

## The Evolution of Two Peas in Different Pods: Pella and Orange City

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The hundreds of Hollanders who settled in Pella, Iowa, in the 1840s and 1850s were ecstatic at the prospect of becoming landowners. The fertile lands of the Midwest offered a brighter future than was ever possible in the Netherlands. Furthermore, their children would eventually become landowners and share in the riches of their new land.

In the late 1860s, however, it became apparent that their children would never be able to buy land in the Pella area. Marion County was filling up fast and land prices had skyrocketed to \$60 an acre. Two young farmers, Hendrik Jan Van De Waa, a veteran of the Civil War, and Jelle Pelmulder, who had been a teacher in the Netherlands, wrote to the Sioux City Land Office and learned that in northwest Iowa land was still available for homesteading. They approached Henry Hospers, the mayor of Pella and editor of the Pella Weekblad, who agreed that it seemed necessary to start a new colony. Hospers gladdened their hearts by announcing the good news that he wanted to join them. They called a meeting of those interested in such a venture. The response was enthusiastic and a committee of four—Hendrik Jan Van De Waa, Jelle Pelmulder, and two other young men, Huibert Muilenberg and Sjoerd Sipma—was chosen to investigate the land in northwest Iowa. Portraits of these four men, the heroes of Sioux County, now grace the walls of the courthouse in Orange City, as does a painting depicting their wagon journey to northwest Iowa.

The four-man scouting party left Pella on April 16, 1869. They followed an immigrant trail through Newton to Fort Dodge, which they decided was not the land they wanted, and continued on their arduous trek westward through almost uncharted lands with sloughs and creeks to cross, until finally they arrived in Storm Lake. They loved that beautiful area but were disappointed that there was no longer enough available land there for their proposed colony.

The four men proceeded for another twenty miles to Cherokee County, whose lands were indescribably beautiful and fertile and almost unoccupied. They decided that this indeed was the land they wanted, and using a compass to find their way, they went to the Sioux City Land Office to file for the land.

It was a mad scene there. Would-be purchasers were pushing into the Land Office, using their fists and elbows to prevent others from getting ahead of them. When the Pella committee announced their wish to buy the Cherokee land, alas, they were too late. Land speculators had heard of their plans to buy land for a colony and had beat them to it. They offered to sell the land to the Dutchmen at a big profit to themselves. The Dutch disdained that offer, learning that land was still available in Sioux and Lyon Counties in the extreme northwest part of the state.

The four scouts hastened on to investigate Sioux County, taking a surveyor with them. Except for one Indian they met along the way, the land seemed completely empty. They did not know that a small settlement existed at Calliope along the Big Sioux River. Arriving in Sioux County they were awed at seeing the almost treeless prairie covered with tall waving grasses richly embroidered with wild roses, buttercups, violets, daisies, and many other

flowers. Here was an abundance of wild game as well—prairie chickens, ducks, and deer. The men thought that Sioux County was the richest and most beautiful land they had ever seen; it was the best of all possible choices. They picked out a tract of land towards the southeast part of the county in what is now Holland and Nassau Townships. Back they went to the Sioux City Land Office, filed the necessary papers, and made payments from the money entrusted to them. The land for the colony was theirs!

Yet one more trip was necessary. Each landowner made a two-week visit to his own homestead, before the actual move to Sioux County. Seventy-five men, including several surveyors left Pella in September, 1869, in eighteen wagons stocked with provisions and plows. They journeyed to the sites of their future farms where they surveyed and plowed in compliance with the Homestead Law and also plowed furrows from one homestead to another so they and their families would not get lost in the shoulder-high tall grasses.

Finally in April, 1870, the great trek to Sioux County began. Hendrik Jan Van De Waa led the first group of five families in a journey that took nineteen days. Two other groups followed immediately, one led by Pelmulder. Sixty-four families left Pella during April and May, 1870. As each group departed, well wishers gathered, and with tears on both sides, bid one another farewell.

Their prairie schooners were drawn by oxen or sometimes horses or mules. The wagons were to be their homes for many days, even after their arrival in the new land. A number of men walked all the way (about 300 miles) driving cattle ahead of them. The biggest risk was the wagons with their loads tipping while crossing the streams, but all made the journey safely, though in one case a number of chickens were drowned.

Henry Hospers resigned his mayorship and joined the group in Sioux County. He served as their leading promoter, insurance and land agent, as well as legal counselor, until his death in 1901. Already by 1870, he was publishing the newspaper, *De Volksvriend* (The People's Friend), which was distributed to Dutch readers in the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, and even Canada and the Netherlands. As Dominie Scholte has been to Pella, so Hospers became "the father" of Sioux County.

It was not all roses those first years. Grasshopper plagues destroyed the crops several times in the 1870s, and some of the settlers became so discouraged they left and pushed on farther West to the Dakotas. Tornados, a scourge of smallpox, and typhoid left many dead, and they faced real crises in finding fuel to keep themselves warm during the bitterly cold winters. Sometimes they twisted the long grasses for fuel. But by incredibly hard work and perseverance, the colony prospered. One factor in their favor was the late date of settlement as compared to Pella. Railroads were already being laid at the time of their arrival, and trade goods were carried in and out via the railroad. Very soon, new immigrants were coming in by rail rather than in covered wagons.

A strong bond with Pella continued through the years. In 1873, an excursion of 150 people left Pella by train for a visit to Orange City. Two hundred people left Pella in 1875 to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the founding of the daughter colony. In each case, singing and bands and visiting and feasting as well as prayers in the church marked the event. During the grasshopper plagues, financial help was forthcoming from Pella.

Writing in 1912, Jacob Van Der Zee, a young man from Sioux Center who became a Rhodes scholar, said: "The founding of a daughter colony is perhaps the most noteworthy

incident in the history of Pella, not only that an abundance of excellent farm land was discovered for so many of Pella's younger generation, but also because Orange City and vicinity has come to be the third successful Dutch settlement (after Holland, Michigan, and Pella) in the United States" (Van Der Zee, 1912, pp. 148-9).

People of German, Irish, French, and other descent also settled in Sioux County, but it was the Dutch who, because of their numerical majority, gave it its cultural flavor. The non-Dutch population resented the Dutch and found them hard to take. Exerpts from a bitter article in an 1882 issue of the Sioux County Herald just before an upcoming election stated: "They [the Dutch] are clannish to the last degree and herd off selfishly by themselves refusing to be Americanized while they simultaneously seek to control our county and keep our people out of power. We Americans have been ruled by the Dutch for the past twelve years, and ruled in an insolent, overbearing, dictatorial spirit...Down with the Dutch...down with the Dutch bosses! (Doon Press reprint, July 12, 1990).

The Dutch may have been bosses but they were definitely not in political control. Calliope, a village on the Big Sioux River on the western border of the county, became the county seat. This is how that happened. In 1860, ten years before the Hollanders appeared, four young adventurers, one of whom was Frederick Hubbell (later to become the founder of the giant Equitable Insurance Company of Des Moines) moved northward from Sioux City and established claims to land along the Big Sioux River. Then they petitioned the State Legislature for the formation of Sioux County and asked for elections. Since they were the only four permanent inhabitants, each of them voted for himself and became an officer and thus were on the county payroll. They built a log courthouse and billed the county for it and for some imaginary improvements such as bridges that they never built. They claimed that Sioux County owed them \$200,000, an enormous debt! Finally, Henry Hospers went all the way to Des Moines and explained the situation to judges there, and the claim was finally dismissed by the courts as fraudulent. Calliope, however, still called the plays. The major political offices were in their hands. Even though Dutchmen typically won the elections, the officers in Calliope refused to accept their credentials and refused to seat them.

A democratic, honest government was imperative to progress and worth fighting for. Accordingly, a number of Orange Cityites riding in twenty bobsleighs left at 2 a.m. one extremely cold day in January, 1872, bound for Calliope, a journey of twenty-one miles. Once at Calliope, they demanded that county control be handed over to them. At the sight of one hundred infuriated Dutchmen, the Calliope men, who were few in number, panicked. Some ran away and hid. The Dutchmen decided to force the issue. They seized the safe containing the county records, and when they could not get it through the door, they took an axe and cut a hole in the courthouse wall and rolled the safe out onto a bobsled and set out for home. Victorious now, they sang Dutch psalms on the way back. When they finally arrived back in Orange City at a late hour, they were greeted by cheers from the waiting populace.

The Orange City faction next petitioned for a county seat location in the center of the county. After considerable negotiation and acrimony with Sioux Center, who also contended for the distinction (it is in the center of the county), the county seat was transferred from Calliope to Orange City.

Calliope had lasted only twelve years as a county seat, 1860-1872. It ceased to exist as a town in 1911, and Hawarden was founded in its place. An amusing sequel to the story is that

on a dark night in August, 1975, more than one hundred years after the safe was stolen, so-called "militiamen" from Hawarden stealthily drove into Orange City one night and located the safe in a storage shed on the County Farm. They loaded it on a truck and drove away with it. Appropriately they chose an illegal manner to do it, similar to that employed earlier by the Dutch. The safe is now on display in the newly restored log cabin courthouse in the Calliope Village Museum in Hawarden.

In the following years, people of Dutch descent have continued to be in the majority in both Pella and Orange City, as one can readily see by looking at their telephone directories. Names beginning with "De" and "Van" and names ending in "ma" "ga" "stra," are numerous. But change is definitely in the air. Pella listings now include 17 Smiths, 33 names beginning with Mac, and other non-Dutch names as well, Asian names, for example. Moreover, the Dutch language is all but lost in both towns. Only a few of the older people are able to speak or read it. The De Weekblad in Pella was discontinued in 1942 and De Volksvriend in Orange City in 1951. Dutch church services too are a thing of the past.

Other cultural patterns continue to be held in common. People in both towns are faithful in their worship of God and strict in observing the Ten Commandments. Churches of Netherlandic origin, Reformed Churches and Christian Reformed churches, dominate. It is estimated that 70 per cent of Orange Cityites are members of one of these churches. This is not as large a percentage as in Pella which has a greater diversity of denominations. Faithful attendance at worship is demonstrated by packed churches on Sundays. Christian education is a high priority, and elementary and secondary schools flourish in both Pella and Orange City. Liberal Arts colleges, Northwestern in Orange City and Central in Pella, were founded in the early years, and they continue to be church supported.

To celebrate their Dutch heritage, both towns hold Tulip Time Festivals in May each year, at which time their royal courts exchange visits. Citizens parade in the costume of the Netherlands province from which their ancestors stemmed. Dutch dancing and singing, street scrubbing, and parades and bands enhance the festivals. Dutch storefronts in both towns leave no doubt as to Dutch influence.

It may appear that Orange City and Pella are like two peas in a pod. This is not true. Two factors tend to account for some major differences. First is their respective location within Iowa; one is on the Western border, the other in the center of the State. Second is their vastly differing cultural orientation. Orange City's "Siouxland" location—a term applied to Northwestern Iowa and adjacent areas in South Dakota and Minnesota—puts them in the trading and television orbit of Sioux City and in the readership area of the Sioux City Journal. They are out of the orbit of Des Moines and state politics. In fact, they often feel they are ignored and neglected by the state. They are as cognizant, if not more so, of South Dakota politics as of Iowa politics. They are nearer to the Western Plains and its Indian reservations, and they are aware of Missouri River problems.

What really catches the eye in Sioux County is the enormous number of cattle in huge feeding lots. Because of its proximity to the West, ranchers from the drier neighboring states ship cattle into Sioux County for their final fattening on corn. This is why Iowa Agricultural maps refer to Siouxland as the WESTERN LIVESTOCK AREA. In the last decade, hog production has substantially increased in this area as well.

Pellans, on the other hand, are closely linked to Des Moines, the hub of the state. Many commute to jobs in Des Moines to work in state offices, banks, businesses, hospitals, and factories. They read the Des Moines Register and listen to Des Moines television stations. They shop in Des Moines and go there for concerts and other entertainment. A few attend church in Des Moines. And that city to city relationship is a two-way street. Des Moines people come to Pella, to teach in Central College, work in various businesses, dine and play golf in Bos Landen, and enjoy the water sports and camping at nearby Lake Red Rock. Each city thus benefits the other.

Differences in geological history are a third factor that distinguish the two areas. The most recent glacier, the Iowan, which is an arm of the Wisconsin, covered Sioux County. It ground up the rocks in its path as it came from the north and on reaching Iowa deposited many feet of these rich minerals (called glacial drift or glacial till). On top of these glacial deposits is a mantle of loess (wind blown soil) varying in depth from twenty inches to six feet. In addition, an abundant source of humus is provided by the decayed native tall grasses of the primeval era. The resulting soil is deep and fertile. In fact, per acre land values in Sioux County are consistently in the top quartile of Iowa land values (\$2,230 per acre in 1997). Importantly, another result of the passage of the recent glacier is that the land is very flat, so that almost every inch of it is arable. It produces bonanza crops of corn and soybeans.

The Pella area, on the other hand, was overlaid by a very early glacier, the Kansan, so long ago that the land has been exposed to the elements of erosion and leaching for hundreds of thousands of years. As a result, it is dissected by gullies and streams into a hilly terrain. This is especially true of the land south of the Des Moines River. Much of the land is too rugged for crops and is used for grazing cattle or sheep. Land values are consistently in the lowest quartile of Iowa's land values (\$1,485 per acre in 1997). State Department of Agriculture maps refer to the Pella area as the SOUTHERN PASTURE AREA.

Orange City is more rural than Pella. Total population numbers were almost identical for the two counties in 1990 (31,359 for Marion and 31,191 for Sioux) but urban population is less in Sioux County. For example, Pella with 9,642 population is about twice the size of Orange City with 5,375, and even the second city, Knoxville (8,312) is considerably larger than Orange City. Orange City owes much to entrepreneurs such as Andrew Vogel, who established the large Vogel Pain and Wax Company, and to other entrepreneurs who are bringing in urban workers. Yet, concentration is heavy on farming, from which 14.5 per cent of county income is obtained (3 times the percentage for the state as a whole [4.8%]). Nagging concerns are weather conditions and the prices of corn and livestock.

Pella is more urban. It depends very much on its large manufacturing operations, which hire several thousand people and sell to national and international markets. Men of vision and inventive genius and business acumen—Peter Kuyper, founder of Pella Roscreen, renamed Pella Corporation, (makes windows and doors), and Gary Vermeer, founder of Vermeer Manufacturing, which makes agricultural machinery, are in large part responsible for bringing in urban personnel, at the same time diluting the Dutch element.

In addition, tourism is healthy and thriving in which Pella advertises its Dutch culture through Tulip Time activities. Also, Lady Fortune has smiled on Pella in making her the beneficiary of having Lake Red Rock right on her doorstep with a nearby Visitors Center managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corp has established many

campgrounds. Hotels, eating places, gift shops, and all retail establishments benefit. Peoples' thoughts and energies and concerns are geared to urban activities. Farming is of relatively small importance.

In conclusion, then, Pella and Orange City share the same heritage with similar religious and cultural ties and family relationships, all of which bind Mother and Daughter together. "Blest be the tie that binds," but they are not carbon copies of one another. They have different geographical settings, different economic bases, and different cultural concerns. Orange City is on the threshold to the West and has fabulous agricultural resources. Pella is poorer in farming resources, but has scenic resources and easy access to Des Moines, the center of state government and finance. Both towns owe much to talented leadership and a strong work ethic. Both are prosperous and healthy. Finally, both Pella and Orange City are becoming more and more a part of the American mainstream, while yet being proud but hopefully not arrogant of their Dutch heritage.

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