

Turkstra Family

Emigration from the Netherlands

In the early 1920s, the Turkstra family lived in a *boerderij* (farmhouse) in Raard, near Leeuwarden, Friesland province in northwest Netherlands. Rients Turkstra (b. 1876, d.26 Dec 1951) and Dievertje Turkstra (b.1879, d.14 May 1963) were tenant *melk boers* (dairy farmers) and lived in a house situated along the *Ee* canal. The Turkstras had ten children: Ytje (Edith), Hessel (Harold), Pieter (Peter), Joukje (Joyce), Aaltje (Elsa), Wiebren (Wilfred), Tryntje (Nienke), Martha, Jouwert (Jack), and Jannie (Jane).

In 2003 at the age of eighty-four, Martha Tigchelaar (née Turkstra), third youngest, published *Wherever You Go: Turkstra Family Memoirs*. She recounts life on the farm, where every morning milk was collected in large cans and set out on a dock along the canal in front of the house. There was no electricity, clothes were handmade, and the many canals criss-crossing the landscape ferried boats and ice skaters by their house depending on the season. Peter (b.10 Aug 1909, d.24 Jan 2000), third eldest, attended school in the town of *Dokkum*, approximately four kilometres east of the family homestead. Everyone worked from sunup to sundown to support the family.

In 1926, father Rients couldn't pay the rent due to an especially bad year. He decided



Turkstra family *boerderij*, present day.



Raard, Leeuwarden, Friesland. Location of Turkstra family *boerderij*.



Family portrait (c.1925). Back row: Ytje, Hessel, Pieter. Front Row: Aaltje, Wiebren, Martha, Riens, Nineke, Jouwert, Divertje, Joukje.

to move the family to Canada where more opportunity awaited and because it was easier to immigrate there. Carl Turkstra, Peter's son, comments on his grandfather Riens, "That's a big decision, but it points to the kind of independent-minded fellow he was. He was a small, but powerful man. He had strong opinions on different matters and worked very hard for his family." Already in his fifties, Riens found work for himself, his two eldest sons Harold and Peter, and daughter Joyce on a farm in Burlington through the help of a friend who worked for the Canadian National Railway.

The three eldest children were sent ahead

in June 1927 on a five to six-day transatlantic journey by ship while the rest of the family remained behind to deal with health issues of other children. The siblings arrived in Halifax and boarded a train to Hamilton, Ontario where they met their host farmer, Mr. Beaufort, who took them to their new home just west of Brant Street in Burlington on the Niagara Escarpment. It was a foreign landscape, but the farm and domestic work were similar, and several months later the rest of the Turkstra family were finally reunited. Martha remembers the rhythm of those early days when Riens, Harold and Peter left early mornings to walk twenty minutes south to work on the farm.

Algegeven door ons Commissaris der
Koningin in de provincie Friesland.

Leeuwarden, den 13 augustus 1927



Mannen hun

De Chef van het Hoofdbureau der Eerste Afdeling
ter Provinciale Griffie van Friesland.

Geboren

WAARSCHUWING.

Houders van Nederlandsche paspoorten
met nadruk op gewezen, dat
tegen inlevering van hun oude
en nieuw kunnen bekomen. Hun
alve in hun eigen belang ver-
paspoort zorgvuldig te bewaren.

785278



Rients Turkstra, c.1927



PASPOORT

VAN HET

KONINKRIJK DER NEDERLANDEN.

(bevat 36 genummerde bladzijden).

Passeport du Royaume des Pays-Bas.

(contient 36 pages numérotées).

Passport of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

(contains 36 numbered pages).

Pasz des Königreiches der N

(enthält 36 numerierte Seiten).

Model A, No.

785278

Divertje Turkstra, c.1927



Painting of Turkstra family *boerdery*.





A New Life in Canada

The Turkstra family was instrumental in setting up a new Christian Reformed Church in the Hamilton area. They started meeting in the McNab Street Presbyterian Church in the Sunday School room and later in the Hamilton Labour Temple at 110 Catherine Street North. Many Dutch immigrant men were invited to spend their Sunday evenings in the Turkstra family home.

Some years passed, and the Turkstra family moved to the Westcliffe East neighbourhood along Scenic Drive near the old Sanatorium and present site of Chedoke Hospital on the escarpment overlooking Hamilton. They had a plot of land and started a business growing and selling vegetables door-to-door. The business grew, and the family purchased a house on Fennell Avenue east of Upper James. At that time, the family vegetable business consisted of a horse (named Sandy) and buggy. Rients and son Wilfred would travel to downtown Hamilton to pick up fresh fruit and vegetables and sell them in the southwest end of the city. As time went by, they desired a house closer to the downtown farmer's market and along a streetcar line, so they could easily get to church.

In the late 1930s, the family purchased a detached Victorian townhouse with a storefront at 619 King Street West near Dundurn Street. The family opened a market called Turkstra Eggs in the storefront where they sold vegetables and eggs. Rients and sons Harold and Wilfred had two trucks and made weekly trips to



Divertje & Rients Turkstra, c.1890s



Cousin Rients, Peter, Rients (in the wagon),
Sandy the horse and Wilfred in front of
Turkstra's Fennell Ave. home (c.early 1930s).

In front of home & storefront
at 619 King St W. Wilfred,
Dad, Martha (c.late 1930s).



Wilfred, Jack & Hessel in
uniform (c.1945).



Rients & Divertje Turkstra,
c.1948



Burford, Waterford, Simcoe and Woodstock to pick up eggs to sell in the store. Peter started an egg hatchery business. When the venture failed, he started working as a contractor and eventually established his own outfit in 1940 called Turkstra Construction.

The Second World War called Wilfred and eighteen-year-old Jack into service. When they both returned home, they joined their father growing the family egg business.

Divertje Turkstra (née Van Der Veen) was a content, involved mother who frequently visited her children and participated in the local church. She was a “salt of the earth” type of woman. She'd put a big bowl of potatoes, cabbage and sausages in the middle of the table. The kids would come and help themselves and she would sit visiting with friends. She was a very sweet lady. She was not a businesswoman and never did speak English very well. Peter's family lived around the corner on Ravenscliffe Avenue and would drop by after church on Sundays to visit and sing with her.

On Boxing Day 1951, Rients Turkstra, age seventy-five, passed away. Twenty-five years earlier he had provided his family a fresh start in Canada and left a growing business to his sons. Divertje passed away May 14, 1963 at the age of eighty-four leaving a growing and loving family.





Left to right standing:
Joyce (Tigchelaar), Wilfred,
Martha (Tigchelaar), Peter,
Jane (VanZuidin), Harold,
Elsie (Braaksma), Jack, Tina
(Priris). Seated: Divertje,
Elsa (Steenhof), Rients



Peter Turkstra Sr.

Peter was the type of kid who was always getting into things. He was a very independent person. He'd take the family car and drive to Toronto without permission. When he was eighteen or nineteen years old, he smuggled himself into the United States to work as a landscape gardener for a relative in Holland, Michigan. That relative told Peter's father who then called the police and forced his son to return home. Peter was a willful kid, and certainly had a mind to do his own thing.

After the Second World War, Peter spent at least half his time placing Dutch immigrants on farms in Ontario. He was genuinely happy to see all these Dutch families coming to Canada and wanted to do his part to help. Before the war, the Dutch community was much smaller, so he

was happy to see people like himself arriving in postwar Canada. It was all about kinship and religion for him.

Peter was determined to assimilate into Canadian society. He could speak Dutch, of course, but when people spoke Dutch to him he'd say, "Don't speak Dutch to me. Speak English. I'm a Canadian." Peter helped place hundreds of immigrants all over Southern Ontario, then set to building their churches in such places as Jarvis, Aylmer, Trenton, Brockville and Woodstock.

Peter married Tina Havinga and had four children: Herman, Carl, Clifford, and Marlene. In the summers, Peter would take the family up north for a week or two. Carl remembers swimming in the lake and having a wonderful time during summer



holidays. Even when he left home at age seventeen to study at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, he always looked forward to working summers at Turkstra Construction and holidaying with the family.

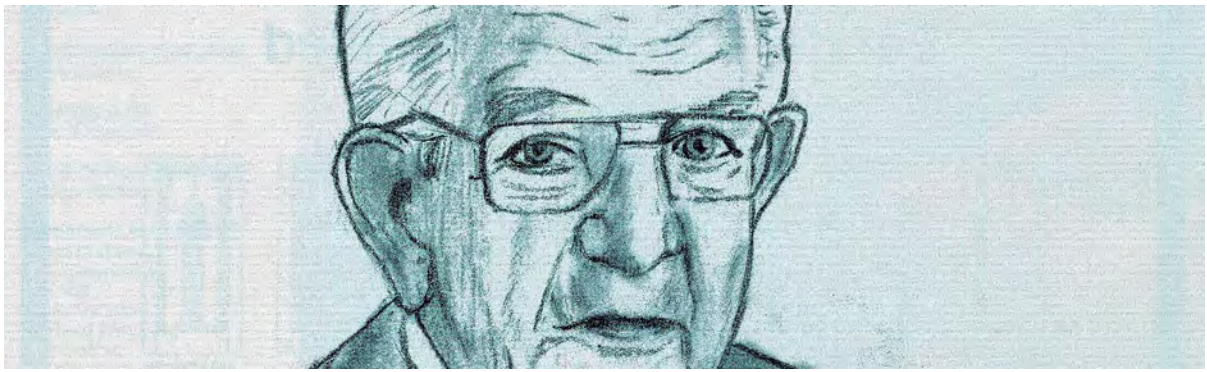
Carl recalls working with his father in the summer of 1950, when he was just fourteen years old,

“My father threw some of my clothes in a suitcase and drove me to Jarvis. On the edge of town there was a crew of Dutch immigrants building the foundation for a new Christian Reformed Church. Pointing to an old shed, he said to me, ‘This is where the workers live, and *you* are the cook!’ Inside the shed was a raised plywood deck with a pile of sleeping bags, clothes hanging from the wall, a picnic table, Coleman stove, plates, cutlery and a few pans. After a trip to the grocery store for cans of soup and stew, bread and butter, coffee, tea and sugar, I was in business.

After many weeks, I finally got them to eat fresh corn on the cob—thought of as pig’s food by the new immigrants! —and tomatoes. Ice cream disappeared by the barrel. They were an extraordinary group of people; both young and old, farmers, bookkeepers, salesmen, bricklayers and labourers, as well as experienced builders, like Mr. Demik. There was old Mr. Guthrie, whose wooden teeth kept falling from the scaffolds. These crews of workers would often leave Hamilton after midnight on a Monday morning, bound for various destinations around the province. They would return the following Saturday afternoon after working each day from dawn to dusk. The churches went up and most are still in use today.” (*Wherever You Go*, 48-49)

Marlene Verduyn (née Turkstra) also remembers summer vacations with the family.

“My brothers were away at university but would come back in the summer to work for my dad. Dad would rent a cottage up north for a month and the boys would come



“ *Peter helped place hundreds of immigrants all over Southern Ontario* ”

up on the weekends. We'd play cards, swim in the lake and go out on the boat. Those were fun times. I'm closer in age to brother Clifford than my oldest brother Herman and second-oldest, Carl. I got along with all my brothers, but I got on particularly well with my brother Carl. Herman married early, but Carl, Cliff and I all got married within a year of each other and we were all in Europe at the time; Cliff in Holland, Carl in England, and I was in France. I realize now how hard that must have been for my mother. There were many years where we didn't see much of each other and didn't do a lot of Christmases together. But eventually we all came back to the Hamilton/Burlington area.”

Marlene remembers her dad, Peter Sr., fondly.

“My dad was a giant in my life. As productive and busy as he was, he could be a bit of a scatterbrain! He wasn't always sure where he was going when he got up in the morning until he called his secretary. He was just that kind of a guy. He would pile all sorts of things into his schedule and it was, ‘Go, go go’ all the time.

He was incredibly generous but extremely humble. After he passed, I heard of things he had done to help people that he had never talked about when he was alive. He was very private about many of his charitable deeds. It probably stems from some of the biblical principles of not wanting to glorify his actions. At Redeemer University College, they named their library after dad passed in recognition of all the money and effort he put into the institution. That never would have happened when he was alive.”



DO YOU LIKE THIS CHURCH?

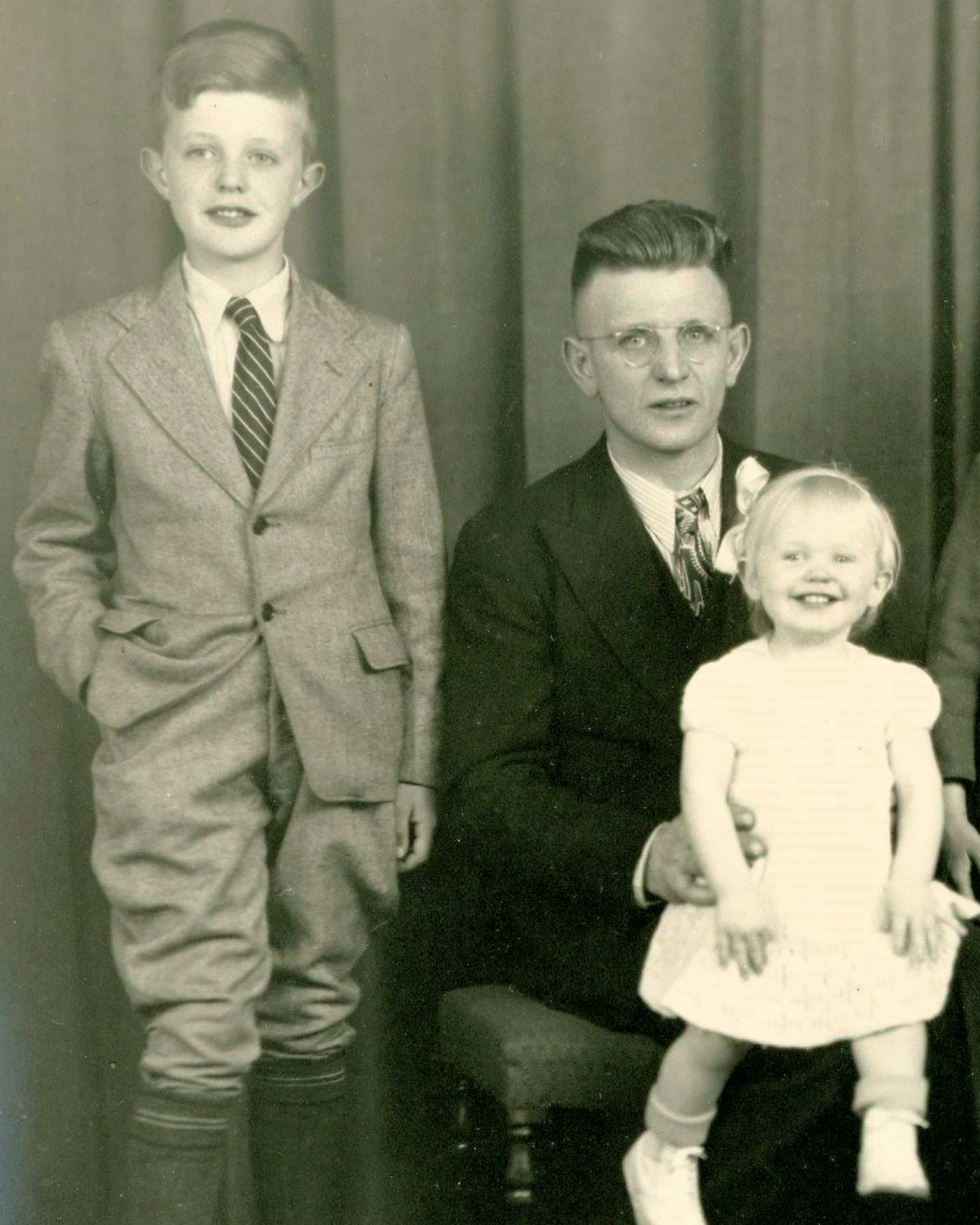
This is the Christian Reformed Church of Fruitland, Ont., of which Rev E. Kooistra is minister. It was built in 1953 by D. Veenendaal, general contractor at Sarnia, Ont.

A large part of the lumber was supplied by the Turkstra Lumber Co. Ltd., THE address for all Dutch new Canadians, who plan to build their own home, or of all congregations, which plan to build their own churches.

TURKSTRA
LUMBER CO LTD



Peter Turkstra,
c.1933



Left to right: Herman,
Peter, Marlene, Carl,
Tina, Clifford





Peter Turkstra

Jantina (Tina) Turkstra

"I think my mother, Tina Turkstra (née Havinga) was born 100 years too soon," recalls Carl Turkstra. "She always wished she could have been a career woman." Tina's sister was a nurse in New York City, and Tina wished that she could have become a nurse or a professional of some kind too. Their mother had come from a very wealthy family in the Netherlands and moved to Holland Marsh, a farming community north of Toronto, Ontario. Tina's father was a market farmer. He was a strong, healthy, handsome man. "My mother idolized him," says Carl.

Tina was a great mother, and a good wife and housekeeper. She was a remarkably

intelligent and independent woman. She used to make leather wallets and sweaters and donate them or give them as presents to her grandchildren. At the age of eighty, she would ride her bicycle around town in Burlington. She was a very generous person. She gave pianos to schools and got involved in other charities. She even drove people to doctor's appointments for the Cancer Society. When she was younger, she wrote a weekly column in a Dutch periodical called *The Banner*. She called herself "Mother of Four" and would send advice to new immigrant mothers.





Marlene recalls, “My mother was a wonderful woman. When I was a kid she always said, ‘If you ever want to get away from something, you have an eternal appointment with your mother.’ I remember there were different school events or parties I wanted to get out of or leave early, so I would just say, ‘Oh, I have an appointment with my mother.’ That was always a real blessing for me. She was always so supportive and loving in that way.”

Peter Turkstra (grandson of Peter Sr.) remembers his Oma fondly.

“My Oma, Tina, was very loving, but also rather reserved. She was a proud, fiercely independent and incredibly active woman. She would ride her bicycle around well into her eighties. At one point, she was riding her bike and was hit by a car in a parking lot, which she never fully recovered from. Still, she would drive around to do all kinds of activities. I remember she drove a compact car that was so light when she crossed the Skyway Bridge and a truck went by, it would literally move the car. She really was a force of nature who supported my

grandfather.”

Tina was also very organized. One of the ways Peter Sr. kept Tina happy was every Saturday night he would have his car cleaned inside and out at the Pioneer gas station near Turkstra Lumber. That way he could come home and take his wife to church in a clean car. Often, the trunk was still a disaster, full of papers and things, but he wanted to please his wife who was known to be a very neat and tidy lady.

Every morning Tina would get up at 6:00am and do her exercises. When she finally got a television, she would do her exercises with the television blaring. It drove the rest of the family crazy! She was involved with the church and all sorts of community activities. She used to cut cloth for care packages that would go to cancer patients and such. She fought for a bike path in Burlington and they installed a brass plaque on a stone near Francis Road in her honour.

Tina also loved to square dance! One day, Marlene came across some country-style clothes in her mother’s closet.

“Mother, what is this?”

“I square dance every week down at the senior’s centre, Marlene. Didn’t I tell you?”

As strange as it seems, it was also very much like Tina to continually find new activities to stay busy and involved.



Tina, Marlene,
Clifford, Peter



Tina Turkstra at opening
of Burlington bike path

 FRANCIS ROAD AREA BIKEPATH
THIS SECTION OF BIKEPATH WAS DONATED BY
MRS. J. TURKSTRA
HER DONATION TO THE CITY
IN AUGUST 1984 HAS BOOSTED THE CITY'S
EFFORTS IN PROVIDING A SAFE AND CONTINUOUS
BIKEWAY SYSTEM ACROSS THE CITY



Oma and Opa Turkstra

Peter Turkstra has fond memories of his grandfather and namesake, Peter Sr., as well as his Oma Tina. One thing that always struck Peter about the larger Turkstra family (which would include the Tigchelaars) was the fact that so many of them are quite accomplished. It's not to brag or sound arrogant, but it appears there is a dominant gene or something where most of them are hardworking, disciplined, overachievers. Peter Sr. and Tina should be very proud of the kids they raised. Herman was a partner at a law firm, Carl was a university professor, Clifford was an influential minister, Marlene was a board member on her dad's land development companies and all of them raised wonderful families.

Peter believes much of the Turkstra family's success has a lot to do with having excellent role models.

"My grandparents cared very much about Hamilton and the Dutch community they personally helped grow. They were both very kind, giving and accommodating people who worked hard and expected the same in return from people. I remember as a teenager, I would stay with my grandparents and they would put me to work all day at Turkstra Lumber doing all sorts of manual jobs. I'd return home so tired I would go right to sleep!"



“ *He was very capable of separating
businessman from being a grandfather.* ”

Peter remembers time with his grandparents being very focused on family.

“We would eat dinner together, read the scripture, go to church together on Sunday, and so forth. If my grandfather had any pressure or stress at work, he certainly didn’t show it at home. I never once heard him complain about anything. He had the ability of being able to separate work from home life. Today, it’s often difficult with technology and expectations of business life to get away from the stress of 24/7 availability. But back then, you had time with your family and it was unusual if the phone rang during dinner time.”

When Peter wasn’t working for his grandfather during the summers as a teenager, they would go fishing together. Peter Sr.’s true passion was fishing, it would seem.

“He would take me up to Key River (south of the French River in the Georgian Bay area of northern Ontario). Before Highway 400 was built, this meant a six hour drive each way. I think he enjoyed the ritual of the drive. In those days, you had to pull over to let trucks pass you on the

highway. Then it was around fifteen kilometres down river in probably the most dangerous houseboat to navigate the Georgian Bay! He’d park his boat at Key Marina. We’d pick up food and fuel, and then spend the next hour trying to get the propane fridge to start. I have fond memories of summer days on the boat with Opa Peter.”

At work, Peter Sr. would always dress in a casual suit. Not fancy, but professional. He commanded the respect of everybody in the company in a practical, confident way. It helped that he was full of integrity. He sincerely believed that working hard and delivering quality products and service meant everything should work out in the end. This obviously connects with his strong faith. Peter never saw his grandfather get flustered dealing with business issues.

“Or at the very least, he was very capable of separating businessman from being a grandfather,” adds Peter.

Facing page: Peter Turkstra (left) with grandfather Peter Turkstra Sr. (right). Fishing on Georgian Bay.





Six daughters and two remaining sons of Rients and Divertje Turkstra at Camp Shalom, August 1987. From left: Jack, Joyce, Elsa, Nienke, Peter, Edith. Seated: Jane, Martha.

Turkstra Clan

The Turkstra clan is a varied mix of people. Carl recalls attending a big family reunion in the 1970s with around 200 people, descendants of Rients and Divertje. At that point, the Turkstra daughters bore forty-eight children (two of whom died prior to birth). Carl remembers driving up and seeing everything from brand new Cadillacs to rusted-out, beat-up trucks.

“There were rich and poor, college and university professors, financiers, workers making minimum wage, well-educated and those with a high-school diploma, some with mental health issues and others with physical challenges. A whole society of people came out of my grandparents! One thread that certainly connected them all was an inclination for being independent-

minded. Most were determined to find their own way and do their own thing.”

In *Wherever You Go*, Martha Tigchelaar found similar diversity in the Turkstra clan.

“Dad and Mother’s posterity, established in this adopted land through their faith and sacrifice lives on in our lives, and those of our children and grandchildren. As farmers, pastors and entrepreneurs, as home builders and homemakers, as surgeons, nurses and lawyers, musicians and photographers, business executives and investment advisors, we continue to make a deep and varied impact on Canada.” (*Wherever You Go*, 90).

Carl's sister Marlene also remembers attending the event.

“I did go to the fifty-year Turkstra family reunion. That was wild. There were eighty-nine cousins when my Oma died, so it was impossible to know all of them. Whoever organized the event did an excellent job. They had colour-coded name tags, so you knew who everyone descended from. There were games and food. It was an all around wonderful day.”

In 1967, Jack Turkstra returned from ministry work in Michigan following an emotional breakdown. He accepted a position at Turkstra Lumber offered to him by his brother Peter. Harold and Wilfred (father of Ron) died in 1967 and 1968. Some years later, Jack was very sick. The family gathered at St Joseph's Hospital. Martha recalls her brother, Peter Sr. saying, “At one time, there were four Turkstra brothers. The Lord took Wilfred from us, and then He took Harold. I *do* hope he will spare our dear Jack.” Jack was later restored to health but passed away in April 2002.

In the year 2000, Peter Turkstra Sr. died at age ninety-one. His sister Martha recalls a tender moment from his memorial.

“It was at Peter's funeral that Jack shared a most touching story. Already showing signs of his own frailty and declining health, and yet glowing with an unmistakable inner peace and strength, Jack stepped slowly to the front of the church. He related the story of a young man who had had a serious breakdown while trying to get established in the ministry. Feeling totally broken at seeing his dreams of being an evangelist so shattered, this man felt completely uncertain of where to turn next.

It was then that his older brother took him under his wing, giving him a place in his prospering business and helping to re-settle him and his family back in Ontario. ‘That young man was me,’ said Jack with a strong smile and glistening eyes. ‘And my brother Peter was the one willing to take the chance on me, to be *my* kinsman-redeemer.’” (*Wherever You Go*, 88-89).





Carl Turkstra and Family

Carl Turkstra met his wife, Kate (née Nicholson), in London, England. They married May 9, 1964. Their first child, Peter, was born in London. Soon after, the young family moved to Montreal, Québec and three years later, daughter Jennifer was born. Kate worked as a head nurse in Montreal, and when the family later moved to New York City, she worked for a time in a methadone clinic. She was a great nurse and a wonderful mother.

When the kids were growing up, Carl

worked as a professor of Civil Engineering at McGill University. Carl had a relatively flexible schedule and with Kate's busy nursing schedule, it was often Carl who was there to help at home, cooking breakfasts and dinners when Kate was busy at the hospital. Jennifer attests, "My dad is a fabulous cook, which is something he passed on to Peter, but alas, it skipped me!" During Carl's sabbaticals, the family spent time in France, Italy, and Mexico City. They also lived in New York City for nine years before moving to Hamilton in 1990 to join Turkstra Lumber.

Jennifer was briefly a shareholder in Turkstra Lumber and helped in the transition process when leadership of the company transitioned from Carl to Peter. Jennifer states, "It is my grandfather, Dad and brother who provide(d) the real leadership that enabled the company to grow and prosper over the years."

Peter also remembers a happy childhood. "I remember living downtown in an apartment and it being very cold with lots of snow. I remember the day my infant sister, Jennifer, came home from the hospital in our Volkswagen Beetle."

When Carl went to New York City to teach civil engineering at Brooklyn Polytechnic, Peter enrolled in first

year engineering courses. He was successful in those courses but wanted to study business. A year later, he transferred to the University of Waterloo where he graduated in 1987 with an honours bachelor in economics. One defining aspect of his education at Waterloo was the co-op program where he had work terms at the Bank of Canada in Ottawa and IBM in Toronto. Upon graduation, he started a career at IBM.

Of course, the other defining feature of his time in Waterloo was meeting his future wife, Karen, who graduated with an honours bachelor in economics a year earlier than Peter did. Peter recalls,

“One thing about Waterloo was there weren’t very many ladies at the time. That must have been where I started to hone my skills in sales since I was able to meet a very lovely lady and she wanted to marry me! I had started working for IBM and Karen was working for Goodyear. We both transferred to Montreal in the early 1990s. I could speak French, of course, and Karen didn’t, but she had an adventurous spirit and eventually learned the language.”

In 1993, Peter and Karen’s first daughter, Sarah, was born in Montreal. A year later, they moved back to Toronto. In 1995, their second daughter, Laura, was born. In 1996, Peter decided to leave IBM to join



the family business and move back to Hamilton.

Peter recalls his mother being a very loving and caring person when he was growing up.

“When we lived in Montreal, she worked as a nurse at the Maimonides Geriatric Centre. She wasn’t a helicopter parent. She allowed us to be independent and participate in all sorts of sports and other activities. Both my parents tried to provide opportunities to allow us to discover the world and decide what we were going to do with our lives. They were not the type of parents who told you what you should do. Unless we were in trouble, they would let us grow and explore.”

Peter and Jennifer always got along growing up. Peter recalls, “Of course, when we were younger, I was more focused on sports and she was ‘the younger sister.’ But we got along, and as partners in Turkstra Lumber for four years, we worked very well together.

We’re good friends and our families get along. In the end, we found our own way through life and ended up being close, which is what our parents always wanted for us.”

Carl and Kate celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary a few years ago. Peter and Karen hosted the celebration at their home with family and many of Carl and Kate’s friends they had made through many associations through the arts and cultural activities in the city. Besides such unique events, the Turkstras get together as a family as often as they can. They have Christmas parties, family vacations and Sunday dinners where they continue to make memories as a family.

