

By my nature, I Peter Van Lankvelt, am a true Hollander having been born and bred in the Netherlands before immigrating to this great country. But I am getting ahead of myself.

My journey began about a century and a half ago in the town of Uden, Netherlands on February 26, 1865 when I was born to Martinus and Ida (Van Duijnhoven) Van Lankvelt. After a pretty normal childhood, at the age of 24, I married the lovely Hendrica Verkuijlen on May 17, 1889. We were blessed with nine children but sadly my Hendrica passed away while bearing our ninth child in 1900.

In seeking the land of opportunity, I made my way to America in 1904. My children were left with caring relatives while I tried my luck at a better life for all of us. Wanting to be with others of Dutch descent, I traveled to Little Chute, Wisconsin. I was lucky to be welcomed by the Peter Wonders family who operated a farm on the northwest side of Main Street of Little Chute. Years later, the Tony Wonders club was built on a portion of that property north of the railroad tracks. Many a drink and dinner was downed at their establishment.

Work on the farm was familiar to me from my days back in the Netherlands and I appreciated the fresh start on my life that it gave me. Also, seeking a fresh start was a fellow immigrant, Mary Van Gerven, who followed me from our homeland. We were married on Sept. 26, 1906 at St. John Catholic Church in Little Chute. As newlyweds, we rented from the John and Mary Hietpas family on Washington Street also in Little Chute. In time, we purchased an eight and one-half acre parcel of land for farming near Highway 00, also called North Street. The hills behind the property were great for winter sledding and skiing for all the kids in the neighborhood. The area is still known as Paradise Valley. God blessed us with five children - Hattie, Gen, Martin, Henry and Jule. I loved farming and especially growing vegetables. Besides my family, the pride and joy of my life was my black Model T Ford with the high running boards. How I loved that car!!! No more horses for me!

By now, it was the several years into the new century. The children from my first marriage had been growing up in Holland. In 1907, I welcomed my seventeen year old son John and a year later his brother Theodore, here to America. Being young independent men, they lived with our good friends, the John Hietpas family in their home on Washington Street near my farm.

Many of the area residents combined farming with an outside job. The boys and I made ends meet by working in the Kimberly & Clark Paper Mill in Kimberly that had opened in 1889. It was located on the other side of the river within walking distance. The boys adjusted well to life here. The years sped by while they established themselves with their own farms. John married Hattie (Peerenboom) and had eight children. Theodore married Henrietta (Pennings) and had ten children.

Work in the mill was hard. The process of making paper was a physically demanding, hot, wet, and dirty job. We felt lucky to have jobs that lasted through prohibition. Unfortunately, my luck didn't last. It was a day like any other day on Oct. 6, 1927. I had just finished talking with Chester Mauthe, a 20 year old youngster who had just been married six weeks earlier. He and two other co-workers George Pohan and Albert Jansen were sitting on top the pulp pile. I was the elevator operator and Arthur Brockman had just pulled up his truck to drop off another load of pulp. From this point on, not much is known about me. Apparently, one wall of the two-story beater plant collapsed and the roof fell in - something about recent excavations under one of the walls. Arthur was taken out of the ruins alive on Friday but died at the hospital at 4:00 pm. Chester was taken out of the pit at midnight on Friday with a broken leg but he lived. On Saturday morning, they found my body in the ruins at 6:30 am. I was one of six dead, eighteen injured and three whose bodies were never recovered.

It was a sad ending to a very happy life. Yet, I am happy to say this tribute is being read by

*Peter, grandson, Jim V.L. son of Ned V.L.*

Thank you all for listening.