

By Antone Van Pelt

This is the story of the Van Pelt family when they left for their journey to America on the 16th day of March, 1907. The family consisted of Grandfather and Grandmother Monnichman, Johanas (John) and Elizabeth Van Pelt and their seven children.

We took the train from Amsterdam to Rotterdam and from Rotterdam we took a boat across the North Sea to Hull, England. At Hull we took a train to Liverpool and then boarded the "Ivernia" which was a British ship of the Cunard Line which took us to Boston, Massachusetts. It was a very rough journey.

The ocean tossed and turned our ship. Every wave splashed water into our cabins. Grandfather Monnichman had a box of fifty cigars under his bed and as the water tumbled over the box the cigars rolled back and forth in the cabin with the rolling of the ship. Grandfather would wait until the water came to his side, then he would grab the cigars he could grab and put them back in the box until he finally got the whole fifty cigars back again. Two days later when he wanted a smoke, he thought they were dried out, but the cigars wouldn't light. We had several desk passengers from Russia and Poland who were roped off in line on the deck. After a few days of sunshine Grandfather Monnichman went along the line with his box of cigars and offered each one a cigar shouting "Holland Day, Holland Day". When they tried to light the cigars they wouldn't light because of the salt water.

Anyway, we arrived safely in Boston and then ran into a problem with emigration. My father had to show the authorities that he had a twenty dollar gold piece for everyone in the family. We had a document from my uncle stating that he would take care of his father and mother, who were seventy-six years old for the rest of their lives. But, the trouble was -- we had lost a container that had all our birth certificates and other documents, so the authorities decided to send back grandma and grandpa, back to Holland. They would let us go without our birth certificates and marriage papers though. We all protested and I asked if there was someone I could talk in Dutch to and explain the situation. A nice young man came over and after I explained it, he went and talked to some of the

authorities. They tried to get a hold of my uncle in Oakland and finally after several hours they decided to let us go through.

We all got on the train which took us from Boston to Chicago. On this trip we stopped several times at the station. At every station there was a Harry House Restaurant which served people with sandwiches, coffee, fruit, pie, and so on. All eleven could not jump off, so my brother John and I would get off and when we got to the counter we ate whatever we wanted to. When the conductor hollered "all aboard" we all turned around and ran back on to the train. This went on till Chicago and we never paid for any food because Uncle had written us that all our expenses were paid for from the time we left Amsterdam to the time we arrived to his home in East Oakland.

In Chicago, a Belgian who had befriended me earlier, took me aside and told me that this kind of thing is not the thing to do. He said, "I have let you get by with it and I don't see how you did get by with it, but I wouldn't do it after Chicago anymore because I'm sure you are going to get into trouble." However I protested to him and told him that Uncle had said everything was paid for. Anyway, we didn't do that anymore after that, but we bought little things from the people who came to the train.

From Chicago we went to Kansas City, then to El Paso and on to Los Angeles. In Los Angeles we had to change trains. There had been a very heavy rain storm between Los Angeles and Oakland, so we were held up by that in Los Angeles station for thirty hours because a bridge was being repaired that had been washed out in the storm.

Anyway, we finally arrived in Oakland on a beautiful Sunday morning on the seventh of April. From the railroad station we went by streetcar to East Oakland, and of course the conductor wanted his fare. My father had no small change so he had to open his pants to get into the money belt to get a twenty dollar gold piece. When he handed the gold piece over to the conductor, he nearly threw us

off the car. Anyway he drove down East 14th Street finding nothing open but a drug store. The conductor changed the twenty dollar gold piece and we got safely to 2510 25th Ave in East Oakland.

When we arrived there Uncle John, his wife and little girl were not home. They were attending church on 23rd Ave. We all sat on the steps and then one of the neighbors took my mother, John and I to the church. We walked in the church and made such a big disturbance asking for Mr. Monnichman that the church service stopped and Uncle John came out, took us by the hand and took us home. And, that's how we arrived.