

# GALLERY

## Coming to America

### Dutch genealogist researches emigration to Carver County

By Mollee Francisco

**I**n modern times, a move from Europe to the United States may seem almost commonplace, but for 19th century immigrants, it was a radical upheaval from the life they knew.

This notion caught Irma Lommen-Salden's interest almost 19 years ago. The Dutch genealogist has spent the last two decades researching a migration of more than 100 residents to Carver County from the Limberg area in the southern area of the Netherlands.

Lommen-Salden spent two weeks in Minnesota earlier this summer, visiting with the descendants of those families and seeing first-hand the land they came to call home.

The Villager asked Lommen-Salden some questions about her research and her trip to Minnesota.

**Q. Why did you get interested in researching emigrant families?**

**A.** While cleaning my bookshelves I came upon old magazines of our local genealogical society. I have to go through them because I always seem to find something new that interests me. And yes, this time too; I came upon a transcribed list of Limburg Emigrants to America over the time period 1851-1877.

These lists were kept by the government for this time period. Earlier records are not kept, later records are only used for statistic reasons and destroyed. But anyway, I was going through that list to see if there were any people from Limbricht — the town I was living at that moment — on it and there were!

All together, man, women and children, over 100 people in a period of a few years (1862-1867). And that's how it started in the spring of 1992.

**Q. How did you start your research? Where? What resources did you use?**

**A.** I started my research at our local archives in Sittard. In the Netherlands we have something called "Bevolkingsregisters." These are books, renewed every 10 years, where all the citizens are noted — man, wife, children; where they live, their age, religion, age (later birth date).

It is noted when someone dies; when someone gets married; and when someone leaves the city/village. That's where I started my research because Limbricht was a municipal then consisting out of three villages; Limbricht, Einighausen and Guttecoven. I looked up from which village they came, most of them were from a very small village called Einighausen which only had a few hundred occupants then.

In those books was noted when they left (a date) and where they went to "to Minnesota" or "to North America." I looked up those



Dennis Van Sloun, of Minnetonka, and researcher Irma Lommen-Salden, of the Netherlands, pose next to a Chaska street sign bearing the family name Van Sloun.

families in the civil records; their birth, marriage, the birth (and deaths) of their children and so on.

Also I went through the local newspaper, the Mercurius, established 1862, for public sales. Many of the emigrant families sold all their property, their land (if they had any), their home, the furniture and all goods they couldn't take with them. All these things were sold in public sales and those sales were announced in the newspaper Mercurius (for the region Sittard).

There were many public sales in the years 1860-1870 and you can imagine that the prices dropped by that. People didn't get much money for their property. The sales were done by a notary and the records are kept in their archives at the archives in either Sittard or Maastricht (provincial archives). I made copies of many of those re-

cords to see what land and other stuff people had to sell and what money they got for this, their starting capital for their new start.

**Q. How much research have you done? How much space does your work occupy?**

**A.** As I said before, I started this "project" in 1992 and have worked on it ever since. It has become a gone-out-of-hand hobby by now. I have researched, and am still researching, hundreds of families. Not only from Limburg but also from the adjoining Belgium and Germany area.

As you probably know, Limburg (the most southern province of the Netherlands) lies squeezed in between Belgium and Germany. Sittard, where I live now, lies about on the narrowest part of the province — it's only a few miles going from Belgium, thru Limburg, to Germany!

I can say that I have about 13 meters (14 yards) of records, files, books and so on, maybe even more. I will have to measure it up one day.

**Q. What have you uncovered that has surprised you most along the way?**

**A.** This is a difficult one. It surprised me all. Imagine those people had never travelled any further as the next city, or not even that, and then all of a sudden (it didn't take long to make this big decision) they sold all their belongings, said goodbye to family and friends and went on a journey not knowing what to expect at the end of it.

They had to travel a day or even longer to reach the harbor, most of the Limburgers travelled via Antwerp in Belgium, then they had to travel on a boat (most of them had never seen the sea before!), arriving in New York or Canada and had to travel over land to Minnesota for several weeks,

#### Online

For more on Irma Lommen-Salden's research, visit [www.limburgemigrant.nl](http://www.limburgemigrant.nl).

finally arriving in a country of which they didn't even speak the language!

I think the whole of this was what intrigued me most.

**Q. When did you decide to travel to Minnesota to continue your work?**

**A.** I have been in Minnesota for the first time in 1993. When I just had started this project there arrived a request for information at the archives in Sittard by the Dircks family from Minnesota.

This was one of the few families that actually came from the village Limbricht and I had started with them first. It was pure coincidence. So the archives asked me to handle this request and so I came in contact with this family. The daughter had started this family research and in the fall of 1992 she visited Limbricht and she stayed at our house. She invited me back and so I travelled to Minnesota in June 1993 for a week. All I saw of Minnesota was archives and cemeteries!

At that time, the Internet was beginning to have some information by bulletin boards and while in Minnesota I got in touch with fellow researchers and I got more and more interested. When I got home we had to have Internet too and I still remember our first phone bill (there was no cable in that time yet) and I almost dropped of my chair.

But through the Internet I found more and more information on those emigrant families and got in touch with more and more families of Limburg descent. I was caught!

**Q. What did you hope to find here?**

**A.** I hoped to meet people. I hoped to meet families of Limburg descent and I did! We were in Minnesota for nearly three weeks and we nearly had no time to do some sight-seeing. We met a lot of great people, visited the archives in Waconia where I scanned over 100 pictures and we took pictures of more than 400 gravestones.

**Q. What observations were you able to make during your trip to the States?**

**A.** The trip was only to Minnesota and we found out that it looked a lot like the south of our province, hilly. Only there is more green and much more open space as we have over here, and more lakes!

People were all very friendly and made us feel very welcome.

**Q. Was there anything that surprised you about Minnesota?**

**A.** Not really surprised me, but we noticed that there were many old buildings restored, churches and other buildings. It made me very happy to see that you in Minnesota also want to preserve the past!

**Q. Do you have plans to return?**

**A.** Oh yes! Only I hope it won't take that long till next time.

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