

Robert Ronald Smith
formerly Bouke Beintema
by Daughter Miriam
Smith Dutch Immigrant
Noordam
March 20, 1927

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM
PIER 21



My father, at the age of 16, chose to come to Canada. I have always been fascinated by his decision and his journey. He was very proud to be a Canadian and made that very clear to us growing up, that Canada was his home now. (Since 1927)

In 1998 I went to the north of Holland to visit the only surviving sibling of my Dad his sister Folk 87 in 2002. Even though we both struggled with the language factor, we managed to communicate well with the help of a little dictionary. At 87, she is as sharp as a tack, her recollections vivid and so welcome to me. She visited Canada once, in 1970 and

my parents visited Holland several times. She was very close to my Dad. She helped me with so much family history.

My Dad passed away of a massive heart attack in December 1985. Prior to that I was not at all interested in his history, as I am now. Shortly after, 1987 or so, my mom began to succumb to the ravages of Alzheimer disease so my interests and time was very limited. She passed away in 1997, and left behind, very valuable (in terms of my history) letters, clippings, notebooks, a real variety of great stuff.

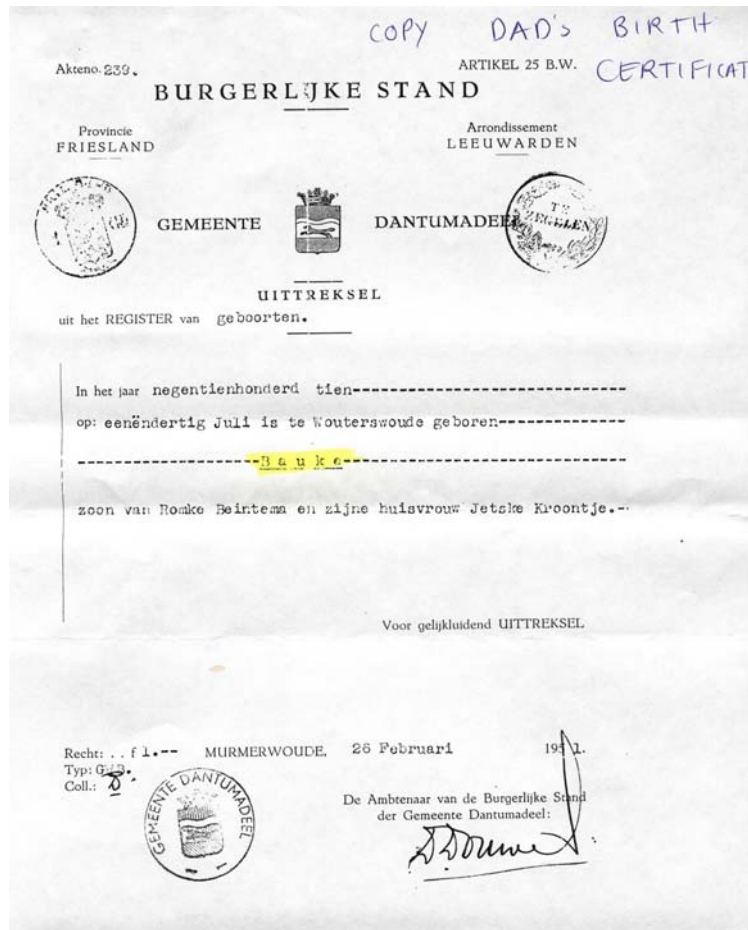
1923 is when the Canadian portion of Dad's story begins. His older brother Wiebe had left to Canada that year. In 1926 my Dad writes a query letter Is there work for me in Canada? Yes, comes the reply. The decision is made. Dad will also go to Canada, as not a lot of hope for



the future in that part of Holland at the time. His father grants permission but first Dad must finish the school year.

Dad is taken by horse and buggy to catch the train to Rotterdam where he will get the boat to Halifax. He sets sail on the S.S. Noordam and 12 days and much seasickness later arrives at his destination.

I am so mesmerized by all of this. Especially at the time the ship is pulling into Halifax Harbour, what is going on in my Dad's mind? Is he scared silly? Excited? Sad? Full of regrets? Or what have I done? Or full of the cocky sense of adventure that often fills teenaged young men? A bravado? Or an overwhelming sense of homesickness? At his first glimpse of Canada what was he feeling? This fascinates me.



When I read the Pier 21 Book I tried to imagine myself going through the processing procedure, and the sights, sounds and smells of the big hall area. What I would feel like after a long, seasick-laden journey with bureaucratic procedures much like customs after a long

airplane trip.

Dad then went on to Winnipeg by train. He was a farm labourer there. My Mom, born in Winnipeg, maintains she saw Dad and his brother pass by her house as they worked nearby. Little did she know then that she would end up meeting up with him again and marrying him in 1945!! (A whole other story!)

Three months after arrival, Dad wrote to his sister in Holland that he could speak English. Total sink or swim immersion. Pretty impressive!

He worked at labouring jobs in Mackinac, Manitoba; Banff, Alberta and ended up as a dairy worker at a T.B. sanitarium in Tranquille, BC (near Kamloops). He spent about 4-5 years there, 1928-1932.

From there down to the coast, Vancouver, where he became a milkman at Crystal Dairy (later Palm Dairy, now Dairy World Foods). Dad became a naturalized Canadian in Tranquille and I'm wondering if that's where he changed his name too.

Anyways, he became a milkman, and a darn fine one too. See enclosed articles. I can truly say I'm the milkman's daughter.

In 1940 Dad signed up and saw civilian duty with the Sea Forth Highlanders of Canada. He was discharged in 1941 due to pleurisy but



was always very proud of his association with the Sea Forths.

My Auntie in Holland (as no communication between Holland & Canada during wartime) shared with me that she hoped my Dad would be one of the

liberating Canadian soldiers knocking on her door in 1945. A beautiful thing if it had happened!!

In 1945, Dad married Mom in Vancouver. They had 40 years together, 5 kids and grandkids and so on. I don't think my Mom ever got over losing him so suddenly it was a shock.

You ask why the name change Beintema to SMITH? The one we came to hear the most at home was SMITH was simply easier to spell over a name like beintema. I've heard other theories ie. Embarrassed at being Dutch or SMITH might mean more pay than a more foreign sounding name on the job. Neither of which I think is appropriate. I think the spelling theory is the most appropriate.

I noticed when I visited Holland that the name change was/is a bit of an issue. They said to me You're not a Smith, What's this Smith? You're a Beintema!

For my Dad I think it was part of his Canadianization process, I really do. And yes, it probably did help him to fit in better.

My father left us all too soon. He was 50 when I was born. I was 24 when he died in 1985. Not a day goes by I don't miss him.

A simple, content, peaceful man. Nose always in a book he loved to read. He loved beautiful music. He loved bread and cheese over sweets any day.

The milkman is gone now but (I hope) his spirit lives on in me.