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Introduction

A couple of years ago some of our daughters offered Dixie and me the ‘assignment’ to record some autobiographical information that could be used by our children at the time of our fiftieth wedding anniversary in 2008. I/we wrote enough to satisfy the immediate needs of the time, with the full and honest intention to produce a more detailed and complete document later. That time now has come; no further delay is acceptable.

A helpful start was a project I worked on during the fall and winter of 2006. I took the time to read through the entire set of diary entries my father wrote—in Dutch, in half a dozen battered-looking notebooks—from the time of our family’s arrival in Canada until a few weeks before his sudden death in November 1980. Deciphering his handwriting was difficult at times but rewarding in the end, especially in entries from his last years when practical farm matters had become much less important to him and had slipped into the background. I did not translate the diary but I was able to produce an 85-page printed version of everything in it that I judged relevant for my sister and brothers and their spouses and children, at least for those among them who have enough familiarity with Dutch and an inclination towards reading ancient family history.

After I completed that project, I was ready to tackle the translation into English of my father’s 21 ‘general’ letters to his past customers and acquaintances in the Netherlands, written during the first five years after our family’s emigration to Canada in 1949. The English versions of the letters, completed in February 2009, became a relatively free translation because, especially in the first letters, Dad gave expression to feelings of nostalgia and other emotions in Dutch words or expressions that have no precise equivalent in English.

Apart from my own records and my memory, including things I remember from discussions with other family members, the sources I have used include my cousin Peter van den Born’s ‘*Born Boek*’ (in Dutch), transcribed talks that were presented by my siblings and by both of my parents at their fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration in 1980, my brother Jack’s eulogy at my mother’s funeral service in 1983, the collective memories of my siblings (especially my sister Bertha), and a small number of family documents that have survived times of war and migration.

For the benefit of readers who know or remember some Dutch, I have included typically Dutch terms here and there, in italics. In most instances, however, I have included an English equivalent alongside.
