

WORLD WIDE SOMSEN FAMILY REUNION, USA

by Marilyn Olson-Lear [3850]

2002 Reunion In Baldwin

What event brought 128 men, women, and children from sixteen states and three countries to a small village like Baldwin, Wisconsin? The Second World Wide Somsen Family Reunion, held



Marilyn Olson-Lear, the brilliant chairman of the Reunion

in Baldwin on August 3 and 4, 2002. Eight family members from The Netherlands and one family member from Canada, along with one hundred twenty Somsens from the United States, got together to meet family members from the Jan Hendrik Somsen family and the Hendrik Jan Somsen family, and to dedicate a stone commemorating the immigration of the Jan Hendrik Somsen family to Baldwin. Two days of family genealogical activities, Baldwin tours, and good American fun were planned so that family members could learn about their past roots and learn to know their present branches, plus learn what the Baldwin area has to offer.

Saturday morning the Baldwin American Legion Building was decorated with banners with the Somsen family logo – the lime tree, Dutch and American flag centerpieces, red and blue tablecloths, patriotic centerpieces, and Uncle Sam. The Somsens heard how Derk and Theo Somsen of The Netherlands had discovered all these relatives, followed by a video made in The Netherlands for the First World Wide Somsen Reunion. The video reviewed how it all started, showed photos and stories of some Somsen family members, the Aalten church, and the Aalten area where the family originated. Moving from historical information about the family to the latest technology about the family, we learned about the Somsen family photo CD, a family website which contains all the genealogical information with photos, and the Somsen Family Foundation which publishes a magazine twice a year with stories and data on past and present family members and their activities.

Throughout the day and evening, family members caught up on their genealogy. They checked out relationships on five large family tree charts posted on the walls. Two family members provided computer print-outs of individual ancestor lists and relationship charts. Five great great grandchildren set up a photo studio in the bar room and took digital photos of families and individuals, to be added to the website.

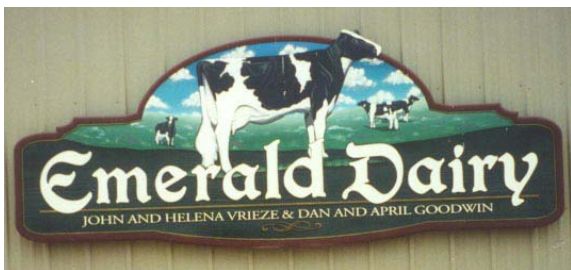
saturday, august 3

American Legion Club
410 Maple Street

- 9:00 am REGISTRATION AND COFFEE
Paula Crist, Barbara DeLander
Cindy & Ron Zignego
Sally & Dave Berkholder
Craft Sales Set-up: Grace Emmert
- 10:00 am PROGRAM
Welcome: Marilyn Olson-Lear
Don McGee, Baldwin Village President
Introductions: Marilyn Olson-Lear
Somsen Family History: How It Started
Theo Somsen, Derk Somsen
Somsen Panorama Video: Sally Berkholder
Somsen Family Sites:
Irene Somsen
Somsen Web Site and CD: John Somsen
Somsen Foundation: Theo Somsen
- 12:00 Noon LUNCH AND CRAFT SALES
- 1:30 pm BUS TOURS
Emerald Dairy, Bison Ranch, Baldwin Area:
Don Somsen
On Your Own Walks: Marie Ista
Displays: Irene Somsen
Craft Sales: Grace Emmert
Genealogy: Derk Somsen, Theo Somsen,
John Somsen
- 6:00 pm DINNER
- 6:00 - 10:00 pm DJ, Karaoke & Elvis



Saturday afternoon, family members were bussed on tours of Emerald Dairy, the Silver Bison Ranch, and Baldwin - seeing where Somsens had lived, and the locations of businesses, churches and schools. The highlight of the Silver Bison Ranch tour was having Esther, a pet bison cow,



put her head inside the bus to be fed apples. The highlight of the Emerald Dairy tour was seeing a calf born. In between tours, Somsens could look at exhibits of wooden shoe making tools, family photos, scrapbooks, quilts, articles, memorabilia; buy items from crafters and from the Somsen Foundation; or take a walking tour of Baldwin's Somsen homes, businesses, churches, and schools marked on a self-guided map.

The good all American fun came in good food, a skit, sales and the evening karaoke. Morning muffins, a noon picnic type lunch and an evening ham and chicken dinner kept all the Somsens pleasantly full. The skit showed how The Three Little Dutch Pigs, very frugal and very very clean, got into trouble because of the wolf's quest for Heineken. Everyone had opportunities to spend money with crafters selling rugs, sweat shirts, denim shirts, t-shirts, dolls, cloth items, small painted folk art, hardanger, entarsia wood sculptures, Baldwin books and with the Somsen Foundation selling Somsen items - books, videos, CDs, tapes, t-shirts. Musical Somsens, and some not so musical, entertained other family members in a karaoke sing-along on Saturday evening – rap songs, a cousins group singing "We're A Family", old favorites like "My Darling Clementine", good

and bad duets, good solos, popular songs, and old favorites.



Saturday evening: Karaoke singers

At the First Reformed Church Sunday morning service, Somsen family members from The Netherlands participated along with the congregation. Derk Somsen was the organist for the service. The congregation sang Psalm 121 in Dutch and English and the Dutch and American National Anthems. Johan Somsen lead the Dutch National Anthem. Theo Somsen said the Lord's Prayer in Dutch. The Reverend Phillip Somsen, grandson of Jan Hendrik Somsen and Janna Rauwerdink Somsen, preached the sermon on "Heritage and Legacy: Your Part in the Plan of God" based on Jeremiah 29:1, 4 -14. Great great granddaughters Jacqueline Christy, Corinne Berkseth, and Shannon Kerr sang a capella a medley "Father I Adore You and We Bow Down" for special music and "Amazing Grace" for offertory music. The service closed with the Somsen family



Formerly a Farm of the Somsens

from the United State and The Netherlands together singing the choral benediction, "The Lord Bless You And Keep You." Everyone then adjourned to the church's lower level for coffee and

sunday, august 4

9:30 am *First Reformed Church*
1120 11th Avenue

CHURCH SERVICE

Sermon: Rev. Phil Somsen
Organist: Derk Somsen
Lord's Prayer: Theo Somsen
National Anthems: Congregation
Psalm 121: Congregation
Music: Great-Great Granddaughters
Choral Benediction: Somsen Family

11:30 am *Baldwin Cemetery*
Pine Street and 8th Avenue

IMMIGRANT MEMORIAL STONE DEDICATION

Grandsons: Phil Somsen, Don Somsen and
Clarence Somsen

12:30 pm *Coachman Supper Club*
503 Highway 63 South

BUFFET DINNER

Next Reunion Plans?

Farewell: 2002 Somsen Family
Reunion Committee

cookies and to view the embroidered fan quilt with many Somsen names on it used as a missions fund raiser in 1933-1942.

Following the church service, the family met at the **Baldwin Cemetery** for the dedication of the stone placed at the grave site of Jan Hendrik Somsen and his wife Janna Hendrika Rauwerdink Somsen, commemorating their immigration from Aalten, The Netherlands to Baldwin in 1881. Two grandsons, the Reverend Phillip Somsen and Don Somsen, lead the service - a poem on "Legacy", thoughts about family and legacy by Reverend Phillip, and other family members speaking their thoughts about the family and the occasion.

At the Coachman Supper Club, following the dedication, Somsens continued family conversations, family genealogy searches, exchanging gifts, and final conversations before and after the buffet dinner. The Second World Wide Somsen Family Reunion ended - amid a multitude of photo taking, fond farewells, the traditional Dutch triple kiss and talk of The Third World Wide Somsen Family Reunion in five years



Stone to commemorate the immigration of
Jan Hendrik Somsen [308]

in The Netherlands.

Family Research And 1997 Reunion

All this interest in the Somsen family started in December 1993 when two Netherlanders, Theo Somsen and Derk Somsen, both interested in family genealogy, realized they were branches of the same family and began working cooperatively to find the origin and the descendents of their families. They traced family roots and family branches - researching community archives, talking and writing to known family members, following up on leads to other family members, checking on families who had immigrated to the United States, compiling photographs, and collecting family stories.

Their "roving in the past and present" brought them into contact with relatives in The Netherlands and abroad who were unknown to them until then. These contacts provided new data as well as old stories and myths circulating in the family. Records, stories, and photographs came from branches of the Somsen family living in The Netherlands, Europe, and North America. They heard stories about unusual marriages and interesting name changes. They learned that in the 1600's the name Somsen came from the Dutch word for the kind of land area on which the family settled - somps for swampland.

Derk and Theo discovered so many people, so many good stories and so many good photographs, that they thought these items should be collected and saved together in a permanent way for anyone interested in them.

A bound hard cover book in both Dutch and English with the stories, the photos and the genealogical records would be a great project - if family members would buy it. And maybe all these people would like to get together and meet each other face to face. They needed to know. So they

surveyed family members, and that survey resulted in a Somsen genealogy book, a Somsen video, and the first reunion.



The First World Wide Somsen Family Reunion

took place at Erve Kots in Lievelede, (near Aalten) The Netherlands in August 1997. We learned family genealogy, visited reconstructed homes and farms, listened to the Somsen band and individual Somsen singers and instrumentalists, saw costumed Dutch dancers, held a commemorative service in St Helena Church, planted a commemorative tree with a plaque, and visited the homes of Hendrik Jan and Jan Hendrik. Those attending from Baldwin and the area were: Marilyn Olson-Lear, Barbara DeLander, Ann Kerr, Shannon Kerr, Don and Irene Somsen, Kathy Somsen, Paula Crist, Mary Gilbert, Cindy and Ron Zignego, Sally and Dave Berkholder. Cornelius Somsen, Jon Somsen.

Somsen family information is recorded - family stories and photos, and the genealogy of previous and following generations of the Somsen family - in the book, *Somsen – Omnes Generationes (Somsen – All Generations)*, written by Derk and Theo Somsen, with information from granddaughter-in-law Irene Somsen. A copy of this book can be read in the History Room at the Baldwin Library.

Somsen Family In Baldwin

The Second World Wide Somsen Reunion in the United States commemorated the immigration of the Jan Hendrick Somsen family to the United States. In 1881 Jan Hendrick (John Henry) Somsen and Janna (Johanna) Hendrika Rauwerdink Somsen, their three children Harmina Hendrika, (Minnie), Bernard Johan, (BJ), and Johanna Berendina, (Annie) and Jan's helper Aaron Jon Hinkamp immigrated to Baldwin from Aalten, The Netherlands. The voyage to America took six weeks, and Janna was seasick during the entire trip.

For about three months, the six new immigrants lived with Jan's oldest sister, Hendrika, her husband John Schepers, and the three Schepers children on a farm north of Baldwin. While the families lived together, Jan worked in Hudson,

walking to and from Hudson, probably coming back to Baldwin only on Sundays. It was very crowded for two families living in a small house so Jan rented a farm east of the Christian Reformed Church. Later he bought a ten acre farm two miles east of the church, then an adjoining ten acres, and still later forty acres across the road.

Jan Hendrik was a wooden shoemaker in The Netherlands and brought his wooden shoe making tools with him to Wisconsin. Jan and "Little Hinkamp", as the Somsen children called him, set up a shoemaking business on the farm in the winter. Jan was known as the best wooden shoemaker in the area. The shoes sold for sixty-four or seventy-five cents a pair, depending on the size of the shoes.



Christian Reformed Church, Baldwin

Jan and Janna had eleven more children after immigrating to the United States, for a total of fifteen children. Thirteen children lived to adulthood. One daughter died at age five months in The Netherlands and another daughter soon after birth in Baldwin. These thirteen children grew up and lived in Baldwin or nearby, though none of them are still living.

They were Harmina Hendrika, (Minnie), Mrs. William Wernlund, my grandmother; Bernard Johan, (BJ), a house builder in Baldwin; Johanna Berendina, (Annie), Mrs. Herman Behm; Willem, (Bill), owner of the Woodville Elevator; Gerrit, a farmer in Baldwin; Herman M, (Herman), who worked in the Woodville Elevator and served in World War I; Edward, (Ed), a barber in Baldwin; Albert, an egg buyer, who lived to be 100 years old; Johanna Hendrika, (Jennie), a hat and dress maker; Dina, (Dena), a hat and dress maker; Ella, a housekeeper; Harry, who worked in the Woodville Elevator and lived in Woodville; and John Henry, (Hank), a butter maker who lived in Bloomer. God said "be fruitful and multiply" and so the Somsens did!

Though four of the thirteen children never married, nine of Jan and Janna's thirteen children produced forty-two grandchildren and one hundred thirteen



great grandchildren, and a whole lot more great great grandchildren.
The family belonged to the Christian Reformed

Church near their farm, and their children were baptized there. They joined the new First Reformed Church in 1905 when it was built. Before the building was completed, services were being held in the hall where Baldwin Telecom is located, and Harry and Hank were baptized in this hall. After Jan's death in 1929, mother Janna and children Jennie, Dena, Ella, Herman, and Harry stayed on the farm until their move to Eleventh Avenue in Baldwin on October 9, 1941, when son Gerrit and his wife Minnie took over the farm. The last living Somsen Sisters, Dena and Jennie, left that house on October 9, 1981 to move into an apartment across the street from the house. ■

A happy family with coffee and cake



Committee button



Dutch visitors of the Reunion:
Back row l.-r.: Joke Somsen [132], Emma Somsen [520], Dick Somsen [130], Johan Somsen [1089], Theo Somsen [227] and Teun Hunse [68], with hat, a Canadian Dutchman.
Front row l.-r.: Dicky Somsen-Lenselink [133], Josette Somsen-Joosse [394] and Yvonne Reijs-Edel [3926]