

# Origins

## Origins

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### *Historical Magazine of The Archives*

Calvin College and  
Calvin Theological Seminary  
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*Origins* is designed to publicize and advance the objectives of The Archives. These goals include the gathering, organization, and study of historical materials produced by the day-to-day activities of the Christian Reformed Church, its institutions, communities, and people.

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*Cover photo:*  
*Fred Ondersma with Charlie.*



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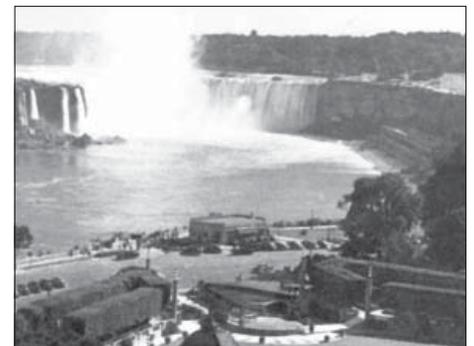
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## **This Issue**

Earlier this year we were visited by Fred Ondersma, who had a few family photos and some of his family's home delivery of milk business in Grand Rapids. With copies of these images, along with copies from several others of the extended Ondersma family and other sources, we produced the photographic essay detailing the history of the Thomas Street Dairy. The format is similar to the photo essay we did on the Holland-America Line in the spring 2002 issue. This is followed by three articles submitted on very different Christian Reformed churches. Dr. William Nawyn examines the story of the congregation in the nation's largest city, which existed primarily during the nineteenth century. Wondering why so little had been done on the Dutch in Michigan's largest city, Detroit, James Evenhuis has recently done extensive work on the subject and published some of his findings in the proceedings of the

Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies. In this issue of *Origins* he discusses a sub-group of his Dutch in Detroit work—the CRC. When Paula Vander Hoven and Angie Ploegstra began genealogical research they found reference to a Christian Reformed church near LeRoy, Michigan. No records of this church existed, but once they discovered that its name was Perch Lake CRC, from a variety of sources they were able to piece together the stories of the congregation's brief existence in the wilds of northern Michigan. 🐦

## **Time to Renew your Subscription**

As we did last year, we are using this column to notify you that it is time to renew your subscription. This notification saves the cost of a separate mailing of renewal notices. As before, we have enclosed the renewal envelope in this issue for your use. A reminder letter will be enclosed for those of you whose subscriptions expired previously. When we began in 1983 subscriptions were \$10 (US) per year. This remains the price today, a practice we suspect few other periodicals can make. Gifts in addition to the \$10 are acknowledged as charitable gifts to *Origins* and we are grateful for this generosity. 🐦

## **Available On-Line**

Our partnership with Dutch website, Ferwerderadeel Families, has born fruit. More than 350 obituary notices scanned from *The Banner* and *De Wachter* for emigrants from Ferwerderadeel are now available at <http://www.erfskipterpdoarpen.nl/Engels/Obituaries/Mainpage.htm>. This is already proving to be a very cost effective means of making our data available digitally. We have also created a new webpage of the membership ([http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family\\_history\\_resources/perchlake\\_church.htm](http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/perchlake_church.htm)) of the Perch Lake, CRC, which existed briefly, 1896-1899, near LeRoy, Michigan. Volunteers Paula Vander Hoven and Angie Ploegstra gathered and compiled these data. This marks the third such page of unique digital data that we have created and are maintaining. With the assistance of our newest volunteer, Ralph Haan, we have redesigned our webpage of family histories held in the archives and created a new webpage listing the marriages performed by Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte, of Holland, Michigan. The new, expanded version of the family list is at [http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family\\_history\\_resources/genealogies\\_page.htm](http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/genealogies_page.htm), while the marriages are

at [http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family\\_history\\_resources/vanraalte\\_weddings.htm](http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/vanraalte_weddings.htm). 📖

### News from the Archives

Among the collections taken in, processed, and opened for research were the 14 cubic feet of records from the discontinued Burton Heights Christian Reformed Church (CRC). Thanks to years of diligence by church staff, the collection has the distinction of having the most thorough set of membership records of any church collection in our holdings. What is remarkable about this is that most of our church collections have excellent membership data, yet this set is better. Two patrons have already used this collection. Also accessioned and processed were records from the discontinued Cedar Falls, IA, CRC, college records from Service Learning, Conferences and Campus Events, and the Alumni Office; the seminary's Office of the President and the Committee for Educational Assistance to Churches Abroad.

We have completed the translation (Dutch to English) of the Classis Grand Rapids minutes (1870-1897), and Classis Grand Rapids East (1898-1927). Translations of these minutes had been frequently requested by scholars of

the controversies in the denomination during the first two decades of the 20th century, particularly the controversy that led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches. We are currently working on the minutes from Classis Muskegon as well as those from the Christian Reformed congregation that was in Arlene, Michigan.

At our request, theological librarian emeritus, Rev. Harry Boonstra has begun annotating the minutes of the CRC Synods, 1857-1880. Several years ago we translated these minutes and then published them digitally at <http://www.calvin.edu/library/database/synod/>. Boonstra's work will place some of actions taken in a larger context, as well as presenting some biographical data about the people who attended these sessions, some of whom played important roles in the early history of the denomination.

Two manuscript collections of former college faculty members also were processed. These are the 16 cubic feet from Edwin Van Kley and 4.5 cubic feet from John DeBeer. Both deceased emeriti of the Calvin College faculty, Van Kley gained an international reputation for his work in Chinese history, and DeBeer was

well known for his work in education.

The biography of Rev. Douwe J. Van der Werp submitted by *Origins* to the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America for publication has been accepted and is scheduled to be published by January 1. The biography of H. J. Kuiper is undergoing its last reader evaluation before being submitted to the Historical Series. 📖

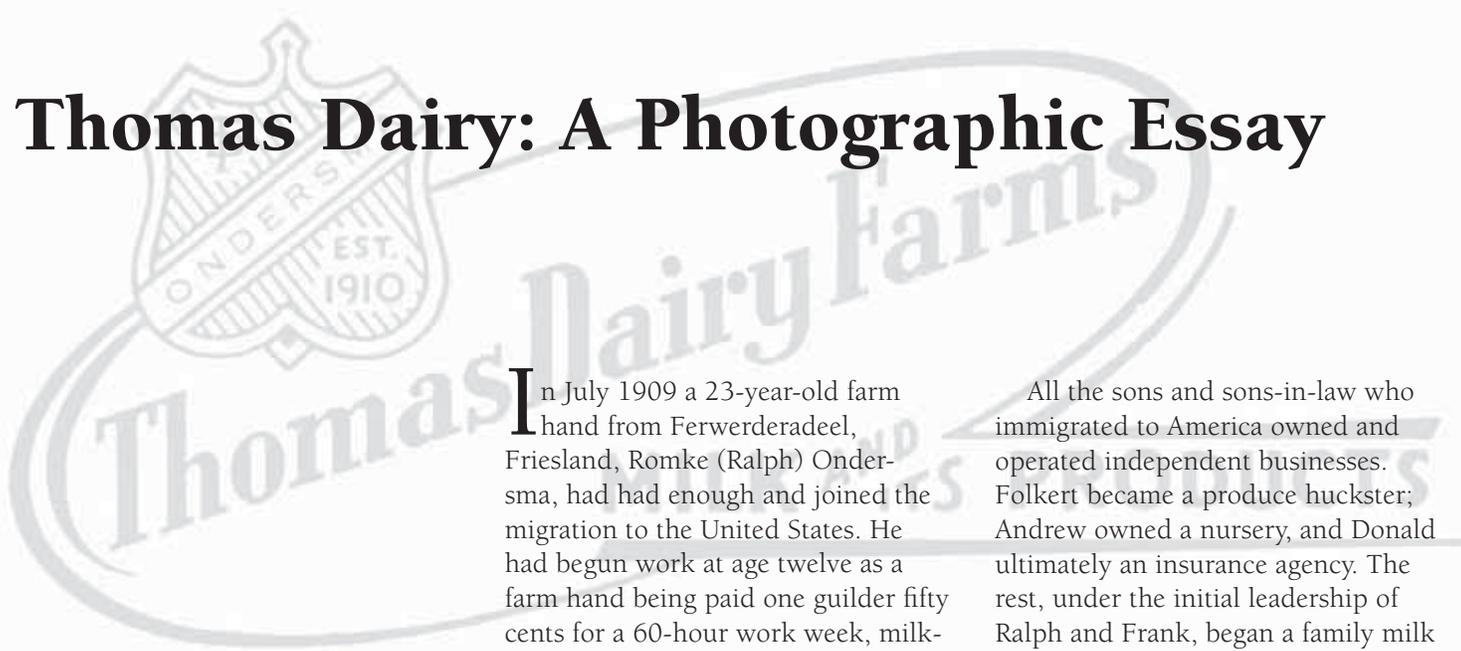
### Staff

Richard Harms is the curator of the Archives; Hendrina Van Spronsen is the office coordinator; Wendy Blankespoor is librarian and cataloging archivist; Boukje Leegwater is departmental assistant; Dr. Robert Bolt is field agent and assistant archivist. Our capable student assistant is Heather Guichelaar. Our faithful volunteers include: Rev. Henry DeMots, Ed Gerritsen, Fred Gredanus, Ralph Haan, Hendrick Harms, Dr. Henry Ippel, Helen Meulink, Rev. Gerrit Sheeres, and Rev. Leonard Sweetman. 📖



Richard H. Harms

# Thomas Dairy: A Photographic Essay



In July 1909 a 23-year-old farm hand from Ferwerderadeel, Friesland, Romke (Ralph) Ondersma, had had enough and joined the migration to the United States. He had begun work at age twelve as a farm hand being paid one guilder fifty cents for a 60-hour work week, milking cows, tending horses, and working the fields. Other jobs might have paid more; particularly working for a farmer in Germany, but even those did not pay a lot. Originally thinking he would settle near a cousin in Whitinsville, Massachusetts, instead Ondersma accompanied a friend to Grand Rapids. He began work for day wages on a road crew in the summer and in the furniture factories during the winter.

The sixth of eleven children born to Siebren Ondersma and Anna Akkerhof (three of whom had died in childhood), Ralph led the way for the emigration of the entire family. His brother Frank followed in October, and older brother Folkert and his family in 1911. His parents and children still living at home in 1910.

All the sons and sons-in-law who immigrated to America owned and operated independent businesses. Folkert became a produce huckster; Andrew owned a nursery, and Donald ultimately an insurance agency. The rest, under the initial leadership of Ralph and Frank, began a family milk business that would last six decades.

This began in 1910 when Ralph bought a milk route, probably known as Jersey Milk Company, for the handsome sum of \$350 (just slightly less than the cost of an average factory worker's house at the time). The next year Frank bought his own route for about the same price. Each brother operated his own route but jointly bottled the milk in the basement of the family house on Baxter Street. When the basement proved to be too small, a creamery and horse barn were built a few blocks away at 900 Thomas Street. This marked the birth of Thomas Street Dairy.

What follows are images from the history of the Thomas Street Dairy and some of the Ondersma clan in the home delivery milk business.

*Richard H. Harms*

N. Y. FORM 296. CERTIFICATE OF ARRIVAL—FOR NATURALIZATION PURPOSES  
 (For use of aliens arriving in United States after June 29, 1906. To be issued immediately prior to petitioning for naturalization.)

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
 IMMIGRATION SERVICE  
 OFFICE OF  
 COMMISSIONER OF IMMIGRATION  
 ELLIS ISLAND, N. Y., Jan 18 1919

Serial No. 16145976

NOTE TO CLERK OF COURT:  
 Insert the above serial number  
 immediately above the line of U.  
 S. District Court of Immigration  
 (State of Arrival from the Inspector  
 of Labor, State this day of \_\_\_\_\_)

This is to certify that the following-named alien arrived at the port indicated, on the date and in manner described below, viz:

Name of alien: Onderama, Romke  
 Port of entry: New York, N. Y.  
 Date of arrival: July 13, 09  
 Name of vessel: \* Potsdam

For the Commission-  
 A. F. Johnson  
 Chief Clerk

\* Or railroad company or any other conveyance.

Like many Dutch emigrants, Romke (later Ralph) sailed on one of the ships of the Holland-America Line, in his case Potsdam, which crossed the Atlantic in ten days, the average sailing time. He was one of 991 passengers on the voyage; 55 in first class, 258 in second class, and 678 in third class. Ralph sailed second-class for 137.75 guilders, which included 17.10 guilders for rail fare in the Netherlands and 40.62 guilders for rail fare from New York to Grand Rapids. (Courtesy of Phil Ondersma)

1614  
 No. 875

BUREAU OF NATURALIZATION RECEIVED  
 JAN 17 1919  
 N. TRIPPLICATE  
 ACKNO. \_\_\_\_\_

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
 DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND LABOR  
 NATURALIZATION SERVICE

DECLARATION OF INTENTION  
 (to be filed for all purposes seven years after the date hereof)

State of Michigan ss. In the Superior Court  
 County of Kent of Grand Rapids

I, Ralph Onderama, aged 26 years  
 occupation Mill-lealer, do declare on oath that my personal description is: Color White, complexion Light, height 6 feet 8 inches, weight 165 pounds, color of hair White, color of eyes Gray, other visible distinctive marks None.

I was born in Hallum, Netherlands on the 23 day of August, anno Domini 1892; I now reside at 302 Thomas St., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I emigrated to the United States of America from Rotterdam on the vessel Potsdam; my last foreign residence was Hallum, Netherlands.

It is my bona fide intention to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to Wilhelmina Queen of the Netherlands, of whom I am now a subject; I arrived at the port of New York, in the State of New York, on or about the 10 day of July, anno Domini 1909; I am not an anarchist; I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy; and it is my intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States of America and to permanently reside therein; SO HELP ME GOD.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 10th day of February, anno Domini 1914  
 Clerk of the Court

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
 NATURALIZATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
 PETITION FOR NATURALIZATION

1079 ORIGINAL

SUPERIOR Court of GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

The petition of Ralph Onderama, Grand Rapids, Michigan, hereby filed, respectfully sheweth:

First, My place of residence is 302 Thomas St. Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Second, My occupation is Mill-lealer.

Third, I was born on the 23 day of August, anno Domini 1892, in Hallum, Netherlands.

Fourth, I emigrated to the United States from Rotterdam, Netherlands on or about the 2 day of July, anno Domini 1909, and arrived in the United States, at the port of New York, on the 13 day of July, anno Domini 1909, on the vessel Potsdam.

Fifth, I declared my intention to become a citizen of the United States on the 10 day of July, anno Domini 1909, at the Court of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Sixth, I am single. My wife's name is Kate, she was born on the 1st day of September, anno Domini 1890, and now resides at 302 Thomas St., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I have three children, and the name, date and place of birth, and place of residence of each of said children is as follows:

Edney, June 7-1914, Grand Rapids, Michigan.  
 Frederick, July 9-1917, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Both born and rearing at Grand Rapids, Mich.

I am not a disbeliever in or opposed to organized government or a member of or affiliated with any organization or body of persons teaching dissent in or opposed to organized government. I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy. I am attached to the principles of the Constitution of the United States, and it is my intention to become a citizen of the United States and to renounce absolutely and forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to Wilhelmina Queen of the Netherlands, of whom at this time I am a subject, and it is my intention to reside permanently in the United States.

Eight, I am able to speak the English language.

Ninth, I have resided continuously in the United States of America for the term of five years, or longer, immediately preceding the date of this petition, to wit, since the 13 day of July, anno Domini 1909, and in the State of MICHIGAN, continuously next preceding the date of \_\_\_\_\_

Six months after the intent to pursue citizenship was filed, the actual petition could be filed. At this time the Thomas Street Dairy, operated by Ralph and his brother Frank, was well established, one of about seventy such operations in the Grand Rapids. (Courtesy of Phil Ondersma)

Until the mid 1920s gaining United States citizenship was initiated at the county courthouse and began with the declaration of intent to officially renounce affiliation with one's former country. (Courtesy of Phil Ondersma)



*In the family enterprise, each brother operated his route independently. At the time there was no pasteurization and no homogenization, so the raw milk was poured directly from the cans into bottles which were capped and kept cold to prevent spoilage. Because the milk was not processed, spoiling occurred quickly and most people had milk delivered every other day. Courtesy of Jacob "Bick" Ondersma.*

*Money pouch used by Richard Ondersma, who also operated a milk route, buying the milk from his brothers Ralph and Frank. Later he went to work inside the dairy; his son Simon operated a route largely located in the wealthy East Grand Rapids neighborhoods. Just before Richard retired from the dairy in 1956, he dropped a milk case on his foot; he died a year later with the injury not fully healed. Courtesy of David M. Ondersma.*



*Ralph Ondersma with his milk wagon about 1915. Milk from Jersey cows had a higher cream content than that from Holstein-Frisians, and was therefore the preferred milk for homemakers. Today, with the emphasis on lower fat content in milk, the milk from Holstein-Frisians is preferred since they produce a larger volume of milk but with less butterfat content. Courtesy of Fred Ondersma.*





A wagon specifically designed for milk deliveries had a step-into driver's compartment that was much easier for the route man than the older carriage-style wagons that required climbing up in order to enter. The area in front of the driver area was waist high to facilitate sorting and assembling orders. The back of the wagon held the crates of milk loaded at the dairy that morning. Courtesy of Jacob "Bick" Ondersma.



Until the 1950s, the dairy picked up raw milk from farms in 10-gallon cans (weighing about 100 pounds each). Thomas Street Dairy bought some of its milk from John Poll, whose farm was south and east of Grand Rapids. An average dairy farm of the time produced four or five cans of milk per day. Courtesy of Fred Ondersma.



Each dairy had its own bottle design; initially pints and quarts were the preferred volumes. Before homogenization, the raw milk kept for perhaps two days, so smaller volumes were preferred. The long neck clearly showed the cream that had separated from the milk. Later half-gallon bottles became popular, but gallon-sized glass bottles tended to be too heavy for most costumers. Courtesy of David M. Ondersma).

Each driver's route was respected, but various advertising techniques were used to attract new business. Often the dairy would sponsor the advertising, since an increase in route sales meant increased demand for the dairy's products. Courtesy of Kees Van Nuis.



The Thomas Street Dairy seal reflects that the Ondersma brothers began their dairy in 1910. Courtesy of Kees Van Nuis.



Pint and quart bottles had bottle caps which were embossed with the bottling date. Any retrieved bottles not belonging to the dairy were sorted out and left for the Grand Rapids Milk Dealers' Association, which operated a bottle exchange for all member dairies. Courtesy of David M. Ondersma.



## THOMAS STREET DAIRY

Pasteurized Milk and Cream - "It's Pure"

Try a Bottle of Our Chocolate Milk

900 Thomas St., S. E.

Citizens 66491

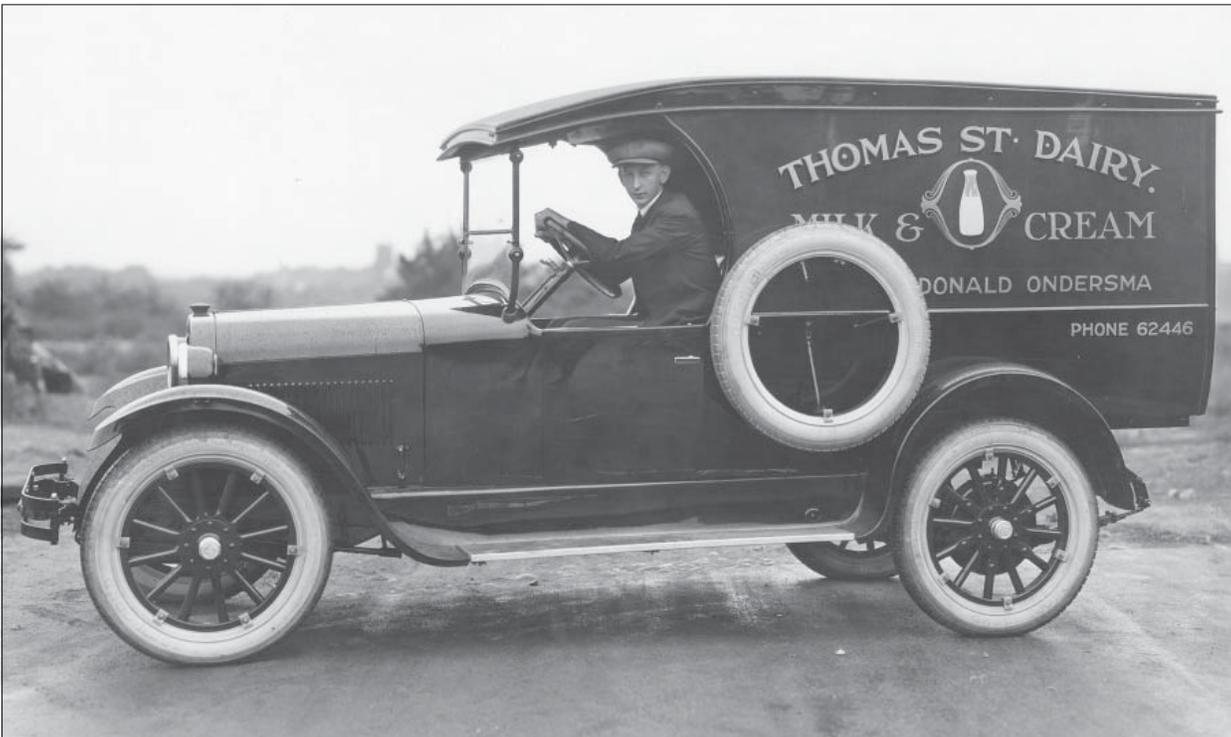




Shown here is a small galvanized milk can. Until the late 1950s, when bulk handling became common, raw milk was transported from the farms to the dairy in such cans, which were sanitized and reused. Galvanized metal did not rust and therefore was preferred. This can was probably a promotional item used by the dairy. Courtesy of Kees Van Nuis.

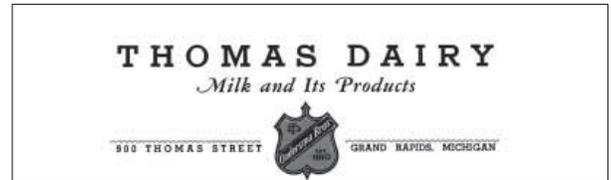


Lightweight metal wire baskets were used to carry the bottles from the street to the door. A basket with six quart bottles weighed almost twenty pounds, so saving weight in the basket was important; the wire design also made for easy cleaning. Courtesy of David M. Ondersma.



Very early on, the route men, who bought milk from a dairy but operated their own routes as a separate business, switched from horses to trucks that were indicative of progress, speed, and power. Donald Ondersma, here in an early delivery truck, was the youngest of the eleven children born to Siebren Ondersma and Anna Akkerhof-Ondersma Courtesy of Phil Ondersma.

By the 1950s the dairy was producing much more than milk.  
Courtesy of Kees Van Nuis.



As truck designs improved, the milk trucks also changed. This is Sydney Ondersma, oldest son of Ralph and Kate Jongsgma-Ondersma, with a panel truck. Sydney did not stay in the milk business, instead he liked vehicles so much that he opened an automobile service station and repair garage. Courtesy of Phil Ondersma (son of Sydney and Hanna Nieuwdorp Ondersma).



The back row, from this 1936 photo, includes the dairy owners: (l to r) Frank Sr., Bernie and Ralph Ondersma; the middle row is that of dairy workers: Mary (Ondersma) DenHouten, Martin Systma (married to Jetske [Jessie] Ondersma), Richard Ondersma, Fred Kruger (a route man and brother-in-law of Frank Sr.), Frank Ondersma Jr., Fred Ondersma, and "Beppe" Anna Akkerhof-Ondersma; and the front row is that of route men: Stewart Groenhout, Sidney Ondersma, Simon Ondersma, Adrian Folkertsma, Jack Mulder and Walter Wybenga. Twelve of the sixteen people pictured were related by blood or marriage. Courtesy of Kees Van Nuis.



Advertising capitalizing on ethnic stereotypes can be very effective. The route men also delivered pint bottles to local factories and schools, where chocolate milk was the most popular. Since Calvin College had a dormitory in the Thomas Street Dairy marketing area, perhaps its dorm is the one referred to on this card. The dairy's syrup for chocolate milk was cooked by Anne on her kitchen stove. Courtesy of Kees Van Nuis.



During World War II, with gasoline rationing, the dairy switched back from mechanized horsepower to horse flesh. Horses were shod about every third week at Ebling's Blacksmith Shop, just a few blocks from the dairy. The horses were housed in a barn adjacent to the dairy. This photo was taken on Wealthy Street, with Fred Ondersma giving a treat to Charlie. Courtesy of Jacob "Bick" Ondersma.



A galvanized milk crate, used to move bottles within the dairy and from the dairy to the delivery wagons. Courtesy of David M. Ondersma.



Bert, the second youngest of the Ondersma clan, left the family business to open his own— Bert's Dairy on Kalamazoo Avenue SE, in Grand Rapids. He later sold the business to Bekkering Brothers Boston Square Dairy, which was later sold to Pure Milk Dairy. Courtesy of David M. Ondersma.

## Origins

Henry Katerberg gets ready to leave the dairy for his route in November 1946. Since most men had two separate routes each week, the horses soon learned the differing routes. To avoid Sunday deliveries, often both routes were delivered on Saturday. The horse got to know each such delivery permutation. Courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections Center, Archives, Grand Rapids (Michigan) Public Library.



Once World War II ended the dairy did not immediately switch back to trucks, which were still in short supply for a few years as the manufacturers converted from war production. Further, the horses had learned the routes and walked along without the driver. Charlie, here pictured in 1946, would walk to the end of a dead-end street, turn around and wait at the first stop on the other side of the street as the driver delivered the milk. Courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections Center, Archives, Grand Rapids (Michigan) Public Library.

*Gaining a new city resident as a customer was worth \$1.00 to the dairy; it was paid as a referral bonus to any dairy outside of Grand Rapids. Courtesy of Phil Ondersma*

**THE FOLLOWING CUSTOMER IS MOVING TO GRAND RAPIDS:**

Name of Customer \_\_\_\_\_  
 Moved From \_\_\_\_\_  
 Amount of Account (Will be Reimbursed without Charge) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date Moved \_\_\_\_\_  
 New Address in Grand Rapids \_\_\_\_\_  
 They Buy Golden Guernsey  They Buy Other Milk or Products

(From) Dairy \_\_\_\_\_  
 (From) City \_\_\_\_\_  
 (From) Routeman \_\_\_\_\_

Thomas Dairy Farms will send \$1.00 upon receipt of Customer.  
 Please Rush this card—or—wire collect.  
 We pledge ourselves to send all transfers to You!



*Fred Ondersma poses with Charlie. Charlie knew his route so well that he even knew stops that were added only to the Saturday route. On his own he turned to make the last delivery that was only on the Saturday schedule, while briefly looking the other way down the street to the dairy and barn. Charlie was also adept at drinking from a garden hose; when thirsty he was known to simply stop in front of any house where someone was watering the lawn or washing a car. Courtesy of Fred Ondersma.*

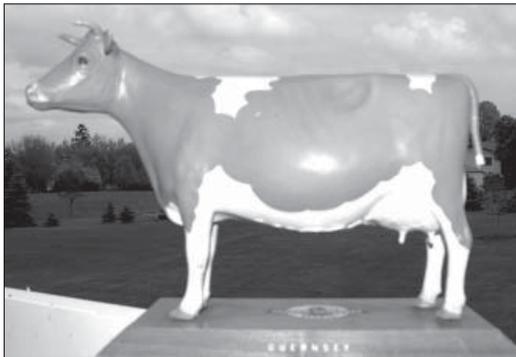


*As technology changed, the dairy upgraded with new equipment. During the 1940s a new type of competitor came on the scene—the supermarket. Courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections Center, Archives, Grand Rapids (Michigan) Public Library.*



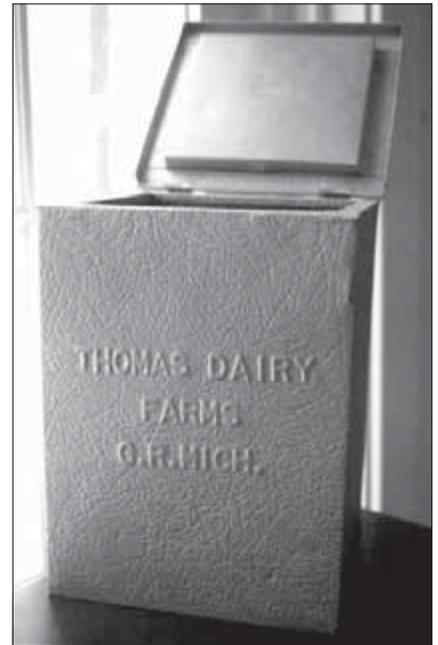
*With homogenization, as seen from the Thomas Dairy operation in 1946, milk and cream no longer separated; along with the earlier pasteurization, it extended the shelf-life of bottled milk. Courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections Center, Archives, Grand Rapids (Michigan) Public Library.*

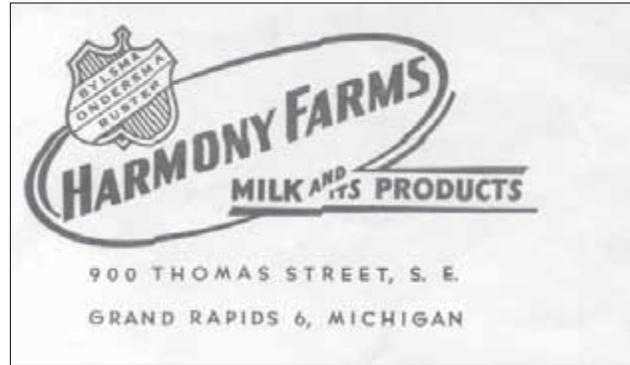
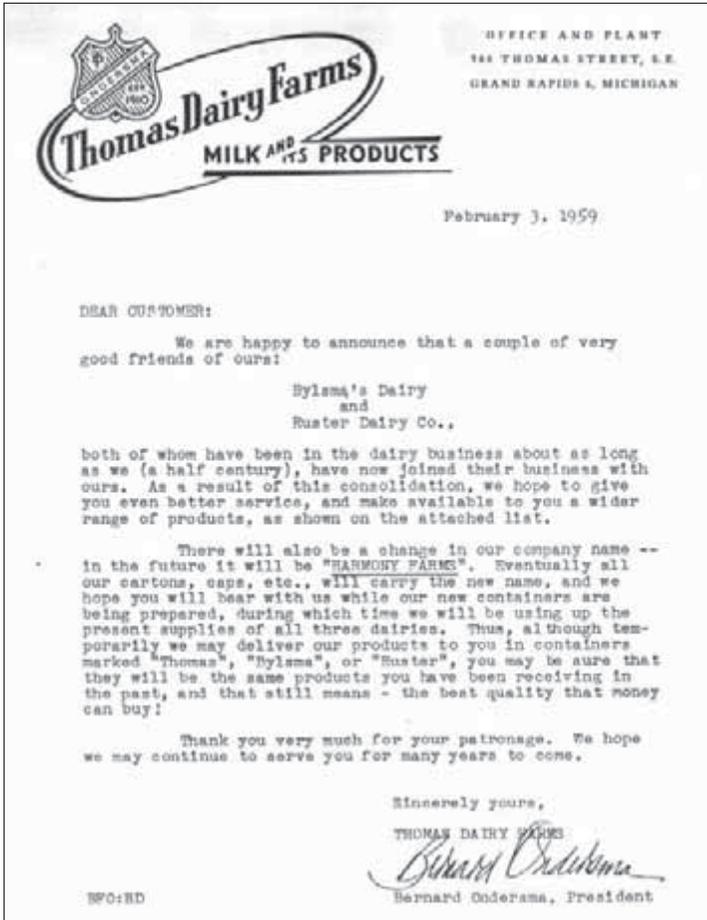
*Fred Ondersma is shown here with Charlie. Other horses in the Thomas Street Dairy stable were Rock, King, Jack, Dick, Plunka, Dolly, Jim, and Red. Jim, at twenty-four, the oldest in the stable, supposedly knew all the dairy's thirty-two routes in 1950. Fred Ondersma, thirty-three in this 1950 photo, began working in the dairy as a bottle washer when he was sixteen, although he had been "lending a hand" since he was ten. Courtesy of Fred Ondersma.*



*This plastic Guernsey cow that probably stood on an office desk was saved after the dairy closed. Courtesy of Kees Van Nuis.*

*Since delivery began early in the morning and because patrons were not always home, an insulated box for home delivery kept milk cool in summer and protected it from freezing in the winter before the homeowner could retrieve the milk. Courtesy of David M. Ondersma.*





As the emblem from the new Harmony Farm Dairy in 1959 notes, it was the result of the merger of three family names prominent in Grand Rapids area dairy business. The shield, address, and plant were those of the former Thomas Street Dairy. About ten years after the merger Harmony Farms was sold to Joppe's Dairy, which closed a few years later. Courtesy of Phil Ondersma.



During the 1950s and 1960s, due to pressure from supermarkets selling milk at or below cost (three half-gallons for one dollar was a frequent price), the dairies in Grand Rapids began to consolidate. By the late 1970s there were two bottling plants remaining in Grand Rapids—during the 1930s there had been more than seventy. Courtesy of Phil Ondersma.

With many faithful customers, Fred also delivered eggs, orange juice, and ice cream along with milk at various times in his fifty-year career in the milk business. At times he did more than just deliver milk, including picking up groceries for an ill customer. One Grand Rapids milkman wrote letters for a customer, others rushed pregnant women to hospitals, reported fires, and frequently were asked to arbitrate family disputes. Courtesy of Fred Ondersma.



In 1952 Fred left the family business and bought his own dairy, as his uncle Bert had done about a decade earlier. Quickly he realized that processing his own milk was more expensive than buying milk from another dairy. He closed his bottling operation but continued the route as Star Dairy until retiring. Courtesy of Fred Ondersma.



Horses stopped being used in the early 1950s. But Fred, seen here in 1978, continued delivering by truck until 1979. This step-in van by Divco (Detroit Industrial Vehicle Company) was specifically designed for delivery service. This milk delivery vehicle was refrigerated. Courtesy of Fred Ondersma.



Owned by Bert Star, the Star Dairy was located at 900 Leffingwell on the city's northeast side. Fred Ondersma bought it in June 1952. After closing the bottling operation, less than a year later, he bought milk from other dairies, first Ruster; then Pure Milk, then United from Holland, Michigan, and finally Quality Dairy, to whom he sold his business in 1979. Courtesy of David M. Ondersma.



Customer service was part of the always an important factor in the home delivery of milk. Jeanette Lathrop, in 1978, had been a steady customer for six years, and at that time Fred had one family to whom he had been delivering milk for thirty years. His Dutch roots helped Fred translate one customer's instruction "Pleeze een vles not wed maar tuus not 2 maar one" to "deliver one quart on Tuesday, rather than the usual two quarts on Wednesday." Courtesy of Fred Ondersma.



At the end of his career, in 1979, Fred had four hundred customers on his route across the entire southern metropolitan Grand Rapids area—from East Grand Rapids to Jension. The last of three generations involved in the business, he typically worked four days a week, compared to six when he began in the business, but one work day could be as much as fourteen hours long. Courtesy of Fred Ondersma.

#### Endnotes

1. "Genealogy of the Descendants of Rienk Ondersma for Seven Generations," 1971.
2. Dwight Jarrel, "Charlie and Old Friends Surrounded by Auto Age," *Grand Rapids Herald*, 21 May 1950: 38.
3. Fred Ondersma, oral interview
4. Pat Shellenbarger, "Milkmen deliver

memories," *Grand Rapids Press*, 1 Jul 2002: J2.

5. Smith, Bruce, "A History of the Dairy Business in the Grand Rapids Area 50 Years (1938-1988)."

6. Ronald Tardy, "Job calls forth the cream of the crop," *Grand Rapids Press-Southwest* 28 November 1978: 1.

# History of the New York Bank Street CRC

William Nawyn

The first Christian Reformed Church (CRC) presence in the United States' largest city, New York, began in lower Manhattan, from 1890 to 1908 and again from 1924 to 1934. This church was founded in 1823 as part of the True Reformed Dutch Church (TRDC).<sup>1</sup> It became part of the CRC reluctantly in 1890 and out of desperation in 1924. During its 111 years the church at times prospered and experienced growth but more often lost members and struggled to continue. Through it all it remained

true to the Reformed faith and fought to retain its own TRDC heritage.

The TRDC was founded in 1822 as a secession from the Reformed Church in America (RCA), known as the Dutch Reformed Church until 1867. During the years 1821 to 1825 a number of congregations broke away from the RCA claiming that it "had lost its soundness of doctrine and had become deeply tainted with error."<sup>2</sup> The new church was organized under the leadership of Reverend Solomon Froeligh, minister in Schraalenburg,

New Jersey. After a few months the new denomination was divided into two classes: Hackensack (primarily in New Jersey) and Union (primarily in upstate New York). Initially, Hackensack consisted of seven congregations; Union, of ten.<sup>3</sup>

On 6 March 1823, sixty persons living in New York City (NYC), half of whom were women, wrote Rev. Froeligh, requesting the committee in charge of organizing the churches of Classis Hackensack to aid them in establish-



The Bank Street CRC building is in the center of the image. Photo courtesy of Archives, Calvin College.

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*A drawing of New York's Broadway Avenue during the 1850s, when the Bank Street congregation seemed to be prospering. Image courtesy of Archives, Calvin College.*

ing a new church. Rev. Froeligh met with the group on 1 September in a rented room located in the Village Academy on Dominick Street in lower Manhattan. At this time he formally constituted them into a congregation, after which the members elected elders and deacons and decided to call their new church the True Reformed Dutch Church of New York, the first and only TRDC congregation in New York City.<sup>4</sup>

On 29 September Rev. Froeligh returned to preach a sermon to the congregation, ordain the members of the consistory and administer the Lord's Supper. The congregation soon began to turn its attention to obtaining a minister. On 4 January 1824 it tendered a call to Rev. Cornelius T. Demarest, pastor of the English Neighborhood, NJ, congregation, for a salary of \$700 per year. Although he began his ministry at the church on 1 February he did not officially accept the call until 25 May and was not installed until 15 August by Rev. Froeligh.<sup>5</sup>

Soon thereafter, finding the room on Dominick Street to be too small,

the church rented what it referred to as "the upper room" on Spring Street. But less than a year later, as new members were added, the congregation decided that it needed a church building. After briefly considering purchasing a nearby Presbyterian church for \$10,000, the consistory in October 1825 purchased three lots (totaling 66 x 75 feet) on the north side of King Street, only three blocks north of the "upper room" on Spring Street.<sup>6</sup> Construction of the new building began in September and, on 16 April 1826, the congregation dedicated its new home, with Froeligh preaching the sermon. The lots and the building together cost the church \$11,550.<sup>7</sup>

Demarest served the NYC TRDC until 1839. The church prospered under his leadership. Membership increased continually during his tenure; some 300 members were added.<sup>8</sup> Demarest left the New York congregation in 1839 and was succeeded by Rev. Samuel Westervelt on 17 January 1840. Westervelt remained until 1851, when he received and accepted a call from a Presbyterian church. Fifty-eight members were added to

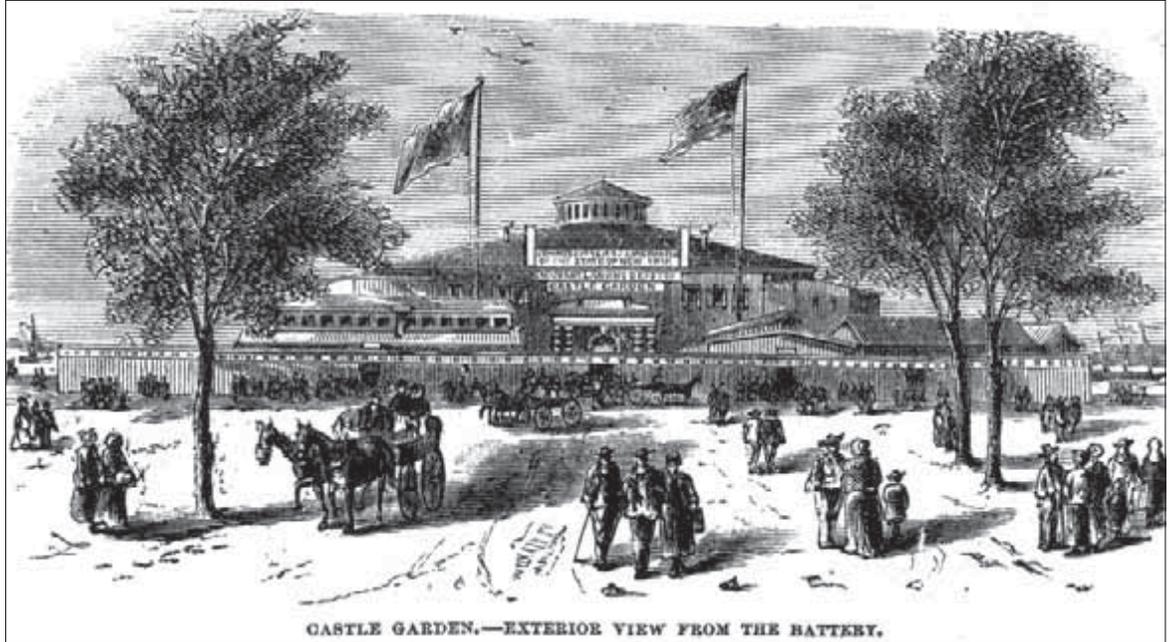
the congregation during his pastorate. Following Westervelt's departure, the congregation turned again to their former pastor, Rev. Demarest, extending a call to him for a second time on 10 July 1851. Although he did not officially accept the call until April 1852, he began to serve the church again in September 1851 as "pulpit supply."<sup>9</sup> He served the congregation until he passed away on 26 December 1862. His later years were marred by a controversy in 1860 over whether the precentor could stand in the balcony instead of on the main floor when leading the congregation. The dispute led to the near resignation of Demarest and also, apparently, to some members leaving the church.<sup>10</sup>

After Demarest's death the church experienced its first extended period without a pastor. Not until 1866 did it succeed in obtaining another pastor. During these years Classis Hackensack periodically provided ministers to the church to preach and administer the sacraments (pulpit supply), but this arrangement did not serve the congregation as well as having its own pastor. This period saw changes in the neighborhood in which the church was located, resulting in most of the members moving away from the church, northward, and many to the suburbs, and consequently to considerable loss of membership. This loss of membership and growing expenses for the building's needs and extensive repairs placed a financial burden on the dwindling congregation. Further, rising real estate values meant the building could be sold for more than it had cost the congregation forty years earlier, leading to a decision on 5 April 1865 to sell the building, even before another building had been acquired. A church committee reported on 5 February 1866 that it was able to sell the church and property for \$19,750.

Proceeds from the sale were used to purchase property for another

building.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the congregation met for almost a year in a hall located fairly close by, at 206 8th Avenue. On 17 February 1866 the congregation voted to buy property further north, at 4th Avenue and Perry Street, in the heart of Greenwich Village, and to proceed with construction of another building, which took approximately a year.<sup>12</sup>

The new structure, which consisted of an auditorium on the main floor and a basement containing rooms for holding prayer meetings and other activities, was dedicated on 10 February 1867. In the front wall over the entrance was a brownstone with the

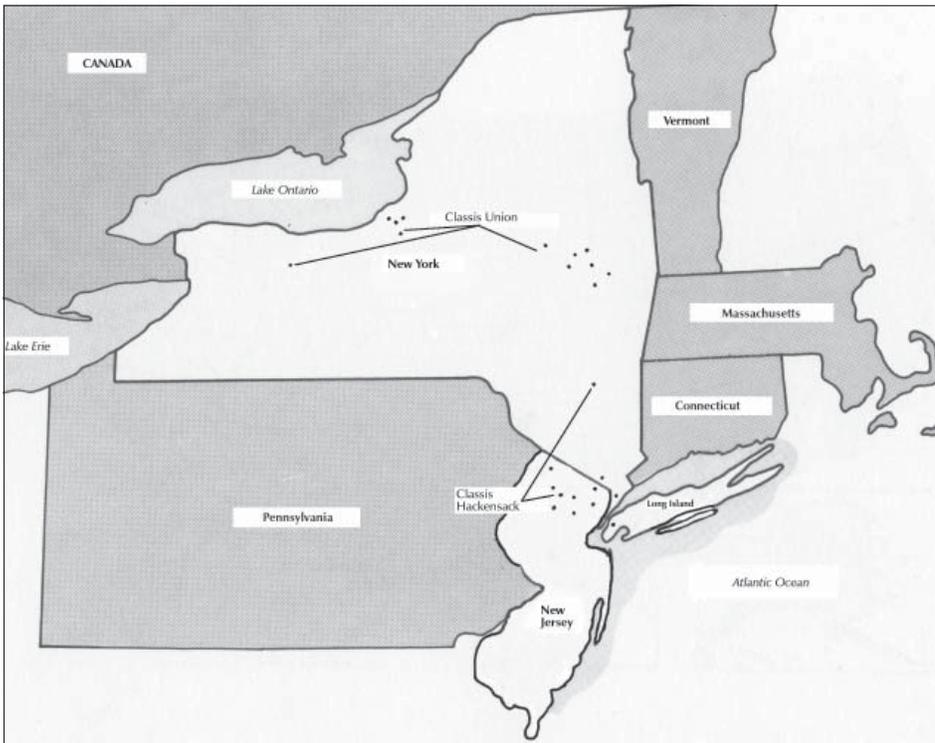


Although the ethnic roots of the church's membership was colonial Dutch, they had no outreach effort to Dutch immigrants who arrived via Castle Garden, the point of entry for immigrants into the United States, until Ellis Island was opened in 1892. Image courtesy of Archives, Calvin College.

inscription, the same as that used on the King Street building, which ended with the admonition to “Earnestly contend for the faith which was onced [sic] delivered unto the saints.”<sup>13</sup> The

cost of the property, building, and furnishings came to approximately \$40,000, which left the small congregation with a sizable debt of about \$20,000. But generous contributions from church members and the sale of pews for \$100 to \$450 pared the debt in half. As a result, the congregation took out a mortgage for \$10,000 on the property.<sup>14</sup>

While all this was going on, the church continued to seek a new pastor. On 8 December 1865 the congregation voted to call Rev. Abraham H. Van Houten of Schraalenburg, NJ. He accepted the call and was installed on 15 May 1866. Only thirty-six years old, he was in the prime of life. His new charge had its discouraging aspects, particularly the dwindling membership, but it also contained challenges, given the new building and location. He began with enthusiasm and energy as well as with new ideas.<sup>15</sup> Soon after he arrived he organized a Sunday school which met before the morning service. An abbreviated form of the Heidelberg Catechism was used for the instruc-



The True Dutch Reformed Church originally consisted of two classes, Hackensack and Union, located in three pockets in New York and New Jersey,

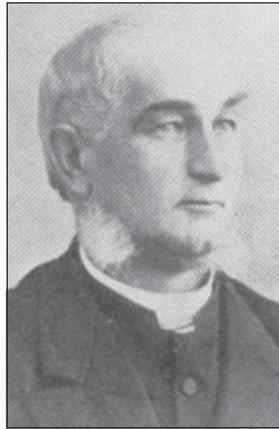
tion of the younger children. He began and taught a Bible class for young men and women, employing the Heidelberg Catechism as well as the Bible for study materials. The Sunday school proved to be very successful and sister TRDC churches soon began to follow suit in establishing Sunday schools.<sup>16</sup> In 1875 he persuaded the congregation to purchase a portable pipe organ for the church and to use the organ and a small choir to lead the congregational singing, thus bringing an end to the era of the precentor. Again, other TRDC churches followed the example of the New York church and soon began using instrumental music.<sup>17</sup> Under Rev. Van Houten the church began to grow again. At least 43 new members were added during his tenure. The church grew to 160 enrolled members, but attendance at worship services averaged 350.<sup>18</sup>

Van Houten served New York TRDC for twelve years. Among his reasons for resigning on 14 February 1878 was that he did not want to “be a burden to the congregation,” given its financial problems. On 7 July 1880 the congregation extended a call to John A. Westervelt, then a candidate for the ministry. Westervelt passed his classical exam on 19 October and was duly installed on 14 November by Rev. John Y. De Baun.<sup>19</sup>

The congregation at first prospered under Westervelt. By 1882 membership reached two hundred souls. But in April 1883 the minister expressed concern about the spiritual condition of the congregation. By May 1884 membership had slipped a bit to 178 and by November 1887 the church again was experiencing financial difficulties and also apparently some problems in the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. In September questions raised about him remaining were answered when the congregation voted to confirm his call to the church. However, on 30 July of

the following year, Westervelt petitioned Classis Hackensack to dissolve his relationship with the congregation. Classis acceded to his request and his service with the New York church came to an end in August 1888.<sup>20</sup>

In 1890 the congregation extended a call to Reverend John Y. De Baun, a former TRDC pastor who had become the pastor of the LaGrave Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. De Baun declined the call. Fraternal relations between the TRDC and CRC had begun as early as 1860, when Classis Hackensack received its first correspondence from that denomina-



*Rev. John Yeury De Baun (1827-1895). Photo courtesy of Archives, Calvin College.*

tion since members of the CRC had become acquainted with the TRDC as they moved westward from New York when immigrating. The TRDC was attracted to the CRC because of its staunch conservative Reformed theology. In 1871 the TRDC agreed that the two denominations were similar in doctrine and indicated some interest in union. The process toward union was slow and halting. Beginning in 1879 the talks concerning union took place between Classis Hackensack and the new Classis Hudson of the CRC. Negotiations became more serious in 1885 and 1886 and consummation finally came in 1890.<sup>21</sup>

The union, however, was condi-

tional as far as members of Classis Hackensack were concerned. It provided there would be no interference with the internal church government of Classis Hackensack by the CRC and Classis Hackensack would not lose its corporate name. At the time of union, the TRDC was small; it had only thirteen congregations, approximately 600 families (one-third of whom were in two of its churches), and six ministers.<sup>22</sup>

The New York congregation was not much in favor of union with the CRC. In March 1886 the New York church sent Classis a resolution that it was not in favor of going any farther toward union, a position reiterated on 12 April 1889.<sup>23</sup> On 21 March 1890 the congregation instructed its delegate to the meeting of Classis at which the decision would be made to vote against union, but four days later voted to rescind the motion and replace it with another which told its delegate to vote for tabling the motion. On 8 April the congregation passed yet another resolution, this one giving its “assent and approval” to the union with four conditions: 1) that Classis keep its corporate name, 2) that TRDC churches retain their corporate name, 3) that the rules of the Classis Hackensack churches in regards to baptism not be interfered with, and 4) that the Classis churches will be “entitled to such representation in the Classis and Synod as are now enjoyed by them.” The resolution went on to say that should these conditions not be received by Classis, the delegate “shall vote in the negative or affirmative as circumstances may present.”<sup>24</sup> The final vote was 10-7 in favor of union, but neither Ramsey, NJ, nor Mariaville, NY, had sent delegates, so the final vote might have been even closer.<sup>25</sup>

After the decision on union, the congregation returned to finding a pastor. During this period both Classis

Hackensack and Classis Hudson of the Holland CRC supplied New York with pastors. But the membership decline continued. In November 1891 the congregation called Rev. Harvey Iserman, of the Leonia, NJ, TRDC. He accepted the call and was installed on 3 February 1892.<sup>26</sup> But once again some of its members were moving up-town or to the suburbs. The result was more financial problems and concern over the \$10,000 mortgage which the church still carried.<sup>27</sup>

Rev. Iserman had some sixty members and less than one hundred attendees as he began his pastorate. Since the building on 4th Avenue and Perry Street was now too large for the congregation and needed repairs the remaining members could not afford to undertake and the mortgage remained at \$10,000, a new proposal was adopted by the congregation to sell the property and find a more modest building at a better location.<sup>28</sup> In February 1893 the congregation approved the sale for \$40,250, an amount approximately equal to what it had cost the congregation originally. The proceeds were used to pay off the mortgage and buy a house at 21 Bank Street, two blocks north, for \$18,250. Alterations and repairs to the new property based on plans drawn by Iserman himself cost approximately \$10,000.<sup>29</sup>

The congregation dedicated “one of the most interesting houses of worship in New York” on 29 October 1893.<sup>30</sup> It served as both church and parsonage. The auditorium was on the first floor while a basement room served as a lecture room and a place for the Sunday school classes and a small kitchen for social occasions. Floors two and three functioned as a parsonage with nine large rooms and “all the equipment of the most modern home.” The auditorium was entered through “massive oaken doors” reached by climbing a number of brownstone

steps with brass handrails. A large stained glass window was in the wall above the entrance.<sup>31</sup> The auditorium was small, only 60 feet long and 22 feet wide, accommodating 150 people. A prominent member of the church described the interior as follows: “A large stained glass window illuminates the rear of the chapel. Another stained glass window . . . illumines the front part of the chapel. . . . To the right of the speaker’s desk is a neat little semi-circular compartment for the choir with curtains upon a brass rod. It is just large enough to accommodate four persons with a miniature pipe organ. . . . The auditorium . . . is tastefully fitted up and very church-like in character. . . . A religious inscription on the wall over the pulpit reads, ‘The Entrance of Thy Word Giveth Light.’ ”<sup>32</sup>

During the early part of Iserman’s tenure a few new members were added to the church, but membership again declined beginning in 1896. In April 1898 Iserman accepted a call to the Paramus, NJ, CRC, (also formerly a TRDC church) which had sought him since 1896.<sup>33</sup>

In November 1898 the church secured the services of Reverend Samuel Vander Beek, then pastor of the LaGrave Avenue CRC in Grand



*Rev. Samuel I. VanderBeek (1848-1924) received his theological training from Rev. John De Baum.*

Rapids. He arrived in April 1899, but he was never formally installed. Instead, the consistory agreed to pay him \$6.25 per Sunday. He continued on this basis until October 1901 when, at his request, he received a certificate of dismissal. The consistory had decided that the church was “not in a condition to warrant our calling a pastor at present.”<sup>34</sup>

The church now entered a long vacancy that lasted until 1909. Membership continued to decline, to four families in 1908. With this decline came increasing financial problems. In 1905 the church had to resort to borrowing \$3,000 from one of its own members, Dr. DeWitt Romaine, apparently for building upkeep and repairs. Nevertheless, the dwindling congregation refused to give up hope. In April 1908 a congregational meeting was held because of “our discouraged conditions” and to seek advice from a committee of three ministers appointed by Classis Hackensack. In November the consistory met with another classical committee to discuss the “low state” of the church, but no solution was found.<sup>35</sup>

By this time, however, the New York church was no longer part of the CRC, since on 2 June 1908 most of the congregations in Classis Hackensack had voted to withdraw from the CRC. Almost from the beginning there had been some discontent in Classis Hackensack concerning the union of 1890. By 1908 charges were afloat in the classis that the CRC had violated the first condition of non-interference with the internal church government of the classis. The classis also objected to the criticism of the classis coming from the CRC for admitting members of “secret organizations” to its churches. It charged that this criticism had caused some churches to leave the classis. The upshot was that on 2 June Classis Hackensack met to ascertain the response of the churches

and take a vote on the issue. The report it received was that seven of the ten remaining churches had voted to withdraw from the CRC. The classis thereupon adopted, by a vote of 9-6 (the vote was by delegate rather than by church) a resolution to discontinue relations with the CRC and resume its former corporate name: The True Reformed Dutch Church. Three dissenting congregations—Englewood, Passaic, and Paterson, all in New Jersey—elected to remain as Classis Hackensack of the CRC.<sup>36</sup>

New York's members had voted unanimously to withdraw, stating that it was due "to the great dissatisfaction existing between us." In January 1909 the congregation considered selling the church property, but nothing



*Rev. John Calvin Voorhis (1843-1922) was a fellow student of VanderBeek with Rev. De Baun. Both VanderBeek and Voorhis were ordained in 1875. Photo courtesy of Archives, Calvin College.*

came of that. Finally, in May 1909 the church was able to engage another pastor, the Rev. John C. Voorhis, as a permanent pulpit supply. He was a veteran pastor (ordained in 1875) from Monsey, NY, TRDC. He was never formally installed as its pastor, but he remained there for thirteen years, until his death in October 1922 at the age of seventy-nine. He was highly

respected for both his ministerial and personal character.

Both membership and finances apparently recovered to some extent in the decade after 1909. Membership rose to about twenty persons. In 1912 the congregation decided it had to improve its financial condition "so as to meet the expenses incident to the maintenance of the church." Subsequently, several members offered to increase their contributions to the church and Dr. Romaine agreed to forego interest on the loan he had made to the church. As a result the church enjoyed small financial surpluses at least through 1914. In 1915 and again in 1916 interested parties indicated a desire to purchase the church's property, but the tiny congregation refused to sell. In 1919 the congregation borrowed \$6,000 from Rev. Voorhis without interest for six years. By 1921, apparently in order to get more income, the New York consistory rented out the basement of the church.<sup>37</sup>

Classis Hackensack of the TRDC recognized the increasingly precarious condition of the New York church. Consequently, in 1921 its board of trustees urged the church to transfer its property to the classis. On 10 November of that year the congregation agreed to this proposal and on 20 December formally approved the "sale" to Classis for \$1.00.<sup>38</sup> But by this time Classis had its own problems. Since the separation from the CRC in 1908, four churches had left the classis. In 1921 only three struggling churches (New York City, Leonia, NJ, and Monsey, NY) and two ministers were left. All three congregations had deeded their property to the classis.<sup>39</sup>

In October 1922 Rev. Voorhis passed away, leaving New York again without a pastor. The following month the Board of Trustees of Classis Hackensack voted to engage Rev. Samuel I. Vander Beek, who had served the New

York and Leonia churches on alternate Sundays. The Board, however, completely suspended services at New York for the summer of 1923. Given this situation, the New York consistory accepted a proposal from the ministers of the nearby Englewood and Passaic, NJ, CRC (and former TRDC) churches to hold "services of a mission character" in the Bank Street edifice for the three summer months. Vander Beek resumed preaching in the fall and continued to serve New York until January 1924, at which time health problems forced him to retire. He passed away in August 1924.<sup>40</sup>

At this point the Eastern Home Missions Board of the CRC offered to provide New York, as well as the two other remaining TRDC churches, with pulpit supplies for the rest of 1924. This decision incidentally gave the members of these churches exposure to CRC preaching. They were pleased and satisfied with what they heard. But this temporary solution could not go on indefinitely.<sup>41</sup> The death of Vander Beek meant that the Classis Hackensack of the TRDC was now without any pastor and therefore, under the rules of the TRDC requiring at least one minister and two elders to constitute a classis, could no longer exist. The six-man Board of Trustees was, however, still legally qualified to carry on business. It now fell to the board, which had recognized the precarious condition of Classis Hackensack, to make provision for the future.<sup>42</sup> Meeting at the New York church on 21 October 1924, the board decided that it would be necessary "to consider and affect a union with some other live and active religious body who will maintain and perpetuate the same old truths our departed ministers taught and preached." That religious body, it determined, would be the CRC and it immediately authorized the board's secretary to arrange a conference with representatives of the

CRC which might lead to an organic union.<sup>43</sup> Quickly following the conference requesting union, the requisite signatures were obtained. The signed document was submitted to Classis Hackensack of the CRC in late November.<sup>44</sup>

Less than three weeks later, on 10 December, Classis Hackensack of the CRC held a special session at the New York church to consider the proposition for organic union from the Board of Trustees. After satisfactorily addressing concerns expressed by the board, classis responded favorably to the petition and unanimously admitted the three TRDC congregations as members of Classis Hackensack of the CRC. Classis responded affirmatively and appointed a committee consisting of three persons each from Classis Hackensack and the Board of Trustees to “effect and complete” the transfer of the three church properties.<sup>45</sup> The legal conveyance of the properties of the three churches to the Eastern Home Missions Board of the CRC was completed by 19 February 1925.<sup>46</sup>

So in early 1925 the New York church found itself again part of the CRC. Membership continued to decline. At that time the church had only thirteen members. During the next decade membership varied from ten to fifteen, most of whom were elderly. It received a few new members during this time, but some existing mem-

bers transferred to other nearby CRC churches. In November 1926 even through the congregation optimistically decided that it would begin to pay denominational assessments, it was not able to pay its own pastor. Instead, the CRC provided ministers.<sup>47</sup> The congregation refused to give up. Indeed, it remained hopeful that it could again grow. In early 1927 the clerk of the church expressed confidence that “God will help us to enlarge our little church, and we hope to have with His help some day a good-sized Christian Reformed Church in the largest city of our great country.”<sup>48</sup>

But it was not to be. The first crisis came in 1929 when Classis Hackensack appointed a committee to study of the Bank Street situation. The committee met with two representatives of the church and thoroughly discussed the advisability of continuing preaching services in the New York church. The two men representing the church “earnestly pleaded for and fervently contended for continuation of preaching services.” The classical committee finally agreed that it would recommend to Classis that the services be continued “as regularly as circumstances would permit.” Classis agreed and the New York church was spared—at least for the time being.<sup>49</sup> Classis continued to provide ministers weekly for its pulpit until late 1932, at which time it reduced the pulpit supplies to alter-

nate Sundays. However, in the fall of 1933 Rev. John A. Westervelt, who had served the New York church from 1880 to 1888 and stayed in the CRC in 1908 and now an emeritus minister, agreed to preach for the church on the alternate Sundays. Classis gave its consent to this arrangement, which continued on into the fall of 1934. By this time the church consisted of only three families, four professing members and a total of ten members.<sup>50</sup>

The end of the New York CRC came in October 1934. Earlier in the fall a committee of the Eastern Home Missions Board of the CRC, owner of the Bank Street property, reported that it had rented out the church building for other purposes and that religious services in the building would be discontinued. The last religious service was held on 7 October with Rev. Westervelt officiating.<sup>51</sup>

A year and a half after the demise of the New York church, on 24 April 1936, the Eastern Home Missions Board sold its former home at 21 Bank Street. Dr. Romaine was instrumental in its sale. Part of the sale agreement was that the large memorial window encased in the front wall of the building and that had been donated to the church by Dr. Romaine would be removed from the building and returned to the Eastern Home Missions Board.<sup>52</sup> Not until the 1950s, would the CRC open another ministry in New York City. ☞

## Endnotes

1. At times the word "Protestant" was added between "Reformed" and "Dutch"—hence True Reformed Protestant Dutch Church.
2. "Brief History of the True Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, New York City," NY Bank Street Church Records, anonymous handwritten manuscript, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Hereafter cited as History. The document was most likely written by Dr. C. De Witt Romaine, a member and prominent leader of this congregation in its last years. Heritage Hall has the difficult-to-read original handwritten history as well as a typewritten copy of the document. All page citations are from the original copy.
3. Henry Spoelhof, "A Brief History of Classis Hackensack," Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, hereafter cited as Brief History, pp. 11-12.
4. New York True Reformed Dutch Church Minutes, Heritage Hall, hereafter cited as NY TRDC Minutes, Book I, pp. 1-3; History, p. 3.
5. NY TRDC Minutes, Book I, pp. 3-8.
6. Spring Street and King Street are both on the west side of lower Manhattan, only a few blocks from the Hudson River, approximately two miles north of the Battery, the southernmost point of Manhattan Island. These lots once were owned by Alexander Hamilton.
7. NY TRDC Minutes, Book I, pp. 15, 16, 18, 19, and 27.
8. History, p. 8.
9. NY TRDC Minutes, Book I, pp. 119, 134; History, p. 8.
10. NY TRDC Minutes, Book I, pp. 262-269.
11. NY TRDC Minutes, Book I, p. 289; Brief History, p. 9.
12. NY TRDC Minutes, Book I, pp. 289, 294; Brief History, pp. 10, 11.
13. History, p. 11.
14. Ibid.
15. History, p. 12.
16. Ibid, p. 13.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid, p. 14.
19. NY TRDC Minutes, Book II, pp. 76-77, 81.
20. History, p. 14; NY TRDC Minutes, Book II, pp. 91, 98-99, 105, 131-134, 136, 141.
21. NY TRDC Minutes, Book II, pp. 76, 161-163, 166; Brief History, pp. 16-18; Classis Hackensack, True Reformed Dutch Church Minutes, hereafter cited as Classis Hackensack (TRDC) Minutes, Vol. II (1862-1894), pp. 67-8, 72, 90, 133, 172, 228, 259, 270, 323, 333, 337-339, 354, 363-363.
22. History, pp. 19-20; Classis Hackensack (TRDC) Minutes, Vol. II, pp. 362-363; Brief History, p. 21; CRC *Yearbook*, 1891, p. 28.
23. NY TRDC Minutes, Book II, pp. 46, 117, 144.
24. NY TRDC, Minutes, Book II, pp. 155, 156, 158-159.
25. According to the TRDC church order every minister had one vote and each congregation could send one voting elder to classis. The total voting pool from the thirteen churches and six ministers, therefore, was nineteen. The motion would still have carried by a small margin had the missing elders voted against the motion.
26. NY TRDC Minutes, Book II, pp. 161-163, 166, 188-189, 193.
27. NY TRDC Minutes, Book II, p. 165; Brief History, p. 16.
28. NY TRDC Minutes, Book II, pp. 208-213; Brief History, pp. 16-17.
29. NY TRDC Minutes, Book II, pp. 218-219, 233-237; Brief History, p. 17.
30. The building had formerly housed the 10th Assembly District Democratic Club, also known as the "Knickerbocker Democratic Club," Walter Aardsma Collection, "Classis Union," Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.
31. History, p. 17. For a view of the front of the Bank Street building as it appeared in 1927, see "New York City Christian Reformed Church," *The Banner*, 7 January 1927, p. 13.
32. History, p. 19.
33. NY TRDC Minutes, Book II, pp. 256-257, 266, 268, 282. The CRC *Yearbook* listed a membership of thirty-three families in 1893, forty in 1894 and 1895, but only twenty-four, nineteen, and twenty for 1896, 1897, and 1898 respectively.
34. History, p. 24; NY TRDC Minutes, Book II, pp. 291, 306, 313.
35. E. Bartson, "An Explanation," *The Banner of Truth*, 6 February 1908; NY TRDC Minutes, Book II, pp. 372-373, 378, 381-382; Brief History, p. 24.
36. Classis Hackensack (TRDC) Minutes, Vol. IV, pp. 90-91; Brief History, pp. 22-23.
37. New York TRDC Minutes, Book II, pp. 396, 413-414, 422-423, 444, and 470.
38. NY TRDC Minutes, Book II, pp. 465, 467-468.
39. History, p. 29.
40. Ibid; Board of Trustees, Classis Hackensack (TRDC), Minutes, Box 367, Folder 2, Heritage Hall, Calvin College hereafter cited as Board of Trustees, Classis Hackensack (TRDC), 22 November 1922, 17 April 1923 and 16 October 1923; NY TRDC Minutes, Book III, p. 175.
41. Board of Trustees, Classis Hackensack (TRDC) Minutes, 15 April 1924; Brief History, pp. 29-30.
42. History, pp. 31-32; Board of Trustees, Classis Hackensack (TRDC), Minutes, 21 October 1924.
43. Board of Trustees, Classis Hackensack (TRDC) Minutes, 21 October 1924; Brief History, p. 31.
44. Classis Hackensack (TRDC) Minutes, Vol. IV, pp. 238-239; Board of Trustees, Classis Hackensack (TRDC), Minutes, 20 November 1924.
45. Classis Hackensack (TRDC) Minutes, Vol. IV, pp. 241-242; Board of Trustees, Classis Hackensack (TRDC), Minutes, 10 December 1924.
46. Board of Trustees, Classis Hackensack (TRDC), Minutes, 17 December 1924; Classis Hackensack (TRDC) Minutes, Vol. IV, pp. 243-245; NY TRDC Minutes, Book III, pp. 113-114; Classis Hackensack, Christian Reformed Church (CRC) Minutes, (1916-1930), Heritage Hall, Calvin College, pp. 110-114.
47. CRC *Yearbook*, 1927-1934; Editorial, "Our Eastern Problems," *The Banner*, 21 January 1927, p. 40; NY TRDC Minutes, Book III, pp. 116, 118, 121; History, p. 32.
48. "New York City Christian Reformed Church," *The Banner*, 7 January 1927, p. 13.
49. NY TRDC Minutes, Book III, pp. 120, 122.
50. Ibid, p. 123; "Classical Supplies," *The Banner*, 11 April 1930, p. 357; "Classis Hackensack Report," *The Banner*, 15 May 1931, p. 472; "Classis Hackensack," *The Banner*, 4 November 1932, p. 957; "Brief Report of Classis Hackensack," *The Banner*, 27 October 1933, p. 882; "Classis Hackensack," *The Banner*, 27 April 1934, p. 378; CRC *Yearbook*, 1934, p. 8.
51. NY TRDC Minutes, Book III, p. 125.
52. "Historic Property to Be Remodeled," unidentified New York City newspaper, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, 24 April 1936, n.p.; "Sale in the Village," *New York Sun*, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, 28 April 1936, n.p.; "News Flashes from Passaic and Lodi," *The Banner*, 17 July 1936, p. 694.

# The Short-Lived Perch Lake Christian Reformed Church

Paula Vander Hoven and Angie Ploegstra

On 6 May 1896 two guests from Grand Rapids made their way along a “fairly pathless” route to a small Dutch settlement about six miles east of LeRoy, Michigan (about 75 miles due north of Grand Rapids).<sup>1</sup> That road, replaced by a nearby modern road and a divided highway, is still barely discernible and it ends in a rutted track in deep forest by the time it reaches what was briefly the center of a small Dutch community. On that day in 1896, ten families were gathered at the brand new Rose Lake Township School #6, located on what is now Fourteen Mile Road between 140th and 130th Streets in Osceola County, and constituted themselves as the Perch Lake Christian Reformed Church, the name taken from a small lake on the edge of their settlement.

The congregation lasted less than

three years. The new school is no longer standing, and no trace of it remains, probably closing when the Dutch children for whom it was built all left the area. None of the locals now—not even the amateur historians—know of that little church, or of the ten families who for three years bravely lived there in bitter conditions. There are sparse ecclesiastical records, some public land records, and a few dim memories passed down through the descendants of the group. With permission of Classis Grand Rapids and the support of the Rev. Eppe Vander Vries and the Rev. Geert Broene, who read Psalm 84, on that first Sunday, and preached on verses 1-5. The congregation sang verse two of the Psalm 84, whereupon “nine heads of families and also a mother handed over their membership papers

*Paula Vander Hoven, from Schoolcraft, Michigan, and Angie Ploegstra, from Zeeland, Michigan, both are descended from families that were members of the Perch Lake church.*



*Now a peaceful recreation spot, Perch Lake was not as hospitable in the 1890s for the handful of Dutch families that attempted to establish a community there. Photo courtesy of the authors.*



*Cornelius Dekkenga and his wife Luikje Doot and seven of their children. Dekkenga's first wife, Anje Boerman, had died in 1889. Photo courtesy of the authors.*

which indicated that until now they belonged to the congregations of East Street and LaGrave Christian Reformed churches in Grand Rapids and Richland.”<sup>2</sup>

The first mention of this group appears in the minutes of the Grand Rapids East Street (now Eastern Avenue) Christian Reformed Church on 1 April 1896. Those minutes note that J. Ellens, a former elder of the congregation, had written a letter in which he stated that the classis had permitted several families to begin a congregation in LeRoy. As a result, the Dekkenga, Dykema, Ellens, Feringa, Frieswyk, Ostindie, Vander Wal, and Visser families received documents allowing them to transfer their memberships to join that group. A month later, on 4 May 1896, the Grand Rapids LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church Council granted a similar request of the Smitter family. The Plugers came from the Richland church (now Lucas Christian Reformed Church near McBain), north

of LeRoy. The new congregation had a total of 63 souls, 13 confessing members, 6 adult members by baptism, and 44 baptized children.<sup>3</sup> There were 22 in the Sunday school and 20 in catechism instruction.<sup>4</sup>

The confessing members elected two elders, Meindert Vander Wal and Johannes Ellens, one deacon, Louwe Feringa, and had young Boude Frieswyk baptized. Members of the new church were Cornelius Dekkenga, his wife Luikje Doot, and their children; Jan Dykema, his wife Geesien Braam, and their children; Johannes (Jan) Ellens, his wife, Gerritje Steenstra, and their children; Louwe Feringa, his wife, Sepke Leekstra, and their children; Johannes Frieswyk, his second wife Getske Postema, and their blended family; Ytse Ostindie, his wife Klaaske Doot, and their children; Anne (a Dutch male name) Pluger, his wife Menke Stol, and their children; Egbert J. Smitter, his second wife Jennie Breen, and their children; Meindert Vander Wal, his wife Grietje

Ellens, and their children; and Hendrik Visser, his wife Martje Haijema, and their children.<sup>5</sup> Most had come from small villages in the province of Groningen in the Netherlands.

Beginning with the Frieswyk family in October 1894, most had purchased land in section 23, Rose Lake Township, Osceola County from Grand Rapids lumbermen Alvin and Elmer Dennis and Sybrand Wesselius. The Visser family, already living in LeRoy at the time, was apparently the last to buy land in February 1896. They typically paid \$600 for 40 acres.

In relative isolation, life for the small groups of families was difficult. Of the chil-

dren in the ten families, nearly thirty were younger than ten years old and not much help in cutting timber, field work, or carrying water from Perch Lake. There may have been as many as eleven or twelve teenagers, three of whom were girls. Of these, Eltje Ellens had returned to Grand Rapids by October 1896, and two of the teenaged boys, Fred Frieswyk and Jacob Vander Wal, had returned to Grand Rapids by November 1897. The Dykema, Pluger and Smitter families did have older children, who apparently remained in LeRoy with their families. But the labor that could be contributed by these few young people was relatively little.

Both Vander Vries and Broene remarked in their report that “the soil there was for the most part fertile, although like everywhere else, clearing is difficult. What they need is the Lord’s blessing, spiritually and materially.” But the soil, as is the case for much of northern lower Michigan, was poor and sandy, suitable for grasses and pines but not fertile enough for



*Louwe Feringa and Sepke Leekstra and their three daughters, a one year-old son had died in 1893. Photo courtesy of the authors.*

other crops. Anna (Antje) Vander Wal Heyboer wrote:

The Vander Wal farm was a field of stumps. It was good for growing potatoes but we had to pull out a stump before we could plant a potato. In time we had some to sell but were offered 10 cents a bushel at LeRoy. . . . The Dutchmen got angry and said, 'Let's take them to Cadillac,' but there was no road to that town, only a trail. It was perhaps twenty miles as the crow flies, but by trail much farther. It took them two days and they got 20 cents a bushel. They had to take along a cross-cut saw to open the way.<sup>6</sup>

Some of the settlers had experience with farming in the Netherlands and since coming to Grand Rapids most of the men had found work as laborers. None had experienced clearing forested land, which was hard work. The Frieswyk family's land was hilly and did not have much value for farming,

as was the case for several other families. Louwe Feringa chopped down trees, cut the lumber into cord wood and sent it by train to Grand Rapids for sale as cooking or heating fuel. As long as he could afford to, he hired young Fred Frieswyk to help him. But when his cash ran out, he gave Fred his watch and did without his help. Ytse Ostindie and others cleared land and farmed as best as they could. Some of the men hired themselves out to work for "Americans" who lived nearby. The plentiful and large wild blackberries and raspberries growing in the woods were picked and traded for necessities at the LeRoy general store.

The members of the Dekkenga family remember being told that the children never went to bed hungry, but the parents often did. There were many times when Sepke Feringa fed her family only potatoes with "water gravy" thickened with flour. Cornelia Feringa Vanderhoven related this episode:

God was trying these young Christians, but not forsaking them. One day as my father (once again) walked about six miles to LeRoy to see if there might possibly be a check for him from Grand Rapids, a stranger overtook him and they walked on together. My father was a very congenial person and made conversation very easily. This man told him that he had heard that one of the new families in the area was having so much financial trouble, and asked if he knew anything about that family. My father admitted that he was that person, and told what a rough time they were having, with hardly enough to eat. When they came to LeRoy, they went into the store, which was also the post office, and my father inquired if there was mail for him. There wasn't.

Meanwhile, his partner on the road was ordering an assortment of groceries, as my father wistfully looked on, wishing he could buy just a little for his family. This man meanwhile paid for his order, asked the store keeper to put it in a burlap bag, and handed it to my father. Then he said, 'Take this to your wife.' My father was speechless, and when he recovered and would thank the man, he was gone. They looked all up and down the street in both directions and asked if anyone had seen the stranger. No one had, and they never did see him again, or find out who he was. You can imagine with what emotions my father accepted that bag, slung it over his shoulder, and as fast as he could go, he carried it home. It was indeed a gift from heaven, and I'm sure that the little log cabin rang with the beautiful Dutch Psalms they loved so dearly. Surely God was not forsaking them and their courage was renewed and their faith strengthened.<sup>7</sup>

On most Sundays the men of the congregation took turns reading sermons in Dutch. But, about once per month classis appointed pulpit supply, ministers from other churches, for the new church. Travel expenses by train from Grand Rapids to LeRoy for these ministers were paid by classis, and they preached without remuneration. This was the common practice for small, new churches in the denomination. In general, the congregation seemed to have been satisfied with the arrangement, but the classical minutes record a complaint that a minister, who was scheduled to come, had sent a seminary student instead. Another pastor, perhaps used to more formal worship conditions in his city church, deplored the fact that there were so many young, noisy children and babies at worship in the new schoolhouse and sternly suggested that children should be left home, a suggestion which the mothers of the congregation ignored without comment.<sup>8</sup>

The Feringa family in their one bedroom home often housed the visiting ministers. The family deemed



*Klaaske Doot (d.1929) married Ytse Ostindie in 1883. Photo courtesy of the authors.*



*Ytse Ostindie and his wife Klaaske had five children, two of whom died young. Photo courtesy of the authors.*

it a very “great honor that a servant of the Lord would lodge in their humble little log cabin.” Louwe and Sepke gave the minister their bed with a good Dutch feather mattress over a straw tick, and Sepke hung a sheet between this bed and the others for privacy. Most of the visitors were satisfied with the arrangement and gracious, but one questioned whether there were bed bugs—a suggestion which highly offended Sepke, who had scrubbed the little cabin spotless in preparation for each visit.

It was a long trek from LeRoy to Grand Rapids, which required precious time away from farming and logging, so Elder J. Ellens attended classical meetings very infrequently. More typically, the church was represented by letter. They did, however, do their best to support denominational causes. Over the lifetime of the church they contributed a total of \$6.00 to the Theological School, and \$3.00 to Interior Missions.

The church that had begun with such high hopes on that May Sunday in 1896 never grew in membership, and never built a sanctuary. By early 1899 all the members had given up the attempt to make a living in LeRoy and had left Osceola County. The Visser family returned to East Street church by June 1897. The 1898 Yearbook notes the church consisted of nine households, thirteen confessing members and sixty-three souls, births having replaced those who had left. There were ten in Sunday school and fifteen in catechetical instruction.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the following year others went to Grand Rapids and, by the next year, the membership was down



*Johannes Frieswyk and Sepke Leekstra and their two children. They also had lost a child, and both had lost their first spouses. Photo courtesy of the authors.*

to five households, seven confessing members and thirty-two souls. There were twelve in Sunday school and eleven in catechism.<sup>10</sup>

In April 1898 the minutes of Classis Grand Rapids East indicate that the membership at Perch Lake had been reduced to five families, and that a pastor be sent to determine “how we can best deal with them in the future.” Letters were received from the congregation at the classical meetings in April, August, and November 1898, each presumably detailing decline. At the 21 February 1899 meeting it was noted that the church had ceased to exist because the members had all moved elsewhere. The total assets of the congregation were divided between the Theological School and Interior Missions, with \$3.35 going to each. There were also some books



Anne Pluger and his wife Menke Stol with five of their children. Like the Feringas and Ostindies, they had lost a young child by the time they moved to Perch Lake. Photo courtesy of the authors.

which were being kept until they could be given to another “poor congregation.”<sup>12</sup>

The Richland church minutes in March 1898 report that Anne Pluger was cutting down trees for the church, so his family had returned to the area they had previously farmed. The Frieswyk family returned to East Street in April 1898 and the Dykema family in May. The Ellens family had returned to Grand Rapids by October 1898. It’s not clear when the Vander Wals left LeRoy, but it was most likely before February 1898, and certainly by February, 1899. The Dekkengas, Feringas, Ostindies, and Smitters remained.

Rev. Peter Ekster, the pastor of the Alpine Avenue (now Westend) Chris-

tian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids who came to supply the pulpit, seems to have been a favorite of the group. He was well remembered and much loved for his gracious humility. It may have been at his suggestion that the remaining members look north to the Richland church as a more suitable home, and they all did. Louwe Feringa and Ytse Ostindie formed a search team, and found congenial assistance from Mr. Kleinhesselink, a leader in the Lucas community, and both Feringa and Ostindie bought land there. The Feringas moved to just south of the Richland church and the Ostindies settled nearer McBain. The Dekkenga family moved north to the Osceola/Missaukee County line, and worked for Len Hesselink, living in a converted granary. They and the Smitter family had joined the Richland church by May 1899. Louwe Feringa’s name appears in the Richland minutes for 2 January 1899 when the council contracted with him to provide cord wood for the parsonage.

There had been other Dutch fami-

lies in sections 23 and 26 of Rose Lake Township: the Bosmans, Bruinsmas, DeJagers, DeKornes, Moddermans, Mols, Schippes, and Van Keulens. The Eli Hoogerhyde family lived several miles away near Reed City. Jacob and Martha Modderman in December 1895 had sold a small parcel of land to the Rose Lake Township School for District School #6. As nearly as can be determined, these families did not stay in LeRoy either, and apparently none joined the Perch Lake Christian Reformed Church. Cornelius and Jannetje DeKorne and their six children and the Leendert and Martina Schipper family maintained Sabbath devotions in their homes by reading sermons and singing psalms.

The only traces of any of these Dutch families that remain today are the remnants of buildings on what would have been the Modderman property. But the families did not disappear. During the less than three years, forty-four children grew in faith there, and probably six infants were baptized in the little schoolhouse; no one had died. Ten families tested the faithfulness of God daily, and found it reliable. They gathered for prayer, and read Scripture and sang psalms. From the sale of wood they cut and from blueberries picked in the woods they generated a surplus to donate to the Theological School and to missions. Cornelia Feringa Vanderhoven notes, “They had come to America with high hopes of material welfare and gain. But God had much richer gifts in store for them.”<sup>13</sup> ☞

### Endnotes

1. *De Wachter*, May 13, 1896
2. *Ibid.*
3. Minutes of Classis Grand Rapids, 11 August 1896, Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
4. *Jaarboekje*, 1897 (Grand Rapids: J. B. Hulst, 1897): 38.
5. For a list of all the residents of the community see: [http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family\\_history\\_resources/perchlake\\_church.htm](http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/perchlake_church.htm)
6. Anna (Antje) Vander Wal Heyboer, in an unpublished family history held by the family.
7. From an unpublished history held by the Vander Hoven family.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Jaarboekje*, 1898 (Grand Rapids: J.B. Hulst, 1898): 41.
11. *Jaarboekje*, 1899 (Grand Rapids: J.B. Hulst, 1899): 32.
12. Minutes of Classis Grand Rapids East, 1896, Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
13. From an unpublished history held by the Vander Hoven family.

# The Christian Reformed Churches of Metropolitan Detroit, 1914 – 2005

James Evenhuis

## First Christian Reformed Church of Detroit

The Christian Reformed Church came to Detroit as the city was undergoing rapid industrial change and unprecedented population growth in the early twentieth century. In 1901 Ransom E. Olds introduced modern automobile production in Detroit by manufacturing the curved-dash Oldsmobile. In 1902 his assembly line techniques had produced 3,000 of the “machines,” making him the nation’s leading automaker that year. Detroit’s location on the Great Lakes, between coal and iron ore reserves, as well as the presence of young enterprising engineers like Ransom Olds, Henry

Ford, and the Dodge brothers, and readily available investment capital enabled the city to become a major center for auto manufacturing. Ford’s introduction of both the Model T in 1908 and the moving assembly line in 1913, along with William Durant’s formation of General Motors, also in 1908, established the city as the auto manufacturing center of the nation. The population of the city went from just under 286,000 in 1900 to 1.5 million by 1930, moving the city from thirteenth in total population in the nation to fourth.

It was during these three booming decades, 1900-1930, that the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) had its organizational beginning in Detroit. This



*From West Michigan, James Evenhuis was a librarian in the Detroit Public Library system his entire career. He has combined his heritage with his vocation to study the Dutch in Wayne County.*

*Looking east across the downtown from the Detroit River in 1929, after three decades of dramatic economic growth due to the automobile industry. The original Dutch/Belgium neighborhood is to the right (north) of this view. Photo courtesy of Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.*

took place even though the Detroit Reformed Church in America (RCA) founded in 1872 had a strong congregation, a conservative minister in Reverend Harke Frieling, and was solidly Calvinistic and Reformed.<sup>1</sup> Still, many in the expanding Detroit Dutch community felt an urgent need to worship and to work for the Lord in a Christian Reformed Church.

On Sunday, 11 January 1914, CRC home missionary Reverend John R. Brink conducted a worship service, followed by an organizational meeting of the new church with a group of thirteen people. The service was held in a small chapel attached to the much larger Clinton Street Baptist Church at the corner of Clinton and Joseph Campau streets in the heart of Detroit's Dutch, Belgian, and German neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> The Christian Reformed congregation had begun as a mission station, but membership grew rapidly when word of the emerging congregation spread. The energetic leaders of the congregation sent a formal request to organize to Classis Grand Rapids East on 25 February 1914, just two weeks after the first worship service. This initial request was turned down by Classis. But by early summer of 1914, when the congregation had grown to 11 families and 61 members, Classis gave its approval and the congregation was officially established on Sunday, 11 June 1914, as the First Christian Reformed Church of Detroit.<sup>3</sup>

The First Christian Reformed Church of Detroit emerged because of many factors and factions at work both in America and the Netherlands. The total Dutch population of Detroit had increased from 310 in 1870 to 1,400 in 1910 and still was rapidly growing, reaching 4,300 in 1920.<sup>4</sup> These new Motor City Dutch-Americans brought new ideas directly from the Netherlands and from other Dutch-American communities. A number of CRC Dutch-Americans from western



*When opened, the Ford Motor Company's River Rouge plant in Dearborn was the largest manufacturing complex in the world. Raw materials flowed into the complex and fully built vehicles rolled out. A number of members of the Dearborn Christian Reformed Church worked in this plant, particularly during WWII. Photo courtesy of Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.*

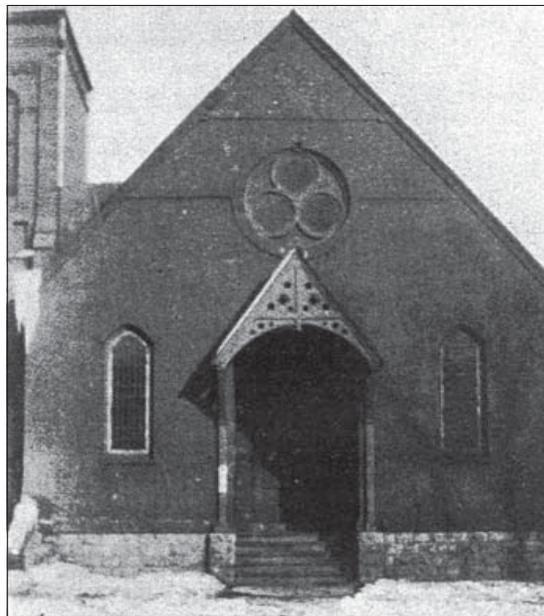
Michigan came to Detroit during this period to make a better economic living for themselves and their families. While furniture factory workers in Grand Rapids were earning \$12.00 for a six-day work week,<sup>5</sup> on 5 January 1914 Henry Ford began paying his workers \$5.00 per day or \$30.00 for a six-day work week. Further the much

larger auto industry provided far more opportunities for employment than the furniture industry in West Michigan.

This employment draw to Detroit is reflected in the letter of request sent from the Detroit CRC to Classis. Of the fifteen men who signed the letter, eight listed Grand Rapids Christian Reformed churches as their home

churches, and none of these eight listed a wife or children, reasonably suggesting that each was either unmarried or had temporarily left their families in Grand Rapids.<sup>6</sup> Both groups of men historically comprised the first wave of CRC migrants seeking better economic opportunities.

Among those from West Michigan there were well-established precedents and reasons for dividing their communities between RCA and CRC congregations. The religious quarrels and church splits of the middle 1800s are well documented.<sup>7</sup> This cleaving of the immigrant community is seen in almost every Dutch-American community in



*This chapel attached to the Clinton Street Baptist Church was the first home for the Detroit Christian Reformed congregation from 1914 until 1916. Photo courtesy of Archives, Calvin College.*

North America during the pre-WWII period. Adding to this was extensive immigrant knowledge of and participation in church divisions in the Netherlands going back to the secession of 1834 from the Dutch State Church and the 1886 Doleantie secession led by Abraham Kuyper, also from the Dutch State Church.<sup>8</sup> In North America the immigrants tended to divide between the more Americanizing-minded RCA and separatist-minded CRC. The Dutch immigration boom, 1870-1920, came primarily from the northern Dutch provinces of Friesland and Groningen and were dedicated followers of the strict theology and strong Christian social activism advocated by Abraham Kuyper. In their minds the RCA was far too liberal and similar to the official Dutch State Church. These newly arriving immigrants therefore tended to favor the CRC over the RCA.

First Detroit CRC quickly prospered. In 1915 the church had 12 families and 86 souls. By 1920 the membership had grown to 60 families



*A number of the male members of First Detroit CRC were skilled craftsmen who built residential subdivisions on Detroit's east side. This bungalow was being built by the firm of Hickey and Eppinga, who also were members of the congregation. Photo courtesy of Rev. Jacob Epping, son of Dirk Eppinga, one-half of the home building partnership.*

and 225 souls.<sup>9</sup> As the congregation grew, the Baptist chapel became too small and a second church home was established with the purchase of the Zion German Reformed Church building at the corner of Jay and Chene streets in 1916.<sup>10</sup>

Even in the new CRC congregation, which so highly prized the strict Dutch theological ways, Americanization slowly made its entrance. In 1916 the evening worship services were held in English and a group of young English-speaking members formed a group "to assist the congrega-

tion in learning to sing the Psalms in the English language."<sup>11</sup> But such changes did not come easily. When the church had its first full-time minister, Herman Bel in 1918, there were three worship services each Sunday. The morning and evening services were then in Dutch, the afternoon service in English. Repeated attempts to switch the languages at the services failed until Bel unilaterally announced that he was making the changes.<sup>12</sup>

Some Americanization changes caused considerable stress in the congregation, such as the introduction of Sunday school in 1919. Unlike the welcomed American-style Sunday school introduced at First Reformed in 1878, Sunday school at First CRC had its roots in the Netherlands' Zondagschool, which was a mission activity for waifs, the poor, and people who were on the edges of society. Members of the CRC generally felt Sunday school was too general and non-specific in the instruction of basic Christianity. Members felt that it was more social than educational, and therefore not for covenant children who ought to be instructed in specific church doc-



*Due to early membership growth, the Detroit CRC purchased this edifice from Zion Reformed Church in 1916. Photo courtesy of Archives, Calvin College.*



*On 5 February 1925 the congregation dedicated its new structure at 1444 Maryland Street. Although most of the new Christian Reformed churches in West Michigan were designed by J. & G. Daverman, the Detroit congregation wanted an edifice that did not have a “certain sameness of style” of the West Michigan buildings. Photo courtesy of James Evenhuis.*

trine through their catechism classes.<sup>13</sup> Over time, in the denomination and in the Detroit church, such differences on religious views and church practices were resolved generally with congregations operating both Sunday school classes and catechism classes, the latter indeed particularly for those of post-elementary school age.

During the early 1920s as the city was growing rapidly, planning began at First CRC to build a larger facility on a new location. In November 1923, thanks to the offer of property at an “exceedingly reasonable price,” the Detroit congregation made the decision to move out of the 50-year-old traditional near east side Detroit Dutch neighborhood and build a new sanctuary six miles directly east, just beyond the Detroit city limits to Grosse Pointe Park.<sup>14</sup> Construction began quickly and the first service was held in the basement in May 1924. The building at 1444

Maryland Street was completed and dedicated for full use on 5 February 1925.<sup>15</sup> The church organ had come from a theater in Toledo on the eve of the denominational synod’s official policy against theater attendance.<sup>16</sup>

A significant number of church members took advantage of the wages and plentiful jobs in the automobile industry, especially in the east side Conner Avenue industrial corridor. Yet, many of the members at First Detroit CRC were skilled artisans and tradesmen who preferred home construction work and, like their kin at First RCA, desired to work together as much as possible and in companies and economic enterprises owned by fellow church members. Fortunately, many opportunities existed for this, as Detroit was growing at such a rapid rate that the need for family housing and other services were critical, and home builders were especially well paid. At

First Detroit CRC, two construction companies owned by members were formed and employed almost a quarter of the men in the congregation. These two, Hickey and Eppinga Construction and Herman Batts Construction, built many housing subdivisions on Detroit’s east side.

The influence of Abraham Kuyper and the Neo-Calvinist struggle to preserve and strengthen Christianity in the face of modern secularism came out actively in these two construction firms during the 1920s and 1930s. Because of the strength of union labor organizations in the city, Eppinga and Batts had their construction workers join the newly CRC endorsed Christian Labor Association. This was a valiant effort to establish a distinctly Christian labor institution, but the giant secular unions soon overwhelmed this small effort.

The next manifestation of this Neo-Calvinism began with the arrival of Reverend Martin Monsma in 1928. Following Abraham Kuyper’s dictum that it was the family’s responsibility to educate its children, the church determined to establish a parent-owned and -operated Christian school. Previously some of the CRC children had attended St. Paul’s Lutheran School, the rest, public schools. Consequently, just as the Great Depression began, First CRC parents built and operated a two-classroom Christian school for grades one through eight in back of the church building. It is important to note that this was not a church-run parochial school such as Lutheran or Roman Catholic schools, but the Grosse Pointe Christian School was operated by a separate Christian School Society made up primarily of parents, rather than church officers. However, since the school board members were all church members, the line between the parochial case and this school was very thin indeed, but formally it did exist. The highly respected Christian educator and church musical compos-

er, Dewey Westra, was appointed the first principal. Pedagogically, the school allowed the church's young people to be trained for roles within the church in addition to receiving the educational requirements mandated by the state. Further, the school encouraged young people "from within the church family" to date and ultimately marry. In short, the Christian school proved to be a great source of strength and solidarity for First Detroit CRC as well as other Detroit area CRCs over the years.<sup>17</sup> One product of this environment in the late 1930s was Reverend Jacob Eppinga, who grew up at First CRC and summed up his feelings about being an integral part of the First Detroit CRC community. "Overall to me, that whole encompassing community I was in—that little Dutch pocket in that big city of Detroit—was the best thing in my life. It was not for all, but it was for me."<sup>18</sup>

### Dearborn CRC

Economic conditions in the mid 1930s provided the initial impetus for change in First CRC as several families, desperate for jobs, moved across town to east Dearborn and Henry Ford's giant River Rouge automotive manufacturing complex into which poured raw materials that became automobiles rolling off the line. In east Dearborn they encountered several CRC members from New

Jersey who had come to the area for the same reasons. Together, on 25 November 1934, these two groups met in a Dearborn classroom to begin the first formal organization of a second CRC in the area. Classis Grand Rapids East designated the Dearborn group a mission station and First Detroit gave full support to the new venture as elders from First taught catechism classes and assisted with organizational matters.<sup>19</sup>

In 1937 the CRC synod granted \$1,000 toward construction of a building at 6606 Greenfield Road. Expecting that the building would be used by the congregation for only a short time, the structure was built with a storefront appearance to enhance later sale. By 1938 nine families and 51 souls were members and Classis approved the formal transition from a mission station to an organized church.<sup>20</sup> The first pastor, Reverend John Entingh, who had worked with the mission as a pastoral candidate on the classical payroll since 1936, was ordained on 19 January 1940, still receiving a portion of his salary from the classis. He preached in Dearborn for the Sunday mornings and evenings and crossed the Detroit River to Windsor, Ontario, to preach in the afternoons.<sup>21</sup> Windsor had been established as a classical mission station in 1926 by Rev. J. R. Brink, supported in part by First Detroit CRC, to serve

Dutch families that had moved from Sarnia, Ontario.<sup>22</sup>

World War II and the tremendous expansion of the defense industries saw the Dearborn congregation double in size as more Dutch CRC workers and their families came from western Michigan to join the war production effort.<sup>23</sup> In 1944 Jacob Eppinga, then a CRC ministerial candidate, was asked to come to Dearborn CRC as a stated supply.<sup>24</sup> Eppinga came and the following year in September was ordained and installed as the pastor of the Greenfield Road storefront church.

When the war ended most of the recent émigrés from western Michigan returned home and the congregation went from nineteen to twelve families. Eppinga's first response, as he tried to add members to the Dearborn church to replace those who had left, was to knock on all the doors in the neighborhood and invite those not going to church to come. This, at first, met with some success. However, the storefront building did not look like a typical church and therefore people were reluctant to come. Second, east Dearborn had become a largely blue-collar European ethnic community which was heavily Roman Catholic. West Dearborn on the other hand was becoming more middle class, white collar, and Protestant. In 1945 serious study and discussion began and the church concluded that if it were to survive and grow it would have to move to west Dearborn. At a congregational meeting in December the decision was made. In 1948 the storefront on Greenfield was sold and the proceeds were used to purchase a choice location at Village Road and Audette Street, just behind Henry Ford's historic Greenfield Village Museum.<sup>25</sup> On 17 November 1949 the new Dearborn sanctuary opened and a new era began for the congregation.

The church reached out to the general community again with some success. However, the Dearborn



*The first building of the Dearborn CRC at 6606 Greenfield Road. Built as a storefront in anticipation that the structure would soon become too small, it was located in East Dearborn, now an Arab and Islamic neighborhood. Photo courtesy of James Evenhuis.*



*In 1951 Dearborn CRC built its second sanctuary across town near Greenfield Village and the Henry Ford Museum. The wing to the right houses the Christian school, which opened in 1957. Photo courtesy of James Evenhuis.*

church kept a strong Dutch majority of members and preached a firmly conservative, traditional Calvinistic message. The move proved to be a positive turning point in the continued expansion and stability of the church. Many factors are evident to explain this. Reverend Ronald Peterson, who served the church from 1969-1976, notes, "West Dearborn was really the place to live. It was more cosmopolitan

than the ethnic neighborhoods of east Dearborn, housing was very nice and modestly priced, many automotive middle managers and highly educated engineers lived there, and the area was neat, tidy and safe under the leadership of the very strong and charismatic Mayor Orville Hubbard." The mayor had been strongly criticized for his segregationist racial policies of keeping out all African-Americans; however, he



*A worship service in the current Dearborn CRC sanctuary on Donaldson Street. Preaching is Rev. Ronald Peterson. Photo courtesy of Archives, Calvin College.*

welcomed the Dutch CRC and opened doors that helped the church grow and stabilize.<sup>26</sup>

The nature of the congregation began to change significantly as large numbers of automotive engineers, technicians and other professionals from the western Michigan CRC Dutch population found Dearborn a comfortable place to live and the Dearborn CRC a most congenial church home. Also, many students from the western Michigan population came to do their graduate work at Wayne State University in medicine, law, and other areas, and found a church home at Dearborn CRC.<sup>27</sup>

In 1957 the church added a wing to the back of the building for the new Dearborn Christian School. The school at first had two elementary classrooms but soon expanded to four. As was the case in Detroit, the school was operated by the parents through a Christian School Society and also, as in Detroit, proved to be an important source of strength for the church. As Peterson notes, "The cohesive power of Christian education is the primary glue in the stability of the Christian Reformed Church."<sup>28</sup>

In 1974 the church and school moved into a new larger location on Donaldson Street, only a short distance from the 1949 sanctuary. Here the church continues to grow and remain strong as a solid Calvinist Christian Reformed congregation. The key to this growth was being able to draw members from the larger Dutch community; published membership rolls for 1974 show that 340 of the 445 have names of Dutch origin.<sup>29</sup>

### **Immanuel CRC**

In 1953 First Detroit CRC identified a small Dutch enclave without an RCA or CRC church in suburban Roseville, a basically blue-collar community northeast of Detroit. To serve this enclave and evangelize the whole

community, a CRC mission chapel was established on Nagel Street near Frazho Road in the southern part of the city. Willard De Waard, a graduate of the Reformed Bible Institute (now College) in Grand Rapids, and a lay evangelist, was hired to initiate and facilitate the early church planting effort. The CRC, adopting the successful methods of many growing Detroit area RCA churches, developed the Rosville congregation with a small core of members from other Dutch CRC congregations and attempted to attract community people who were not familiar with the doctrines or social mores of the CRC. The mission was formed into a self-sustaining congregation in 1958 and officially organized as Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in 1959.<sup>30</sup>

Difficulties became evident at the very start as the model for growth did not work well in the larger non-Dutch community. Operated in the manner of a traditional Dutch CRC in worship, organization, and expected social mores, the church did not mesh well with the community. Adjustments to the worship, organization, and social mores were made which caused those members of Dutch background to feel uncomfortable and gradually leave. As a result the congregation began to move increasingly more in the direction of an American evangelical fundamentalist congregation, rather than a doctrinally Reformed congregation.<sup>31</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s this created a lack of identity at Immanuel which in turn led to contradictory actions. First, the congregation built a large church sanctuary and Christian school in a prime location of the city on Church Street, along with which came a corresponding level of debt obligation. Second, it moved away from traditional CRC doctrinal preaching and use of the denomination's Psalter Hymnal to more contemporary worship services along the lines of Baptist and other

fundamentalist churches.<sup>32</sup> The lack of a distinctive identity caused some to leave for other church congregations. The Christian school now is closed and church membership has gone from 38 families and 172 souls in 1965, to 8 families and 55 souls in 2000.<sup>33</sup>

### **Cherry Hill CRC**

With the evident growth of Dearborn CRC and the even greater growth of some of the western suburban RCA community churches, the CRC saw a denominational vacuum in the expanding western suburbs of Inkster, Garden City, Wayne, Westland, and Taylor. In 1956 Reverend Harold Botts was appointed to serve as CRC home missionary to these communities. A number of Dutch CRC families lived in these western suburbs and had to drive several miles to reach the church in Dearborn. It was assumed that these families were sufficiently numerous to form a Dutch congregational core for a successful CRC community church in these areas.

Mission work in the Inkster area was started with the support of Dearborn CRC in the fall of 1956. The first worship service was held in a school auditorium on 11 November 1956, and the congregation began to meet as a CRC mission in its own building on Cherry Hill Road in Inkster in November 1957. The mission was organized as a CRC congregation in 1962 with sixteen Dutch families and ten non-Dutch families.<sup>34</sup> Botts hoped for strong community growth and he approached the non-Dutch community with a rather rosy but not fully complete picture of the new congregation's Dutch heritage or doctrinal positions.<sup>35</sup>

The church grew steadily until 1967 when the membership reached 44 families with 183 members. Then, major problems developed. A racially based fear swept through the entire Detroit metropolitan area in the wake of the 1967 riots. Cherry Hill CRC was locat-

ed in Inkster which had been racially integrated for many years and which now basically became an African-American city. African-American adults had never joined Cherry Hill, although Black youth participated in activities and some went to the Christian school in Dearborn. The proximity of the church to the African-American community during the racially tense late 1960s drove away many non-Dutch members. Some of the Dutch Cherry Hill members also moved into the safe and more desirable boundaries of Dearborn and transferred their memberships to the Dearborn CRC. Other Dutch did not move from the white cities of Wayne, Westland, Garden City and Taylor, but also transferred their memberships to Dearborn CRC. A new dynamic and socially conscious pastor, Reverend John Steigenga, tried to stop the decline during his pastorate at Cherry Hill from 1968-1974. However, the demographic forces of change were too great and the church disbanded in 1978.<sup>36</sup>

### **Detroit Community CRC**

Motivated by evangelical forces in the church and facilitated by CRC Home Missions, a very different and unique outreach effort was established in Detroit during the 1960s. Looking inward to Detroit's central city, Home Missions in 1966 procured an apartment building in an almost completely African-American neighborhood at the corner of 14th Street and Pingree, not far from West Grand Boulevard and only two blocks away from the center of the 1967 riots on 12th Street. Here the Detroit Community Mission was established.

The mission was not a small emerging CRC congregation in the traditional sense, but rather a CRC organizational effort to approach the numerous religious, educational, recreational and social needs of the community. Reverends Harold Botts,

Hendrick DeBruyn, and John Steingenga gave their vision and talents to this effort. The mission was very different from the other CRC initiatives in that there was no Dutch community to form a membership base. However, the African American community loved the mission and supported it for ten years.<sup>37</sup> Several African-American youths were enrolled as students in the Dearborn Christian School.

In 1976 urban renewal efforts forced the closing of the mission, but a very unique cooperative effort with the RCA emerged from this closing. Membership at Nardin Park RCA had been declining since the 1950s because of “white flight” and the inability of the white RCA pastors to effectively develop a viable African-American congregation. So the RCA and the CRC agreed to have the Detroit Community Mission merge with Nardin Park in a joint ministry.

In 1975 the RCA and CRC also began a joint assistance program at Nardin Park called the Community Assistance Program, which provided emergency aid in food, clothing, counseling, employment referrals, and a strong recreation program for the youth.<sup>38</sup> In 1979 the church received its first African-American pastor, Nevon Newell. This led to a new stability in the African-American church based on Reformed doctrine and preaching, with a traditional Protestant African-American worship service format.<sup>39</sup> But this stability mitigated the need for a joint effort and the CRC discontinued its involvement in 1981.<sup>40</sup>

### University Hills CRC

In the mid 1960s CRC Board of Home Missions surveyed the expanding northwest Detroit suburbs and saw a large movement of Protestants out the Grand River Avenue corridor to such prosperous suburbs as Farmington Hills, Livonia, and West Bloomfield. The board noted that there were no



*University Hills CRC, with its 160 foot tower, built near I-696 and 12 Mile in Farmington Hills. The congregation disbanded in 1982 and the building now is home to the Forest Park Baptist Church. Photo courtesy of James Evenhuis.*

Christian Reformed churches anywhere in the suburban area and therefore in 1968 launched an effort, under the auspices of Classis Lake Erie, to plant a congregation in this suburban Detroit area. Reverend J. Harold Ellens was transferred from the Detroit area Royal Oak Mission, where he had been working since 1965, to plant a CRC congregation in Farmington Hills.

With only a very small Dutch base the new University Hills CRC began services in February 1968. The church was located in a strategic spot on Farmington Road overlooking the new highway, I-696, just south of 12 Mile Road. A beautiful sanctuary and community building with a 160-foot high metal tower with the sign of the Trinity was erected overlooking the highway. The church took its name from its location, just across Farmington Road from the Farmington Hills campus of Oakland Community College.<sup>41</sup>

The congregation decided to follow a course independent from the

Christian Reformed denomination in religious thought and activities. In 1979 Ellens took a three-year study leave from the church, ultimately leaving the CRC for the Presbyterian Church (USA). In 1982 the church disbanded.<sup>42</sup> Today the tower with the sign of the Trinity still stands as strong and beautiful as ever, but the sanctuary is now home to Forest Park Baptist Church.

### North Hills CRC

In early 1961 Classis Lake Erie identified 15 Christian Reformed families in a small but growing Dutch community in the suburb of Royal Oak, north of Detroit in the Woodward Avenue corridor which, at the time, was 64 percent Protestant.<sup>43</sup> After promising community contact work was done, Reverend Martin Stegink was appointed classical home missionary to facilitate an outreach project in the Royal Oak area. The first worship service was held on 11 February 1962. At this service 51 people attended and of this number six families became the nucleus of a new congregation. Classis Lake Erie asked Dearborn CRC to become the sponsoring church for the new outreach effort and for Reverend Stegink. The Royal Oak Mission grew in the following years and, on 11 February 1966, was organized as the Christian Reformed Church of Royal Oak. In 1967 the youth group was asked to make suggestions for a new church name and North Hills Christian Reformed Church was chosen. At the time of organization, as had been the case elsewhere, the majority of the members were Dutch, although 12 of the 47 names on the charter listing had names not recognizably Dutch.<sup>44</sup>

The congregation, as the one in Dearborn, was made up primarily of professional and business people in the middle to upper income ranges. With much of the membership living north of Royal Oak in the rapidly expand-



*The dynamic lines of the North Hills CRC in Troy, on Adams Road. Because of its location, this congregation has drawn some members away from the first Detroit CRC. Photo courtesy of James Evenhuis.*

ing affluent suburbs of Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Troy, and Rochester Hills, the church decided to move north and acquired a prime location on Adams Road just north of Big Beaver Road in Troy. The congregation moved to Troy in 1970 and also began to draw members from First CRC who had moved from Grosse Pointe to the northern and northwestern suburbs. Again, as in Dearborn, the connection with western Michigan was strong, facilitated by the fact that church was about one-half hour closer to West Michigan than the other area churches in driving time.<sup>45</sup>

Both Reverends Stegink and Ellens served the congregation in its early years and North Hills remains a thriving traditional CRC with a modern touch. A count of the membership directory, published in 1991 on the 25th anniversary of the church's organization, reveals 209 Dutch members and 127 non-Dutch.<sup>46</sup> In 2004 total membership was reported to be 341 people. Although North Hills has not established a Christian school, as did the First and Dearborn churches, in 1991 the congregation had twenty-one young people enrolled in college of whom twelve were enrolled

at Calvin College in Grand Rapids. Han-Bit (Great Light) Korean CRC

During the 1980s and 1990s large numbers of Korean immigrants began to join the CRC (whose 2005 membership of just over 273,000 is estimated to be 10 percent Korean). With the assistance of North Hills, a Detroit-area Korean CRC congregation was formed, initially using the facilities of North Hills. In 1988 Christian Y. Oh, a recent graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, was installed as the congregation's pastor and still leads the parish. Han-Bit CRC was officially organized in Rochester Hills in 1991 and in 2004 had 21 families with 110 members.<sup>47</sup>

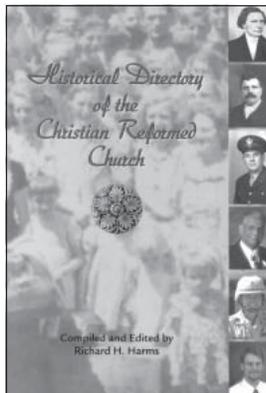
### Summary

At its peak in Metropolitan Detroit the Christian Reformed Church grew to seven congregations, of which five remain. The peak in membership came in 1975 with over 300 families and 1400 souls. In 2000 there were 250 families and nearly 1050 souls.<sup>48</sup> Two methods of church growth have worked for the CRC in the Motor City, building a congregation around a core membership that has its roots in the descendants of Dutch immigrants, particularly those from West Michigan, and immigrants from Korea, who had a reformed theological background and experience with Presbyterian church polity.☞

## Endnotes

1. Reverend Jacob Eppinga interview with author, transcript in Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eppinga notes that many of those who formed or joined the CRC in Detroit were stricter Sabbatarians than was the case among Detroit Reformed Church members. For a discussion of the larger Detroit Dutch community, including the Detroit RCA see: James Evenhuis, "Detroit's Motor City Dutch," *The Dutch in Urban America* (Holland, MI: Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies, 2004), 13-33.
2. "First Christian Reformed Church of Detroit, 1914-1964," (Grosse Point, MI: First Christian Reformed Church, 1964), 2; hereafter cited as Fiftieth Anniversary.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Albert Mayer, "Dutch Population in Detroit, 1870-1940," unpublished manuscript, 1951 at Wayne State University.
5. James D. Bratt and Christopher H. Meehan, *Gathered at the River* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 97.
6. "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary," (Detroit: First Christian Reformed Church of Detroit, 1939), 4.
7. Robert P. Swierenga and Elton J. Bruins, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches in the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 61-135.
8. James D. Bratt, "Abraham Kuyper; 150th Birthday Anniversary," *Origins* 5, no. 2 (1987), 23-27. 13. Marcia DeVries and Miriam Cooke Schaafsma, eds., "First Christian Reformed Church: 75th Anniversary, 1914-1989," (Grosse Point, Michigan: First Christian Reformed Church, 1989), 3; hereafter cited as Seventy-fifth Anniversary.
9. Yearbooks of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, (Grand Rapids: Office of the General Secretary, 1915-1920).
10. Fiftieth Anniversary, 3.
11. Seventy-fifth Anniversary, 3.
12. Eppinga interview.
13. *Ibid*; Reverend Jacob Eppinga interviewed by author, 3 December 2002, transcript available in Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.
14. Eppinga interview. The official name of the church remains, "First Christian Reformed Church of Detroit," however, it is often referred to as First Detroit or the Grosse Pointe Church.
15. Seventy-fifth Anniversary, 3.
16. Eppinga interview.
17. Eppinga interview.
18. Eppinga interview, 3 December 2002.
19. "50th Anniversary," (Dearborn Christian Reformed Church, 1988), 9.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. The families remaining in Sarnia were organized into a congregation in 1934 by Classis Grand Rapids East, see: Richard H. Harms, *Historical Directory of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Historical Committee of the CRC, 2004).
23. "Program of Dedication," Dearborn Christian Reformed Church, 1949, 2.
24. Typically a minister was called by a church and once installed was under the supervision of that church's council. Those who served as stated supply were appointed to a church, often by the classis, which also provided for some or all of the pastor's salary.
25. "Dedication of a New Building," Dearborn Christian Reformed Church and Dearborn Christian School, 1974, 1. The storefront at 6606 Greenfield is now an emerging Islamic mosque as east Dearborn has become home to one of the largest Arabic Islamic populations outside the Middle East.
26. Reverend Ronald Peterson, interview with author, 10 September 2002.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. "Dedication of New Building."
30. Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church 1959.
31. Randall Kaastra, "Americanization of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church," unpublished manuscript, Archives, Calvin College, 1988, 5-8.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Yearbooks of the Christian Reformed Church, 1965-2000.
34. Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church 1962.
35. Cherry Hill Christian Reformed Church, Presenting . . . a Church for You and Your Family, 2-3.
36. Cherry Hill Christian Reformed Church, disbanded 1962-1978, 1-2.
37. Dearborn Christian Reformed Church, "Historical Highlights," 11.
38. *Ibid.* 12.
39. Board of North American Missions, RCA, "Nardin Park Reformed Church," 1-4.
40. Nardin Park Community Church, "The Good News People," 2-3; Dearborn Christian Reformed Church, "Historical Highlights," 13.
41. University Hills Christian Reformed Church, "Significant Dates," 1982, 1-2.
42. *Ibid.*
43. "Historical Highlights," 10; North Hills Christian Reformed Church, "25th Anniversary Booklet 1966-1991," 3-4.
44. North Hills Christian Reformed Church, "Charter Members," 1966, 1.
45. Ronald Peterson interview with author, 10 September 2002.
46. North Hills Christian Reformed Church, "25th Anniversary Booklet 1966-1991," 10-17.
47. Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church 2004.
48. Yearbooks of the Christian Reformed Church, 1975-2000.

# book notes

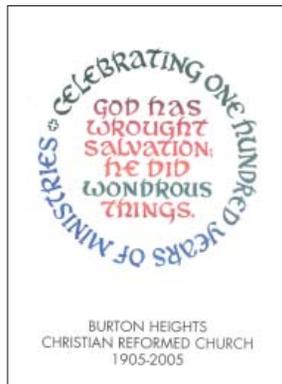


## Historical Directory of the Christian Reformed Church

*Richard H. Harms, editor*

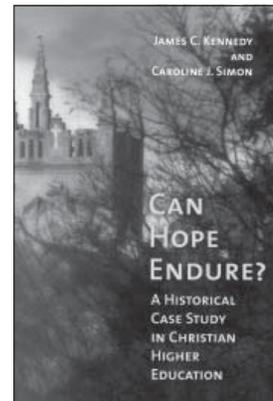
Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Board of Publications (available from Heritage Hall, Calvin College)  
511 pages, \$34.95

*Origins* subscribers can purchase the book for \$27.95 at Heritage Hall or \$30.00 via the mail (prices in US currency). Send payment in check or money order to *Origins*, Calvin College Archives, 1855 Knollcrest Circle SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4402.



## Celebrating One Hundred Years of Ministries

(Grand Rapids: Burton Heights Christian Reformed Church, 2005)  
135 pages, \$15.00 postage paid.  
Copies can be ordered from John Knight, 1761 Woodcliff SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

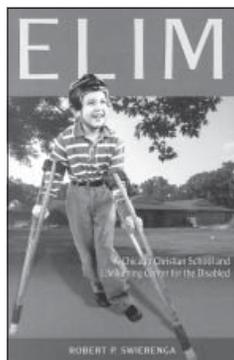


## Can Hope Endure?

A Historical Case Study in Christian Higher Education

*James C. Kennedy and Caroline J. Simon*

(Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005)  
249 pages, \$28.00.

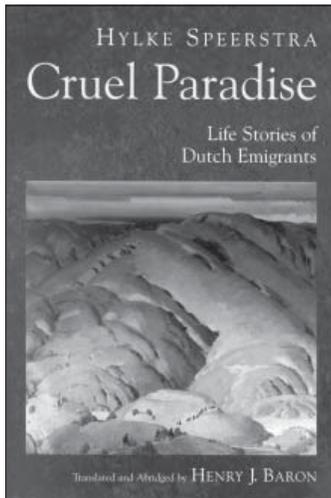


## Elim: A Chicago Christian School and Life Training Center for the Disabled

*Robert P. Swierenga*

(Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005)  
343 pages, \$31.00.

# book reviews



## Cruel Paradise: Life Stories of Dutch Emigrants

*Hylke Speerstra, translated and  
abridged by Henry J. Baron*

William B. Eerdmans  
Publishing Company,  
Grand Rapids, MI, 2005  
224 pages  
\$15.00

In 1997 former newspaper editor and author Hylke Speerstra traveled to North America, South America, and southwestern Oceania to gather stories of Dutch emigrants primarily of the post WWII period. Between 1947 and 1966 approximately 100,000 Dutch left a homeland economically devastated by the war, of which approximately 20 percent eventually returned. Many went to Canada, the rest to the United States, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. In 1999 Speerstra published, in Frisian, thirty-four stories about the

Frisians among this emigration in *It Wrede Paradys*. Because of its popularity and demand from Dutch readers, the next year he produced a Dutch version, *Het Wrede Paradijs: Het Levensverhaal van de emigrant*, with twenty-nine stories, including several not contained in the original Frisian version. *Cruel Paradise* presents twenty stories selected from these two volumes and translated by Henry J. Baron, Professor Emeritus of English, Calvin College and scholar of Frisian.

Others, such as Dr. H. J. Brinks (*Dutch American Voices*) and Dr. Suzanne Sinke (*Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States*), to mention only two, have studied autobiographical and other descriptions of the immigrant experience. These studies rely on the letters and other writing the immigrants produced and therefore reflect what the individual writers considered significant. Speerstra, however, went to the immigrants and asked them specific questions about what he thought was significant, so that the various responses had some commonalities among them, much as oral historians do. But, rather than present the response in the usual oral history question-and-answer format, Speerstra presents each person's or couple's response in a single narrative, journalistic style.

The stories suggest a number of reasons for emigration. Most common is the lack of economic opportunity in the Netherlands and the seeming unlimited opportunity elsewhere. Hetty Seif-Leetinga (pp. 15-25) and her husband saw their cows succumb to disease and the expected help from family not materializing; John Reitsma (pp. 41-45), the seemingly unbounded opportunity of

a young man at the beginning his adult life; and Anna Postma-Wielinga (pp. 26-35), the economic opportunity in spite of the wife's misgiving about leaving. Klaas and Mares van der Ploeg (pp. 46-53) experienced dissatisfaction with the increasing number of legal limits placed on their ability to farm as they wished in the Netherlands. The various accounts from Tsjummearum (pp. 70-93) present many such reasons and others such as the fear of Communism during the onset of the Cold War. This group of stories also demonstrates the profound impact on a community that loses a sizable number of its residents to emigration. And lastly there are personal reasons such as Hindrik Baron's father leaving (pp.1-14) following a personal affront.

From causation, Speerstra moves to the experience of emigration and here finds the paradox implicit in the book's title. Each member of the Baron family has to work hard and the father dies early in the new land. Seif-Lettinga's parents experienced such hardship together that the husband died within a year of his wife's death; or Postma-Wielinga and her husband achieve ultimate economic success only after much hardship and several false starts, but this is offset by the personal tragedy of their youngest son's death. In short, some of the stories describe that the experience of emigration led to relative betterment not absolute betterment, while others (Reitsma) suggest an absolute betterment.

The stories Speerstra presents focus on the problem of homesickness—in some cases the longing for family or friends left behind, in other cases the longing for the actual soil left behind.

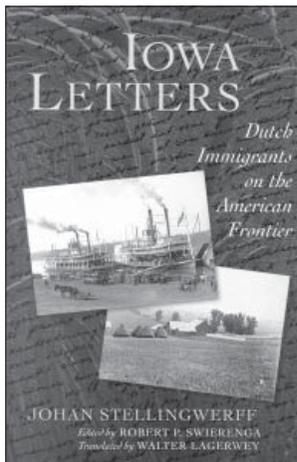
Some were able to overcome these longings, others traveled back from time to time. In the case of Marten Dykstra and Simone Koornstra it led to their divorce as she could only find peace in Friesland, while he could only find it in New Zealand. Even in this dynamic, Speerstra notes a paradox that develops when the longings of the parents are juxtaposed with children whose ties are to the new land in which

they were born and raised.

Speerstra does not suggest that *Cruel Paradise* presents a definitive study of Dutch emigration; rather it presents vivid, compelling, and engaging vignettes of the experience. He notes in the preface that the successful emigrant was determined not for economic gain but in finding peace and harmony in the new environment. Often such peace and harmony can be seen in the chil-

dren and succeeding generations rather than the emigrants themselves. *Cruel Paradise*, in an engaging and journalist style, adds rich texture to the story of twentieth-century Dutch emigration and is on the list of “must-read” titles of Dutch emigration in particular but also emigration studies in general. ♪

Richard H. Harms



**Iowa Letters:  
Dutch Immigrants on the  
American Frontier**

*Johan Stellingwerff*

*Edited by Robert P. Swierenga*

*Translated by Walter Lagerwey*

The Historical Series of the Reformed  
Church in America, No. 47

William B. Eerdmans  
Publishing Company,  
Grand Rapids, MI, 2004  
701 pages, \$49.00 US

About thirty years ago Johan Stellingwerff, then director of the Library at the Free University of Amsterdam, edited *Amsterdamse Emigranten: onbekende brieven uit de prairie van Iowa*,

1846-1873, a volume of letters written by emigrants from Amsterdam who settled in Iowa. These letters are now available in the current volume, which also contains additional portions of some of the letters not available to Stellingwerff and about one hundred newly discovered letters. Iowa Letters contains, in translation, a total of 215 written resources. Far from mere letters about living better in America, these voluminous and often lengthy missives, written by women and men, portray in poignant eloquence all aspects of domestic dynamics. Woven in most of these communications in bright or dark hues are threads of optimism or pessimism which result in a texture revealing a remarkable literary style. Preserved are the innermost thoughts of pious folk who found great strength in their faith.

Enhancing the value of these letters are several factors. First, this collection contains the correspondence of three families and their friends living in both America and the Netherlands. Second, the writers were seceders from the Netherlands Reformed Church and for most this was the primary reason for their migration to Iowa during the late 1840s. And thirdly, these folk were from the upper middle class and had their roots in Amsterdam. They had

money to invest, and their social and educational status set them apart from most Dutch immigrants who came to America during the years 1847-1900, who came from rural, small-town environments and had very little cash to invest in land or the establishment of a modest business, and for whom just finding money for passage across the Atlantic was a daunting challenge.

Seventeen-year-old Pella pioneer Hendrik Hospers arrived in America in 1847. He did not find paying for trans-Atlantic costs an insurmountable barrier. His parents and siblings left the Netherlands in 1849. Crisscross correspondence written by Hendrik and his father Jan illuminate Hendrik's sunny optimism about prospects on the Iowa frontier and his father's gradually emerging conviction that Iowa would be the place where his family's seceder heritage and hopes would blossom and bring forth tangible results such as a truly Reformed church for the faithful. For this bundle of convictions Jan was willing to sacrifice a comfortable middle-class life in the Netherlands, although he pondered hard and long the financial, social, and religious implications of this momentous decision.

Hendrik's thoughts about America are amply illustrated in the following excerpt from a letter written in May

1848, about a year before his parents came to America, “I continue to be very healthy and very content, so that I would not care to be back in Holland for all the money in the world, especially after learning in one of the American papers about the happenings in France and the precarious conditions in all of Europe” (p. 171). In retrospect, the middle-class Hospers family found America a land of opportunity where all members of the Hospers clan thrived in business and church affairs.

The Hospers’ success story was not shared by Andries N. Wormser and his family, who had left Amsterdam for America in 1848. Disillusioned and disappointed, they returned to their homeland less than a year later. Perceptively critical, the letters of Andries Wormser reveal an American environment where immigrants were victimized at every turn and economic endeavor and, above all, free religious expression of a kind Wormser desired, remained unobtainable goals in mid-nineteenth century Iowa. Chapters “The Disappointment of Andries N. Wormser” and “The Emigrants of 1849” are not filled with the romantic sentimentalism often found on television and much frontier fiction.

When writing his brother in the Netherlands, Wormser is bluntly candid, as these reflections, typical of many of his letters, attest: “The Hollanders are not highly regarded in America, and Rev. Scholte and his gang have finally dealt them a death blow (p. 278). Add to this the observations that Americans spit tobacco juice on carpets, lack cultural refinement, and

think only about money. Hard work, Wormser adds, wears men out by the time they are forty and they have the appearance of those sixty years old.

All letters in this collection manifest the marrow of mid-nineteenth-century life in America and the Netherlands. Varying comments about ministers, either judgmental or complimentary, fervent piety, and biblical references relevant for varied personal dilemmas are often found in the same missive. Among other items scattered throughout the correspondence are the deaths of children, deathbed scenes, and medical problems often discussed in exquisite detail. Looming large are worried concerns about money matters, reports of financial gains and losses, and prices for a host of every imaginable item useful for human existence.

Concern for the mundane evidenced in these letters must never demean or trivialize the robust analytical piety shared by the women and men who etched on paper their deepest thoughts about God’s will for their lives. The following excerpt, from an 1855 letter written by Mrs. C. M. Budde-Stomp to a friend in the Netherlands, ranks high as a testimonial document, “All the world is a stage, and every day there is something new, and because of sin we have to eat the bitter fruits. But thanks be to God, who has purchased us with his blood, and in his own good time will liberate us from this body of sin to live on an earth where righteousness dwells and the Lord will be glorified perfectly (p. 415).

According to editor Robert Swirenga, this translation of *Amsterdamse*

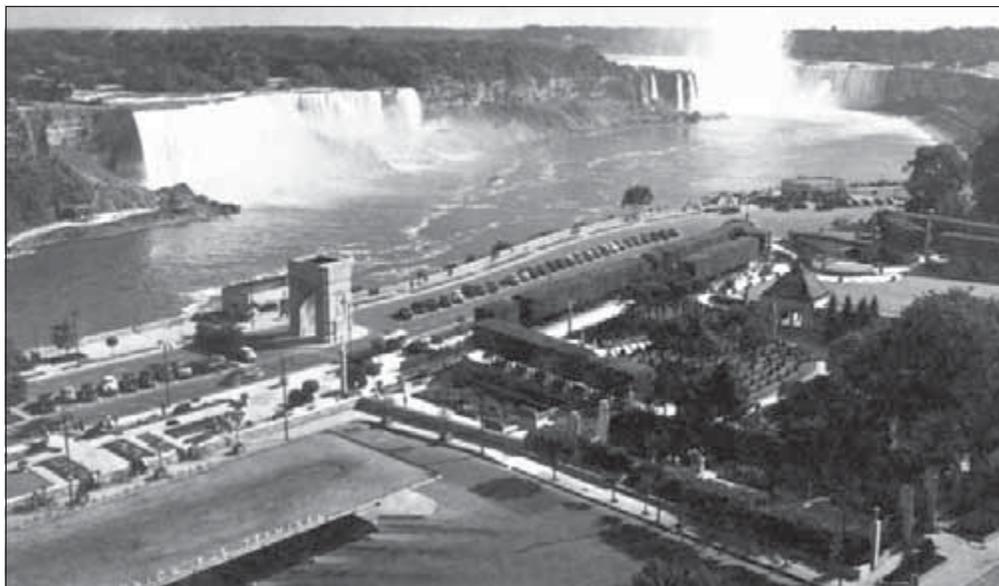
*Emigranten* is the “most ambitious project” of the Dutch American Historical Commission (its members are Hope College, Western Theological Seminary, Calvin College, and Calvin Theological Seminary). Accompanying the letters are many illustrations, copious scholarly remarks, a useful bibliography of primary and secondary sources, a very detailed subject index of the entire contents of the volume, and a chronological listing of all letters included in the text. Great credit must be given to the late Calvin Professor Walter Lagerwey for translating this massive tome from Dutch into English while always retaining the colloquialisms and informality of the Dutch.

This 701-page archival resource is a vast store of information for both scholars and those who share only a casual interest in immigrant life on the Iowa frontier. This collection of the correspondence from both sides of the Atlantic is a very welcome companion to other books available in English such as *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings*, selected and arranged by Henry S. Lucas (Eerdmans, 1999) and the two publications of Herbert Brinks, *Write Back Soon: Letters from Dutch Immigrants 1847-1920* (CRC Publications, 1986) and *Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States 1850-1930* (Cornell University Press, 1995). For something gender specific consult Suzanne M. Sinke’s *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States 1880-1920* (University of Illinois Press, 2002). ☞

Conrad Bult

# for the future

The topics listed below are being researched, and articles about them will appear in future issues of *Origins*.



Niagara Falls when the Buths visited in 1949 (Image: Archives, Calvin College)

*“Onze Reis naar N. Amerika (Our Trip to North America)”* by G. J. Buth.

Jan Gelock’s Autobiography

*Voices from the Free Congregation at Grand Rapids* by Walter Lagerwey

*The Dutch Come to the Hackensack River Valley* by Richard Harms

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