

I wanted to share with you our remarkable journey to the former farm of Jan Hendrik Ter Avest in the farming hamlet of Zuna.

Julie and I traveled to The Netherlands in August of 2010, in part, to follow the trail back to the village of Grandma Van Doorn's Ter Avest ancestors. My search for the Ter Avests led me to the farming hamlets of Zuna and Notter in Eastern Holland. I had no contacts there. I could see from searches using Google Maps that Zuna and Notter were simply a collection of farms on either side of a small river...no business district, no streets, just farms. My expectation for learning more about the Ter Avests was low. Nevertheless, I wanted to go, just to see the place. Realistically, the best I hoped for was to stop and talk to a local resident we might meet as we drove through the area.

The night before our visit to the Notter-Zuna area, we stayed at a Bed & Breakfast named "Ter Avest", in the nearby town of Almelo. The owners were named Ter Avest. However, after reviewing the family tree with them, they didn't think we were related. And they couldn't tell us much about Zuna or Notter, as they had no ties to either of these communities.

The next morning we set off for Notter using Julie's global positioning system (GPS) software. I told her to set it to "city center" (even though there is no city of Notter). Driving through the country-side, several miles from Almelo, the GPS announced we had arrived at Notter. All we saw was farms. Not long after that, it announced we had arrived at our destination.

We found ourselves pulling up to the building pictured below.



This is a shared community center for the farming hamlets of Notter and Zuna.

It appeared to be a school (its actually a community center) and there were cars parked out front. I told Julie, I'm going to stop and go in. We found four people sitting in the break room having coffee time. One lady spoke English. I told her the story of the Ter Avests living at a farm called "Kamphuis" and leaving for America in 1869. Julie and I waited as a discussion in Dutch unfolded. I had fully expected that they wouldn't know anything and that would be the end of it. But the discussion went on and on and involved everyone.

The discussion went on for at least ten minutes. I had no idea what they could be talking about for so long.

And then the lady who could speak English announced, they indeed knew about that farm. Furthermore, the gentlemen sitting at the end of the table lived on that farm. What?

She went on to say that when the Ter Avests left for America, they sold the farm to a neighbor. Not too many years later, the neighbor proceeded to take down the house and built a new barn. The year (1871) was inscribed in the floor of the barn.

She explained that a book had recently been written describing the history of the farms in Zuna. That's how they knew about the Ter Avests and their farm.

Through the lady acting as translator, I quickly asked if the gentleman would take us to the farm. He would, but he was on a bicycle and the farm was about 2 kilometers away. Would that be OK? Of course, I said. Talk about finding the needle in the haystack.

We followed the farmer to the farm. He led us into the barn and showed us the date. Keep in mind he spoke no English. And we spoke no Dutch. We took some more pictures of the barn and the house. The house was relatively new. We shook his hand and thanked him. Unfortunately we couldn't ask him any questions.

I have since identified the book that they talked about. I found some web sites that cited that book as a source and contacted the web site owners. One of them has since sent me a copy of a page from the book with a map showing the location of the Kamphuis farm. It confirms that we indeed did visit the Jan Hendrik Ter Avest's former farm.

Julie still can't believe it. According to her, how is it possible to fly thousands of miles to a place where we don't speak the language and don't know anyone.....show up unannounced.....find one person who speaks English meet the sole individual who lives on a farm that my family sold 140 years ago, and visit the farm.

All I can say is sometimes a story wants to be told. I simply put myself in a position to enable it to happen. After that, it's out of my hands.