

# Origins

## Origins

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*Historical Magazine  
of The Archives*

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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:*

*Dirk Baatenberg de Jong's shore leave pass used while the SS Maasdam was docked in the New York Harbor.*



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## Time to Renew Your Subscription

As we have in past years, we use this section of the column to notify you that it is time to renew your subscription. An envelope for this is included in this issue; this saves the cost of a separate mailing for renewal notices. Subscriptions remain \$10 (US) per year. Gifts in addition to the \$10 are acknowledged as charitable gifts to *Origins* and we are grateful for this generosity.✉

## This Issue

As past articles in *Origins* have shown, family has been an important component of the immigrant experience and in this issue two sons write about their fathers. Grand Rapids attorney David Baatenberg relates his father's experience of being on a torpedoed ship early during WW II and the life-long impact this had on his father. A member of the faculty of the University of Nebraska—

Omaha, Peter Szto traces his parents' ministry in New York and the path some Chinese-Americans followed to join the Reformed faith. Dr. Robert Swierenga, a frequent contributor to *Origins*, describes the controversy in one Holland, Michigan, church during the super-patriotic fervor that swept the United States during WW I. Cal Cevaal, another previous contributor to *Origins*, recounts the baseball career of John Vander Meer, the only professional baseball player to pitch consecutive no-hitters. And lastly, we have the next installment of the account by Dutch visitors to the Midwest during 1949.✉

## Available On-Line

During the summer we compiled the membership records of the short-lived (January to December 1893) Rilland, Colorado, Christian Reformed Church near present-day Alamosa, Colorado. These Dutch immigrants were part of a larger group that were victims of a land swindle detailed by Peter de Klerk in "The Alamosa Disaster: The Boldest of Swindles," *Origins* (Spring 1986): 22-26. Families are listed under both the mothers' and fathers'

names. These data come from the records in the Archives of Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and are available at [http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family\\_history\\_resources/Rilland\\_church.htm](http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/Rilland_church.htm).✉

## News from the Archives

During the summer we organized and opened for research approximately thirty-five cubic feet of manuscript material in ten collections. Among these materials are the papers of Dr. Robert Recker and those of Dr. Carl Kromminga, ministers in the Christian Reformed Church and professors at Calvin Theological Seminary. The Recker papers detail his ministry in and teaching of missions. Kromminga's material contains much on the history of the denomination, his writing for *The Young Calvinist*, and the various courses he led at the seminary during a 36-year teaching career. We also completed the reorganization of the Walter Lagerwey papers, who was a leading educator of Dutch in the United States at the college level. This collection contains both his extensive research material as well as his curriculum files.

Among the archival material processed were records from the denominational Chaplaincy Ministries, back to the 1970s, but the bulk of the records date to the 1990s, including information on the individuals who served as chaplains. Also among the denominational records opened to research are those from two discontinued ministries: Comstock Park, Michigan, CRC (1930-2007, with organization of the congregation in 1957), and Portage, Michigan, CRC (1966-1995); as well as records from a still active congregation, Lombard, Illinois, CRC, which began in Chicago in 1912. Lastly, thanks to a special endowment, we were able to produce a typescript of John Vogelzang's nearly 500,000-word autobiography originally written on fifty-four rolls of shelf paper, which details his life from his birth in Overijssel, the Netherlands, emigration to the United States in 1907 with his bride, and life in Holland, Michigan, where he established a successful hardware business.

Our volunteers continue their numerous projects. The minutes from Manhattan, Montana; Bemis, South

Dakota; Birnamwood, Wisconsin; and Prairie View, Kansas, Christian Reformed Churches were translated, and by the time this issue goes to press the minutes of the Central Avenue CRC in Holland, Michigan, will also have been translated. Indexing of *The Banner* continues, with two volunteers now hard at work having completed approximately two-thirds of the years 1985-1995. Another volunteer continues collating and keying into a database the information on post World War II Dutch immigrants in Canada. And still another volunteer continues indexing our collection of family histories.

Since spring we have accepted fifty-eight cubic feet of records. Among the larger transfers were twenty-nine cubic feet from the Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Dance, and Sports Department of the college; four cubic feet from CRCNA Chaplaincy office; the records of the Detroit Campus Chaplaincy effort, and the discontinued Comstock Park, Michigan, CRC.

*Henry J. Kuiper: Shaping the Christian Reformed Church, 1907-1962*, by James A. DeJong is the second

collaborative effort by *Origins* and the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America (see book review section). Published by William B. Eerdmans, it is available for \$28, but to subscribers for \$22 at the *Origins* office. 📖

### Staff

Richard Harms is the curator of the Archives; Hendrina Van Spronsen is the office coordinator; Wendy Blankespoor is librarian and cataloging archivist; Melanie Vander Wal is departmental assistant; Dr. Robert Bolt is field agent and assistant archivist. Our capable student assistants are Lisa Van Drunen, Cyndi Veenstra, and Dana Verhulst. Our volunteers include Willene De Groot, Rev. Henry De Mots, Ed Gerritsen, Fred Greidanus, Ralph Haan, Dr. Henry Ippel, Helen Meulink, Rev. Gerrit Sheeres, Janet S. Sheeres, and Rev. Leonard Sweetman. 📖



Richard H. Harms

# SS *Maasdam*: The Battle of the Atlantic and a Dutch Sailor's Diary

David L. Baatenburg

*The only thing that ever really frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril.*

—Winston S. Churchill

The Allied war effort during WW II depended upon the maintenance of the Atlantic lifeline linking North America with the British Isles. Much of the food and raw materials, and all of the oil, were imported. Rather than attacking the Royal Navy—the largest in the world at the start of the War—Germany sought to defeat Britain by attacking the merchant shipping that supported the island nation.<sup>1</sup> The principal weapon used to accomplish that goal was the U-boat. The Battle of the Atlantic, the longest continuous campaign of World War II, took the lives of between 75,000 and 85,000 Allied seamen. And, for the three years beginning 3 September 1939

through 31 August 1942, German and Italian submarines sank a total of 1,904 Allied and neutral ships.<sup>2</sup>

One of the Allied counter-measures was the convoy system with destroyer escort to help protect merchant ships. The risk to merchant ships in convoy and to those who sailed on them is not well reported. Dirk Baatenburg de Jong, my father, sailed in several convoys. This is an account of one—Convoy HX 133—particularly the sinking on Thursday, 26 June 1941, of the Holland America Line's *Maasdam*.

*Maasdam*, the third of five with this name in the Holland America Line, was an 8,812-ton ship that was launched 21 October 1920, with a length of 466 and a beam of 58 feet. Constructed at Rotterdam, she was originally designed as a combination cargo and passenger vessel with accommodations for 14 first-class,

David L. Baatenburg is partner in the Grand Rapids law firm of Muller, Muller, Richmond, Harms & Myers. He was a history major in college particularly interested in WW II and will “watch pretty much anything that appears on TV that chronicles that war.”



The rebuilt SS *Maasdam*, with one smokestack, entering the Havana, Cuba, harbor just before the outbreak of World War II. Photo courtesy of the author.

26 June  
 's avond word de hollanse tanker  
 sibia gespederd, doch blijft also  
 gewoon of er niets aan de hand is  
 doorvaren en blijft ten spijs van  
 moffen drijven. Doch naar er duid

Baatenberg de Jong's entry for the day his ship sank, 26 June 1941, began in an understated manner, "This evening the Dutch tanker *Tibia* was torpedoed, but she remained as if nothing had happened. . . ."

174 second-class, and 802 third-class passengers in ninety cabins. She had a crew of eighty-nine and originally showed two funnels, but only one was functioning. The ship laid up in 1933 and overhauled the next year with the dummy funnel removed, passenger cabins reduced to twenty, and crew size to forty-eight.

My father was born 18 September 1911 in Maassluis, the Netherlands, a Dutch fishing village on the Maas River near Rotterdam.<sup>3</sup> At sixteen he entered the family business—trolling the North Sea for fish. Eventually he found a better-paying job as a sailor for the Holland America Line and was assigned to *Maasdam*. On 9 May 1940 she was in port in Liverpool, England, awaiting return to the Netherlands when the crew was warned not to return to their home country. The next day the German army invaded the Low Countries. The ship and crew were immediately militarized and *Maasdam* was chartered to the Ministry of War Transport in London.

On 2 April 1941, *Maasdam* left Hoboken, New Jersey, with a load of war material. The Atlantic crossing and the return were largely uneventful but the ship and crew saw both danger and excitement while docked in Liverpool. In the 26 April entry to his diary my father recorded Prime Minister Churchill's visit to the Liverpool docks. The diary reports that "Churchill is hailed loudly by the

crowds" and adds that "[i]n his talk he encourages them, telling them that they are on their way to victory." At that time the German Luftwaffe regularly bombed British targets, particularly ships in port. For several days German bombers dropped thousands of incendiary bombs on shipping and nearby buildings. Incendiaries were single-purpose bombs ranging in size up to 500 kg (1,100 pounds), intended to set fires. One night—as fearful as any in the war as far as *Maasdam*'s second radio operator, Ernie Brown, was concerned—hundreds of these bombs fell on or near *Maasdam*. My father wrote of his fears in his 4 May diary entry, where he recited words of assurance from Isaiah 43:2 but added "still I was often so afraid which is the result of me looking too much to people and circumstances."

Among the ordnance were small Thermite bombs, particularly dangerous to shipping as they quickly heated to a temperature as high as 4,000° Fahrenheit and burned their way through ship decking. That May evening numerous bombs fell and several nearby ships were badly damaged or destroyed. *Maasdam* crew members pushed several of these bombs overboard with shovels, melting the metal shovels in the process. When a shovel was not nearby, my father picked up one of those bombs with his overcoat and threw it overboard. Doing this burned his forearms, though only

temporarily, but the intense heat from the incendiary device he carried for only a few seconds damaged his eyes badly enough to require medical attention. The treating physician told my father that if he had carried the superheated bomb only a few more seconds he would have been permanently blinded.

The ship arrived at New York at the end of May and was filled with wheat and war material, including a pair of twin engine bombers, with wings loaded separately. *Maasdam* left New York for Halifax on 11 June 1941 with a crew of forty-eight, plus thirty-two passengers, including eleven US Marine Corps personnel and seventeen American Red Cross volunteer nurses. The marines were destined for duty at the US Embassy in London and the nurses were scheduled to serve at the Harvard Hospital, also in London. Traveling with the nurses was Mrs. Ruth Breckenridge, who was to act as housemother to sixty nurses at Harvard Hospital.

Halifax was a common port from which eastbound convoys formed. *Maasdam* arrived the evening of 13 June 1941. Assigned to Convoy HX 133, she left 16 June amidst incredibly dense fog that lasted four days, causing several ship collisions. On 21 June the fog had lifted and HX 133 was joined by thirty-eight ships from St. Johns, Virgin Islands. The resulting fifty-eight-ship convoy was reduced by seven due to the collisions and mechanical problems. One cruiser and four destroyers accompanied the convoy for protection.

*Maasdam*'s small, crowded lounge was the social center for passengers and crew. The ship's two tables were constantly occupied with card games as passengers and crew became acquainted over evening sandwiches and beer. The voyage began with 6,000 bottles of beer and after eight days one-third of that supply

had been consumed, causing the head steward to lament, “I’ll be short going back.”<sup>4</sup> The weather became rough, the seas were high and the sailors were ordered to sleep with their clothes and life jackets on. Sleep was difficult on the rolling ship, even more so after the 23 June warning to the crew that a German “wolf pack” was in the area. Anxiety was justified because on 19 June German Admiral Karl Donitz had scattered twenty U-boats throughout the North Atlantic. On the afternoon of 23 June, Rolf Mutzelburg, the twenty-eight-year-old *Kapitanleutnant* (Lieutenant Commander) of U-203, happened upon HX 133 approximately 400 miles south of Greenland. The sighting was the first Halifax convoy any U-boat had found in thirty-five days. Having caught HX 133 rather early in its voyage Donitz ordered Mutzelburg to shadow the convoy. It was Donitz’s intent to engage the convoy with as many U-boats as possible. Thus was launched an epic chase and battle that would last nearly a week.<sup>5</sup>

Mutzelburg tracked the convoy through the afternoon and evening of 23 June, sending frequent reports. Other U-boats plotted intercept

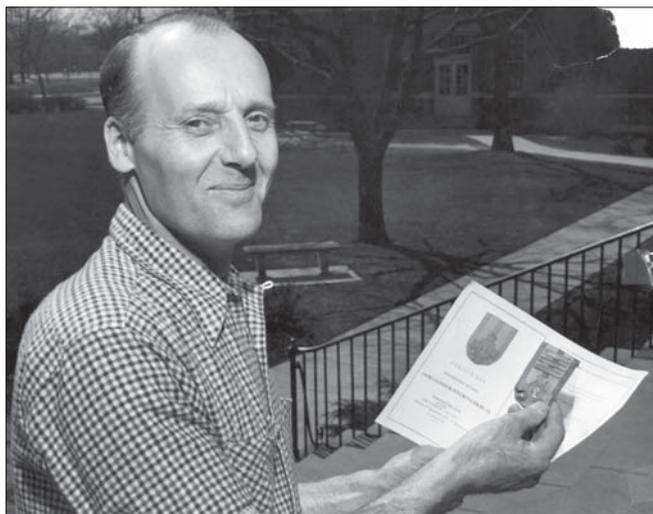
courses and early the next morning Admiral Donitz authorized U-203 to attack. Mutzelburg quickly responded and opened hostilities by firing on three large ships. He claimed sinking two and Norwegian sources report two of their ships—Vigrid and Soloy—were sunk the evening of 23-24 June, along with the British ship Brockley Hill.<sup>6</sup> No ships were torpedoed on 25 June and there is no evidence to show that any torpedoes were fired at any convoy ships that day.

“June 26th was a day full of excitement” begins—with considerable understatement—my father’s postwar handwritten account of the definitive moments of his life. Like all convoys, HX 133 traveled in rows and *Maasdam* was assigned Station 81 (eighth row, first ship). Late that evening my father was on watch on the starboard side. Ernie Brown was on duty in the radio room which was entirely sealed off from any outside view of events. The ship was traveling approximately 300 miles southwest of Iceland just south of the Arctic Circle. At this location, the light just before midnight—days after the summer solstice—was essentially a twilight sky. A storm system had moved through the North Atlantic

and it was no longer raining. The sea was not as rough as it had been but it still had swells.<sup>7</sup> At nightfall a half dozen U-boats were preparing to attack HX 133 and two convoy ships were hit but not sunk. By 2310 hours Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), 2110 hours ship’s time, the presence of submarines was reported, *Maasdam*’s anti-submarine gun was manned, and all crew members were on alert.

Among the U-boats was U-564 commanded by twenty-five-year-old Reinhard “Teddy” Suhren. That evening Suhren had been impatiently awaiting contact with HX 133 as part of a search line set up on orders from German Naval Command. Upon finding the convoy he ordered his chief engineer to keep U-564 at periscope depth (14 meters). Suhren observed an escort ship pass by, then being surprised to see the entire convoy tacking starboard. As the convoy’s turn continued U-564 literally was in the middle of the convoy. Whispering commands, Suhren found the lead freighter (presumably *Maasdam*) to be only 500 meters away and he had five torpedoes prepared for firing. As *Maasdam* continued to move forward, Suhren’s memoirs record the ship “now only 15m away, just beside me, high as a house and near enough to touch. It nearly runs us down.”<sup>8</sup> At 2345 hours GMT U-564 fired torpedoes in rapid succession. The first torpedo struck *Maasdam*’s port side at the rear of cargo hold no. 2. From my father’s starboard watch post and Ernie Brown’s radio room the meaning of the shudder was unmistakable. One of my father’s handwritten accounts mentions that “the alarm is sounded; in a way it seems to be almost a relief after days of tension.” Radio operator Brown immediately set out to dispose of the code books using a sack weighted with a chunk of scrap iron. He tied the sack and was headed out the door to toss it overboard when a second, more frightening, explosion rocked the ship.

Immediately to *Maasdam*’s port side was the 8,700-ton *Malaya II*, a British freighter loaded with TNT. Another of U-564’s torpedoes struck her and the ensuing detonation of that ship’s cargo literally blasted it out of the North Atlantic. A winch from *Malaya II* was thrown onto another of the convoy’s ships two rows away and shrapnel



Dirk Baatenberg de Jong during the 1950s with a newspaper story of his war-time experiences. In Grand Rapids, he was a member of the Calvin College maintenance team for many years. Photo courtesy of the author.

began raining down on the deck of *Maasdam* making it impossible to walk on deck for a brief time. Many on *Maasdam* believed their ship had been struck with a second torpedo, but when Brown looked across the water there was a patch of smooth, wave-less water where *Malaya II* should have been. Amazingly, six people from this suddenly nonexistent freighter survived, but thirty-eight others perished.

Directly behind *Maasdam* was the Norwegian tanker *Kongsgaard*. Moments later another of U-564's torpedoes hit *Kongsgaard*. In a time span that may have been no more than sixty seconds Suhren had scored a hat trick on HX 133.<sup>9</sup> Although *Kongsgaard* was not as seriously damaged and did not sink, the situation on *Maasdam* was more desperate. Bulkheads and walls between cabins were bent and doors demolished. One sailor was knocked unconscious when a door—no doubt sent flying by the explosion of *Malaya II*—struck him in the head. For a time some of the crew were trapped in a cabin, unable to open its door. Damage either from the torpedo or the explosion of the neighboring ship activated *Maasdam*'s steam whistle and the control had to be cut in order to stop the continuous noise.

My father, more protected in his watch position on the starboard side, observed several people with injuries as a result of the rain of metal. One passenger nearly had his heel cut off, while the third mate, who had been on the bridge with Captain Jan Pieter Boshoff, was struck in the head near the temple and began to bleed profusely.

Procedure required that Boshoff order the ship's engines stopped and the fuel supply cut off. The port shelter on the bridge was blown away and the wheelhouse—though heavily reinforced with concrete—was also gone and replaced by a large hole. The *Maasdam*'s foredeck quickly dropped to sea level. Boshoff consulted with



Survivors of SS *Maasdam*'s torpedoing aboard SS *Havprins*, one of two ships in convoy HX 133 to rescue passengers and crew. Photo courtesy of the author.

his chief engineer and his first officer, who on a previous ship had witnessed a similar torpedo attack and sinking, and gave the order to abandon ship. *Maasdam* was equipped with six lifeboats—1, 3, and 5 on the portside and 2, 4, and 6 on the starboard. Two portside lifeboats—those closest to what had been *Malaya II*—suffered damage from that explosion. Lifeboat 1 had been completely blown away and no. 3 (which was motorized) was hanging from its davit and had to be cut away in order to launch the no. 5 boat.<sup>10</sup>

*Maasdam* crew members and passengers had a specific lifeboat assignment but under the circumstances there was little choice other than to send those assigned to lifeboats 1 and 3 starboard to disembark there. Brown recently wrote that he still has “etched in his mind” a picture of the injured third mate, the blood streaming down his face, issuing orders to crew members preparing to launch a lifeboat; standing at his side was an American nurse attempting to staunch the heavy bleeding.<sup>11</sup>

A successful lifeboat launch from a

sinking ship—even one in a convoy—came with no promise of rescue. The standing convoy rule was not to stop to pick up survivors. There was good reason for this draconian-sounding rule—German U-boats loved to prey upon stragglers—explaining why these submarines were called “wolf packs.” The harshness of this rule was mitigated somewhat by the fact that the last ship in the column was usually designated as a rescue ship, but captains could use their own discretion to carry out rescues as conditions permitted. For instance, when the Norwegian ship *Vigrid*—a convoy straggler with engine trouble—became the first casualty of the convoy the night of June 23-24, four lifeboats containing forty-seven people were launched. It wasn't until 5 July—just as food and water supplies were running low—that the occupants of the first lifeboat were rescued. More than a week later a second lifeboat was picked up, but the other two disappeared forever. Only twenty-one of forty-seven people survived.<sup>12</sup>

From all reports there was never any panic among *Maasdam*'s

passengers and crew, but one of the launches nearly resulted in sudden disaster when the crew member opposite my father began lowering his end too quickly. The end my father was lowering could not keep up with the pace set at the opposite end and the lack of coordination nearly resulted in everyone in that boat being dumped into the rolling ocean waves. American nurse M. Marian McGill Wood, in her 1992 *American History* article, specifically mentions the difficulty in launching boat 4, “[i]t appeared as if the boat—lurching downward first at the bow and then stern—might drop its occupants into the sea at any moment.”<sup>13</sup> Eventually boat 4 splashed into the North Atlantic and, while the crew attempted to cut free, a wave slammed her against *Maasdam*’s hull. The boat nearly capsized before stabilizing. The other boats experienced similar difficulty during launching.

The last to leave the ship, following standard protocol, was Captain Boshoff. Prior to leaving on lifeboat 6, he made a final tour of the ship during which he determined that no more living people were on board. He also verified that the secret radio/telegraph codes had been thrown overboard in the specially weighted bag, but was unable to reach the ship’s documents and confidential papers stored in the almost totally destroyed chart room.

The four lifeboats, carrying forty-eight crew and thirty-two passengers, initially remained together. Small no. 2 and large no. 4 eventually made their way through the mist and the rolling North Atlantic waters to find the designated rescue ship—the Canadian freighter *Randa*. Lifeboats 5 and 6 made for *Havprins*, stopped since its course was blocked by the damaged ships. Despite standing orders not to stop and pick up survivors, *Havprins* chose to stay.

Boat 5 and its occupants reached the tanker, but the occupants of boat

6 had a more desperate struggle for survival. Aboard lifeboat 6, in the dim twilight, the splintered lifeboat began to fill with water. Nurse Lillian Evans reported, “First it came to our knees, then up to our waists. The water rose until soon we were completely submerged.” Although the lifeboat was taking on water and would eventually be swamped, it was designed not to sink due to metal flotation tanks under its seats, but rowing became impossible. Nurse McGill Wood described Captain Boshoff as standing in the lifeboat, cupping his hands, and repeatedly shouting, “Throw us a line! We’re sinking.”<sup>14</sup>

As the passengers furiously bailed water, swells washed away several occupants. McGill Wood remembers one large wave washing over the boat taking most occupants with it. Of the twenty to twenty-two people Boshoff testified were in lifeboat 6, approximately twelve stayed with the craft which was drifting towards *Havprins*. McGill Wood and at least one other nurse stayed with the swamped boat as did several crew members, including the first officer, who encouraged them all. McGill Wood wrote that they “found loops of rope secured to the outside of the lifeboat—at that moment they seemed like sea-based hitching posts.”<sup>15</sup> Others began swimming to *Havprins* approximately 200 yards away.<sup>16</sup> The water, while certainly chilly, was not as brutally cold as expected since the convoy was in the relatively warmer water of the Gulf Stream.

Once boat 5 reached *Havprins* and its occupants had boarded the rescue ship, Norwegian sailors used the lifeboat to rescue *Maasdam* survivors. On its way to the flooded boat 6, Norwegian sailors pulled four people from the water. Still attempting to swim in the North Atlantic were Maxine Loomis and Ruth Breckenridge. Breckenridge made her way to *Havprins* and

was eventually spotted drifting about mid-ship by Eugene Plouvier, *Maasdam*’s third engineer. Hanging from a rope ladder, Plouvier witnessed the efforts of several people as they tried to rescue Breckenridge from the water. According to the transcript of the deposition given by *Maasdam*’s officers on 9 July, these attempts repeatedly failed because she was not cooperative and again and again had to be released due to the swells and the motion of the tanker. Plouvier made his own attempts to rescue from the rope ladder. Plouvier managed to grab hold of Breckenridge but he was unable to maintain his hold. Breckenridge had a rescue rope in her hands but she made no real effort to grasp it, no doubt suffering from cold and exhaustion. Plouvier made the decision to jump into the ocean and drag her back to the rope ladder. At that moment *Havprins*, in danger of colliding with the now listing but still floating *Maasdam* in the rolling ocean water, maneuvered to avoid the impending collision and the sudden course change and turn of *Havprins*’ screws seemed to create a whirlpool that sucked Breckenridge under the water. She was not seen again and presumed drowned at 0100 hours GMT, 27 June 1941.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time another tragedy was unfolding alongside *Havprins*. Chief engineer Schutter, by now swimming towards the rescue ship, reached a floating drum attached to a lifeline. Several people had a hold on the drum or the rope, including Maxine Loomis, grasping the drum “in utter terror.” As the drum was pulled toward *Havprins* everyone except Loomis let go of the drum as they approached the ship. Two lines and a lifebuoy were thrown to her but Loomis, described as being in full shock, continued to hold onto the drum but “she apparently had no notion, as she continued staring

with terrified wide open eyes.” As the ship began to move forward, Loomis apparently finally let go of the floating drum, slipped beneath the waves near the ship’s propeller and like Breckenridge drowned.<sup>18</sup>

After steering clear of *Maasdam*, the tanker stopped again, now an even greater distance from those still bobbing in the water. In the dim light appeared a lifeboat manned by sailors from the tanker wearing black rubber suits and yellow hoods, rowing in perfect unison. This boat first picked up survivors near the tanker’s stern before arriving to rescue the others still clinging to *Maasdam*’s swamped lifeboat 6. “They’re Norwegians” noted Boshoff succinctly. Someone else, supplementing the captain’s comment, added “Viking gods.”<sup>19</sup> Eventually all the remaining passengers of boat 6 were taken into the life boat, overloading it. But a motorized lifeboat arrived shortly afterward and all were quickly towed to *Havprins* where it was still a challenge to get all the exhausted passengers and crew members aboard the tanker in the rolling sea.

Those rescued from the water were given immediate care and dry clothes. Nurse McGill Wood was provided an odd, “motley assortment of donated clothing—sailor pants and shirt, and an oversized overcoat.” One marine approached her and gave her the bad news about Breckenridge and Loomis. “Your roommate and your house-mother didn’t make it,” he said. “They got caught in the propeller when the ship changed position. We knew what happened when we saw shreds of kapok from their life vests floating in the water.”<sup>20</sup> For the first time they learned the name of the rescue tanker, that it was six years old and had lost five of its sister ships to German torpedoes. For those easily spooked it was no doubt even more distressing to learn that *Havprins*—depth charges

exploding around it—was carrying a cargo of highly flammable aviation fuel. The tanker hurried to rejoin the convoy and rumors claimed that its captain, having stopped to pick up survivors against standing convoy orders, would face reprimand if his ship didn’t regain its position. By the afternoon of 27 June the weather improved with the sun making its first appearance in many days. From the deck of *Havprins* the survivors from the night before could see that *Randa*, the designated rescue ship, had other members of *Maasdam*.<sup>21</sup>

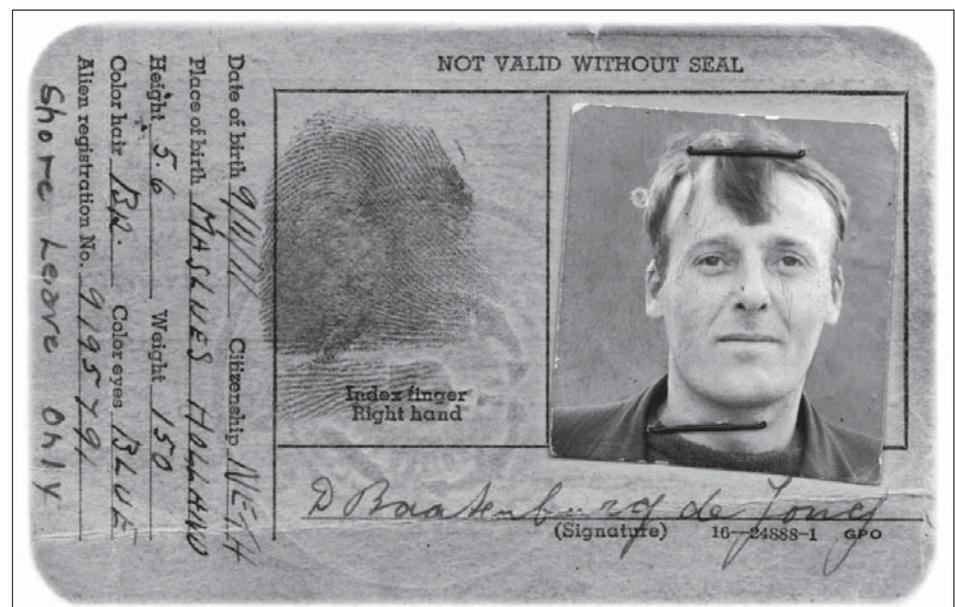
My father remembered all the nurses with admiration and fondness but he reserved special praise for the nurse who continually attended to the third mate’s head wound. Later he called her “a brave nurse, a young girl with sparkles in her eyes.” She kept constant pressure on the wound, first with one thumb, then the other, then back again. The assessment of a later attending physician was that her actions saved the man’s life.

Convoy HX 133 continued without *Maasdam* and *Malaya II* and the German submarines continued to hound the convoy for three more days before

being called off by Admiral Donitz. According to Clay Blair’s history, the battle with HX 133 led to important changes in U-boat strategy and tactics, including withdrawing U-boats from the area near Greenland, since this area was simply too large and remote for effective convoy hunting with the U-boats available; the fuel expended by shorter range U-boats left little time for patrolling and chasing convoys, and consistently poor weather conditions, including frequent fog, along with the onset of the summer solstice made conditions unfavorable for effective U-boat operations.<sup>22</sup>

After rescue *Randa* brought *Maasdam*’s survivors, including my father, to Reykjavik, Iceland, mainly to get the seriously injured third mate better medical care than what could be provided on a ship traveling in convoy. Meanwhile *Havprins* remained with HX 133 and delivered its *Maasdam* survivors at Avonmouth Docks, a Bristol suburb in southwest England, on 4 July.

The deaths of Ruth Breckenridge and Maxine Loomis left a scar on my father that never quite healed. When he did speak about the events he



A shore leave pass used while SS *Maasdam* was docked in the New York Harbor. Image courtesy of the author.

**MERCHANT NAVY A/A GUNNERY COURSE.**

**CERTIFICATE OF PROFICIENCY.**



D.E.M.S. TRAINING CENTRE  
 21 AUG 1941  
 H.M.S. "FLYING FOX" BRISTOL  
Date stamp of Training Centre.

Name D. BATENBURG

Rank or Rating SAIKOR

B. of T. or D.B. No. 10800 SS. OREEDYK  
HOLLAND AMERICA

has completed the Merchant Navy A/A Gunnery Course and is qualified in the firing and maintenance of a LEWIS, HOTCHKISS & MARLIN machine gun.

*J. W. Jonge*

Rank Gunner R.O.

D.E.M.S. Training Centre

D.E.M.S. TRAINING CENTRE  
 21 AUG 1941  
 H.M.S. "FLYING FOX" BRISTOL

Baatenberg de Jong's gunnery certification. Image courtesy of the author.

never failed to mention the deaths of the two women. He had other dangerous and interesting war experiences, but this was a defining life experience for him. I believe he spoke about the death of these women more than any other war-related event in his life, always with great sadness, and often with tears seemingly ready to well up in his eyes. Days before his death on 25 March 2007 he again described the helpless feeling at watching those unfolding events, ending with the phrase "those poor, brave nurses." The sadness created by what he witnessed never really left him.

## Epilogue

After a short stay in Reykjavik, my father and other crew members were picked up by the Dutch ship, *Volendam*. My father arrived in London on 17 July 1941 and was required to pass a Merchant Navy A/A Gunnery Course. Just days after his death I found that he—for sixty-six years—had kept among his papers the original Certificate of Proficiency he received which stated that he was "qualified in the firing and maintenance of a Lewis, Hotchkiss & Marlin machine gun."

A few days after their rescue Ruth Martin and Captain Boshoff parted company with the words, "We may meet again some day." In 1955, the former Red Cross

nurse, who had been studying at London University, booked passage on the *Holland America Ryndam* to return to the United States. When doing so she asked shipping officials whether they knew where Captain Jan Boshoff might now be. After hearing her story they smiled, and when Martin walked up the gangplank, *Ryndam's* skipper—Jan Boshoff—was there to meet her. He invited her to a champagne dinner to celebrate their survival, a dinner to be enjoyed together when the *Ryndam* reached the precise location in the North Atlantic where *Maasdam* had been torpedoed. ☞

## Endnotes

1. The BBC did a series of broadcasts on WW II events, including a segment on *The Battle of the Atlantic*. The DVD was released in 2005 and helpful written materials were prepared by Dr. Gary Sheffield, Senior Lecturer in the War Studies Group at King's College, London, and Land Warfare Historian at the Joint Services Command and Staff College, Shrivenham. See [www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwa/baffle\\_atlantic](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwa/baffle_atlantic).

2. Clay Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War*, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1996) vol. 1, 771. Blair's history, written after access to official Allied and German records became more generally available, challenges the long-held belief that German U-boats came within a whisker of defeating the Allies during WW II.

3. The primary source for this is my father, who immigrated to the United States after the war. My father eventually became a janitor at Calvin College, working there from 1954 until 1977. He left diaries and written accounts of his life, as well as telling me on many occasions of his war experiences. I was greatly aided by O. Ernie Brown, the second radio operator on *Maasdam* the night it sank, whom I found via his website, (<http://www.spectralumni.ca/erniebrown.htm>), created in memory of his time as a radio operator aboard merchant ships during the Battle of the Atlantic. I also corresponded with Brown via E-mail and we talked by telephone.

4. M. Marian McGill Wood, "Torpedoed!" *American History Illustrated* (Nov-Dec 1992), 38. In my 3 May 2007 telephone conversation with Ernie Brown, he mentioned that one of the passengers, Mac Phillips, was a British citizen and a Hollywood actor who was returning home to join the war effort.

5. See Clay Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War*, vol. 1, 308-316 for a detailed account of the entire attack on HX 133 the week of 23-29 June 1941. The attack was complicated by the fact that two outbound convoys, 335 and 336, were proceeding west through the same area. Westward traveling convoy 336, with twenty-three ships and five Canadian escorts, was ordered to avoid the area, but the convoy commander's regular radio operator was ill; the substitute could not decode

it and he simply laid it aside. The convergence of convoys brought additional ships into the killing zone.

6. The Norwegian website (English language) [www.warsailors.com](http://www.warsailors.com) is a rich source of additional information on all WW II convoys containing Norwegian ships, including HX 133. It gives a full list of all HX 133 ships, including those who, for one reason or another, never departed or turned back. It also gives each ship's designated location in the convoy, her nationality, cargo, destination, and, in several cases, a narrative of a ship's final disposition.

7. There is some disagreement on both the weather and the size of ocean swells. One of the few specific questions I remember asking my father was related to the weather and the seas. His answer stated that the weather the day or two before 26 June had been stormy but that the storm system had passed through and that it did not rain on 26 June. He also said the seas were not particularly rough. Brown agrees fully with my father's account of the weather and the seas. The nurses aboard the torpedoed *Maasdam* are quoted as saying it did rain and that the seas were quite rough. McGill Wood's account recalls that she wished she had brought her raincoat because "a heavy shower began" just as she was loaded into her lifeboat to leave the sinking ship. It certainly could be that it didn't rain on 26 June until about the time lifeboats were launched and that my father and Brown were too busy doing other things to notice. As for the size of the sea swells, Brown theorizes that the nurses were not used to seeing the kind of waves common to the North Atlantic. Waves that appeared rather pedestrian to regular seafarers might be described as huge by someone encountering them for the first time, particularly from a seat in a lifeboat.

8. *Fregattenkapitan* (rank is equivalent to US Navy commander) Suhren was an irreverent and rebellious commanding officer who was in constant hot water with German High Command; he claimed in his memoirs that he sank "about 33 ships" (he acknowledges twenty-three confirmed) and fired more successful torpedoes than anyone in the war. The website [www.uboat.net](http://www.uboat.net)

reports Suhren sank nineteen ships and damaged four others. His successes as U-boat captain protected him from his obstinate refusals to conform to the expectations of National Socialists and he found acceptance at the highest levels of Nazi power. He stayed as a guest of Martin Bormann at his private retreat near Berchtesgaden after being decorated with the Crossed Swords with Oak Leaves. Suhren danced to a tune with Eva Braun even though both the song and rhythmic movements had been banned by Propaganda and Education Minister Joseph Goebbels as "un-Germanic." Suhren survived the war and one year before his death in 1984 published his memoirs under the title *Nasses Eichenlaub*. These memoirs were translated and published in 2006 by Naval Institute Press using the English-language title *Teddy Suhren: Ace of Aces* (subtitled, *Memoirs of a U-Boat Rebel*).

This pursuit of HX 133 was Suhren's first mission as captain of U-564. In 2000 a shoebox of 361 photographs—first found in late summer 1944 by a Royal Navy diver at the newly liberated French port of Brest—was rediscovered in the British town of Staintondale, on the edge of Yorkshire Moors. These fascinating snapshots of life on a WW II German U-boat were those of Suhren and U-564 on a later mission. The pictures had been taken by an onboard war correspondent during the summer of 1942 and they show the U-boat in action in the Atlantic and Caribbean. Their discovery led to the publication of Lawrence Patterson's, *U-Boat War Patrol: The Hidden Photographic Diary of U-564* (London: Greenhill Books, 2004).

9. The timing of events is provided by the ship's declaration given by officers of *Maasdam* in London, the Norwegian account of the torpedo that struck *Kongsgaard*, is supported by Clay Blair's history as well as nurses' accounts, and is consistent with Ernie Brown's memory. The damage done to all three vessels engulfed *Kongsgaard*—traveling behind *Maasdam*, and behind and one row over from *Malaya II*—in black smoke from bow to stem. Suhren's memoirs also describe the torpedo firing and its aftermath and how he was prevented from firing additional torpedoes at the

convoy. Suhren described his frustration at the thick cloud of black smoke and wrote "I cannot see anything, and decide with a heavy heart to dive deep." *Teddy Suhren: Ace of Aces*, 108.

10. Besides the ship's declaration, the details concerning *Maasdam*'s lifeboat situation is provided by Ernie Brown and Wood's account in *American History Illustrated*.

11. From Ernie Brown's E-mail dated 24 April 2007.

12. Details on convoy rules were provided by Ernie Brown in a telephone interview 3 May 2007 and are also described on his website.

13. McGill Wood, "Torpedoed!" *American History Illustrated*, 39.

14. McGill Wood's *American History Illustrated* narrative (page 40) mentions that two men worked each oar but that very soon one oar broke. By the time a spare was unlashed the boat had already filled with so much sea water that further rowing was very difficult.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Ernie Brown reported to me that the marines had it the easiest because they were strong swimmers and also carried their own state-of-the-art life vests which they quickly filled with gas from carbon dioxide cartridges. He also mentioned that nurse Loomis told him that she could not swim.

17. Ship's Declaration testimony given by 3rd engineer Eugene Plouvier and 4th officer Johan Diehl given in London, 9 July 1941.

18. Brown did not observe the drowning of either Breckenridge or Loomis since he was occupied trying to find rescue for himself. My father reported that he did observe the drownings—apparently from the dry lifeboat 4.

19. Both McGill Wood's account and Ernie Brown's recollections make the same comments about the Norwegian sailors' rubber suits and yellow hoods.

20. McGill Wood, "Torpedoed!" *American History Illustrated*, 41.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Clay Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War*, vol. 1, 312-314. 24 April 2007.

# Our Trip to North America, Part IV

## Summer 1949

G. J. Buth, Nieuwe Tonge  
[Gerrit Johannes Buth – b. 16 May 1905]<sup>1</sup>

Translated from the Dutch by  
Gerrit W. Sheeres  
Annotated by  
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Calvin College Heritage Hall  
Summer 2005

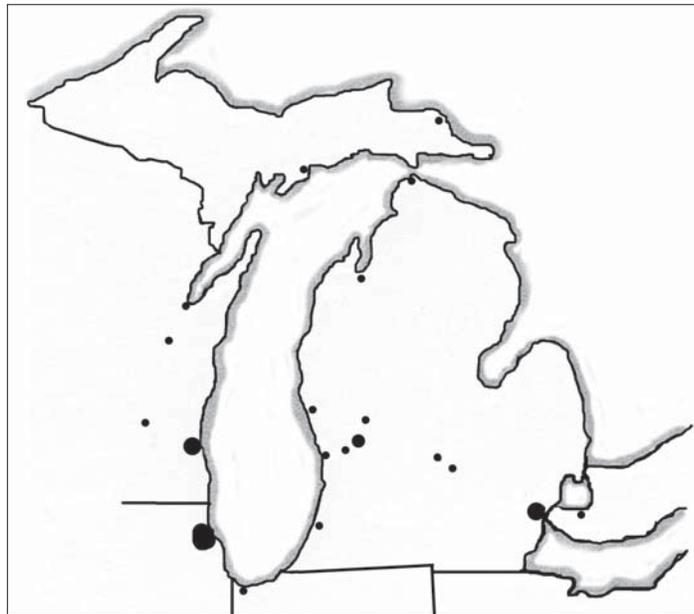
**Thursday, 28 July.** As mentioned we were slated to go to Canada today to visit Dirk Buth who, as we had learned, lived in the Tilbury area. We got up at 6:30 A.M. and the six of us left for Lansing. We had quite a trip ahead of us, so Uncle Pete stepped on the gas. We bought some candy and bananas on the way. At 11:30 A.M. we arrived in Detroit. We drove through the inner city with its tall buildings and headed for the tunnel under the Detroit River that leads to Canada. They checked us at the American side, and our passports got yet another stamp to Miny's delight; she is very proud of them. We had another thirty-four miles to go before we got to Tilbury. We stopped in a village to

eat at one o'clock. We thought we had found a decent restaurant but were greatly disappointed. The food they served was very hot, and not all that good.

After we had eaten Uncle Pete went to inquire where we might find Dirk Buth. This appeared to not be very easy, and it looked as if we might run into quite a few obstacles. The post office was closed. The police were unable to give us any information, and the telephone book did not make us any the wiser either. So we went to some of the businesses like the lumberyard, the mill, etc. But no one had any information that would help us. Hence we decided to tour the area and to inquire at farms. We also stopped

at a Dutch family, but they could not help us either. Another farmer advised us to go back to Tilbury and to inquire at the drugstore. They received some of his mail at times, but were unable to give us current information.

It seemed to be pretty hopeless. In the meantime it had started to rain and it was raining pretty hard because of a heavy thunderstorm. So there



During the thirteen days described in this installment of the Buth travel memoir, the Dutch visitors traveled more than 1,700 miles, mostly by automobile, but some by air and rail as well.

A native of the Lutjegast, Groningen, the Netherlands, Gerrit W. Sheeres is a retired pastor and volunteers in the Archives translating records from Dutch into English.

we were without any solid leads and, after some discussion, we decided to go home with nothing to show for our troubles. Uncle Pete had thought he might be able to locate him, and it would have been better if we had first asked Dirk's family on Flakkee<sup>2</sup> for his address. But we did all we could. On the way back we were going to take the bridge into Detroit. On top of the bridge you have a beautiful view. Gasoline cost thirty-nine cents per gallon in Canada, and twenty-five to twenty-seven cents in America. However, the Canadian gallon is one-fifth larger than the American, in other words 4.2 liters. In view of the difference in the rate of exchange the gasoline in Canada is about 5 percent more expensive. I mention this lest I forget it.

In Canada An looked for a cup and saucer for Mother Buth, but one was too crude and the next one too expensive, since we would have to add import duties, so we decided to purchase this later in Grand Rapids. We continued in the direction of Lansing. We stopped for a bite to eat in Portland

after the weather had improved some. We were home at nine o'clock and glad that we could sit down in a chair and rest.

We had in mind to go to bed early to recuperate after such a long trip. A long trip like that combined with the heat does make for a tiresome day.

**Friday, 29 July.** We had quite a thunderstorm last night with lots of rain. We left the light on for a while thinking that Miny might want to come upstairs, but we heard this morning that Abe had taken pity on her. So we don't have to worry if this should happen again.

In the afternoon Uncle Pete and I plan to go to the "Black and White Show" in Lowell, where the best Frisian Holstein cattle of this county will be shown. There we met quite a number of Buths and their wives; their animals did quite well. Gert, Uncle John's son, received the champion award in the category for elderly milk cows. Uncle Dirk received first prize with two bulls and two two-year-old cows. It consisted of three

blue ribbons. Uncle John and Martin Jr. also showed some excellent stock.

The weather was nice and we had a pleasant afternoon with everyone doing their own thing. I took pictures of some of the animals. We were home at 5:30 and Abe arrived soon afterwards and, as before, served us a highball.

After dinner with Uncle Pete I was supposed to visit Joe Markus. I had a little package for him from Holland. Fortunately we found the Markus family at home and we were received most heartily. Of course, Joe is an old Flakkee acquaintance because in 1947 he and his wife made a trip to Holland. He had a nice home with all the comforts that American homes have. We had a very pleasant couple of hours together during which both Holland and America were the topics of conversation. I could share some of his opinions in view of the fact that he and his parents were not exactly flush when they lived on Flakkee. Nevertheless, he was not aware of some of the social improvements that had taken place in Holland. When we left Joe asked when we were go-

ing back and asked if we would like to say goodbye before then on the Creston Farm. We were home at 10:30. We played cards for a while and then went to bed.

Tomorrow, Saturday, was going to be the last day that we would stay at Kent Hills.

**Saturday, 30 July.** These two weeks went by just as fast as the previous ones. We will remember them with much pleasure and gratitude; they really have shown



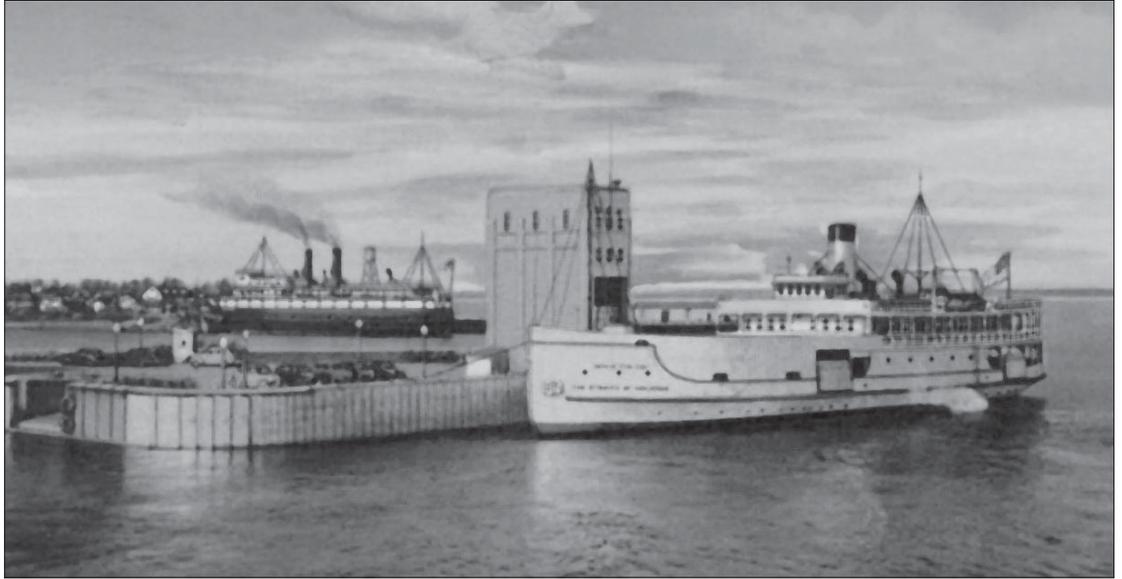
The Michigan Veterans' Facility, also known as the Soldiers' Home, was built during the late nineteenth century for aging veterans of the US Civil War. During the 1940s, the home was one of the customers for Buth milk. Photo courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives Grand Rapids Public Library.

us a good time. We have five weeks left yet and then we hope to undertake the return trip. We stayed home so we could pack our suitcases. In the afternoon we did go to the city to get a refrigerator for Abe's office from J. den Hartigh. When we came home Miny was practicing driving on the road in front of Abe's house. She is starting to get the hang of it, and it won't take her long.

Abe was home at 5:30 and served us a drink for the last time. After dinner he showed us a few photos of our visit to Niagara Falls. Around ten o'clock we took our leave from Kent Hills. Annie and Abe took us to the Hill, where Aunt Allie welcomed us back. We went to bed around midnight.

**Sunday, 31 July.** The weather turned this into a nice day and we fully enjoyed our natural surroundings. During the morning hours we didn't do much. Martin Jr. also was at Aunt Allie's because his wife had gone up north to her mother's cottage for a few days. In the afternoon we went to Peter who lives in Grandville. He is married to Pauline. We left at three o'clock and stopped at Mrs. Johnson's, Aunt Allie's neighbor. This lady had helped to collect a lot of goods after the war and sent them to the Netherlands. These people live in a nice home with beautiful surroundings. We saw much old glassware and all kinds of antique stuff.

They gave us a guided tour explaining everything. It was very interesting. At 4:30 we arrived at Peter's in Grandville, which is about twenty miles from the Creston Farm. Grandville is a nice village with a very



*Prior to the opening of the Mackinac Bridge in 1957, ferries carried highway traffic across the Straits of Mackinac, northward from Mackinaw City (note the differing spelling between the straits, bridge, and the city). Image courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives Grand Rapids Public Library.*

busy road right through it that takes you to Holland. Peter's house is not big, but it is surrounded by quite a bit of space for expansion or perhaps a new development which is what he intends to do. His garage and his workroom are built in such a way that another house can be built onto it. Uncle Dirk, Aunt Maatje, and Gerrit Markensteijn also came a bit later and we all had a cup of tea.

For supper we went back to the Creston Farm around 6:30. Uncle Dirk and Gerrit joined us and stayed the entire evening and we had a good time together.

**Monday, 1 August.** For once we had a beautiful cool morning. The ladies used this respite to do the laundry and take care of all kinds of odds and ends. At nine o'clock I went along with Martin Jr. on the milk truck that had to go to the dairy and the Soldiers' Home. We picked up some milk at Uncle Dirk's because they did not have enough for the Soldiers' Home. At the same time we picked up our suitcase that had been at Abe Pott's since our arrival. For the final packing of our

suitcases it would be easier to have them all at Aunt Allie's because we had already agreed that we would start our trip back home from there. Uncle Pete had cleaned an armed forces locker which we could use in case we ran short of space. We were quite pleased with that. The Pott family can then use it next year when they travel from Holland to America. We were back home at one o'clock. In the meantime old Mr. van Dale, who used to live in the Korteweegje in Dirksland, had stopped by. He had been visiting his son in New Jersey this summer.

They decided to go on a trip by car and came to Grand Rapids. Once here they wanted to meet the Buth family. They had gone to Uncle Dirk's first. Since I thought it would be nice to meet them I quickly got into the car and drove to the farm. It was very nice to meet him. The old gentleman has enjoyed himself immensely in this beautiful country. He is also going back on the *New Amsterdam* on 7 September so most likely we will meet him on board. Due to all of this I came back home rather late and missed out on dinner, but Aunt Allie had saved a little

bit for me and, now that it was later, it tasted even better.

After I had eaten I took Miny to Annie Pott's because she had to see the dentist for a filling this afternoon. They went to Dr. Verweij, a distant relative of Suus van Dyke. Annie was waiting for her. Uncle Pete was gone so I decided to drive back right away. I stopped at Uncle John's for a while. According to custom he was taking a nap on the bench after lunch. Aunt Marie had done the wash and also took a nap to beat the heat a little. After that I went to the Broers' farm to take a look; they were harvesting oats with the combine. It appeared to be high time for this. When you can see the clover and other weeds beginning to grow it is time to take care of the oats. When I arrived there it was raining a little, which was the reason they were getting some green stuff with the oats; although I think that it would spoil without drying. At Aunt Marie's I had a cup of tea followed by a cup of coffee and left again for the Creston Farm. Uncle Pete was going to come as well and stay the night at the Hill, for tomorrow we were going to go on a three-day trip to the north country.

The evening with the Leenheer family was very pleasant, and it was midnight before we went home. They are very hospitable people and Flakkee was a recurrent topic of conversation. Mrs. Leenheer showed a few photos they had made during their trip through Holland last year. It was very interesting. She showed some nice pictures of the Zeeland province and Flakkee got its share as well. The Lorredijk caught our attention especially.

**Tuesday, 2 August.** We were up at seven, for we had agreed to be ready by eight. The three ladies in the back, the luggage in the trunk, and we left the farm. We stopped after about an hour since a trout farm caught our attention. Fish are raised there to a certain



*The State of Michigan opened the Soo Locks in 1855 primarily for copper and iron ore shipments. The locks in the St. Marys River at Sault Ste. Marie have been improved several times since 1855 and have been under the ownership of the US Army Corps of Engineers since 1881. Photo courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives Grand Rapids Public Library.*

size after which they are planted in the Great Lakes. We were going to have lunch in Traverse City, which is located at an inlet of Lake Michigan. Martin Jr.'s wife is there visiting her mother who lives in one of those beautiful cottages. We had to do quite a bit of searching before we found the right address. There are hundreds of those small homes, totally hidden in the undergrowth. The reception was very warm and the lunch tasted great. An hour later we left and drove past the big lake. We saw some beautiful vistas.

The first thing we wanted to do was reach Mackinaw City. We had to take a ferry to Saint Ignace in order to reach our most northern point in Michigan.<sup>3</sup> We were in Mackinaw City around four o'clock and were amazed at the lines of cars that were waiting for the ferry. This was not going to be easy. Hundreds of cars were standing in line. Each crossing took one hundred cars, and the smaller ferries

could carry seventy-five. They had three big ones, one of which was a railroad ferry, and a small one. Our turn came at 6:30. The crossing took about forty-five minutes. I took a few pictures of that big pack of waiting cars and the ships and the water. We still had about fifty miles to go to get to Sault Ste. Marie. This was going to be the farthest point north of our trip. It started getting dark by the time we reached the city, so we first started looking for a place to stay. We already had noticed the many cars in the city, meaning that there were many tourists in town, which proved to be true. To our disappointment, all hotels were booked.

They tried to get some cabins for us, but that too proved to be impossible. Since it was getting late we went to the Tourist Information Center and after a lot of trouble we did get rooms in private homes that took in guests regularly during the tourist season. Aunt Allie slept in one, and the four

of us in another home. Fortunately it was clean and we were quite happy to be able to rest.

We looked back on a nice day during which we saw much.

**Wednesday, 3 August.** At eight the next morning we were back in the Dodge and ate breakfast in town. We drove straight through the upper part of the state of Michigan not quite knowing how far we would get. The plan was that we would try to get to Milwaukee in the state of Wisconsin, but we didn't know if we would make that. The distance was almost too far to be able to take in all the beautiful sights. We drove through a region with a lot of deer, and in wintertime thousands of hunters come up here to bag their favorite game. The region was truly beautiful with much natural beauty, and we found it difficult to imagine how people could make a living here. Uncle Pete told us that many people here work as guides for the hunters in wintertime and that they live very simply.

Since the soil appeared to be rather poor this made sense. We stopped for lunch in Manistique and our goal was to get to Green Bay and stay there overnight. In the meantime we had crossed into the state of Wisconsin and, because of the beautiful weather, we did not really get tired even though the trip was quite long. We arrived in Green Bay at six o'clock. Uncle Pete thought we had better drive on for a while, which would be better for the next day. So we decided to continue on to Appleton which was thirty miles farther. We were there at seven o'clock and found an excellent motel. Having first refreshed ourselves we went out for dinner. We filled the evening by driving around the city. At ten o'clock we had a drink and saw a movie in a theatre across from the motel. Before going to bed we discussed our travel plans for the next day. The plan was

to get to Milwaukee, and from there to take the clipper and cross the Lake to Muskegon. It meant eight hours of sailing. An and Miny were a bit apprehensive of a boat trip since they had heard that the waters of the lake could be rather tempestuous at times. So, Uncle Pete suggested that instead of taking the ferry we drive to Grand Rapids via Chicago. The ladies eagerly agreed to this.

**Thursday, 4 August.** At eight o'clock on Thursday we all went into the town for breakfast. We began full of good cheer. In this area we passed a lot of beautiful farms. The farm buildings all looked trim and neat. We stopped at a mink farm where we saw hundreds of those animals. I quickly took a picture.

Before we had left Sault Ste. Marie we visited the big locks. These were huge structures with equally huge installations that saw to it that the big ore boats could continue their journey either up or down within fifteen minutes. These locks are somewhat simi-

lar to the locks at IJmuiden which, according to Uncle John, are said to be the largest in the world.

We drove in the direction of Milwaukee. It was the third and last day of our trip. Milwaukee is known for its many large beer breweries. Many farmers in the area sell their barley to the breweries and are able to demand a higher price than if they sold it for feed. But it is the same there as it is in the Netherlands, the breweries insist on good color and quality. The barley in this area is mowed the traditional way, shocked, and threshed with an ordinary threshing machine. People in the state of Wisconsin generally work their grain that way. This area was of great interest to a Flakkee farmer. Then we made our way to the city of Chicago and tried to bypass the center of the city as much as possible. Our time was getting short and Grand Rapids was still a long way away.

Chicago is a city of about 3 million inhabitants; Milwaukee has 250,000. Some twenty miles past Chicago we stopped at a small dinner along the



Twice during the two weeks detailed in this installment, the Buths visited Milwaukee. Photo courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives Grand Rapids Public Library.



Opened in 1925 by the Holland Furnace Co., whose motto was “Holland Furnaces make warm friends,” the Warm Friend Hotel was purchased by Resthaven Care Community in 1981 and is now a senior residence center in Holland, Michigan. Photo courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives Grand Rapids Public Library.

road. After lunch and a refreshing drink we continued. In the meantime we were in the state of Illinois. Today we would drive through three states—Wisconsin, Illinois, and Michigan.<sup>4</sup> Just before Michigan we drove through a beautiful area with big dark woods followed by deep valleys and big hills. The horizon in this entire region was hazy due to the fumes of the enormously big factory complexes, something that you don't see in the Netherlands. We had planned to follow the big lake and thus reach Holland. We were going to eat our final dinner there. Some fifty miles from Holland we stopped to stretch our legs while the ladies had to buy a few things for the next day. An and Jan were going to celebrate their birthdays tomorrow. All of this took almost an hour after which we continued our trip to Holland. After a while we ran into a detour which delayed us and caused us to get lost. My advice based on the map could not convince Uncle Pete and thus we got farther and farther away from Holland. When Uncle Pete was finally

convinced that he was wrong we took a narrow, rough road that led us back to the highway. There we saw a crop duster spraying a blueberry field. It skimmed low across the field and in our estimation did a fine job. At 8:30 we stopped in Holland and, of course, at the Holland Hotel.<sup>5</sup> It looked very neat and trim, and the entrance was adorned with a sign that in Dutch read “Welkom Vreemdelingen,” and a sign near the exit read “Vaarwel Vrienden.” The dining room was arranged in Dutch style and we even saw a few waitresses in costumes typical of Spakenburg. We had an excellent dinner and enjoyed a highball before and an extra one after the meal in anticipation of the upcoming birthdays.

Then we started the last leg of our trip with the Creston Farm as our final destination. We wondered if perhaps we had gotten mail from the Netherlands; indeed, no fewer than seven letters were waiting for us. The last three days had been very enjoyable and we thanked Aunt Allie and Uncle Pete for all the things they had

done for us to make it so. We read the letter from Mother Buth aloud after which we all quickly retired for the night since tomorrow we wanted to go to Williamston for the big Michigan cattle show.

**Friday, 5 August.** Congratulations were the first order of business in the morning. An received congratulations and a gramophone played “Happy Birthday.” We started out at 9:30. An, Aunt Allie, Miny and I took Aunt Allie's car. We were our own boss and could go as we pleased. We arrived at our destination at noon. The cattle at this show were of excellent quality. Uncle John, Uncle Dirk, and Martin Jr. had taken a nice collection of animals to the show and they did well. They even got blue ribbons. We had lunch right there since Aunt Maatje and Aunt Allie had taken everything along. Around 3:30 we left and stopped in Portland for a glass of beer. Just before Grand Rapids we drove to the Mast farm which is right on the highway. The children had just come home from the city where they work in various factories. We did not get out of the car because this would have taken too much time, for we were also scheduled to visit Jacob Vreeswijk in the evening. We decided that after visiting Uncle Dirk we'd come back a couple of hours to hear about their experiences.

We were home at six, had to eat in a hurry, get spruced up quickly, for at seven the Leenheer family would arrive to take us to the Vreeswyk family. Mr. Vreeswyk is a cousin of An and has lived here in America for many years. Leenheer knew him and knew where he lived. He lived quite a ways outside of town in the Grandville area. After a brief search we reached our destination and the Vreeswyk family was very happy to see us. He has a pleasant wife and they have one daughter who lives next door. He

built the home they live in. He grew in my esteem, especially because of his workmanship and his age.

We had a very pleasant visit and drove home with Leenheer at eleven o'clock. We drove through Grand Rapids which is always quite interesting at night. Such a metropolis with its many advertisements in lights, good street lights, etc., makes for an image we won't soon forget. When we got home Aunt Allie had already retired for the night. First we read our mail. We had no less than seventeen letters from Holland, this in honor of Mother's birthday. It took us about an hour, but we did have a pleasant hour reading all those new messages.

**Saturday, 6 August.** The day began with good weather. An took care of the clothes we would need the coming days, after which all of us went to the city. Aunt Allie had to buy various items for the party. We were home at noon, and it was time to leave for Uncle Dan's where we would stay for a week. Miny stayed to assist Aunt Allie,

and we went to Belmont for lunch. I could take Aunt Allie's car and had to get Ann Campau at four o'clock; she was going to come a bit earlier so she could help with the party preparations.

We arrived at Aunt Riekje where we first unpacked our clothes. Uncle Dan was still at the farm. I quickly went to Uncle Dirk who lives only two minutes away by car. I asked Uncle Dirk if after lunch he would be willing to take me to the barber and then to go with me to the Campaus. He consented immediately. Uncle Dan joined also us. After lunch An did not feel too well because of a headache and laid down for a while. It was really too bad, first because the party was for her, and secondly for all those invited. Aunt Allie also was very disappointed, she had really put herself out to make sure everything would be just right—it was a big disappointment, but it could not be helped. Genevieve stayed home until after supper when we returned to check up on An. If she had been able to come then Aunt Riekje would

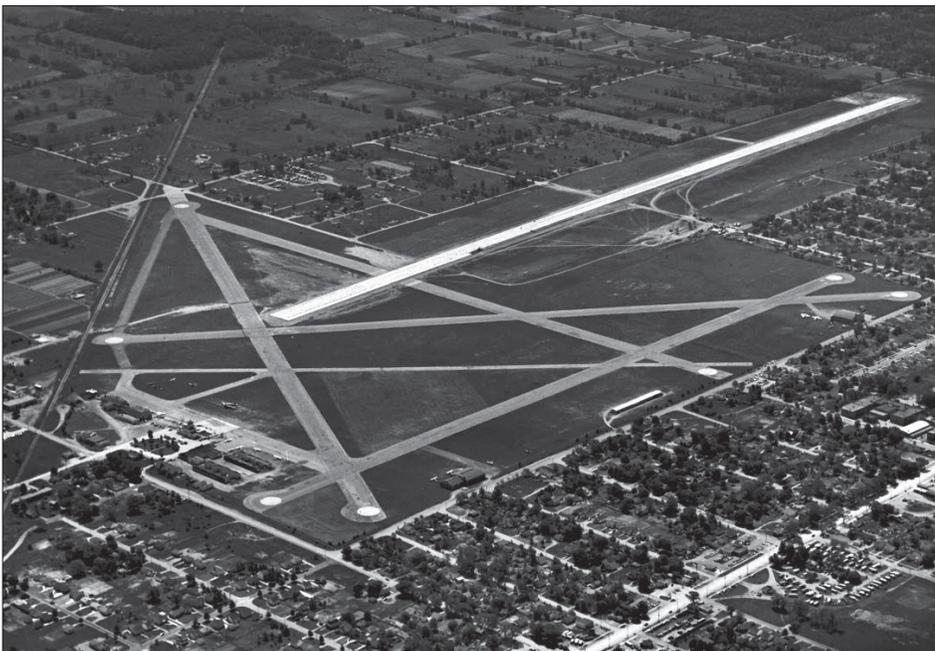
stay home. When we went to inquire it was obvious that she would not be able to get up, so we left without An. In the meantime we picked up Gerrit Markensteijn and later took him home again.

The dinner was excellent and well prepared. Martin Jr. took a picture and another one of Miny and me. It was such a pity that An did not see any of it. We returned home slightly after midnight. We had a really wonderful evening together.

**Sunday, 7 August.** The sun shone radiantly. We stayed home. I had a toothache that bothered me. It had been troubling me for a couple of days. I had hoped every day that it would go away, but instead it gradually got worse. I decided therefore to call Abe and ask him if there might be a dentist who would pull a tooth on Sunday. Miny called Abe and he asked if Dr. Verwys, who he knew quite well, was willing to pull the tooth. It turned out I was lucky. I could see the dentist at five o'clock. Abe and Ann came to get me, and fifteen minutes later the tooth was removed and I was in a different world.

Before supper the children of Uncle Dan came home and I met Gert for the first time. But he left before supper since he had not planned to stay. We spent the evening looking at pictures that I had taken along. The men planned a two-day trip for Monday and Tuesday. There was to be a big sale in Wisconsin and Uncle John had asked if we felt like going along. We did like the idea and so had to see to it that we would be at his place at 6:45 A.M.

**Monday, 8 August.** We got up at 5:30 A.M. Aunt Riekje and Miny drove us. There was a heavy fog which made driving difficult, but we did arrive on time and Gert, son of Uncle John, arrived shortly thereafter. I have to add that we were going to go to Chicago by plane and from there by train. The



The Grand Rapids Airport was located on an old fairgrounds south of 32nd Street at Madison Avenue. Due to the longer runway needs of jet aircraft, in 1963 it was replaced by the Gerald R. Ford International Airport east of the city. Image courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives Grand Rapids Public Library.

flight turned out satisfactory and because of the nice weather we had some beautiful vistas. After a flight of about an hour we landed at the big Chicago airport. It had gotten quite warm in the meantime. We quickly put our jackets in the suitcase and rolled up our sleeves. A taxi took us to the train, which was a half-hour ride. However, at this station there was no quick connection, so we tried our luck at another station nearby. Even there it took about one and a half hours before we could board a train. We freshened up a bit and ate our lunch in the waiting room of the station.

It was nice and cool there and when the train arrived we could sit down with a full stomach. The cars were wonderfully roomy and had excellent ventilation; it was pleasantly cool. This train was about a kilometer in length, I believe. You could barely see the last car. The trains in America are also very clean and have a club car where you can buy all kinds of drinks. We arrived at Watertown around noon and a taxi took us to our hotel. This hotel, Hotel Washington, was small but very clean; the only negative was that it was quite warm upstairs. After we had unloaded our suitcases and handed them over, we left with the same taxi for the sale which was about nine miles from Watertown.

When we arrived at the sale it had already been in progress for an hour, but we were able to find seats in the big tent that was built specifically for this purpose. When we entered someone gave us a catalogue in which one could find all the cows that were on sale with many pictures and the yield of milk, butter, etc. Gert, Uncle John's son, explained various things to me. It was stifling hot in the tent with swarms of flies. The first sale day closed at 5 P.M. after which we rode back to Watertown in Mr. Smith's car. He is one of the sale's managers.

Before we went out to eat we

refreshed ourselves. The dinner was at my expense this time because we had made a bet about Gert and Uncle John's weight, which I had gloriously lost. The important thing was that we had a delicious meal; the service was excellent. Later in the evening we went to a movie house because the air conditioning there makes for enjoyable temperatures. Around midnight we bought an ice cream cone and sat on the bench in front of the hotel for a while after which we went to bed. It was terribly hot in the bedroom. It did not seem to bother Uncle Dan, for he quickly fell sound asleep and did not wake up until eight in the morning. Uncle John slept in another room and Gert slept in the hallway on a cot with a screen around it.

**Tuesday, 9 August.** I was outside already at seven. Something had gotten into my eye which bothered me, but it was gone in a few hours. At first I thought I might have to see a doctor, but fortunately that was not the case. At ten o'clock we left for the sale in Mr. Smith's car. Uncle John had called the Milwaukee airport to see if they had room for four passengers to Grand Rapids, but they had room for only three. We decided that we would see what things looked like once we were there, hoping it would work out somehow.

We stayed at the sale until around two. An acquaintance of Gert took us to the city where we retrieved our suitcases. We first had a drink in Watertown and then rode to the station in the same car that had taken us to the sale. The train for Milwaukee left at 2:55. We arrived there at four o'clock, had lunch, and then hurried by taxi to the airport, which also took half an hour. We found out right away that there were indeed only three seats available on the airplane. Gert decided therefore to travel via Chicago and would not be home until ten o'clock. The plane took off at 6:45 P.M. and after

only a brief moment we were above the Great Lake which we had to cross in order to get to Muskegon. A nice flight attendant served us coffee and sandwiches. In about an hour we landed in Muskegon and ten minutes later took off again for the last leg to Grand Rapids. When we were above the city it started to get dusk and you could see the city lights quite distinctly. We had a nice flight and I am glad to have also experienced this in America. It was a good thing Mother did not know about it otherwise I might have been in for a scolding. However, it was too tempting not to do it. Miny and Richard were at the airport to welcome us back. Having thanked Uncle John most heartily for this enjoyable trip we quickly went home. When we arrived Abe and Ann were at Aunt Riekje's. An also was quite happy that we were back home and we celebrated with a good glass of beer.

I will not easily forget this trip for I learned quite a bit, and we saw that Wisconsin has a lot of beautiful farms with good equipment. The corn there also looked very good. ☺

#### Endnotes

1. Buth refers to his family in the USA as uncles and aunts, but he was their second cousin; in age they would have been the age of his uncles and aunts. He and his wife Anna (An) Geertrudi van Es and their daughter Jacomina Anna (Miny) born in 1929 made this journey accompanying his second Cousin Peter Buth who had been visiting the Netherlands. Gerrit Johannes was a successful farmer on Sommelsdijk, and operated the Buth family farm "Dijk zicht" later "Sunny Home."
2. The Island in the Netherlands.
3. Isle Royale is the most northern point of Michigan, while Copper Harbor is the most northern point of the Upper Peninsula.
4. Buth forgot to mention that they would also travel through Indiana.
5. Warm Friend, now a senior residence development.

# The Story of Chinese in the CRC

Peter Szto

The story of Chinese in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) may be unfamiliar to many of those of Dutch heritage, but the story of how Chinese immigrants entered and embraced the CRC involves three concerns. First, location in China influenced which Chinese immigrated to America. The regional orientation of early Chinese immigrants plays an important part in understanding why they left their ancestral home for a new, far away land. Second, the urban and cosmopolitan character of the Chinese immigrants once settled in the United States was a factor in their affiliation with the CRC. And finally, how the emergence of CRC Chinese ministries in the United States and Canada adds to the diversity within the CRC.

## The CRC in China before 1950

The 150th anniversary celebration in 2007 of the CRC offers a unique opportunity to reflect on how God has blessed the CRC. The CRC has a theological heritage deeply rooted in Reformation life and thought. Moreover, it has established institutions to pass its core theological beliefs from generation to generation. Providentially, the Chinese people were early recipients of the CRC's theology—first in China and more recently in North America. In its early history the CRC focused its mission efforts exclusively on the Dutch, and then later expanded to Native Americans. However, China, the world's most populous nation, begged the question of CRC involvement beyond North America. Synod responded to the challenge of

the Great Commission by sending the first CRC missionaries overseas. In 1920 it adopted the following grounds for doing so:

1. The rich language and literature of the Chinese.
2. The wholesome climate.
3. The relatively good opportunity for communication by telegraph.
4. The strategic importance of the land and people of China.
5. Good opportunities for the education of children of missionaries.
6. The conservative intellectual spirit of the Chinese that harmonizes more with the character of our own people than the emotional nature of the African natives.<sup>1</sup>

The CRC Synod felt China offered fewer obstacles to the young Dutch-American missionaries it would send to Shanghai—the Rev. and Mrs. John De Korne, Dr. and Mrs. Lee Huizenga, and the Rev. and Mrs. Harry Dykstra. This first effort to evangelize China foreshadowed the work among the Chinese in America some thirty years later.<sup>2</sup>

The CRC missionaries entered China during a period of political turmoil and transition. When civil war erupted in the 1930s no one anticipated that in 1949 the Communist Party would emerge victorious to establish a new government. The new regime immediately set out to liberate China from all foreign elements that had semi-colonized China since the nineteenth century. The regime's goal was to create a modern nation-state rooted

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in socialist ideology, as opposed to western Christian ideals. Ridding the country of “foreign oppression,” including CRC missionaries, would allow China to modernize on its own terms. In 1950 CRC missionaries reluctantly left China along with thousands of Chinese nationals who feared communist reprisals.

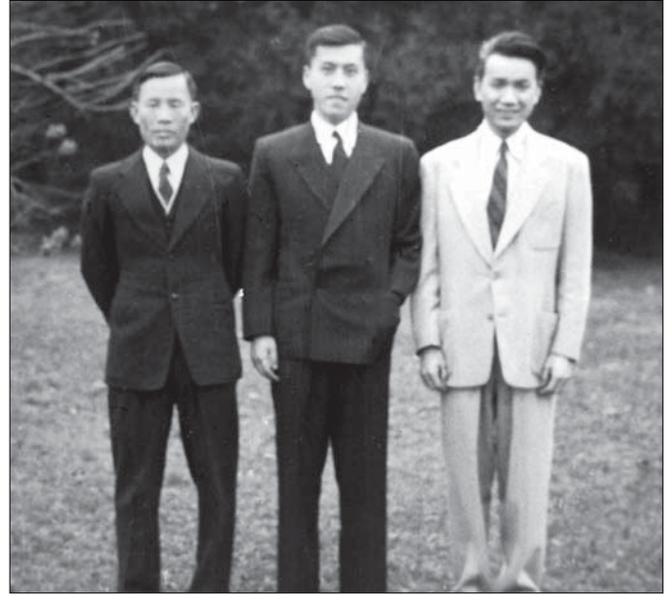
Leaving China created an unforeseen opportunity to evangelize the growing number of Chinese coming to America. The United States Chinese Exclusion Law in 1882 had inhibited legal immigration for decades. In 1890 the number of Chinese was 107,488; due to the Exclusion Law, by 1920 the number had dramatically dropped to 61,639. Repeal of the Exclusion Law in 1943 sparked a return to a steady influx. In 1952 the US Congress passed the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act, a law that intentionally allowed Chinese to immigrate and naturalize. This legislation admitted approximately 30,000 Chinese, including at least 5,000 scholars who were stranded in American universities due to the 1949 communist take-over. This latter group was comprised of “young scholars, former government officials, top financial managers, diplomats, and generals.”<sup>3</sup> Prior to the 1950s most Chinese in the United States

were uneducated, common laborers who lived in Chinatowns. The newer Chinese immigrants were educated, middle-class, and cosmopolitan in outlook. Taking advantage of this mission opportunity, the CRC strategically refocused its overseas ministry on a home missions effort among the Chinese immigrants.

### Chinese Immigrants

The Chinese who immigrated to America represented the vast regional and socio-cultural differences in China. The dialects they spoke, the foods they ate, and their educational levels differed according to their origins in China. The first wave of immigrants came from China’s far south—the province of Guangdong. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, because of its coastal location, Guangdong afforded convenient access for foreign merchants and missionaries arriving by sea. Maritime trade was far more profitable than the treacherous land route over the infamous Silk Road. The city of Canton (Guangzhou), in particular, thus became the main port of arrival for foreigners, as well as the principal point of departure for Chinese bound for America.

During the nineteenth century Chinese began leaving southern China due to social unrest and economic insecurity. Men in particular left and family to try their luck in



Left to right: An unidentified friend, Isaac Jen, and Paul Szto at Westminster Theological Seminary. Both Jen and Szto graduated from Westminster in 1952 and became ordained ministers in the Christian Reformed Church. Photo courtesy of the author.

America, in “Gold Mountain,” the name affectionately given to America. The first wave of southern migration began in the late 1840s when gold was discovered at Sutter’s Mill in California. The Chinese embarked from small villages in and around Canton to board ships bound for America from Hong Kong. Although many did not see riches from the gold rush, the Chinese continued to out-migrate, helping to build America’s first transcontinental railroad. Completion of the railroad in 1865 led to a dispersion of Chinese laborers from San Francisco to New York City. The former laborers settled in Chinatowns—ethnic enclaves common to all immigrant groups, providing safety and security in numbers. The Chinatowns were distinctly Cantonese and working-class in character. They provided continuity with the southern culture they had left in China.

Joining these laborers came a second wave of immigration at the turn of the twentieth century. This group included intellectuals from throughout China looking to the West as a



Like early services among the Dutch Reformed in the Netherlands, the early worship services of the Queens Christian Reformed Church were held in a home. Photo courtesy of the author.



*Cornelius Van Til and Paul Szto; their teacher/student relationship and friendship at Westminster introduced Szto to the Christian Reformed Church. Photo courtesy of the author.*

means to modernize. They came to study Western science and technology in order to develop China from its feudal past. This group settled near American universities, mostly in large urban centers. Thus, by the 1950s there were two distinct groups of Chinese in America—a labor class, holding positions in laundry shops, restaurants, and import-export companies; and an educated elite, as either students or university profes-

sors. Of the countless villages that sent their own overseas, the village of Chek Hom is unique for its contribution to the CRC. Chek Hom is a remote farming village southwest

of Canton. Nestled among plush rice fields and low-rolling hills, for centuries its inhabitants led quiet peaceful lives. Subsistence farming and strong family ties provided a harmonious way of life. Life on this good land yielded seasons of prosperity and peace. Unfortunately, later threats of poverty occasioned some to

migrate to nearby Canton, or to the bustling island of Hong Kong, or to America. Chek Hom was the birthplace of Paul Szto who in 1928 left for Hong Kong at age four. He eventually made his way to America in 1947 to become in 1957 the first Chinese pastor to be ordained in the CRC.

### **Chinese Ministry in New York City**

Szto had left China to enroll at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. His interest in theology was inspired by the vision of establishing an evangelical seminary in China. He entered Westminster Seminary in 1947 and Union Seminary in New York City in 1950—commuting

between the two cities and seminaries. The theology taught at Westminster Seminary captured Szto's mind and heart, creating a deep commitment to the historic Reformed faith and its creeds. The teachings

of Cornelius Van Til, in particular, shaped his understanding of the Bible in relation to the modern world. Van Til emphasized the relevance of Reformed apologetics for contextualizing a biblical world and life view, a perspective that would have lasting influence on Szto's ministry with the Chinese. It was at Westminster that a relationship with the CRC was also born through the encouragement of several professors.

Upon his graduation from Westminster Seminary in 1952, Szto explored his options for ministry and denominational affiliation. In 1952, on a weekend visit to a CRC church in Paterson, New Jersey, the late Rev. Dr. Oren Holtrop challenged Szto to minister among the Chinese living in New York City. Since China was closed to the Gospel after the Communist takeover in 1949, Holtrop's challenge was very appealing. A subsequent visit to the CRC Synod in Grand Rapids, Michigan, further convinced Szto to affiliate with and seek ordination in the CRC. Most importantly though, he felt theologically at home in the CRC and looked forward to developing a ministry among his fellow ex-patriots.

The CRC selected New York City as the place to start its work among the Chinese in America—because of the city's sizeable Chinese population. According to the 1950 US Census, the Chinese population in America was 117,629 (not including Hawaii and Alaska), approximately .08 percent of the entire population. Although the majority lived in California, by the 1960s, New York City had become the primary destination for Chinese immigrants, with up to 15,000 living in its Chinatown at any one time.<sup>4</sup> The perception in China was that Manhattan's Lower East Side provided a safe enough haven with its vibrant urban environment in which to live, work, and play.



*In 1968 worship services of the Queens Christian Reformed Church had moved from a home into its own sanctuary, here pictured in the late 1970s. Photo courtesy of the author.*

The late Rev. William Heynen of Third CRC in Paterson, New Jersey, saw the strategic importance of establishing a ministry among New York's growing Chinese population. He persuaded his congregation to provide seed money to support the ground-breaking ministry in New York City. For two years Szto diligently labored, seeking to gather converts from among his fellow Chinese intellectuals. His work began in his apartment near Columbia University. It was a ministry of hospitality to Chinese intellectuals. As a native Chinese himself and naturalized US citizen, Szto was keenly aware of the emotional and cultural needs foreigners experience when away from home for extended periods. He pursued a mission strategy sensitive to Chinese ways and cultural habits. His goal was to contextualize the Reformed faith as a church development principle to evangelize the Chinese. Familiar food and a common language experienced through friendship were essential elements of the ministry, as were Bible study and preaching. The Szto apartment provided a safe space for social support and the nurture of spiritual fellowship. But the ministry focused on both Chinese studying at Columbia University and on blue-collar workers working in Chinatown. Inspired by the success of Billy Graham crusades, open-air evangelism meetings were held in Chinatown. The strategy proved effective, especially when the Gospel was preached in the southern dialect of Toishan—the major dialect of Chinatown.

In 1954 the Eastern Home Missions Board (EHMB) took over the supervision of the Chinese ministry from Third CRC in order to provide more financial support. Synod mandated the General Committee for Home Missions to supervise the growing New York City ministry and formally designated Szto as a home missionary.

The next step of affiliation was ordination. On 6 October 1957, in Ocean City, New Jersey, Szto became the first Chinese ordained into the CRC ministry.

Reaching the Chinese with Reformed theology and the limited resources were concerns of both Szto and the

Home Missions Board. A difference in vision emerged over pursuing an urban student-focused ministry versus developing a parish-oriented approach based on suburban middle-class sensibilities. Szto advocated a student-focused ministry as a means to instill Reformed ideas and values in receptive minds. He believed that establishing relations with Chinese intellectuals and persuading them to embrace the advantages of Reformed thinking was strategic to reaching Chinese in their life situation. The notion of a biblical world-and-life view was good news for foreign intellectuals looking to explain their displacement. The strategy proved effective as countless hours of discussions filled Szto's Upper West Side apartment. The EHMB, however, did not support this long-term strategy of relationship building and nurturing leaders. In a 26 January 1955 report on Chinese missions, the EHMB made four critical observations of the New York City Chinese ministry:

The constituency there is not large enough for a fruitful Home Missions field.

The student constituency there is characterized by instability and



Isaac Jen (far left) and Paul Szto (second from right) and two unidentified people visiting the denominational headquarters at 2850 Kalamazoo Avenue in Grand Rapids. Photo courtesy of the author.

too much flux. The fact that many are students, or refugees, and have family relatives in the Orient proves this point.

The likelihood of being able to establish a Chinese church there is very remote.

Perhaps the most strategic service that can be performed for these Chinese is Christian social service to help them meet their problems as refugees.<sup>5</sup>

The authors of the report could not see the benefit of contextualizing Reformed ideas among students and instead favored a parish-style model of church development. With strong prodding from the Home Missions Board, Szto shifted his student ministry focus towards developing a suburban middle-class congregation in Queens.

In 1955 he moved the student ministry from Manhattan's Upper West Side to the middle-class Jamaican neighborhood in the borough of Queens in New York City. The change from urban to suburban was dramatic. Manhattan had been vibrant, energetic and full of students from China. Queens was predominantly Jewish and full of leafy residential



In 1954 Isaac Jen went to the Chicago area on behalf of the denomination's Home Missions Board. A congregation was formed the next year and is here pictured in October 1962. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

neighborhoods. Fortunately Szto discovered a handful of young Chinese families living close to the relocated ministry. His hope was that these same families could potentially support a parish-oriented model. Once in

Queens the focus on student ministry receded and creating a family ministry preoccupied Szto's energies. By 1956 Szto had established the first Mandarin-speaking house church in Queens.

An effective leadership team was formed and in 1958 a CRC congregation was formally established. It received organized status in the CRC in 1960.<sup>6</sup> To the surprise of many, the congregation quickly outgrew the rented house in Queens. A large house with ample land was purchased with the generous support of Home Missions. As Szto continued

QUEENS CRC				
YEAR	FAMILIES	COMMUNICANTS	TOTAL	COUNCIL
1960	11	31	51	4
1961	11	40	64	4
1962	11	41	65	4
1963	12	44	71	4
1964	13	49	79	4
1965	12	45	69	4
1966	13	46	70	4
1967	16	51	78	4
1968	18	53	80	4
1969	21	60	91	6
1970	25	68	104	6

to reach out to Chinese in Queens, attendance in the new house church congregation steadily increased. The table on this page illustrates the rapid growth of the Queens CRC ministry.

By the mid 1960s the congregation began talk of building its own sanctuary on the property. Within ten years the number of families and communicant members doubled. After prayer, planning, and outreach, a church building was erected in 1968 to house the ministry. Cultural differences eventually aggravated the tensions that arose between the congregation, its council, pastor, and the EHMB.

Still carrying the burden to reach newly arriving immigrants and intellectuals, Szto shared his vision for expanding the CRC ministry to the Chinese in the 17 June 1960 issue of the *Banner*:

The Queens Church has started some mission work in Chinatown and uptown Manhattan and deserves some help from our board and churches. The Chicago Mission has obtained a building so that it can better carry out the work. And we trust the Lord will continue to bless these fields and laborers as they become more integrated into our denomination. The second thing we can do is to explore the possibility of carrying on mission activities among the Chinese in San Francisco or Los Angeles on the West Coast, where there is great concentration of Chinese immigrants and students.<sup>8</sup>

Szto was well aware of the changing demographics of the Chinese population and the need for the denomination to plan strategically. Despite the denomination's focus on parish ministry, Szto's passion for student ministry never subsided and he took advantage of every opportunity to evangelize Chinese students. As a result, he helped organized Chinese congregations in Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

**Chicago**

The Hyde Park CRC was established by Rev. Isaac Jen in 1955. Jen was born in Shanghai and left China in 1952 to study at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. At Westminster, Jen and Szto met and became fast friends who shared a passion for Reformed theology and interest in developing ministry among their fellow Chinese. While still in seminary, Szto encouraged Jen to pray about serving in the CRC. In 1954, Jen went to Chicago and was instrumental in persuading a Chinese congregation

there to affiliate with the CRC. The group had initially started as a small student fellowship near the University of Chicago. It grew into a large Bible study and children’s vacation Bible school.

The pattern of growth in Chicago was similar to that of the ministry in New York City. Chinese university students were receptive to the Gospel



*Rev. George Lau leads an early outdoor meeting of the Crenshaw Church for Chinese-Americans in the Los Angeles area. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

through a ministry of hospitality, discipleship and Bible study. It was predictable that the urban and cosmopolitan character of the Chinese would lure them to big cities like Chicago. Jen labored diligently and soon the *Banner* reported in 1960 how the Chicago Mission had “obtained a building so that it can better carry out the work.”<sup>9</sup> In a report published by the Women’s Missionary Union of Grand Rapids, Jen wrote:

At the invitation of a small group of Chinese in Chicago who have organized as a church, our Home Missions Committee agreed to call and support me to work among these people. At present our average attendance is about thirty-five, including about eight children. Our peculiar difficulty in this work is the high rate of transiency. Of the people we came to serve two years ago, only two and one-half families will move away in the very near future. In other words, in two years’ time, there will shortly be only one family left of the original

group that called me. All the rest of the people who attend our church now have been newcomers since the fall of 1955.<sup>10</sup>

Jen’s commitment to Reformed doctrine however cannot be measured against numerical growth as depicted in the table on this page. He explained:

There is a great need for mission work to reach these Chinese intellectuals in the United States. Outwardly, they seem to be content, having higher degrees, good jobs and salaries, and families. But sometimes when you talk to them, you sense that they unknowingly agree with the words of the Ecclesiastes, “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” Deep down in their hearts, there is loneliness and disturbance. We must reach them with the Gospel of Comfort, of God’s love, and of the only way of salvation, to bring them back to God’s family.<sup>11</sup>

Jen understood all too well the nature of Chinese immigration and thus the need for wisdom and patience. His

<b>HYDE PARK CRC</b>	
<b>YEAR</b>	<b>FAMILIES</b>
1962	10
1963	12
1964	12
1965	12
1966	12
1967	12
1968	12
1969	12
1970	12

**CRENSHAW CRC**

YEAR	FAMILIES	COMMUNICANTS	TOTAL	COUNCIL
1964	14			
1965	14			
1966	15			
1967	18	39	60	5
1968	19	48	77	5
1969	19	60	83	8
1970	16	52	70	7

**GOLDEN GATE CRC**

YEAR	FAMILIES	COMMUNICANTS	TOTAL	COUNCIL
1968	3			
1969	5			
1970	5			

patience bore fruit when the Chicago ministry formally organized in 1974.

**Los Angeles**

CRC Chinese ministry in Los Angeles began through the support of Rev. Szto. According to “Under Our Roof,” a Home Missions report by Marvin C. Baarman, “Several years ago, Rev. Paul Szto made contact with a group of Orientals worshiping in the Crenshaw district of Los Angeles, California. The group was looking for an ecclesiastical roof under which it could grow into an expanded ministry.”<sup>12</sup> It took months of negotiation between Szto, the Crenshaw group, and the Home Missions Committee of Classis California before denominational affiliation took place. When it did, the new congregation called Rev. George J. Lau as its first pastor. The church began with thirteen families and soon found itself looking for its second pastor. In 1962 Stephen Jung became that second pastor. Born and raised in Hong Kong, Jung was introduced to Reformed theology through Rev.

Szto after meeting at a 1957 Billy Graham Crusade in New York City. At the time Jung was a student at the Toronto Bible College and was in New York to attend the crusade. Szto persuaded him to stay in New York to help develop the Queens CRC summer ministry program. His experience with the CRC was positive. When he moved to Los Angeles in 1958 to pursue a business career he visited the Cren-

shaw church. A gifted individual, Jung eventually became pastor of the Crenshaw church and helped enfold it into the CRC in 1966. After several years at Crenshaw, Jung accepted a call to pastor the Chinese church in Vancouver, Canada.

**San Francisco**

The fourth Chinese congregation established in the CRC was located in San Francisco. The founding pastor of the Golden Gate CRC was Peter Yang. Rev. Yang was born in China and raised in Hong Kong. He immigrated to the United States in 1958 to attend St. Paul Bible College in Minneapolis, Minnesota. That same year Szto was visiting Minneapolis to conduct research for his doctoral dissertation. Learning of Chinese students studying at the local Bible college, he visited the college, met Yang, and invited the young student to visit the CRC ministry in New York. Yang was impressed with the Queens ministry and returned to serve every summer until 1963. With the support of Szto, Yang enrolled at Calvin Seminary in 1959. After graduation in 1963, he spent a year as an intern at Crenshaw CRC before developing a church plant in San Francisco. In 1965 the first service was conducted in the living room of Rev. Yang’s home, a pattern already observed in New York and Chicago. Sixteen people were in attendance.



Installing officers in the Golden Gate CRC in San Francisco. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

### Future Opportunities

The story of Chinese in the CRC has been a tale of immigration and redemption. Within fifteen years of the initial Home Missions effort in 1952 four unique ministries had been established in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. These first four ministries bear testimony not only to faithful servants but to bold vision. Eventually, Chinese congregations emerged in Iowa City, Vancouver, Toronto, and Abbotsford, British Columbia. All these congregations, although largely on the periphery of mainstream denominational life, marked the first steps after World War II that the denomination took towards embracing people from all nations, tongues, and tribes into the CRC denominational family. ☞

### Endnotes

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5. P. C. H. Szto, “A Model of Covenantal Church Renewal and Inter-Church Relations — The Development of a Reformed Urban Ministry in New York City.” Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Westminster Theological Seminary: Philadelphia, PA, 1987.

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9. 17 June 1969, 13.

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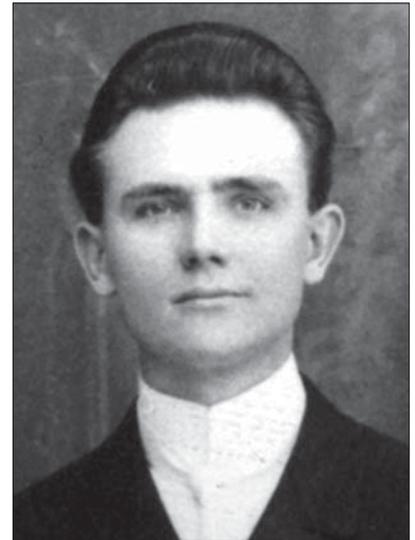
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# Disloyal Dutch? Herman Hoeksema and the Flag in Church Controversy during World War I

Robert P. Swierenga

The First World War sparked a wave of hyper-patriotism in the United States that impacted ethnic institutions with broadly Germanic roots. The federal government, under President Woodrow Wilson, set off the nativist campaign by having Congress create the War Propaganda Committee whose purpose was to promote patriotism in the citizenry and ferret out “traitors” with pro-German sympathies. Since Dutch, linguistically a Low German language, was confused in the popular mind with Duits or Deutsch (High German), Netherlanders tended to be painted with the same brush.

The Netherlands remained neutral during the War and this led some Americans to conclude that the Dutch were sympathetic to Germany. Dutch immigrants were also known to harbor anti-British sentiments lingering from the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). Further, many Dutch immigrants came in the last big wave before the War and had not applied for American citizenship, so they were exempt from the military draft. That they prospered in the booming war economy while neighbors went off to fight aroused considerable animosity. The clannish Dutch not only prospered, but farmers willingly paid premiums for nearby farmland to keep their adult children close. The expanding enclaves pressured American neighbors, who resented having to give way to the sturdy Dutch.



*Rev. Herman Hoeksema as he began his ministerial career in 1915. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

Twenty-seven states enacted sedition laws far more severe than the national model, most targeting Germans. Iowa Governor William Harding in May 1918 unilaterally issued a “Language Proclamation” that prohibited the use of any tongue but English on the streets, in stores, in telephone conversations (all phones were then open party lines), and in all worship services. The latter proviso presented the greatest hardship for recent Dutch immigrants and their clerics, who could only preach in Dutch. Under the governor’s edict they had to struggle to use English or stand down. Most chose the former course and fumbled for words. The Iowa

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governor later offered one concession; clerics could provide parishioners with English translations of sermons. In Sioux County ministers of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), an English-speaking denomination, collectively took the step of pledging to “address their [immigrant] congregations henceforth ‘in the English language and in the presence of the Stars and Stripes.’”<sup>1</sup>

Such conciliatory gestures did not assuage hyper-patriots bent on rooting out disloyalty. War hysteria gave the nativists the opportunity to even the score. In some locales anti-Dutch sentiment boiled over into mob action. Ministers found burning crosses on parsonage lawns and farmers lost barns to the torch. In the vicinity of Pella, Iowa, in 1918, several Christian schools were set afire in what became known as the “Hollander Fires.” Supporters managed to extinguish the flames at the Sully Christian School, leaving only minor damage, but the Peoria Christian School and adjacent Christian Reformed Church burned to the ground. In nearby New Sharon, the Reformed Church was set ablaze and the pastor, Edward Huibregtse, found dynamite under the parsonage that had failed to explode because of a defective fuse.<sup>2</sup>

Events in Peoria took a further ugly turn in May 1918 when a young thug brutally beat James Hietbrink, the Christian school principal, as he walked home from the village general store. The flash points, apparently, were decisions to not unfurl the American flag over the school, buy war bonds, or sign food pledges. The school was bursting at the seams, due to the high birthrate among the Dutch, while four nearby public schools were “almost without pupils” and three “will shortly be closed.” Birthrates among the Americans were as low as among the Dutch they were high. Following the attack the school

board immediately suspended classes and county authorities ordered the school to remain closed. Some weeks later state education officials rescinded the order as illegal and allowed the school to reopen.

Dutch leaders saw the troubles rooted in old and deep-seated jealousies due to their prosperity. Dutch farmers around New Sharon received threatening letters in the mail to “leave or be burned out.” American farmers, it was reported, hired thugs to set fires for \$50 or \$100 per “job.” The big barns of two farmers, G. Vos and an unidentified church elder, who had two sons serving in the army, were burned down one night. Another Hollander lost a new house he was about to occupy. At the deepest level, it was a cultural clash between Dutch Reformed immigrants and Yankee

Protestants, who lived in close physical proximity but in entirely separate social worlds.<sup>3</sup>

Hollanders elsewhere also found themselves at risk during the wartime hysteria. In Holland, Michigan, Edward Reimink was ousted by a unanimous vote of the members of the North Laketown Farmers’ Club because of “alleged pro-German utterances.” In Little Falls, New Jersey, the Rev. Sidney Zandstra, a graduate of Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, was forced to resign his pastorate after he inadvertently failed to doff his cap during the playing of the national anthem at an outdoor rally. The US Secret Service was called to investigate the disloyal Dutch dominie, but he was found innocent.<sup>4</sup>

Among Dutch Reformed immi-

grants, members of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) were more vulnerable than those of the RCA. The CRC had long prided itself for being the “Dutch church,” whereas the historic RCA boasted of being an “American church.” It had dropped the word “Dutch” from its official name in 1867 and was well assimilated into American Protestant culture. The CRC did not delete the name “Holland” from its title until 1894, and then it acted out of respect for its many German Reformed members and not as an affirmation of Americanization.

The “Dutchness”



Organized in 1902, the same year this structure was designed by J. H. Daverman & Son, Fourteenth Street was the first English-language Christian Reformed congregation in Holland, Michigan. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

of the CRC caused major problems during the First World War. In January 1918 *The Anchor*, the Hope College student newspaper, editorialized that “the average Dutch settlement in America is a hotbed of disloyalty.” By average Dutch settlement, the editors clearly meant CRC strongholds. The Grand Rapids labor newspaper, *Michigan Tradesman*, touted the same theme, calling Calvin College, the denominational school of the CRC, “a bed of pro-German ideas, prejudice, and propaganda,” and staffed by “German sympathizers” for its refusal to stop teaching German.<sup>5</sup>

Also in Grand Rapids, Rev. Dr. John Van Lonkhuyzen of the Alpine Avenue CRC, who in June 1915, before the United States had entered the war, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Grand Rapids News* that criticized President Wilson’s handling of the *Lusitania* sinking by a German U-boat. Van Lonkhuyzen, a recent émigré to the United States, believed that Wilson failed to live up to US neutrality laws by siding with the British in the crisis. Editor Edwin Booth printed the Dutch dominie’s letter in a black-lined box on page one and in an adjacent column castigated the foreigner for having the gall to criticize

the American president. The dominie stood his ground for a time and even filed a suit for slander against the *News*, which was unsuccessful. But the public pounding induced him to accept a call to the First Chicago congregation and he left in a huff.<sup>6</sup>

In nearby Holland, Michigan, Rev. Herman Hoeksema of the Fourteenth Street CRC “stirred up a hornet’s nest” in 1918 when he barred the American flag from his church sanctuary. The congregation was the first English-speaking body of that denomination in town and proud of its Americanizing ways. But, according to Hoeksema’s logical mind, unfurling the nation’s banner in church was conceding too much to Caesar’s realm.<sup>7</sup>

During World War I it was customary to display both the American and the Christian flags in front of the sanctuary. The *Holland City News* frequently reported the raising of the American flag in local congregations. The influential Third Reformed Church, the congregation of many professors at nearby Hope College and Western Seminary, both denominational schools, was first to be so recognized in May 1917.<sup>8</sup> Six weeks later Grace Episcopal Church went

Third Reformed one better. During the regular morning worship service it dedicated its “beautiful silk flag” with a special litany, including a rendition of the national anthem. The congregation also posted to its bulletin board the names of all the “boys in active service of the government.” That same morning Hope Reformed Church, the “College church” since 1862, unfurled Old Glory above the pulpit and promised to display it for the duration of the War. The congregation boasted that its flag was the “most beautiful banner in the city.” Trinity Reformed, First Reformed, and St. Francis Catholic churches similarly hung flags and service banners in impressive ceremonies of blessing.<sup>9</sup>

At St. Francis Church, the Right Reverend M. J. Gallagher of Grand Rapids, bishop of the diocese of Western Michigan, came to preach “an appropriate sermon, bless the flag, and give a solemn benediction” at a special Sunday evening service. The local press gave his hour-long “address” extensive coverage. Gallagher stressed the hyper-patriotism of Catholics who “sent to the colors double their proportionate share.” Catholics totaled only one-sixth of the American population, but made



From left to right, the Peoria Iowa Christian school, church, and parsonage. When the pastor, Rev. Jacob Weersing felt threatened, he rode his horse to neighboring pastor Cornelius De Leeuw to hide using an arranged knock on the door so that the De Leeuws would know it was he and not turn on any light. A neighbor of the De Leeuws came to take care of the horse. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

up 35 percent of the Army, 40 percent of the Marines, and over 50 percent of the Navy. “If necessary,” Gallagher concluded in a spirit of frenzied emotion, “the church would give its all, and would even sell its churches and its plate[s] to give to the government the means to be used ‘that this nation of the people, for the people, and by the people would not perish from the earth.’” What better way to close than to quote Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, America’s sacred text.<sup>10</sup>

The growing practice of linking God and country and blessing the American flag in worship services was too much for a strict Calvinist like Rev. Hoeksema. To honor the nation more than God smacked of a civil religion, not Christianity. The issue was joined for Hoeksema on Sunday morning, 10 February 1918, when he entered his pulpit and saw a flag on a staff in the front corner of the sanctuary. He said nothing until after the service when he asked the consistory to have it removed before the evening service. They complied and that evening in the course of his sermon Hoeksema explained to the congregation that the flag “had no place in a church and that the national anthem should not be sung there.” Some congregants did not agree with their dominie and they broadcast his views far and wide. Understandably, in the charged atmosphere of the War, this brought an immediate public outcry.

Three local men—Frank Ledebouer, a physician; Jacob Geerlings, a mail carrier; and Bert Slagh, a storekeeper—appointed themselves a committee of three, and within two days they called on Hoeksema to “discuss” his beliefs and let him know that “some indignation had been aroused” around town by his rumored remarks. The trio took along a reporter for the *Holland Daily Sentinel*, so that Hoeksema’s words could be fodder for a front-page story,

under the headline, “Pastor Asked to Explain by Committee.”<sup>11</sup> According to the newspaper “a spirited discussion ensued” and the dominie would not yield an inch. Hoeksema insisted that the Christian church, “as the manifestation of Christ’s body on earth, is universal in character; hence the church as an institution could not raise the American flag nor sing the national hymns.” The flag could be flown in the church edifice during choir concerts, Christian school graduation exercises, and similar events, but not during worship services. Members should also raise the flag at home, on the streets, and on all public and Christian school buildings. Hoeksema insisted that his congregants, as Christian citizens, “are duty bound to be loyal to their country” and to answer the call when needed for military service. Finally, he declared, “anyone who is pro-German in our time has no right to the name of Calvinist and is a rebel and traitor to his government.”<sup>12</sup>

Rev. Peter P. Cheff, minister of Hope Reformed Church, jumped into the fray immediately by penning a piece for the newspaper that challenged his colleague’s contention that the universal nature of the church precluded honoring the American flag. Hoeksema’s “proposition is illogical and wrong,” Cheff declared. “Does this universality exclude nationalism? Cannot a man love humanity and be a patriot just the same? Isn’t it perfectly proper to show one’s colors and not at all clash with the universal character of the church? If theology makes a man ‘neutral’ while in the house of prayer on the Sabbath, God deliver us from such theology.” Cheff continued, “The life of the church is interwoven with the life of the world so that you cannot separate the universal aspect of Christianity from the local colors.” Having dismissed Hoeksema’s argument, Cheff would not lay down his

pen before levying one more broadside; he charged the Dutch dominie with poisoning the “minds of men” by raising the “adder of disloyalty.” Cheff concluded, “I believe I voice the sentiment correctly when I claim that the best element feel aggrieved and somewhat humiliated by the acute situation which has developed in our midst.”<sup>13</sup>

Within the week Gerrit J. Diekema, former Fifth District US Congressman and Holland’s leading citizen, took his best shot at the CRC cleric. Diekema told a large assembly at Winants Chapel on the Hope College campus, which had gathered to witness the unveiling of the Hope Service Flag and the reading of the Hope Honor Roll of servicemen, that Hoeksema’s rationale was not only “theological hair-splitting” but bordering on treason. That Diekema used the word “treason” in his “thrilling address” raised the ante considerably, especially when the audience greeted his remarks “with a loud and prolonged applause.” Diekema, who had two sons in the military, almost worshiped the flag. In his eulogy he declared, “If the flag stands for all that is pure and noble and good, it is worthy of being unfurled in any building on the face of the earth. The very portals of heaven would welcome such an emblem.”<sup>14</sup>

The attacks on his patriotism forced Hoeksema to respond with a long letter, which the paper published in its entirety alongside Cheff’s letter. “Every citizen has a right to absolutely fair treatment,” declared the *Holland City News* editor sanctimoniously. But he gave Diekema equal space for a refutation that immediately followed Hoeksema’s defense. Doubtless, the editor saw the newspaper war of words as a boon to sales.

Hoeksema responded with three main points, modeling the structure of his sermonizing, and he insisted he was speaking in defense both of

himself and his entire denomination. He began on a questionable point, however, by asserting that the Protestant Reformation turned on the issue of religious liberty and the principle of the separation of church and state, which was embodied in the “laws of our own dear country.” This placed the emphasis on political theory, rather than Luther’s cardinal theological points of salvation by grace alone and sola scriptura.<sup>15</sup>

In his first point, Hoeksema took the typical debater’s tactic of insisting that his critics misunderstood the distinction he made between posting the flag during divine worship and at other times. He only opposed the former, not the latter. “You may be surprised to [find] Old Glory even in my own church building sometimes.” Not only did he honor the flag, he was willing to die for his country. “I am fully prepared to give my life for the country,” said the dominie, but “I am no less prepared to do the same for the truth of the Word of God.” The War was just, Hoeksema noted, and he fully supported the president. He had never condoned the German tactics of sinking merchant ships and mercilessly marching through Belgium. These views are well-known in the community, the cleric insisted. “How the gossip could spread that I was pro-German I fail to understand, unless for ecclesiastical differences, the ‘wish was father to the thought.’ No, Mr. Diekema, you are hopelessly mistaken if you call my attitude one of approximate treason: and mistaken you are again . . . if you try to present matters as if a certain college and a certain church had a monopoly of patriotism.” Christian Reformed folk are “not the people that raise riots and insurrections, we are not the people that perform the work of spies, but we are loyal, obedient people on whom our country can rely!”<sup>16</sup>

Having stated his personal views

on patriotism and war, and hopefully disarming his critics, Hoeksema developed his second point on the biblical and doctrinal necessity of citizens to support and pray for their government. He referred to historic Calvinism and the Heidelberg Catechism which Diekema and Cheff, as Reformed adherents, were also duty bound to uphold. In the third and final part of his statement Hoeksema asserted his beliefs about the spiritual nature of the church. “In the church of Jesus Christ, we raise no flag, and sing no national anthems. . . . The church and state are separate, must be separate, and if you do not keep them separate, it is you who stab at the heart of all true liberty. Then you will either come to the domination of church over state, as is the ideal of Roman Catholicism, or to the subjugation of the church to the state, as was the condition in Old England, at the time of our Pilgrim Fathers.” Hoeksema thus cleverly appealed to the anti-Catholicism of his readers and he tied his wagon to the revered Pilgrims, whom Diekema himself held up as precursors to the Dutch Seceders who had founded Holland in 1847. Both groups had been driven out of their homeland under persecution.<sup>17</sup>

Diekema enjoyed a fight as much as Hoeksema. In Diekema’s mind, the “self-delusional” cleric had displayed an “utter hopeless lack of good sense.” During war is no time for community leaders to waffle on patriotism. Everyone must together fight the Kaiser and his master, the devil. The German “beast, armed with the greatest and cruelest military machine the world has ever seen,” is bent on “world domination through terrorizing humanity with murder and rape.” This beast had already devoured millions, Diekema continued as he warmed to his work, and “the very earth is trembling under our

feet” and the “fate of humanity hangs in the balance.” At a time when “our sons and daughters are sinking to the bottom of the sea, are dropping from airships, crushed to earth, and are baring their breasts to German bombs and shrapnel, anyone [who] wastes his time in theological hair-splitting, rather than sincere patriotic effort . . . is guilty of conduct which is next to treason. . . . ‘If the shoe fits’ Hoeksema must ‘wear it.’”<sup>18</sup>

Diekema then “hit below the belt” by quoting reactions of Hoeksema’s own congregation to their pastor’s sermon. “My blood ran cold,” said one. “I wanted to leave the church but seemed frozen to my pew.” Another averred that his pastor was “such a good preacher but seems to be such a poor American.” A third was more nuanced in his reaction. “I do not believe he is so wrong at heart but he is unfortunate in his expressions.” That Hoeksema caused his parishioners pain and distress was bad enough, said Diekema, but that he gave comfort to the enemy was totally unacceptable. Further, Hoeksema wrongly asserted that he spoke for his entire denomination, when his fellow CRC pastors, Marinus Van Vessum of First Zeeland, John H. Geerlings of North Street Zeeland, and chaplain Leonard Trap at Camp Custer near Battle Creek, all had recently delivered “wonderful patriotic addresses” in a Zeeland church.

Diekema concluded with a ringing endorsement of unbridled patriotism. “This is a Christian nation. Our flag represents God and Country. It is the emblem of Purity, Truth, Loyalty, Sacrifice, Liberty, and Justice. You cannot banish it from a church building, for although you may carry it out, it remains in all its glory engraved in the hearts of the people.” Although Diekema had vented his spleen and displayed his debating skills, he missed Hoeksema’s point entirely. The

dominie welcomed the flag in church, just not during worship services.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to giving Cheff and Diekema space to refute Hoeksema, the *Holland City News* ran two more stories on the “flag in church” controversy. One noted that the Saturday evening edition of the *Holland Sentinel* had sold out as soon as it hit the streets and that at least two congregations—Hope Reformed and the Methodist Episcopal Church—had burst into spontaneous applause during Sunday morning worship services when their pastors mentioned the rightness of flying the flag in church.

The other story favorably reported an “out-spoken” oration on the “flag in church” controversy by editor Booth of the *Grand Rapids Press* in a well-attended Sunday evening service at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Holland, in which the American and congregational service flags were unfurled. Booth had earlier driven Van Lonkhuyzen out of Grand Rapids. The flag is the emblem of sacrifice, Booth declared. “Sacrifice is the center of civilization, and to the extent that the American flag stands for great sacrifice, to that extent it has a right to be placed in our Christian churches.”<sup>20</sup>

Within a month of Hoeksema’s “flag in church” sermon, he declined letters of call from three congregations, two in Grand Rapids and one in Paterson, New Jersey. For a strong-willed man who relished a fight and was determined to defend the integrity of the Christian faith, this was no time to cut and run. Hoeksema even had to ward off criticism from fellow CRC leaders. Rev. Henry Beets, pastor of the Burton Heights CRC in Grand Rapids and the influential editor of the denominational weekly, the *Banner*, scored Hoeksema for placing “Our People’s Loyalty Under a Cloud,” as he titled an editorial on 14 March 1918. Beets addressed the broader issue. “We want to claim here



*A Grand Rapids critic of the Wilson Administration’s neutrality policy, which he felt favored the British, Rev. John VanLonkhuyzen, like Hoeksema, became the object of public criticism by residents and one newspaper editor when the US entered World War I. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

publicly that the great bulk of the charges of pro-Germanism among us consists of unwarranted exaggeration, based upon one-sided information, or at least on misunderstanding, or both.” The apparent pro-Germanism is “in reality nothing but anti-British sentiment, created by historical conditions, some of them going back to the days of Cromwell and Charles II, and some of it dating from the Boer War.” Give the Dutch a little time “to get their bearings on the changing sea of world politics,” and they will overcome their psychological inertia and “change their mind.”<sup>21</sup>

That leading voices in the Grand Rapids CRC would not back the young cleric in Holland was not unexpected, given that they had not done so for Van Lonkhuyzen. But little did Hoeksema expect that some members of his own congregation would act to embarrass him publicly and undermine his crusade. Early on a Sunday morning in mid-July 1918, just three months after the third letter of decline, led by James Dyke Van Putten, a future political science professor at Hope College, some young people sneaked into the church through



*A graduate of Hope College and the law department of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Diekema was a member of the Michigan State House of Representatives, 1885-1891, mayor of Holland in 1895, and also served as Michigan’s 5th Congressional District to the Sixtieth Congress, 1907-1911. He had been a candidate in the 1916 primary for Michigan governor. Photo courtesy of the Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, Holland, Michigan.*

the basement door and hung a huge American flag behind the pulpit. When the dominie and consistory entered the sanctuary for the morning service they were shocked to find Old Glory filling the alcove from floor to ceiling. The sight “created no unusual stir during the services,” the *City News* editor noted in the understatement of the year. He went on to report that Rev. Hoeksema, amazingly, carried on the service as usual, but only after informing the body that “the decorations were placed there unbeknown to him or members of the church consistory.” In the congregational prayer he “made a fervent prayer for the soldiers,” but he also asked God to forgive those who committed “an act of rowdiness.”<sup>22</sup> Having made their point, or perhaps in pangs of guilt, the pranksters just as craftily re-entered the church that Sunday afternoon and removed the national emblem before the evening service.

The newspaper report failed to note that atop the pulpit Bible that morning, Hoeksema had found a note,



Unlike Rev. Hoeksema, Rev. John P. Battema and the council of nearby Maple Avenue Christian Reformed Church had no objection to placing an American flag in the sanctuary. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

signed by the American Protective League that read: “This flag must and shall remain in this place.” It is reported that the “ensuing uproar, especially among the better folk in town, prompted [Rev. Hoeksema] to carry a pistol, which he threatened to use one night on some vigilantes near his home.”<sup>23</sup>

Hoeksema’s principled position against civil religion was further undermined the same week when a sister church, Maple Avenue CRC, at a congregational meeting voted “with a great deal of enthusiasm” to place the American flag in their sanctuary along with a congregational service flag. The decision clearly had the approbation of the consistory and the pastor, Rev. John P. Battema.<sup>24</sup>

Following the July 1918 flag unfurling at Fourteenth Street Church

no further news accounts of the controversy appeared in the local press. The public war of words was over. Fifteen months later, in January 1920, Hoeksema announced that he had accepted the call extended to him by the Eastern Avenue CRC of Grand Rapids.<sup>25</sup>

That Herman Hoeksema was right, biblically and theologically, to challenge unbridled patriotism within the walls of the Christian Church, is beyond question. But Hoeksema’s analysis was surprisingly simplistic. He drew on the patristic tradition to argue for the universality of the Christian church, but made no attempt to develop a doctrine of the church in relation to the state such as, for example, his contemporary Rienhold Niebuhr did. In Niebuhr’s typology, Calvinists believed in transforming culture, not being made captive by it. But the dominie lost the propaganda war. In a time of national crisis most Americans equated God and country and saw Christianity and patriotism to be one and the same holy crusade against German totalitarianism and militarism.

One of the remarkable aspects of the controversy was the contrasting views of Reformed and Christian Reformed believers. The two churches shared a common ethnic and religious heritage yet the differing rate of Americanization kept them apart. The “Dutch” Christian Reformed Church, which had gathered in most of the immigrants since the 1880s and sought to hold American cultural influences

at bay, was better able to hold the line against the worship of national icons.

The Reformed Church, on the other hand, was thoroughly acculturated by 1917 and saw no conflict between American Christianity and America as a Christian nation. Indeed, it had been common for a century or more for Reformed churches to hold special patriotic worship services on the Sundays around Memorial Day and the Fourth of July. Worshipers today find the American flag and other red, white, and blue banners prominently displayed; they sing patriotic “God and country” songs; veterans rise and receive ovations; children’s sermons celebrate the blessings of freedom; and church bulletins boldly display the national colors. Some pastors might even sport a stars-and-stripes tie.<sup>26</sup>

As CRC citizens have Americanized, many now also display flags in church sanctuaries during worship services and have adopted other patriotic gestures, with little thought to the theological implications. But some members, especially immigrants of the 1950s, recognized the myopia and challenged this mixing of God and country. They reminded fellow believers that they belong to a heavenly kingdom that is not of this world. Indeed, in 1984 the Worship Committee of the Fourteenth Street CRC decided to remove all flags from the sanctuary and when a member objected the elders stood behind their committee.<sup>27</sup> On this point, at least, Hoeksema was finally vindicated. ☞

## Endnotes

1. *Holland City News*, 11 July 1918; letter of Rev. Sytze De Bruine, *De Hollandsche Amerikaan* (Kalamazoo), 3 June 1918 (translation by Nella Kennedy); James P. Dahm and Dorothy Van Kooten in *Peoria, Iowa: A Story of Two Cultures, With an In Depth Look at the Hollander Fires* (rev. ed., Pella, Iowa: 1993), 80-81.
2. Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the United States of America*, 2 vols., Robert P. Swierenga, general ed., Adriaan de Wit, translator (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1985), 760-63.
3. *Holland City News*, 13 June, 20 June 1918; Chas. Stuursma, "About the Peoria Incident," *Banner*, 13 June 1918; Van Hinte, *Netherlanders*, 761-63.
4. *Holland City News*, 2 August 1917; 25 April 1918.
5. *The Anchor* (Hope College), January 1918; *Michigan Tradesman*, 16 January 1918, both cited in Henry Beets's editorial, "Our People's Loyalty Under a Cloud," *Banner*, 14 March 1918, 180-82.
6. Van Lonkhuyzen, "Speelen met Vuur" [Playing with Fire], *De Wachter*, 16 June 1915, translated by William Buursma; *Grand Rapids News*, 3 July, 29 July 1915; *Grand Rapids Press*, 3 July, 4 November 1915; *Holland City News*, 4 November 1915.
7. Jacob E. Nyenhuis, *Centennial History of the Fourteenth Street Christian*

- Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan 1902-2002* (Holland, MI: 2002), 13-14; *Holland City News*, 14 February 1918; *Holland Daily Sentinel*, 13 February 1918; *Michigan Tradesman*, 6 March 1918.
8. *Holland City News*, 17 May 1917.
  9. *Ibid.*, 28 June 1917; 7 March, 14 March, 21 March, 30 May 1918.
  10. *Ibid.*, 14 March 1918.
  11. Gertrude Hoeksema, *Therefore Have I Spoken: A Biography of Herman Hoeksema* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969), 81-82, which extensively quotes the *Holland Daily Sentinel* articles of 13-18 February 1918.
  12. *Holland City News*, 14 February 1918.
  13. *Ibid.*
  14. *Ibid.*, 21 February 1918.
  15. *Ibid.*
  16. *Ibid.*
  17. *Ibid.*
  18. *Ibid.*
  19. *Ibid.*
  20. *Ibid.*
  21. *Ibid.*; *Holland City News*, 28 Feb., 14 March, 11 April 1918; Beets, "Our People's Loyalty Under a Cloud," 180-81. Beets also published a lecture of Rev. R. B. Kuiper of the Sherman Street CRC of Grand Rapids, entitled "Christian Patriotism," which he had delivered at Calvin College on 11 April 1918. Kuiper, the future president of Calvin

College (1930-33), had "standing," and his views set forth the "official" position of the CRC establishment (*Banner*, 6 June, 13 June, 20 June 1918, 418-19, 432-33, 452-53).

22. *Holland City News*, 18 July 1918; Jacob E. Nyenhuis, "A Century of Change and Adaptation in the First English-Speaking Congregation of the Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan," 188, in Nyenhuis, ed., *A Goodly Heritage: Essays in Honor of the Reverend Dr. Elton J. Bruins at Eighty* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). Whether due to the flag "break-in" or not, the consistory of the Fourteenth Street CRC did not renew janitor Kroze's contract in 1919 and he was "asked to resign" as of 1 May (consistory minutes, 10 March 1919, quoted in Nyenhuis, *Centennial History*, 73).

23. James D. Bratt and Christopher H. Meehan, *Gathered at the River: Grand Rapids, Michigan and Its People of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 119.

24. *Holland City News*, 18 July 1918.

25. *Ibid.*, 22 January 1920.

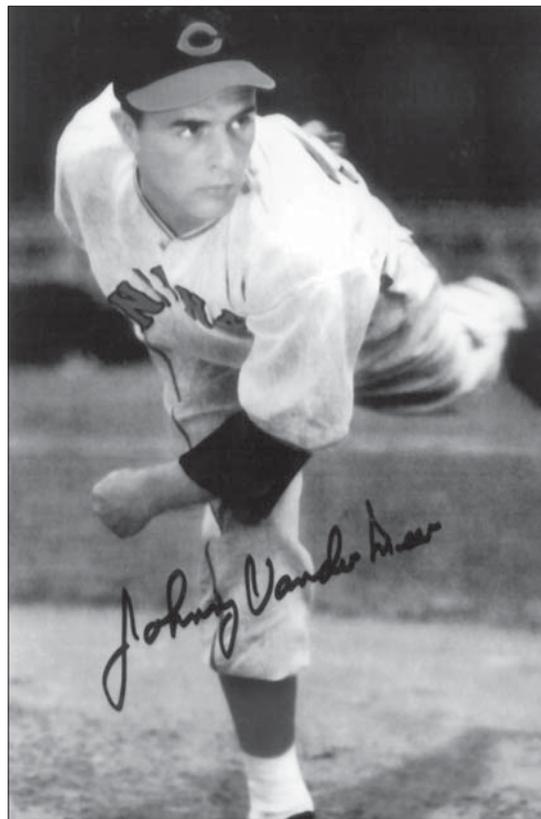
26. Brian Brooks, Hudsonville, Mich., letter to the editor, *Church Herald*, Jan. 2006, p. 6.

27. Fourteenth Street CRC, consistory minutes, 28 March 1984, as quoted in Nyenhuis, *Centennial History*, 133.

# Johnny Vander Meer: The Dutch Master

Calvin Cevaál

**I**t promised to be a big baseball night for fans of the Brooklyn Dodgers. On 15 June 1938 Ebbets Field would play its first night game under the newly-installed lights. And, to top that, the starting pitcher for



*A copy of the autographed images from one of Vander Meer's baseball cards. Photo courtesy of the author.*

the opposing team, the Cincinnati Reds, would be the southpaw Johnny Vander Meer, who had pitched a no-hitter against the Boston Bees<sup>1</sup> just four days previously.

Over five hundred fans from Vander Meer's hometown—Midland Park, New Jersey—planned to attend, including his parents, sister Garberdina (Gerry), and fiancée Lois Stewart.

Babe Ruth was an invited guest, as was Jesse Owens who would run an exhibition race against an outfielder from each team, who would get a head start.

The Dodgers had oversold the game with close to 39,000 fans in the stadium, which had a seating capacity of 32,000. At a pregame ceremony Vander Meer was presented a watch by the mayor of Midland Park. The fire department had to be called in to clear the aisles and try to control the crowd. The game was delayed for so long that the two pitchers warmed up three times. Years later John said about being feted by his hometown: "That's a jinx right there. You usually don't get by the third inning."<sup>2</sup>

After the delay of more than an hour the umpire finally called out the familiar "Play ball!" About the only player in the Bees' lineup that today's average baseball fan might recognize was Vince DiMaggio, the brother of Joe. The Bees' manager was a different matter; he was the crafty Casey Stengel, who would become legendary manager of the NY Yankees. Vandy's<sup>3</sup> catcher was one of the premier catchers in the league—Ernesto "Schnozz" Lombardi. He was large and slow-footed but had an outstanding batting average of .342, a fine throwing arm, and could handle pitchers well. His batting average might have been higher had he had any speed on the bases.

The Reds were managed by Bill McKechnie. Vander Meer's mound opponent was Albert "Max" Butcher with a record for the year of five wins and four losses. The Reds threatened

*Calvin D. Cevaál and his wife live in North Carolina in retirement. He has previously written about the Cevaál and Kranendonk families, both from Oostburg, Wisconsin. He travelled to New Jersey while doing research for this article.*

in the first inning with runners on first and third but Lombardi flied out to end the inning. Johnny walked a man in Brooklyn's first but routine outs brought the inning to a close. In the third inning, with two men on base, the Reds' first baseman Frank McCormick connected for a homer in the left field stands. Lombardi then walked and after two more singles, Lombardi scored. This was all for Butcher, who was replaced by Tot Presnell, who had a 4-3 record in 1938. Shortstop Billy Myers struck out to end the inning. Both the Reds and the Dodgers went out in order in the fourth and fifth innings and nothing happened in the sixth. By the seventh inning the crowd—now aware that the Dodgers were hitless—was paying more attention to every pitch thrown by Vandy. The Reds scored twice in the seventh increasing their lead 6-0. In the bottom of the inning Vander Meer experienced a touch of wildness, walking Harry "Cookie" Lavagetto and Dolph Camilli. Brooklyn fans had a glimmer of hope for a big

inning, but neither scored. The new pitcher for the Dodgers, Vito Tamulis, did a superb job in the ninth getting the Reds one-two-three.

And so the stage was set for the last of the ninth. Much has been written about that last bat the Dodgers had, and it has to go down as one of the most exciting nail-biting experiences ever witnessed by a baseball fan. Who better to call the inning than the old redhead himself, Red Barber, the famous voice of the Brooklyn Dodgers. The game was not broadcast in 1938 and what follows is a recreation of the inning, play by play.

Vander Meer goes through the eighth inning and this huge crowd at Brooklyn now is roaring for Vander Meer to do it. In the last half of the ninth inning, the first batter up for the Dodgers was Buddy Hassett, and he hits a little ground ball on the first base side and Vander Meer, like a hungry cat, swept off the mound, grabbed it, and tagged Hassett out himself. One out. And then Vander Meer's trouble that had caused him to be in the

minor leagues for six years while he was a rookie, he was twenty-three, his trouble was wildness. He couldn't find the plate. He suddenly walked Babe Phelps, and Phelps gave way for a pinch-runner named Goody Rosen, as Burleigh Grimes, the then Dodger manager, made a move.

So the next batter up is the dangerous Harry "Cookie" Lavagetto, and he was walked. And now two men are on, and Vander Meer seems to be almost out of control himself. Dolph Camilli, an even more dangerous hitter, came up. Vander Meer throws him a strike and then four balls. Now he has loaded the bases, he has walked three straight men. But still with one out in the ninth inning, he hasn't given up a base hit . . . .

Now the batter coming up is Ernie Coy, a big right-hand hitting outfielder who played fullback at Texas and he can run like a deer. Vander Meer is ready to go, McKechnie going back to the dugout . . . .

Ernie Lombardi, "Big Schnozz," sitting back of the plate, was ready to give the sign. One out. Vander Meer pitches and fires a strike. No balls and one strike.

The infield is back . . . Coy swings, and it's a ground ball half speed going down to third. Riggs charges, he's got it, and his only play is to the force at home. Two outs but the bases remain loaded. Vander Meer now is just one out away, and the hitter coming up is Leo Durocher, a right-hand hitter, a loose-footed hitter, and a dangerous man in the pinch. Vander Meer goes to the rosin bag, throws it away, the big left-hander steps on the mound, looks around, the outfield is straight away. He delivers, it's a strike. No balls, one strike. Leo is going to get ahead if he can. Leo's ready, so is Vander Meer. The runners take their leads. Two down. Here's the pitch. Strike two.

Vander Meer ready. Lombardi sets up the target. The left-hander delivers, Durocher swings, it's a hard line drive going down the right field line and it's foul, just by a few feet, in the right field corner. Durocher gets back in again, Vander Meer rubs up a new



John Vander Meer attended Midland Park Christian School where he played on the school baseball team, the "Obadiah Nine." Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

ball. He pitches and it's a high fly ball going into medium center field. Harry Craft runs under it, sets, and takes it and it's a double no-hitter for Vander Meer!<sup>4</sup>

Of course, bedlam erupted on the field. Big Ernie Lombardi rushed to Johnny and lifted him off of the ground. Babe Ruth, who was seated in the Reds' dugout, greeted him with "nice going, kid." A group of teammates formed a protective barrier around him to protect him from the fans who had overcome security and who would have torn the clothes from his body. Some loyal friends from Midland Park waited hours for him to emerge from the clubhouse and escort him home.

Early the next morning Vander Meer was off fishing for bass, but the biggest surprise of the day turned out to be a visit to the Vander Meer home by Babe Ruth. His sister, Gerry, collected dozens of flash bulbs left by photographers and kept them as souvenirs. Congratulatory telegrams started pouring in. The ones saved were from President Franklin D. Roosevelt and National League Commissioner, Ford Frick. Letters arrived from J. Edgar Hoover, Head of the FBI, as well as the Mayor of Cincinnati, and baseball announcer Red Barber.

Vander Meer was born on 2 November 1914 the second son and middle child of Jacob and Katie. Their older son, Martin, had been born in 1912 and would become a semi-professional catcher and a battery mate for John.<sup>5</sup> Their daughter, Gerry, was born in 1922. Jacob Vander Meer's entire working life was at the United Piece Dye Works in Paterson where he became a maintenance foreman. In 1918 the family moved approximately five miles from the Borough of Prospect Park to the Borough of Midland Park where they purchased a wood-framed house on Rea Avenue.



*The Midland Park Rangers, which became a semi-professional team in New Jersey. Vander Meer is seated in the front row, at the far left. Photo courtesy of the author.*

John started playing baseball in grade school at the Midland Park Christian School for the "Obadiah Nine," named after their Bible Society; the team later became the Rangers. After grade school John and his father disagreed over which high school to attend. His father insisted on a Christian high school while John saw more opportunity to advance his baseball career in the public high school. When they reached an impasse, John decided to forego school and his father got him a job at the United Piece Dye Works. He apprenticed as an engraver and after a couple of years was earning \$22 per week. All during this time he was the star pitcher for the Rangers and local semi-pro teams.

He described his developing baseball career during these years as:

The first money I received for playing ball was thirty cents an inning for pitching for the Midland Park Rangers. Sometimes I made as much as three dollars a week extra. My pitching improved and soon I was able

to make as much as fifteen dollars a week pitching for semi-pro teams in the Paterson vicinity.

I had pitched five no-hit, no-run games in the summer of 1932 in semi-pro games around Paterson. I pitched one for the Vaughans of Paterson, an eight-inning affair that I didn't even win. It ended in a 0-0 tie because of darkness. I pitched three for the Midland Park Rangers, winning them all. The other one I pitched and won for the Prospect Park Prospects, a seven-inning twilight game.

I don't want to raise any animosity among those who claim to have discovered me, but Fred Pridmore, of Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, an oil salesman who was an avid baseball fan and who had major league connections, was the first to believe enough in me to try to get me a try-out.

Pridmore was sold on my possibilities and he got me a three-day tryout with the Giants in late September, 1932. I reported to the Polo Grounds at ten o'clock on a Saturday morning, expecting to see Bill Terry, my boyhood hero, who had succeeded John McGraw as manager of the Giants that season. Terry wasn't there. I

worked out and nobody paid much attention to me.

Later I dressed and sat in the left field stands and watched the Giants play the Cardinals and began to wonder.

Sunday, I sat in church, still wondering.

I didn't wonder on Monday. I went to work at my old job at the United Piece Dye Works, in Paterson, at \$22.50 a week.<sup>6</sup>

Vander Meer got his big break when Joseph Walsh, a producer for Pathe Films in New York City, came to see National League President John Heyden about an idea he had for a baseball film. Dave Driscoll, Business Manager for the Brooklyn Dodgers, was also in the office. Walsh wanted to make a film about an all-American boy who tries out for a major league team. The boy had to have a good chance of succeeding and had to come from an average family with religious tones and an unblemished character.

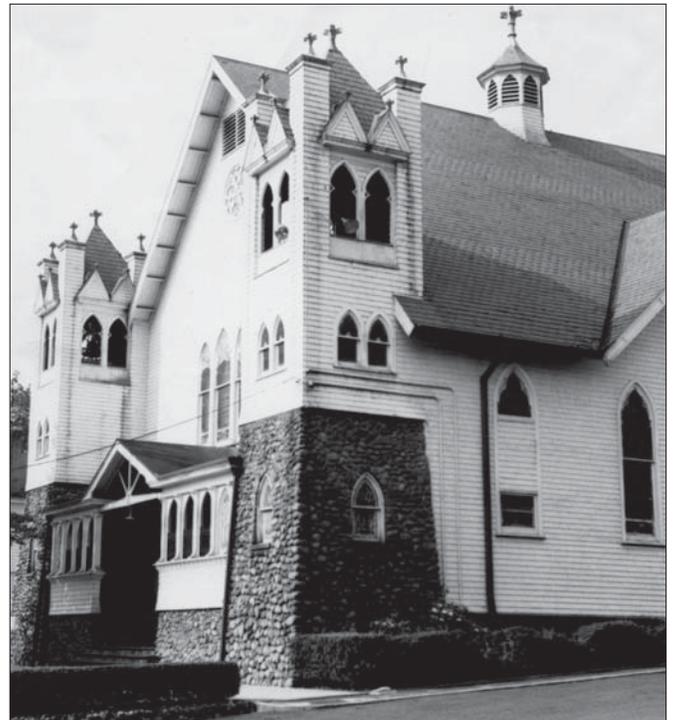
Driscoll told Walsh about Vander Meer. Driscoll had watched Vander Meer pitch that summer and did a background investigation with a view to offering him a contract with the Dodgers. Heyden bought the concept and Vander Meer arrived at the Brooklyn Dodgers' training camp in Miami in 1933 to star in the film called "Typical American Boy." Joe S. Haute, a former Cleveland Indians pitcher, introduced him to some of the techniques of becoming a better pitcher. They worked on how to toe the rubber and develop a curve ball to supplement his fast ball; up to that time his pitching arsenal was limited to the fast ball. After the completion of the film John was offered a contract by the Dodgers for \$125 a month and was sent to the "A" farm team in Dayton, Ohio. It was a start, but the inauspicious start of most professional baseball players at the time.

One problem for Vander Meer

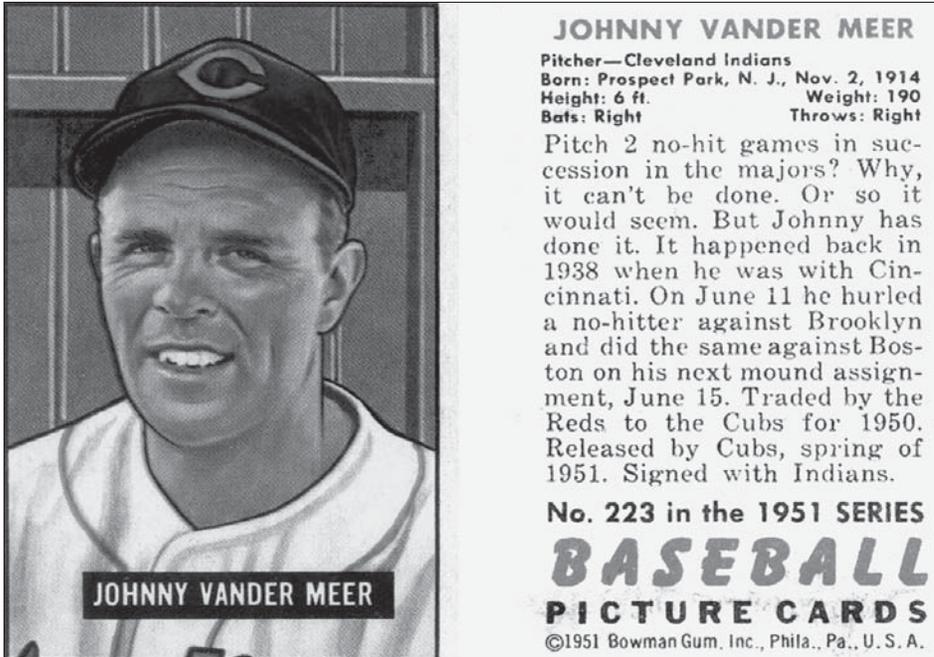
was his Christian Reformed Church congregation, many of whose members objected to playing baseball on Sunday. Dick Jeffer and Vander Meer were in grade school together and both were on the Rangers' team. "I was his best friend," said Jeffer, "and the feeling was mutual. It lasted until he died."<sup>7</sup> Jeffer never missed a game when Vander Meer pitched in the New York area and always was his hunting and fishing companion. He characterized John as an average guy who was always gracious and accommodating to his fans. When asked about the controversy caused in the church, "It was the times," said Jeffer. "You know how it was in the thirties—you couldn't even ride your bike on Sunday if you were a member of the Christian Reformed Church,"<sup>8</sup> but as far as I know the church never started any disciplinary action against Johnny." But reaction from individual church members was different. Vander Meer's sister Gerry recalls, "The church treated Johnny terribly," and she still harbors hard feelings against some people who were critical of John for playing on Sunday.<sup>9</sup> Jeffer remarked on the hypocrisy of some of Vander Meer's critics who didn't hesitate to go to the games to see all those Sabbath Day desecraters play ball. Jeffer was organist at the Midland Park Christian Reformed Church and he tells me with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, "I'll tell you how baseball crazy we were in those days. When Johnny would be

pitching in either the Polo Grounds or Ebbets Field, an usher would go to his car and tune into a radio station. They didn't broadcast games but would give the scores on the top of the hour. He would then write it on a piece of paper and bring it to me at the organ."<sup>10</sup> We both had a good chuckle over that one.

As for his baseball career, ask any player who came up in the minors in the thirties and they will all tell you the same story: low pay; long road trips in old, non-air conditioned buses; cheap motels; terrible food; and often poor playing conditions, with even poorer dressing facilities. John spent six years in the minors, starting with the Dayton Ducks and then two years in Scranton, Pennsylvania. It was there in 1935 that he met Lois Stewart who would become his wife. His first three years in the minors were not spectacular, with control being the main problem.



*The Vander Meer family were members of the Midland Park Christian Reformed Church, whose members took a dim view of his playing professional baseball on Sundays, though some went to watch him play. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.*



Vander Meer's baseball card from the Bowman Gum Co., which closed in the late 1950s but was at one time the leading producer of baseball cards. Note that the card lists Vander Meer as a right-handed pitcher when actually he was a left-hander. Photo courtesy of the author.

In 1935 he had 88 strikeouts but walked 90. In 1936 he was sent to the Nashville club to consult with Dr. Lee Jensen, a noted sports doctor, who specialized in treating injuries to the arm. Vander Meer was diagnosed as having an injury that involved a muscle behind his shoulder and, after a series of treatments and exercises, his arm started to heal. He was sent to Durham, North Carolina, and finished the season with nineteen wins and only six losses and a low ERA (earned run average) of 2.65.<sup>11</sup> He was named Minor League Player of the Year by Sporting News and was told to report to the Cincinnati Reds in Tampa, Florida, for spring training in 1937.

The next year was the turning point in his career. He finished with fifteen wins and ten losses with a very respectable ERA of 3.12. This record, along with his successive no-hitters, gained him a spot in the 1938 All-Star Game as the starting pitcher. Some of the future Hall of

Famers he faced were Joe DiMaggio, Charles Gehringer, Jimmy Fox, Bill Dickey, Joe Cronen, and Lou Gehrig. His mound opponent was Lefty Grove, who would have six wins and no losses in the World Series play. John pitched three excellent innings and received credit for the National League win that year.

John signed with the Reds again in 1939 for \$13,000 but his arm trouble all year resulted in a dismal five wins and nine losses record. In 1940 he was sent down to the AAA Indianapolis club so he could begin treatment for his arm again with Dr. Lee Jensen. The arm again started to respond to the treatments and the velocity of his pitching gradually started to improve. He was called back to Cincinnati and pitched thirteen innings in a nineteen-inning game he won that clinched the pennant for the Reds. That propelled them into the World Series against the Detroit Tigers. John was scheduled to pitch the fourth game but Manager McKechnie's

strategy dictated that he go with a right hander. The Reds won the series and Vandy was voted a half-share of the series money purse since he had only spent a little over a month with the team. His record for 1939 was five wins and nine losses. Arm trouble plagued him again in 1940 and he only pitched forty-eight innings and only won three games.

He came back strong in 1941 winning sixteen and losing thirteen. He had a low ERA of 2.82. He was the "strikeout king" of the National League with 202 but also gave up 126 walks. His wildness was still not under control. John was again selected for the All-Star Game and pitched three outstanding innings with six strikeouts, tying the great Carl Hubbel's all-star record. The next two years, 1942 and 1943, were outstanding ones for John—33 wins against 20 losses, but with a slightly higher ERA of 4.15.

In the spring of 1944 he joined the Navy, reporting to the Sampson Naval Training Center in New York, for basic training. After the completion of training he was ordered to the Pacific Theater and duty at Pearl Harbor. Admiral Chester Nimitz had managed to assemble around forty major league players divided into two teams, which island-hopped playing exhibition games for the troops. The tour ended in Guam and Vander Meer was able to visit with Tunis Nywening, who had married his sister Gerry.

Vander Meer was discharged in time to join the Reds in 1946, but compiled a lackluster record of ten wins and twelve losses. Things did not improve in 1947 with only nine wins and fourteen losses and a high ERA of 4.40. But in 1948, when many figured his career was over, he racked up seventeen wins against fourteen losses with a respectful ERA of 3.41. The 1949 season, for all practical purposes, was his last. In 1950 his

contract was sold to the Chicago Cubs for \$30,000. Manager Frankie Frish used him mainly in relief and he only pitched seventy-three innings the whole year. He did manage to win three and lose four. In 1951, he was traded to the Cleveland Indians. This would be John's first time in the American League. He was used in a relief role again but the starting pitchers for the Indians—Bob Feller, Early Winn, Bob Lemon, and Mike Garcia—did not need much relief. By mid-season he had pitched only three innings. He was released and he finished the season with the AAA Oakland team in the Pacific League.

Vander Meer knew his playing days in the majors were over, but he had to find work to support his wife and two daughters, since he was still years from being eligible to collect from his baseball pension. To his surprise, he received a call from his old friend Gabe Paul in the Reds' organization, who offered him a job as manager of the Tulsa, Oklahoma, club. He accepted and was both manager and player, winning eleven games with a nice 2.30 ERA. In 1953, he managed the Burlington, Iowa, team of the Three-I League. From there he managed the Petersburg, Virginia, team in 1954 then went on to Daytona Beach and the Palatca Club in the Florida State League. From Florida it was back to Topeka, Kansas, but his wife Lois was getting sick of the long absences but, more importantly, he was not making enough money to adequately support his family. He began working part-time for the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company in public relations and was thinking of giving up baseball. But in 1961 he was offered the job managing the Tampa team of his adopted city. He was home most nights and the longest road trips were to Miami and Daytona Beach. In 1962, John was hired for the AAA Syracuse, New

York, team with a hefty annual salary of \$14,000 and a two-year contract. But, after the first year, management brought in a new manager and Vander Meer had to file a grievance with the league to collect on his contracted salary. He won the grievance provided he served as pitching coach for the second year. He resigned and started to work for Schlitz full-time in sales and public relations, a job that lasted eighteen years. In 1982 he was able to retire with a very comfortable baseball pension. That same year he lost his wife Lois to a stroke and his daughter Shirley died as a result of complications from diabetes.<sup>12</sup>

Among the honors Vander Meer cherished most was his induction into the Cincinnati Reds Hall of Fame. He, along with Ernie Lombardi, was among the first to be honored. The Brooklyn Dodgers, in a unique display of sportsmanship, also inducted him into their Hall of Fame. In thirteen seasons, he had won 119 games against 121 losses. In 1942, he started in 33 games and finished 21. With relief pitching today starting pitchers rarely finish a game. He struck out 1,294 batters but he walked almost as many—1,132. They did not have devices for record-

ing the speed of pitches in those days, but players and his managers all thought his pitches were in the 100 mph+ range.

Throughout his career Vander Meer often returned to Midland Park to renew family ties and seek out old friends. During the off-season he would pitch exhibition games to benefit local charities. A Little League field was dedicated to him in recognition of several thousand dollars in donations. In one of his many letters to Dick Jeffer he mentioned that he would like to donate some of his baseball memorabilia to the Midland Park Library. A beautiful, solid oak display case in the library contains baseballs from his back-to-back no-hitters, a photo of him in the White House with President Nixon, an invitation to visit from the Queen of the Netherlands, and one of his baseball uniforms.

Vander Meer passed away on 6 October 1997 from an aneurysm. A service was conducted in the Methodist church by Bishop Knox and interment was held at the Garden of Memories on the outskirts of Tampa. His boyhood friend, Dick Jeffer, and many former baseball players were the honorary pall bearers.☞



*John Vander Meer, a baseball pitching legend, with Babe Ruth, a baseball batting legend. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. The provenance of the print is unknown but this image had been reproduced elsewhere.*

**Endnotes**

1. The Boston Bees, later became the Boston Braves, then the Milwaukee Braves, and finally the Atlanta Braves.

2. Mike Celizic, *The Bergen Record*, April 1996, 1.

3. His teammates called him Vandy. After pitching his second no-hitter, some sports writers called him “The Dutch Master.”

4. Paul Lightman, *The Dutch Master* (New York: Vantage Press, 2001), 56, 57.

5. The first son, also named Martin, died at the age of two.

6. Excerpts from a scrapbook article from the *Saturday Evening Post*, August 1938.

7. Jeffer’s living room in the Holland Christian Home, North Haledon, New Jersey, is filled with memorabilia given

to him by Vander Meer. There are autographed baseballs, photographs, bats, gloves, and his prized possessions—three large scrapbooks filled with clippings from every game in which Vander Meer pitched. There are clippings from every National League city of that time in addition to comments by sportswriters on Vander Meer’s games. Although in his mid-nineties, Jeffer is alert and a walking encyclopedia on Vander Meer’s life and career. I was privileged and most grateful to be able to spend an entire day with Jeffer and be permitted access to these resources.

8. The Christian Reformed Church had no official policy on Sabbath observance; such decisions were made at the local, congregational level, and varied from one region of the country to another.

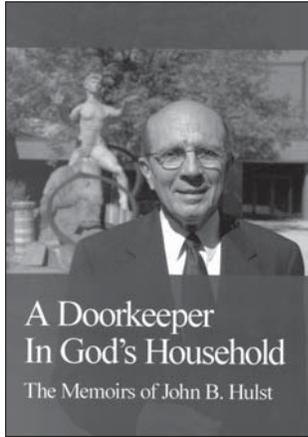
9. In a letter in the author’s possession, Gerry declined my request for an interview because *Origins* is part of Calvin College, which is owned, in part, by the Christian Reformed Church.

10. Rev. Donald Wisse, a friend of both Jeffer and the author, told me that Dick once made a bet with a friend that he could play “When It’s Springtime in the Rockies” as a prelude with so many frills and flourishes that no one would recognize it. He lost the bet.

11. Widely used index to determine a pitcher’s effectiveness by how many earned runs are scored against him in a nine-inning period.

12. A daughter, Evelyn, had died in 1975.

# *book notes*



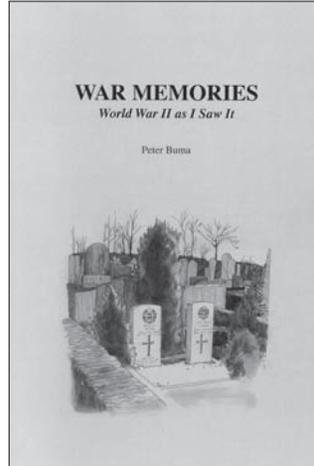
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*John B. Hulst*

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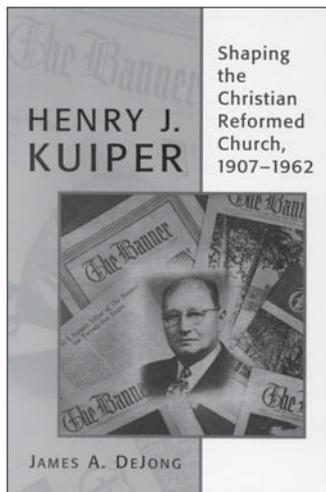
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# book review



## Henry J. Kuiper: Shaping the Christian Reformed Church, 1907—1962

James A. DeJong

Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007. The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, in cooperation with Origins, Studies in Dutch-American History, No. 55.

248 pages, paperback

\$28.00

To scrutinize the life of Rev. Henry J. Kuiper is to understand the middle third of the Christian Reformed Church's history. From the time of his ordination in 1907 until his retirement in 1956 he tirelessly shaped the denomination's practices and identity, through sermons, editorials, and overtures that addressed an astounding array of topics and issues. During his early years he heartily concurred in the ouster of three of the denomination's contentious figures: Rev. Harry Bultema, Prof. Ralph Janssen, and

Rev. Herman Hoeksema. He retired as the church processed social upheavals churning in the wake of the Second World War, especially in the area of race relations. Between these book-ends he left very visible thumbprints on the denomination's stance against worldly amusements and its uniform order of worship that prevailed until well into the 1970s.

James A. DeJong's appreciative biography sets out to rescue H. J. Kuiper from a pall of obscurity that has descended upon him during recent years. In this book we see Kuiper promoting a militant denominationalism that is a bit too narrow for contemporary tastes. We are reintroduced to his pronouncements on church issues that might lead some to long for a golden age when one leader provided the church's authoritative voice. But in the wake of the church's recent upheavals DeJong's story also reminds us that even Kuiper had critics within the tightly-knitted confines of the denomination. However, from his position as editor of the *Banner*, Kuiper always had the final word on any issue.

For over twenty-five years Kuiper's opinions penetrated into the bosom of most Christian Reformed households. His words were accorded a unique status—one that sanctioned them as Sunday afternoon reading among the faithful. Everything in the *Banner*, from the news and editorials to the advertisements and illustrations, received his careful scrutiny. Nothing appeared in its pages without his approval. His sense of his church's (and his) rightness bordered on the self-righteous. Like his Dutch immi-

grant ancestors, he was convinced the purest form of the Christian religion bubbled to the surface in the Netherlands during the Protestant Reformation. In his view, his chief task as a church leader lay in keeping the old tradition in tact. Untidiness had no place in Kuiper's cosmos. Disagreements and challenges were threats.

It was this need to keep things in carefully defined packages that drove Kuiper's ministerial career. DeJong's book looks at this from basically three angles: Kuiper's early years and pastorates, his role as denominational leader (particularly his services to classes, synods, educational and ecumenical efforts), and his twenty-five years as editor of the *Banner*. At times this structure obscures the chronological connections. We see Kuiper in compartments that are not always adequately ventilated. For instance, what Kuiper understood about the meaning of being "distinctively Reformed," while referred often in the early chapters, is not delineated in detail until the latter chapters, which summarize the recurring themes of his editorials.

What does clearly emerge in these pages is a portrait of Henry J. Kuiper as the defender of a Christian Reformed Church he believed rested on three unifying pillars: doctrine, governance, and worship. He played a major role in defining all three for his era. He ferreted out those who deviated from the doctrinal norms—pre-millennialists, supralapsarians, and higher critics—regarding them as concessions to unwarranted "Americanization." Kuiper often fought these climactic battles on the floor of classes

or synods, where he excelled as an ecclesiastical infighter. In his mind the aim of the struggles remained internal harmony. That ideal was most clearly expressed in a common form of worship he largely developed. A united church was a uniform church.

In the opening chapters DeJong spotlights Kuiper's upbringing within the ethnic fastness of Dutch Grand Rapids. A foray into the broader world of Central High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan, convinced Kuiper that purity lay in cultural isolation. His Calvinism taught him sin resided in all of creation; his Dutchness convinced him that sin was more highly concentrated in other neighborhoods. And so he became a spectator who looked at the world from his side of the wall. For the most part he spoke to and wrote for likeminded folks. He helped them build a meticulously prescribed world. Cohesion depended upon the ethnic bonds that

tied the Christian Reformed Church to the Netherlands. To lose them, he thought, would lead to either the swamps of American fundamentalism or the desert of theological liberalism. His voice would lead the denomination along a middle way, as he understood it, preserve the denomination's unique character, and ensure its continuing role as a model for other churches to follow.

When the Second World War disrupted his tidy world, wrenching sons and daughters from the enclaves and placing them in military camps, defense factories, and battlefields, Kuiper proved largely incapable of fathoming its implications or understanding the need to adapt. The war-driven encounters with life beyond the Christian Reformed bailiwicks inevitably raised questions and challenges to Kuiper's categories. He was not ready for them, and did not handle them well. The world changed

during the war, but he could not.

And so James DeJong's story of the great leader gives us a portrait of a man who was long on opinions and short on introspection. He defined the world in terms of his own experience, which was largely confined to West Michigan, except for brief forays to rural Kansas and Dutch Chicago. He saw himself playing the role of Old Testament prophet, standing in the gap against evil, hands raised with palms forward, his voice resounding. But this is the Henry J. Kuiper of the pulpit and editor's desk. We are left with a clear view of the parsonage's study. But what transpired in the house's other rooms, the ones closed to visitors, remains a mystery. Pulpits, parsonages, and ethnic enclaves could be isolated places. But H. J. Kuiper found them comfortable ones. This book is a good reminder of both the strengths and weaknesses of a life lived in a fortress. ☞

*Robert Schoone-Jongen*

# for the future

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



Rev. Howard Spaan, the longest, continuous serving classical stated clerk in the Christian Reformed Church, details the settlements of Dutch-Americans on the West Coast.

Onze Reis naar N. Americak [Our Trip to North America] by G. J. Buth concludes

The Dutch on America's West Coast by Howard Spaan

Meindert De Jong; Two Childhoods, One Literary Career in Two Worlds by Richard Harms

The Dutch Come to the Hackensack River Valley by Richard Harms

The memoir of James Koning, who came from the Netherlands as a teenager, translated by Eltine De Young-Peterse, with Nella Kennedy

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