

Recollections of Whitinsville

Jacob Kooistra

Business

Whitinsville now has 16,000 inhabitants, including a number of Frisian businessmen. The five Van der Baan brothers (their father immigrated from Tjirns) have a large grocery business, including meat and bacon. Part or the whole of a hog can be purchased there or a hind quarter of beef. Herman Bakker (son of "Little Sjoerd" Bakker) has four dry-goods stores, selling all the household articles required for young couples who may be contemplating the Double Harness Act [marriage]. Arnold Banning, born in Makkum, owns five greenhouses, which keep him very busy. Beinema has a grocery store, Schotanus sells refrigerators and washing machines, and Van Den Akker, Jasper De Jong, Jan De Haan, and Robert Nydam have auto-repair garages.

Trades

Peter Koopman owns the largest carpentry business, with two stores—one for hardware and lumber, the other for farm implements such as tractors, plows, and so forth. Koopman's builds houses continually and, needless to relate, is a very busy man. Berghuis and

Wynja are close companions with the paintbrush. They do wallpapering and all else that is connected with their thriving painting business. Martin Vierstra, who hails from Snits (Sneek), gains his livelihood as a tinsmith and furnace salesman.

Farming "on Their Own"

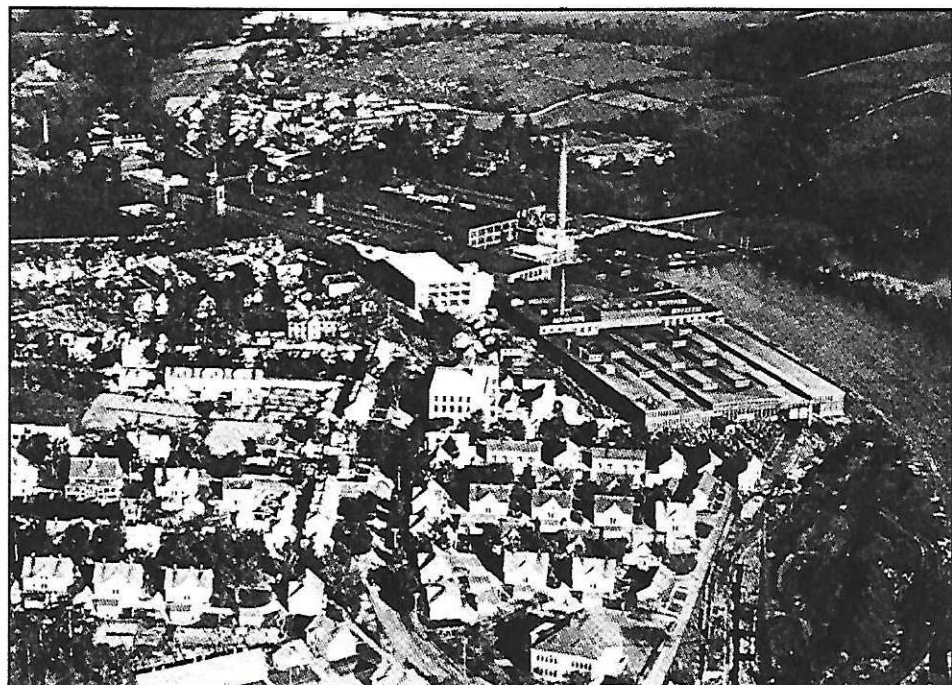
After the first Frisians were established somewhat, a few bought run-down farms in the area. At first they gained little because the land needed proper tilling, clearing, and

fertilizing. Determination was the primary cause for their success, and today many of these are large productive farms utilizing the latest machinery.

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Among the largest farms is that of Louis Wiersma from Dokkum, who has a herd of over a hundred cows. Krol from Driesum has sixty cows, as does Hylke Bakker from Koudum. Arend Bakker, son of "Little Sjoerd," has a fifty-cow herd.

"Aerial View of Whitinsville, 1925," page 6 in A Trip Through The Whitin Machine Works at Whitinsville, Massachusetts, USA, 1925.



These recollections were written by Jacob Kooistra in 1950.

Others, also immigrants from Friesland, have herds of thirty to fifty cows. Among them are Jouke Van Den Akker, Louis Bangma, Jan Vos, George Nydam, Harman Haringa, Dirk Visser, Albert Koopman, Ruurd and Geert Bosma, Jacob Wassenaar, and the Vander Zicht family. Milking machines are used almost exclusively now, and the milk is pasteurized to meet health requirements.

Along with dairy farms we have Teake Oosterman's piggery with some five hundred screwtail hogs, large and small. Japik Wiersma keeps a forty-head goat herd and milks them by hand. He says that goats are more profitable than cows because they eat less than cows. Goat's milk retails for ten cents more per quart than cow's milk. His customers are children afflicted with asthma.

Barn Fire, 1947

Frisians in Whitinsville work indus-

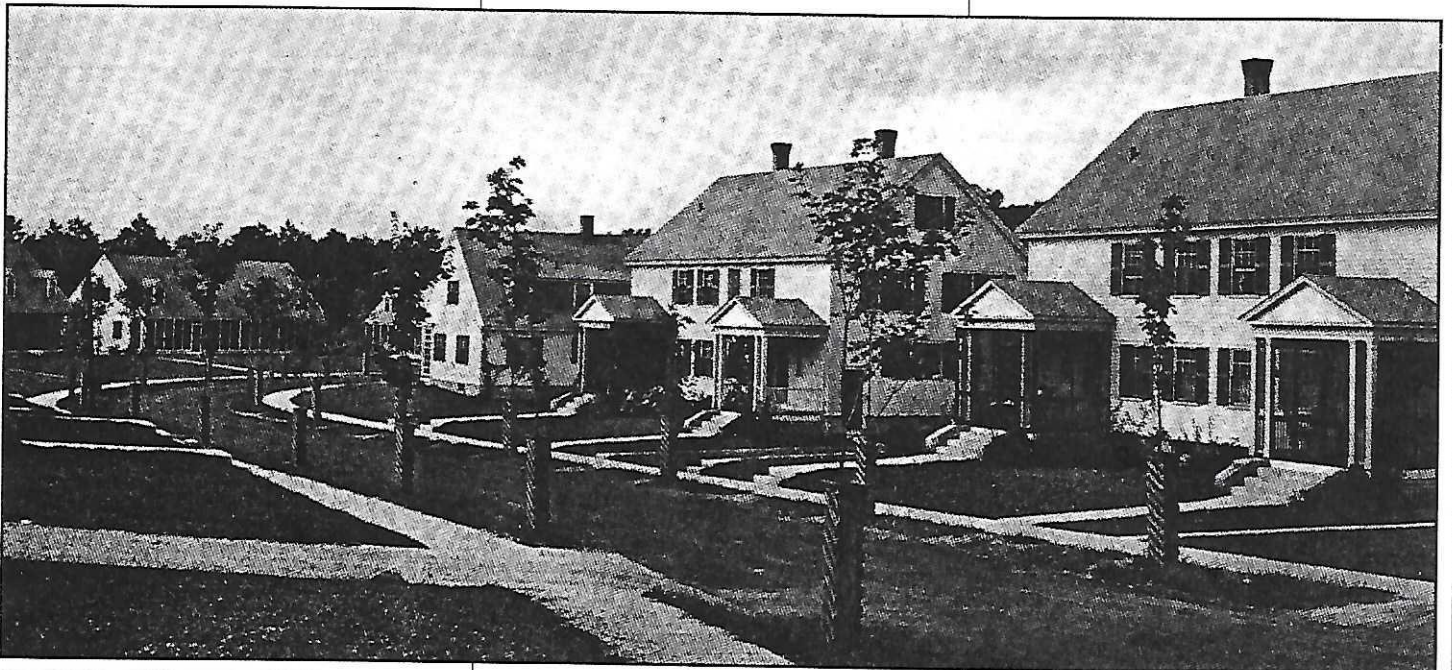
triously and cooperate well with each other. In cases of need or disaster the community springs into action, as it did when Arend Bakker's barn burned. The fire that destroyed Bakker's barn on October 27, 1947, was probably caused by spontaneous combustion. The evening's milking had been about completed, when suddenly the upper sections of the barn were enveloped in flames. The cows were hurriedly "let out" and saved. The many people who were attracted to the fire carried out the grain and the equipment from the milk room. Although the evacuation was done in a helter-skelter manner, the grain and the milk-room equipment did not fall prey to the flames.

Five fire engines responded to the call, but the barn was a roaring mass when they arrived. The large house, housing four families, received most of the firemen's efforts; it remained untouched, evidence of their effectiveness.

For Bakker sound advice was now priceless, for the winter months were around the corner,

and the hay that had been gathered during the summer months had gone up in smoke. Bakker's immediate future looked ominous—like that of the man who, while holding a black hog by the tail, said, "Things look rather dark ahead of me." But then the Frisians banded together. "Bakker," they said, "we are going to lend a hand. The factory is idle on Saturdays, and many a tradesman and carpenter works there." Peter Koopmans, of the large "carpenter business," was chosen to supervise. He had to provide all the necessary lumber and building material. The first few days were days of labor with a capital L. Andrew De Vries, whose business includes the digging of trenches and cellars and the erecting of cement walls, arrived with his largest steam shovel, and the Castle Hill Farm sent trucks and tractors. All the half-burnt hay, still a smoldering mass, and the burnt farm machinery were pushed aside by bulldozers. The hay was carried into a nearby field, where it again burst into flames. The fire engines

Whitinsville company housing.



had to be called out again. In two days' time the ruins were gone and cleared away, and the burned walls had been pulled down with a tractor. The time for building anew had come.

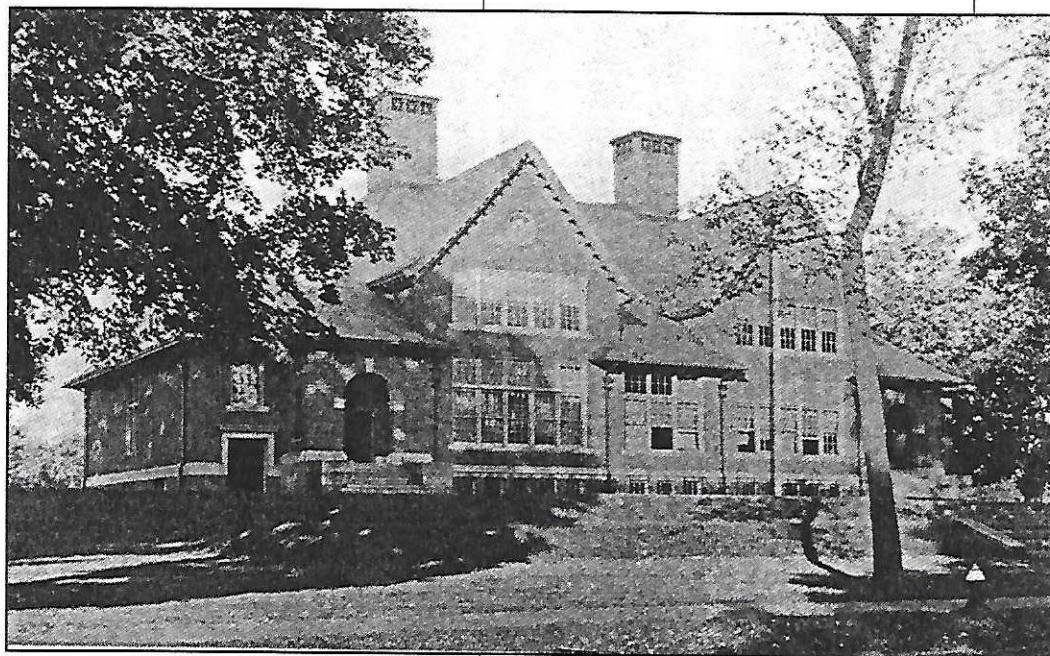
It soon became evident that a lot of measuring and fitting had to be done. The best carpenters were given charge over the less experienced. Our new minister, Reverend Veltman, donned a pair of overalls

and offered his services. It was soon evident that he and the hammer were not strangers, and, to the curious few who came to inquire as to his progress, he replied, "Brothers, the time for conversing will come later. Action is needed now. Soon the snowflakes will be flying. By that time there must be a new shelter for Bakker's cows."

And the work progressed by leaps and bounds. Fifty men were

crawling over the roof and walls. The din of the hammers was deafening. The women, too, helped as they could. Coffee and cake, fried cakes and pastry were brought to the scene of action. The Reverend's wife, also doing her share, baked cakes and pies. And every morning and afternoon a recess of fifteen minutes provided a breather. The large coffee urn from the church parlor did yeoman service. The buns and pastries were looked forward to, and they provided tasty snacks.

One month later, on the twenty-eighth of November, the barn had neared completion to the extent that it could house the cows, its length—one hundred and twenty-six feet, its height—thirty-five feet.



(left) Whitin-Lasell High School.

(below) Whitin family farm.

