted, but the disagreement resulted in two families leaving the church.

A dark cloud engulfed the church early in 1897 when their beloved pastor became ill and was taken from his family and congregation by death. Beside the loss of their spiritual leader, the consistory struggled with their obligation to support Mrs. Broekstra and her four children and at the same time make plans to call another minister. It was decided to give Mrs. Broekstra \$42.00 a month for 3 months and pay the funeral expenses. It was also decided not to call another pastor until their obligation to Mrs. Broekstra had been met. Some years later Lena Broekstra, daughter of Rev. Broekstra and Aletenus Rus, a son of the Peoria congregation, met in Grand Rapids, Michigan and some time later were married.

In August a call was extended to candidate G. Westenburg at a salary of \$500.00 per year. Candidate Westenberg accepted the call and was ordained in October, so once again the struggling flock was blessed with an undershepherd.

After surveying her new domicile the new "Juffrouw" came to the consistory with a request for new wallpaper and plaster for the "sitting room". With the need of renovation only three years after the parsonage was built, one wonders about the structural quality of the building. After a lengthy discussion her request was approved and she was given the privilege of picking out the wallpaper. Soon afterwards the pastor expressed

a desire for a flock of hens, so the consistory obligingly built a chicken coop to house the pastors "flock". In those early days the duties of the consistory members were many and varied. They ranged from soliciting funds and admonishing wayward members, to constructing chicken coops and barns and hauling coal.



Rev. G. Westenberg, wife Della Eugene, James G., Gertrude, Evangeline. 1897-1901.

Permission was received to hold a "Question School", later called catechism classes, in the rural public school and as the celebration of Christmas approached, it was decided to give each young catechumen a small book as a gift on Christmas at a total cost of \$3.00. This practice was carried on for many years but was discontinued for a time during World War I because of the unavailability of books.

With new wallpaper brightening the parsonage "sitting room" and the pastors hens comfortably situated in their new coop, the last years of the 19th century were relatively untroubled years for the Holland Christian Reformed Church of Peoria.

It might be noted that during this time an offering was taken for the Christian Reformed Church of Sully whose building was destroyed by fire. During this time also the tradition of holding an annual "Mission Fest" for the Christian Re-

formed churches of the area was established.

Since the congregation at this time did not possess a musical instrument to lead congregational singing, Mr. A.C. De Jong served as "Voorzinger" or leader for congregational singing. His pay for serving in this capacity was free barn rent for his horses.

A committee from the consistory was commissioned to visit a church member and admonish him for his irregular church attendance. His defense was that because he was blessed with a large family it was necessary for him to bake bread on Sunday to provide nourishment for his brood. Undaunted the consistory committee then admonished him for laboring on Sunday.

Once again in 1901, the church was left without a pastor when Reverend Westenberg accepted a call to New Era Christian Reformed Church. Once again God saw the need for the young church and sent Reverend P. Jonker to them. Just five months after Reverend Westenberg left, the Peoria Church again had a pastor.



Rev. Peter Jonker Sr., wife Anna, John, Cornelius, Peter, William, Marie, Anna, Grace, Betty, Hildagarde, Jeannie. 1901-1907

Early in 1902 a decision was made to enlarge the existing church building and just five months later, after the completion of the addition, a service of dedication was held. Another expansion project took place early in 1904 when the church bought one half of the Peoria Creamery to be used as a consistory room and "Koffie Kamer" or in today's terms "fellowship hall".

Though the Peoria church was but a youngster among the churches in the denomination, nevertheless, her voice was often heard at the Classis meeting through the delegates who were sent with instructions to present proposals to the Classis. One such proposal was brought to the spring meeting in 1904. It was suggested that when examined by Classis all candidates be asked the question, "How are things at the college in Grand Rapids?" No report was made as to the acceptance or rejection of the proposal.

In the spring of 1904, it was decided to start a "Dutch" summer school for two months during the following summer. This was a forerunner of the Christian Day school which was first held in the "Koffee Kamer" or consistory room of the church in 1907. It then moved to a one room building built north of the church in 1910. As the church struggled in its early beginning, so the school also struggled. But by the year 1912, there were 84 students enrolled. The Dutch language had been replaced by English, a second room was added and Mr. Frank Kuiper joined Mr. Richard Drost as teacher.

During the time the Christian school was being established, Reverend P. Jonker accepted a call to Prospect Park, New Jersey. The six years under Reverend Jonker's leadership were a time of growth, both numerically and in unity and harmony as a part of the body of Christ, so it was with sadness that the congregation bid farewell to their pastor and his family.

After being vacant for eight months Reverend A. J. Brink came all the way from Oak Harbor, Washington to be the new pastor of the Peoria Church. His pastorate in Peoria was brief and marked by illness, which at one time necessitated a leave of absence. In spite of that, the church moved forward. A furnace was installed, an organ was purchased for \$315 and in 1911 another addition was added to the north side of the church.

By 1909, a choral group had formed within the church and in December of that year, they presented a musical program along with the children of the Christian school. Since those early days, music, both vocal and instrumental, has been dear to the hearts of the Peoria congregation and

a vital part of their worship service. Visitors to our church have often commented on the fine quality of our congregational singing. What better way to use musical talents than in the praise of God the giver of those talents! The music in the church was not always without controversy, however. Shortly after purchasing the new organ, the consistory received complaints that there was confusion among the parishioners as to when to start singing following an elaborate introduction to the Psalms by the organist. A committee visited the organist and requested that he give the congregation a "clue" as to when the singing was to begin, so the singing might be more edifying and all the congregation would begin singing at the same time.



Rev. A. J. Brink

On December 12, 1911 the second addition to the church building was dedicated, so in a period of only 17 years a band of believers from over the river had built a house for worship, and twice enlarged it to accommodate the growing congregation. They had reason to gather and thank God for His care and blessing and rededicate their church to God's praise and glory.

Reverend Brink left the Peoria church in 1912 after receiving a call to a church in Colorado. After a short vacancy, candidate H. Bultema accepted the call to Peoria and was ordained in September of 1912.

Perhaps it was his youth, or perhaps exposure to the modern conveniences of the city during his years of schooling, but whatever the reason Reverend Bultema felt his work should be facilitated by an automobile. They would use this automobile as a means of transportation rather than the pastor's ponies which at this point in time, had reached a ripe old age. The consistory consented and bought the Pastor an auto, however, excerpts from church history indicate that whether this was indeed an improvement in transportation is debatable since the auto seemed to be indisposed much of the time.



Rev. H. Bultema, wife Dena. 1912-1916

The church experienced a setback in 1916 when a large new parsonage which was nearly completed burned to the ground from an overheated furnace. There was no insurance, but once again, the people came together, raised the necessary funds and again began construction. The parsonage built at that time served as home for pastors and their families until the home that Bouwkamps are now occupying was built in 1982. The original parsonage served as school teacherage until 1989.

When Reverend Bultema arrived, he felt the need for Bible instruction for the congregation so during his term in Peoria a Young People's Society was organized and also the Persis Ladies Aid. In 1917, a Young Men's Society was organized

and over the years, societies were added and changed and eventually all adopted the English language. An interesting side note is that in 1948 the Peoria congregation was the only one in the Christian Reformed denomination that had among its various Bible study societies, two young men's societies. In the earlier years of the church's history, societies were not only for Bible study, but were also a time for socializing and recreation. At times it took the form of activities which called for intervention by the pastor and consistory. Activities such as placing a dummy in the ladies restroom which caused the girls to exit rapidly amidst shrieks of terror, racing their cars in circles around the church, an attempt on at least one occasion to ascend the church steps with an automobile, and of course when a wedding had taken place in the congregation, the young folks went to shivaree the newlyweds.

Reverend Bultema left the Peoria congregation early in 1916 when he accepted a call to the 1st Christian Reformed Church of Muskegon, Michigan. Once again the spiritual needs of the congregation were provided for when Reverend J. J. Weersing accepted the call to Peoria and arrived in the fall of 1916.



Rev. J. J. Weersing, 1916-1918.

Shortly after the arrival of Reverend Weersing, our nation became involved in World War I. Though Peoria, Iowa was far removed from the

battle fields of that war, the Holland Christian Reformed Church of Peoria was tested and tried far beyond the usual war-time activities of donating to the Red Cross and anxiously awaiting news from families in the Netherlands or loved ones in military service. Because church services were conducted in the Dutch language, the English speaking people of the community became suspicious of these Dutch settlers with a language that sounded so much like that of the Germans, the enemy. Reverend Weersing became the focal point of the suspicion and anger against the Dutch community when he assisted the young men of the congregation seeking to avoid being drafted into military service. Not all young men escaped serving in the military however. Nine young men from the congregation entered military service.

Early in 1918 Reverend Weersing was arrested, and his whereabouts was unknown to the congregation for some time. When church members were able to communicate with him, he was advised not to return to Peoria to avoid further confrontation with the English-speaking community. When he accepted a call to Hull, Iowa, later in the year 1918, he sent his farewell message in written form on the advise of the consistory. Mr. Hietbrink, the Christian School principal left Peoria also after first attempting to help the congregation conduct church services in the English language, following a proclamation by the Governor that all preaching must be done in English. Mr. Hietbrink also urged the people to learn English and become naturalized citizens.

The hostility against the Dutch settlers reached its peak when on June 13, 1918 the Christian school was set on fire. Both the school and church burned to the ground that night. Once again, the faith, courage, and determination of the band of settlers was tried. The written records of that time show no faltering of faith or courage, but rather a determination to rebuild. Meanwhile, services were held in one of the horse barns. When the weather turned cold, they winterized the barn as best they could and folks were asked to bring chairs from home for seating the congregation. For a time, the church property was guarded by young men of the congregation, but

then the war came to an end and the armistice not only brought peace to the nations at war, but also brought peace to the beleaguered church in Peoria.

An epidemic of influenza forced the church to suspend services for a time. In October of 1918, the quarantine was lifted and church services were resumed. No church members were lost at that time due to the influenza epidemic.

Plans for rebuilding the church were made soon after the fire. With joy and thanksgiving, the new church building was dedicated late in 1919 and the 25th anniversary of the church was celebrated. Probably no 25 year period in the church's 100 year of existence has been as eventful as that first 25 years. Though that church built in 1919 has gone through some changes, with new additions and refurbishing that building still serves as our house of worship today.

Efforts were made to implement the slow, painful transition from Dutch to English worship services. An English Bible and a book of English sermons were purchased. An attempt was also made to sing the Psalms in English and teach Catechism in the English language. It was also decided to have one English service per month on an evening when there was a bright full moon! Though these efforts were made in 1918 and 1919, the transition was slow and it wasn't until 1936 that half of the worship services were in the English language. It wasn't until 1945 that all services were conducted in the English language.

Reverend P. Van Dyk accepted the call to Peoria and arrived in January of 1919. Though he and his family were housed in a fine new parsonage, it must have taken some courage to accept a call from a congregation meeting in a horse barn in the dead of winter!

With a new building and a new pastor, the church moved forward. The young people planned a "welcome home" party for returning service men. The decision was made to purchase a pipe organ to replace the organ lost in the fire. The decision was also made to treat the school-aged children to fruit and candy at Christmas time. This tradition continues today.

Late in 1921, Reverend Van Dyk accepted a call to South Holland, Illinois. After a six month

vacancy, Reverend D. Krominga with his wife and four children came to minister to the church in Peoria. He had previously taught at Grundy College.



Rev. P. Van Dyk, 1919-1921.



Rev. D. H. Krominga, wife Katherine, Johanna, Agnes, John, Carl, 1922-1926.

The decade of the twenties following World War I was a time of prosperity, optimism and the throwing off of some of the old restraints. This sense of new freedom even reached into the Peoria congregation when several of the young ladies "bobbed" their hair. This did not escape the watchful eye of the consistory, and the young

ladies were sharply reprimanded. This was a case, however, where it was impossible to undo what had been done and it was a matter of only a few years and young women "bobbing" their hair became a common practice.

After serving the congregation for four years, Reverend Krominga accepted a call to Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. After Reverend Krominga's departure, Peoria experienced a two year vacancy, and 21 calls were extended before candidate Marvin Vander Werp, his wife and young daughter took up residence in the parsonage at Peoria. Reverend Vander Werp also served the Peoria congregation for four years.



Rev. Vander Werp, wife Ann, Betty Ann, 1928-1932.

During this time, the church acquired its first piano, and in November of 1929 a new pipe organ was dedicated.

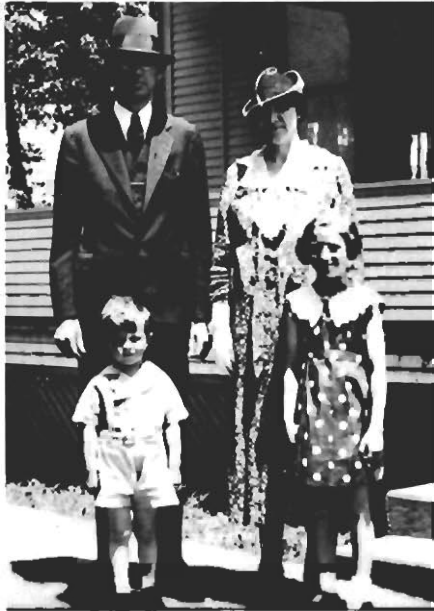
Two members who had gone off for a day to the State Fair were reprimanded and warned of the spiritual danger of such activity. The closely-knit Dutch community feared those activities and practices from the outside that might change their conservative Dutch traditions.

During this time, the decision was made to have a second English service per month and the request to organize an English Men's Society, which was denied in 1930, was approved in 1931. Though change was slow and sometimes viewed

with dismay it did occur.

1931 also brought electricity to the church and parsonage, and earphones were installed in the home of an invalid in Peoria so he could listen to the worship service.

After serving as pastor in Peoria for four years Rev. Vander Werp accepted a call to Prinsburg, Mn. After a much shorter vacancy of only three months, Reverend John Weidenaar arrived from Worthington, Minnesota with his wife and two children.



Rev. John Weidenaar, wife Jennie, Evelyn, Kenneth, 1932-1936.

In the 1930's the nation again suffered through a period of economic depression and drought. These hard times were also felt in the church in Peoria. At the time that Rev. Weidenaar was called, the ministers salary was lowered from \$1,800 to \$1,000.00 per year. The janitor's salary was lowered from \$350.00 to \$250.00 a year and the organist were asked to play without remuneration. Despite their economic struggle the Peoria congregation took up an offering for fellow Christians in South Dakota who they felt were suffering more than they were. Also a decision was made to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the church "with feasting."

In spite of a shortage of money, the coming of the machine age and improvements in transpor-

tation and communication was evident when a telephone was installed in the parsonage.

In 1934 when the fields were turned to dust and livestock prices plummeted, the congregation held a special prayer service to ask God for His help, guidance and protection.

The 1930's were not only dry because of lack of moisture, but these were also years of prohibition which caused a problem in obtaining wine for communion. A source was found in Chicago however, so a supply was ordered from there. Not only was the 40th anniversary of the Peoria Church celebrated in 1934 but also the secession from the State church of the Netherlands which took place in Genderen in 1834. This event was celebrated in Peoria with one afternoon program in Dutch and one in the evening in English.

In 1935 a group of 15 young people appeared before the congregation to make public profession of faith. This was the largest group in the church's history to profess their faith at one time so though the times were hard there was also cause for celebration and rejoicing.

The matter of members speculating in the board of trading was brought to the attention of the consistory and after wrestling with the question of whether it was permissible for Christians, the consistory came to the conclusion that this activity was not censurable.

With the coming of the automobile and a decline in the use of the horse barns the congregation decided to sell the lower barns and use the proceeds to purchase new Psalter Hymnals. After months of patient endurance the consistory requested the buyer to clean up the mess left behind after the removal of the barns.

In 1936 the church initiated the practice of having one half of the worship services in the English language.

Rev. Weidenaar left Peoria in 1936 when he accepted a call to Dennis Ave. Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. In June of 1937 Rev. Dewey Hoitenga with his wife and five children arrived from Hancock, Minnesota. The church was recovering from the drought and depression and could experience the satisfaction of having their church and the parsonage debt

free.

In 1940 the church was made available for weddings, but receptions in the church basement were not allowed until some years later. The first evening wedding was held in 1951.



Rev. Dewey J. Holtenga, wife Theresa, Dewey Jr., Kathleen, Rose, Esther, Lois, 1937-1943

Due to the heat and humidity of Iowa summers, the Queen Esther Society requested permission to place fans in the book racks on the benches for the purpose of stirring the air a bit during the summer months. This request was granted providing there was no advertisement on the fans.

In 1941 the consistory proposed using individual cups for serving wine when communion was celebrated. This met with strong opposition from some members. The proposal was adopted. However, to accommodate those opposed to this change, communion was served again in the evening, and at that time the goblets were used.

The nation was again plunged into war in 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Twenty-five men and one young woman from the Peoria congregation were either drafted or enlisted in the service of their country. Through the goodness and protection of God they all returned home, though some experienced the horror of war on the battlefield and at sea, and some were wounded.

Perhaps remembering accusations of disloyalty to their country during the first World War, but

also to demonstrate patriotism and support for those serving their country, the congregation decided to display both the American and the Christian flags in the sanctuary. Both flags are still displayed in our church today. Not only young people from the congregation served their country at this time, but Rev. Hoitenga also left our congregation to serve as chaplain in the Army.

A welcome home dinner and program for those returning from military service was held December 11, 1946. Rev. Hoitenga returned to give the address at this celebration.

Many in the Dutch community still had ties with the Netherlands through relatives and friends. And the Ladies Aids of the church responded to the great need of the Hollanders devastated by war by sending aid packages. They requested help from the consistory for postage. \$1,000.00 was designated for sending goods to the Netherlands.

When Rev. Hoitenga entered the chaplaincy, the Peoria Church was once again without a pastor. The first call was extended to Rev. Raymond Haan from Wellsburg, Ia. He accepted and arrived with his wife and family in the spring of 1943.

During the years that Rev. Haan served as minister the church celebrated its 50th anniversary, and a year later decided it was time to let go of the language of their forefathers and conduct all worship services in English. It was also during this time the minutes of consistory meetings were first recorded in English. Just two years after taking up his work in the Peoria church Rev. Haan accepted a call to the Fourth Christian Reformed Church of Roseland, Il.

Early in 1946 Rev. J. A. Mulder from Ocheyedan, Ia. became Peoria's 13th minister in the 50 years of the church's existence.

The depression was now history and the years following World War II were years of prosperity. This was reflected in the ministers salary which had more than doubled since early in the 1930's, and also in a remodeling project in the church basement. The last of the horse barns were torn down and a garage was built for the dual purpose of housing the ministers automobile and also the

Christian school buses. Though the barns had not been used to shelter horses for some time, they did provide some excellent hiding places for school children engaged in a game of "hide and seek", and the rafters served as gymnastics bars for the stout hearted ones.



Rev. Raymond H. Haan, wife Henrietta, Gaylord, Raymond, Nelson, 1943-1945.

Rev. John A. Mulder, wife Anne, Jacquelyn, Marianne, Arlys, 1946-1950.

Rev. Mulder accepted a call to Moline, Mi. late in 1950, and it wasn't until three years later that Rev. Henry Verduin from Overisel, Mi. became the new pastor in Peoria.

The work of the church moved forward in spite of the absence of an under shepherd. Early in the 1950's the coal furnace was replaced with an oil furnace. After intensive research and organ dem-

onstrations a new pipe organ was purchased and dedicated in April of 1952. This organ is still in use in our sanctuary today and over the years its rich mellow tones have worked their way into the hearts of the people. Consequently when mechanical difficulties indicated the need to either replace the organ or to have extensive repair work done, the congregation decided to have the organ repaired. It was rebuilt and 2 ranks of pipes were added. The repaired and enhanced organ was dedicated on Dec. 10, 1989. After the work was completed our organ was featured in an article in American Organist magazine. Another rank of pipes was added in 1993.



Rev. Henry Verduin, wife Laura, Laura Ruth, 1953-1959.

An innovation in 1956 was having Sunday School during the summer months. Later, with the passing of catechism instruction taking place in the Christian Grade School during school hours and taught by the minister and elders, Sunday School classes began meeting nine months a year. We now have Church School classes for members from preschool through adults. The close relationship between the church and the Christian School is evident in the fact that on Sunday all the school classrooms are used for church school classes, and during the week the school band members practice in the church basement.

In 1957 our church began participating with

other area Reformed and Christian Reformed churches to produce a weekly program of music, scripture, and a short message on Sunday afternoon. This program was aired on radio station KBOE and was called Reformed Chapel of the Air. The churches took turns arranging the programs. Our church stopped participating in the Reformed Chapel of the Air in Nov. of 1986.

Rev. Verduin served the Peoria Church until the spring of 1959 when he retired from the ministry. In the fall of that year candidate Douglas Vander Waal became our new pastor.



Rev. Douglas Vander Waal, wife Leanne, Pamela, Debra, Carla, Laura, 1959-1962.

In the late 1950's and early 60's some changes took place in our worship services. Not as controversial as some earlier changes perhaps, but some of them were voted on a number of times before receiving a majority vote. One change was that consistory members began sitting with their families during worship service rather than as a body in the front of the church. On occasion they have moved to the back of the church in an effort to control unruly young men of the congregation. These efforts were thwarted on one occasion however when a group of young men marched forward and seated themselves in the front of the church. There was a period in the history of our church when there was a peculiar custom of the young people (particularly young men) sitting in the rear of the church rather than with their parents.

Another change was having a 10 minute song service preceding the regular worship service once a month. After a trial period of having the second worship service in the evening during the three summer months, then for five months of the year, and after having been voted on a number of times, the congregation finally decided to have the second service in the evening the whole year.

In 1960 a Calvinist Cadet Club was organized for the boys of the congregation. It wasn't until 10 years later that the Calvinette Club for girls was organized.

Also in 1960 the church auditorium was re-decorated, and two years later an extensive remodeling project was under taken which included adding classrooms on the east side of the church basement and a carport and new entry on the south.

Rev. Vander Waal left Peoria for Phoenix, Arizona in 1962. The first call was sent to candidate Donald Van Beek who accepted and arrived with his family while the church was in the middle of the remodeling project.



Rev. Donald J. Van Beek, wife Helen, Sheryl, Douglas, Daniel, 1962-1966.

The number of church societies grew with the addition of a third Ladies Society, the Bible Searchers, Junior Men's Society, Cadet and Calvinette Clubs were also organized. The boys and girls societies decided to merge into one Young People's Society.

Due to some disturbance during the church

services from wailing youngsters it was decided to consolidate the wailing in the east rear section of the church and designate that as the "baby section".

The ministers salary had risen to \$5,200.00 yearly and the salary of the janitor to \$1,900.00. Organist received \$4.00 per Sunday. A weekly bulletin had been printed for some time, but its appearance was made more attractive by having the weekly bulletin information printed on the inside with a picture of the church and order of worship on the front.

During the 1960's the sanctuary received a face lift with the refinishing of the ministers chairs, communion table, and the purchase of a new pulpit. The church aisles and platform were carpeted as well as the consistory room and hallways.

Rev. Van Beek accepted a call to St. Paul, Minnesota late in 1966. It wasn't until June of 1968 and after 9 calls had been issued that Rev. Donald Drost from Brookside, Mi. came to be our pastor. During the 20 months that the parsonage stood vacant, the interior was redecorated. So the Drost's were welcomed into a newly refurbished home.



Rev. Donald J. Drost, wife Edith, Norman, 1968-1973.

One of the rooms in the church basement was converted into a nursery. Nursery equipment was installed along with a speaker system to make the church service audible to those caring for infants there.

In 1971, the societies of our church began making visits to Bethel Mission, a shelter for homeless people in Des Moines. The visiting group would give a program of songs and a simple message from God's Word. Following the program the visitors had the opportunity to talk with the residents over a cup of coffee.

Another redecorating project took place in 1972. The parsonage and church sanctuary were painted, the woodwork and floors in the sanctuary were varnished, and the benches were cleaned and waxed. There was some feeling at the time for replacing the old benches with new ones, but it was decided that the old benches fit the style of our auditorium best, so the benches installed when the church was built are still in use today.

A bigger project was undertaken in 1973 when the west entrance to the church was enclosed and a car-port added. At that time a terrazzo surface was put on the basement floor and some remodeling was done in the church kitchen.

In 1973, the congregation took on the project of placing paraphrased "Reach Out" Bibles in the rooms of 15 motels in Iowa along Interstate 80. God has blessed this effort of our congregation to reach others with the good news of salvation. Over the past 21 years, 46,000 Bibles have been distributed and replies have come from all over the United States, Canada, Mexico, and even from South Africa from people who have taken the Bibles with them.

Reverend Drost retired from the ministry in 1973 after serving our congregatin for five years. Reverend and Mrs. Drost moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan after their retirement. The church said farewell to the Drosts in July, and in September welcomed Reverend Peter Van Drunen and family. The Van Drunen's came all the way from Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada.

There had been some changes made in the external appearance of the church and some changes also occurred in the worship service. In 1974, the time of the Sunday evening service was changed from 7:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., not a big change, but one that was debated, nevertheless.

In 1975, the congregation joined the pastor in reciting the Apostle's Creed during the evening

worship service. It was decided in 1979 to use grape juice in the place of wine for communion. Women's suffrage came to the Peoria congregation also in 1979 when women were given the right to vote at congregational meetings.



Rev. Peter Van Drunen, wife Kathryn, Mary, Leonard, Lols, David, Ruth, Mark, William, 1973-1981.

The consistory decided that when weddings were held in the church, a notice should be placed in the bulletin inviting the congregation to attend the ceremony.

In 1980, elder's meetings were initiated in addition to the regular consistory meetings for the purpose of dealing with matters that pertained only to the work of elders.

In 1981, the King James version pew Bibles were replaced with the New International Version.

After serving the Peoria congregation for eight and one half years, the longest time for any minister in the history of the church to that time, Reverend Van Drunen accepted a call to Delevan, Wisconsin.

It might be noted as a matter of interest that in 1982 the two delegates to synod from the Pella Classis were both from the church in Peoria.

After serving as the home for thirteen pastors and their families, the big square house on the top of the hill that served as parsonage for sixty-five years was torn down. A new brick parsonage was built on the same location.



Rev. Ronald Bouwkamp, wife Marlene, David, Daryl, Brian, Amy, 1983-

In January of 1983, Reverend Ronald Bouwkamp, his wife, and three sons moved into the new parsonage and took up the task of shepherding the Peoria Christian Reformed Church. At the welcome program for the Bouwkamp's the new pastor announced that a new resident would soon join the family in the house. In May, their youngest child and only daughter was born.

Pastor Bouwkamp and his wife Marlene have served our congregation faithfully for eleven years, the longest time any pastor has served this church in its 100 year history.

When the new parsonage was built, the basement was left unfinished, but in January of 1983, the congregation decided to finish the basement to provide additional bedrooms and a family room. This work was done after the pastor's family had taken up residence in the parsonage.

The cost for building the parsonage in 1917

was \$4,100. In comparison, the cost of the parsonage built in 1982 including the basement which was finished some months later was approximately \$70,000.

A new sound system was approved by the congregation late in 1988 and installed in 1989. An innovation made possible by the new sound system was playing taped sacred music before worship services. This was begun in 1990.

A new Psalter Hymnal was compiled by the Christian Reformed denomination in 1989. Since our hymnals were worn and needed to be replaced, the congregation decided to purchase the recently published Psalter Hymnal. There were mixed feelings in the congregation when the hymnals were first used. Some of the old familiar songs and tunes were missing and new melodies seemed difficult to learn. Over time, however, we've learned many of them. Some tunes are still difficult, but many of the new songs are sung with the enthusiasm and fervor that has been a hallmark of our congregation through the years.

In the summer of 1988, Reverend Tony Van Zanten from Roseland Christian Services in Chicago, brought a black choir to sing in our church. The choir members stayed in the homes of our church members and joined the congregation for a potluck supper before the evening concert. It was an enriching experience for us to mingle with people with an ethnic and racial background different from our own, and enjoy their unique style of singing. One of the songs they sang was "Lead Me, Guide Me." As we sing that song now six years after the Roseland choir sang it for us, in our minds eye we still see the swaying bodies and hear the emotion filled voices. Our Dutch reserve slips just a little and our bodies almost move with the music and sometimes a tear slips down our cheek.

The church that started with seventeen families and twelve individuals has grown over the years. In 1952, our church recorded the highest number of families -- 129. In 1956, the total membership was 569, the highest in our history. At present, we have 93 families in our congregation, with a total membership of 337. The growth of the church has been evident in the number of

Bible study societies that have been organized over the years. We now have eleven societies within our congregation. Thirteen young people have gone out from the church as ministers or missionaries. At present, one young member is studying for the ministry. We contribute to the support of four missionary families serving the Christian Reformed denomination in Africa, Central America, and Texas.

There are descendants from three of the original families still attending church in Peoria.

During its 100 years of existence, the Peoria Christian Reformed Church has gone through times of struggle and hardship. These struggles were caused by adverse weather conditions for growing the crops essential to a farming community, and depressed economic conditions that produced meager returns for crops and livestock raised.

The church has gone through times of misunderstanding and anger from those outside the Dutch community, and also, at times, among members within our fellowship. But the church has also had times of prosperity, harmony, and joy. This is not due primarily to the work ethic, perseverance, and staunch faith of its members, though these qualities have certainly been manifested. The fact that Peoria Christian Reformed Church has existed for 100 years is due to the providential care and faithfulness of our God. We can, as a body of Christ in this place, raise our eyes to the words from I Samuel 7:12 inscribed in the front of our sanctuary and say with hearts filled with praise and thanksgiving, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." As God has graciously cared for us, and faithfully guided us through the past 100 years, may the Peoria Christian Reformed Church continue to serve Him faithfully in the years to come.

God of our life, through all the circling years,
We trust in Thee;
In all the past, through all our hopes and fears,
Thy hand we see.
With each new day, when morning lifts the veil,
We own thy mercies, Lord which never fail.

God of the past, our times are in Thy hand,
With us abide.
Lead us by faith to hope's true promised land;
Be Thou our guide.
With Thee to bless, the darkness shines as light,
And faith's fair vision changes into sight.

God of the coming years, through paths un-
known,
We follow Thee;
When we are strong, Lord, leave us not alone;
Our refuge be.
Be Thou for us in life our daily bread.
Our heart's true home when all our years have
sped. Amen.

Author - Charles H. Purday