

## *Eabe*

In our community during the 1920s and '30s, as no doubt in all other times and places, some people were known for their remarkable behaviour, as they displayed peculiar habits or did other things that set them apart from the rest. Eabe was such a person. If a stranger had inquired after one Eabe Veenstra, most likely he would have been out of luck; however, if that same stranger had asked for one "Eabe *liegt net*" (doesn't lie), even most third- or fourth-graders could have told the stranger where Eabe lived.

Eabe was a teamster by trade. He liked to talk, and he loved to tell stories but, through repeat performances, he'd fallen into the habit of stretching the dividing line between fact and fiction, just a bit. Being aware of this, and occasionally observing a measure of skepticism among his audience regarding the truthfulness of his story, Eabe had made it a habit to assure his listeners that the story he was telling, this time, was the truth and nothing but the truth. He would end each story with, "It's the truth. I'm not lying!" In due time, he became known as "Eabe *liegt net*."

Throughout the years, in order to accommodate his gradually growing business, Eabe had accumulated on his land a significant number of buildings having an unknown architectural style. As a young man, he had started with one horse and one wagon. So he had built a stable for the horse and a shed for the wagon. When all went well, he bought another horse and a larger, different type of wagon. This expansion called for additions to the original buildings. Of course, since he now had twice the number of horses, he also needed twice the room to store his hay and grain. So, another addition.

In the historically cold winter of 1929, when the roads were covered with ice for many weeks, Eabe had bought himself a sleigh so that he could keep his business on the road. The purchase of the sleigh required the building of another lean-to. The last unscientific count that Gerrit and I performed gave a grand total of eleven buildings, including the house; some freestanding, some additions, some lean-tos, and other extensions of different shapes and sizes, all spread out for a considerable length along both sides of his driveway. Clearly, Eabe didn't believe in long-range planning. On that point, he stood firmly in the true Reformed tradition: only wretched Communists promoted and practised long-range planning.

Eabe was also known for his well-developed moustache and was a tobacco chewer as well, which wasn't unusual in itself – there were many other people who seemed to enjoy this habit-forming activity – but Eabe was special. Eabe, you see, was an artist! Everybody knows, of course, that the chewing of tobacco results in a steady quantity of juices that have to be discreetly disposed of by the chewer. It was in the disposal of the tobacco juices that Eabe's artistic abilities were widely known and, with some reservations, even admired. With the help of a spittoon, strategically placed at the end of the dinner table, and the unlimited patience and forbearance of his wife, through years of practice Eabe had developed a nearly-flawless performance.

One cold winter morning, my brother-in-law Johannes Dykema stopped by on some business. Over a cup of coffee, they talked about the sudden change in the weather. Johannes remarked that it was the coldest day of the winter so far. Eabe reluctantly had to admit that Johannes had it right, but from his lifelong experience on the road, he could testify, he said, to colder, much colder, days than these ones. In fact, if he thought back far enough, way back to the 1880s, then the weather this winter was, comparatively speaking, child's play.

Eabe said, "No, Johannes, this is nothing; not even worth mentioning. When I was a young man, in February 1882, I remember one afternoon, I got it into my head to go skating on the lake. It was cold, Johannes, bone-chilling cold; colder than you'll ever experience in your life!"

Then he stroked his moustache in both directions with the back of his forefinger, and paused a moment for the proper effect, before continuing, "There were a few other people skating there but it was just too cold to be out in the wind. It cut right through your body. It took your breath away.

"Most people were at the shelter where a couple sold hot chocolate milk to the skaters. After a while, I went there for a cup, too. Now, you won't believe this, but it's the truth, Johannes. I'm not lying. When I stepped outside with my cup of boiling-hot chocolate milk, the cold north wind blew around the corner of the shelter right into my cup and, before my very eyes, in one instant it turned the boiling hot milk into ice!

"And it's the truth, Johannes. I'm not lying. It froze so fast that, when I touched it, the ice was still warm!"

Then, as if to brand this historical fact with a "beyond the shadow of a doubt" seal of approval, Eabe closed one eye, took aim, and spat masterfully over the full length of the table, over the cream and sugar, and right into the spittoon. Well, more or less.

Eabe said to his wife, "Pour Johannes another cup of coffee."

But Johannes, having witnessed Eabe's performance, glanced at him from the corner of one eye and said, "Well, I better go home now. I promised my wife that I'd be back shortly."

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