

# Origins

## Origins

Volume XXX • Number 1 • 2012

Historical Magazine  
of The Archives

Calvin College and  
Calvin Theological Seminary  
1855 Knollcrest Circle SE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546  
(616) 526-6313

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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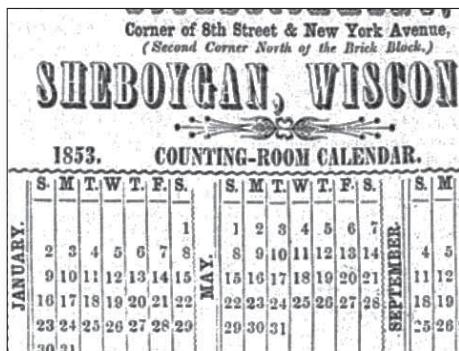
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*Cover photo:*

The masthead from the Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode



page 8



page 23

- 2 From the Editor**
- 4 Jacob Quintus and the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode***  
Hans Krabbendam
- 11 Dutch-American Identity Politics:**  
The Use of History by Dutch Immigrants  
Hans Krabbendam

- 21 History Preserved**  
Allison DeWaard
- 25 James Koning Memoir (1906)**  
Robert P. Swierenga, editor  
Nella Kennedy, translator



page 34



page 40

- 31 My Recollections of Holland in 1852**  
George Edward Holm
- 38 Immigration Journey Under Sail**  
Eugene Westra and Robert P. Swierenga

- 45 Book Notes**
- 46 For the Future**  
upcoming Origins articles
- 47 Contributors**

# *from the editor . . .*



## **This Issue**

In the current issue Allison DeWaard, a student at Dordt College, tells the story of her family's efforts at farming near Columbus, Montana. Hans Krabbendam, Assistant Director of the Roosevelt Study Center in Middelburg, the Netherlands, presents the life of Jacob Quintus, who published the first Dutch-language newspaper in the United States and described how Dutch identity came to be defined among immigrants in North America. Next, we present two accounts of the immigration experience during the middle of the nineteenth century, the first written by Eugene Westra and Robert Swierenga, who also introduced the second account by James Koning. Lastly, we include events

described by Edward Holm of his visit to Holland, Michigan, in 1852 when he was eighteen years old.

## **Available On-Line**

The update of the *Banner* Index of vital records was updated with 2011 information and published on our website (<http://www.calvin.edu/hh/Banner/Banner.htm>).

## **News from the Archives**

A portion of our time since last fall that would otherwise have been spent processing collections was devoted to moving collections. Late in the fall, phase 1 of the Heritage Hall/Rare Books renovation was completed and we moved all of the college records, Christian Reformed Church congregational records, genealogical materials, and approximately two-thirds of our reference collection into the new space in preparation for the phase 2 work. We boxed the remaining reference material and all of our office files for moving to the Surge Building, and

then unpacked these there for use until we return to the renovated space in May. By the time you read this we are scheduled to be back in the newly renovated space and will gladly give you a tour. In the fall issue we will present a visual tour of the new facilities.

We processed the papers of Andrew Barnes, a specialist in the history of Christian mission work in the Sudan. The papers contain many original documents and unique secondary sources on the CRC mission efforts beginning there in the 1930s. We also opened for research the personal papers of Rev. Bartel Huizenga, history professor Henry Ippel, economics professor John Tiemstra, as well as the first day postal covers collection by John Cevaal. Work on the translation of the Holland, Michigan, Central Avenue CRC minutes through 1927 continues, as does keying in data of vital records information from the *Banner*, and family data in the *Calvinist Contact*. Work has also begun on

organizing the records of the church plants in the CRC Home Missions collection as well as the extensive papers of Dr. Vernon Ehlers who served on the Kent County Board of Commissioners, in the Michigan Legislature, and in the US House of Representatives.

Noteworthy among the archival accessions were twenty-one boxes from CRC Home Missions and six boxes from the college Provost. The Home Missions material contains significant information on church plants during the past four decades. Among the personal papers received were those of geologist Clarence Menninga and a significant addition to the papers donated by Diet Eman, who worked in the Dutch resistance during World War II.

### **Publications**

In early November Richard Harms was invited to present a paper based on his research on the tensions among Dutch immigrants in West Michigan,

1847-1857, at a conference in recognition of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Dr. A. C. Van Raalte. He was one of six presenters asked to participate at both the conference in Holland, Michigan, and the following week in Ommen, the Netherlands. As part of this, media in both locations interviewed him, and a Dutch translation of his presentation was published online by the *Trouw*. The full research paper will be published in a book of proceedings produced by the Van Raalte Institute and the Free University of Amsterdam.

### **Staff**

Richard Harms is the curator of the Archives; Hendrina Van Spronsen is the office coordinator; while Wendy Blankepoor our librarian and cataloging archivist is on leave, Diane Vander Pol has joined the staff for several months; Laurie Haan is department assistant; Dr. Robert Bolt is field agent and assistant archivist. Our student assistant is Ben Rietema.

Our volunteers include Rev. Dr. Paul Bremer, Mrs. Willene De Groot, Mr. Ed Gerritsen, Mr. Fred Greidanus, Mr. Ralph Haan, Mrs. Helen Meulink, Rev. Gerrit W. Sheeres, Mrs. Janet Sheeres, and Mr. Ralph Veenstra.

### **Endowment Fund**

Currently our endowment fund and operating fund have a value of \$492,921. Of this, \$100,000 will be used to offset the current renovation project, but our annual subscription rate remains at \$10, even though \$10 no longer covers the cost for the two mailings a year. As always, we are grateful to our supporters, many of whom contribute well above the subscription cost. ▶



Richard H. Harms

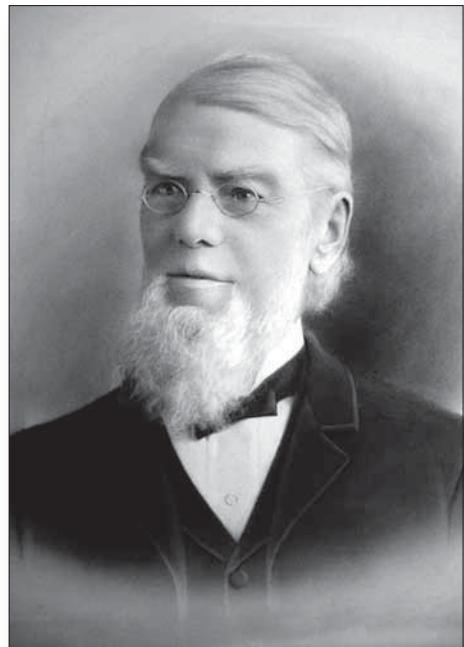
# Jacob Quintus and the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*

Hans Krabbendam

Jacob Quintus (1821-1906), son of a teacher in a small village in the Dutch province of Zeeland, has been largely forgotten in the Netherlands. In the United States his editorship of the first Dutch-American newspaper (1849-1861) saved him from oblivion. One might argue that Quintus was not unique, since many other publications were launched in the immediate years, but his publication was the first successful enterprise and acted as an inspiration to others who recognized the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* as the model for the Dutch-language press in the United States.

The activities of Quintus reveal, in detail, the stream of information between the sources of emigration in the Netherlands and settlement areas in the United States. While the corpus of the fifty-some Dutch-language publications has been well documented, little is known about the motives, the instruments, and the decisions an editor made. Quintus's work reveals in detail his selection decisions, while his later editorial work confirmed that he was an irrepressible newspaperman.

His career documents the role of non-clergy in the pioneer phase of Dutch immigration. Further, the location of this first newspaper office is significant and Quintus's move to Michigan helps to explain why though the Badger State had been the destination of the early immigrants, Michigan became the center of Dutch immigration in the US.



Jacob Quintus (1821-1906), from the Dutch province of Zeeland, edited the first Dutch-American newspaper (1849-1861). Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Finally, there is an additional academic reason for a renewed interest in his life. One of the new questions in migration history focuses on the connections between areas and people that transcend national boundaries and national origin: the issue of transnationalism. Early ethnic newspapers functioned in this space between two nations and the way in which editors such as Quintus advanced transnational connections helps to understand this process.

## Origins

Jacob Quintus was born in

Since 1990 Dr. Hans Krabbendam has been with the Roosevelt Study Center in Middelburg, The Netherlands, currently serving as its assistant-director. He is the author of several books and numerous articles in the intersections of Dutch immigration history, religious history, and Dutch-American relations.

Zonnemaire, on the island of Duiveland, the northern most part of the province of Zeeland, on Christmas Eve 1821. He was the youngest son of Jan Quintus, who died before Jacob's first birthday. At age ten his mother Neeltje Slagboom (1792-1831) also passed away, leaving Jacob an orphan. Thanks to an earlier marriage of his father, who was sixty-five when Jacob was born, he had enough relatives in the province to take care of him. A number of them were craftsmen living in Zeelandic Flanders,<sup>1</sup> others were teachers. The Quintus family was part of the lower middle class; they owned their home in Zonnemaire, ten acres of farmland, and some stock in rural industry.<sup>2</sup>

Jacob followed in the footsteps of his late father and became an assistant teacher in Haamstede on the island of Schouwen. At age eighteen he entered the lowest category of teachers, an assistant to a teacher. While he served alternately in various regions where his relatives lived, he became an assistant teacher on his native Schouwen in 1847. Jacob had ambition, but lacked opportunities. He had acquired diplomas to teach foreign languages, but the economic crisis kept many children out of school and prevented him from earning further promotion.

Practical, well-informed, a well-connected person, full of initiative, and with a good sense for business, Quintus in the late 1840s was interested in emigration, the talk of the town, especially in Zeelandic Flanders, where laborers had been leaving for New York and Wisconsin before Dutch immigrants under the leadership of the ministers Albertus Van Raalte and Hendrik Scholte launched the era of large-scale Dutch migration. Wisconsin had attracted many settlers from Zeeland, who settled in the Milwaukee area: Gerardus Brandt from Kapelle in Bethlehem (or "Town Eight," eight miles north of Milwau-

kee); Jan Kotvis and Pieter Lankester from Middelburg, south of this city in Franklin Prairie. In 1845, similar groups from western Zeelandic Flanders had founded "Town Thirteen," two years later renamed "Town Holland," south of Sheboygan, and then named Oostburg. The expectations for the development of Wisconsin were high; Scholte and Van Raalte intended to settle in the state, until American contacts persuaded them to settle in Iowa and Michigan, respectively.

The departure of the large group of 457 from the center of the province, headed by Seceders in April 1847, made a deep impression on Jacob. His brother-in-law, Leendert Dooge, who was a painter and an emigration agent, made him aware that emigration was a viable solution for the economic stagnation in Zeeland. His friend Pieter Souffrouw added valuable personal experiences. This watchmaker had returned from Wisconsin to bring his mother, two brothers, and four sisters to the American Midwest. On 10 July 1847, Souffrouw and Dooge placed an announcement in the *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, recruiting passengers for a quick departure in August. A group of eighty artisans and small businessmen from Axel, Oostburg, Terneuzen, Zierikzee, Bommenede, Goes, and Zonnemaire (all towns in Zeeland) joined the two.

This exodus was a business enterprise and not religiously motivated.



Quintus was born in Zonnemaire, on the island of Duiveland, in the northern part of the province of Zeeland.

Among the travelers was the thirty-one-year-old Frans van Driele (1816-1900) from Goes, who was very much like Quintus. Van Driele came from a family that had lost a parent and had learned at an early age to support himself. He worked as a baker's apprentice in various places and later as a traveling salesman in haberdashery and books. He used his savings for the trip to the United States and would become a leading Dutch community leader and elder in the Reformed church in Grand Rapids.

The party sailed from Zeeland on 6 August 1847 on *Charles Humberston*. A strong countering wind in the English Channel stranded the ship on a sand bank close to Calais. The passengers were rescued and set ashore at Calais, where they were treated well with bread and warm milk, and then continued their journey via Le Havre. Quintus's knowledge of French and German was useful when talking to the authorities and negotiating with the other, mostly German, immigrants



The masthead from the Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode. Zierikzee is just south of Zonnemaire also on the island of Duiveland. Image courtesy of the author.

to find an alternate ship. This resulted in their departure on *Robert Parker*, which five weeks later, on 27 September, brought the company to New York.<sup>3</sup>

During the trip Quintus had grown as a leader and after arriving he continued to seek opportunities as an information broker for his fellow countrymen in Albany, where his brother-in-law Dooge acted as agent for immigrants en route to Buffalo.<sup>4</sup> They became partners who contracted with a person in New York to arrange transportation for immigrants to Albany. They made reservations on canal boats to Buffalo and lake vessels on the Great Lakes. In the process Quintus taught the new arrivals the basics of the English language. This project was successful because many Dutch immigrants, while literate, lacked English-language skills. Soon he published a Dutch-English dictionary as part of this instruction.<sup>5</sup>

The Dutch immigrant group in Albany was diverse and transient. It wasn't until 1859 that they organized their own congregation. Quintus's many contacts and the need for information led him to sell the *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode* in the United States. On 24 July 1848 the newspaper announced that J. Quintus in Buffalo (and in Albany in 1849)

sold three-month subscriptions to the Dutch periodical for \$1.10. This Dutch newspaper from his home region had a circulation of 1,500 and was a commercial success. It vented the frustrations of the Dutch who were dissatisfied with the economic stagnation and high taxes in the Netherlands which did not benefit the citizens.<sup>6</sup>

Since the weekly importation of Dutch newspapers was costly and time consuming, Quintus tried publishing a Dutch-language newspaper in New York State. However, he had to abandon the project when other publishers set up *De Nederlander in Noord-Amerika* (*The Dutchman in North America*) and ruined the reputation of such enterprises by depositing subscription money, publishing eight issues, and then canceling the operation—to the disappointment of their subscribers.<sup>7</sup> Quintus realized that a trustworthy enterprise could work and discovered that the West offered a faster growing market and therefore was more promising than New York. He decided to move to Wisconsin to join his future in-laws in the spring of 1849 and there determined to make a second effort to realize his plan to provide Dutch immigrants in the US with news about their homeland, their new environment, and each other.

## To Wisconsin

Quintus's departure from New York fit into the typical pattern of Dutch immigrants. Most of them had sufficient funds for passage, but not to buy property upon arrival. A temporary stay in the East, building canals or railroads, generated the capital to invest in farms and businesses in the Midwest. Frans Van Driele, for instance, had labored on the Delaware & Hudson Canal for nine months before he moved on to West Michigan.<sup>8</sup>

Quintus traveled to Sheboygan, where members of his immigrant party had settled. It is likely that he had an eye on Pieter Souffrouw's sister, Catharina, whom he married shortly after his arrival in the spring of 1849.

When he arrived in Sheboygan, the town had just 700 inhabitants. He realized that his clientele needed more than the (old) news from Zierikzee. So, on 16 October 1849, he launched his own newspaper, only changing the place name to the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, the first Dutch-language newspaper published in North America. He built it into a business, opened a printing shop, and offered additional services as a notary public. Quintus joined his brother-in-law Souffrouw in local politics. They both supported the Democrats against the Whigs and

hoped to increase Jacob's business enterprise in this way.

The *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* began as a double-paged newspaper with news from Dutch immigrants in the Sheboygan area, local advertisements, and summaries of the news from Dutch and American newspapers. Within a year the size doubled to four densely printed pages. Quintus recruited an extensive network of local correspondents to provide information and retailers (often the same person) to distribute his newspaper. He wrote the copy and reprinted articles from other sources. A short poem illustrated this method: "De Redacteur zit neer, met kranten overladen, Bijna verdwaald in 't nieuws, van alle nieuwsbladen." (The editor sits down, burdened by many newspapers, almost lost in the news from all the periodicals.)<sup>9</sup> Thanks to his circle of mostly Zeeland agents, who

and Van Raalte, spread the word and whose persuasive powers made them into two prominent leaders in other aspects of immigrant life in their communities. However, there were differences with Badger State immigrants who did not necessarily share the same religious aspirations as their kin in Michigan and Iowa. Instead of ministers, Dutch business leaders, such as Quintus and Milwaukee lawyer and Dutch consul Gijsbert van Steenwijk, were instrumental in promoting settlement in Wisconsin.

Quintus's Wisconsin promotion praised the state's export routes for its mining and agricultural products, via the Great Lakes to the East or via the Mississippi in the South and West. He announced that large tracts of land were still available and cheap. The air was much healthier than in Michigan, which was plagued by "fever and ague" caused by stagnant

United States. He closely monitored the immigrant flows as he had done back home, where his brother-in-law Leendert Dooge had been an immigrant agent. In Wisconsin Quintus printed statistical overviews for the state which kept readers informed about new business opportunities. In addition to his printing business, Quintus sold coffee and Dutch gin. In 1855 he was ready for expansion and he dropped the name Sheboygan from the title and hoped to attract a broader clientele with the name *Nieuwsbode*.<sup>12</sup> More than other newspapers, Quintus's newspaper looked beyond the horizon at railroad planning, new legislation, the court system, education, and promising new economic activities such as growing tobacco or producing cheese.

While the *Nieuwsbode* had many American features, there remained much continuity between the *Zierikzeesche* and the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*. As the Zeeland newspaper took sides for the workers in their struggles with owners, Quintus supported the Democrats against the aristocratic Whigs. At the beginning of 1850 he wrote: ". . . we believe that each reader has long felt that we adhere to the teachings of Jefferson . . . He, the true democrat, acknowledges all the classes of his fellow citizens, and treats the poor with equal respect as the rich. He spreads with speed the truths of the democratic faith and contributes to the maintenance of the correct principles and the everlasting continuity of our free institutions and laws."<sup>13</sup>

Of course his preference was also guided by the profitability of political connections. Local newspapers could only survive thanks to printing government documents which were allocated as political gifts to supporters. Quintus's efforts to run for local offices failed, even though he also printed the English-language *Democratic*



The first issue of the Sheboygan Nieuwsbode. Notice the similarity with the Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode. Image from microfilm in the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

received a free subscription as compensation, Dutch immigrants received information about the movements of their ilk. He gradually expanded his sources from only Zeeland to American newspapers and used his Buffalo contacts for news about the East. Of course he promoted Wisconsin in his newspaper and sent copy for publication in his native country.<sup>10</sup>

In promotional aspects Wisconsin differed from Iowa and Michigan, where ministers, particularly Scholte

water in that tree-covered state. He claimed that this reason had encouraged hundreds of Michigan citizens to move west. Even more promising for farmers was that the states of Iowa and Wisconsin would soon be connected to the East via railroads.<sup>11</sup>

Through the years, Quintus developed a good compass for economic opportunities and political currents. He maintained an excellent national newspaper network, both in the Netherlands and increasingly within the



The 16 January 1855 issue of the Nieuwsbode, when Quintus dropped the geographic limiter of Sheboygan from the masthead. Image from microfilm in the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Secretary. In 1854 he joined the Republican Party out of frustration with slavery, but possibly also in aspiration of elective office.<sup>14</sup> He served as clerk of court for two years, but was defeated and he returned to the Democratic Party in 1857 because of the radical ideas on abolition, a campaign against immigrants, and opportunism by the Republicans. These shifting political allegiances made his readers nervous and many canceled their subscriptions. The political vicissitudes were a foreboding of more change.

During the economically unstable 1850s, Quintus concluded that Sheboygan was not the best location to realize his ambition. In May 1857 Quintus visited Grand Rapids, Michigan, and became convinced that this city had a great future and would develop into the second largest city in the state, thanks to its cheap and abundant waterpower, cheap building materials, and developing rail connections. He saw three railroads approach the city and connect the various corners of the state, generously funded by land grants. The city boasted excellent educational opportunities, a variety of churches, and well-stocked department stores, among them one called the "New Dutch Store" in the city center, owned by his brother-in-law Leendert Dooge. Many Holland-

ers found jobs in the city's factories and workshops. Also, the surrounding area was prospering and the hopes of a good port increased the prospects for a Holland harbor.<sup>15</sup>

In the spring of 1858 Quintus decided to sell his newspaper to his German coeditor and translator, A. Pott, and take his family on a trip to the homeland. The summer of 1858 was a turning point in his life. Not often did immigrants decide to return to their native country so soon for a visit. On 3 June Quintus, his wife, and four-year-old daughter Jennie landed in Rotterdam and visited relatives in Zeeland for three months. After their return to the US they settled in Grand Rapids.<sup>16</sup> Whether the economic crisis and the crop

1853. COUNTING-ROOM CALENDAR. 1853.												
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	30	31										
MAY.								1	2	3	4	5
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	8	9	10	11	12
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	30	31										
SEPTEMBER.								1	2	3	4	5
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	28	29	30	31				25	26	27	28	29
	30	31						30	31			
OCTOBER.								2	3	4	5	6
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	26	27	28	29	30	31		23	24	25	26	27
	30	31						23	24	25	26	27
	30	31						20	21	22	23	24
NOVEMBER.								20	21	22	23	24
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	27	28	29	30	31			27	28	29	30	
DECEMBER.								27	28	29	30	
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	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	28	29	30	31	
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	25	26	27	28	29
	30	31						30	31			

**BLANKS FOR SALE AT THE NIEUWSBODE OFFICE:**  
The following blanks, neatly printed on firstrate paper, kept constantly on hand:  
**WARRANTY DEEDS,**  
**LAND CONTRACTS,**  
**LEASES,**  
**JUDGMENT NOTES,**  
**TOWNS ORDERS,**  
**CRIMINAL WARRANTS,**  
**EXECUTIONS,**  
**VENIRAS,**  
**SUBPOENAS, &c.**  
All other forms printed on the shortest notice and at the cheapest rates.  
Jan. 1st 1853.

**MORTGAGES.**  
**CHATTTEL MORTGAGES (two kinds),**  
**QUIT CLAIM DEEDS,**  
**MARRIAGE CERTIFICATES,**  
**GARNISHEES,**  
**ATTACHMENTS,**  
**REPLEVINS,**  
**SUMMONS,**  
**&c., &c.**  
J. QUINTUS.

Advertisement by Quintus for his printing services. Image courtesy of the author.

failures of 1857 stimulated his departure, or whether he had alienated his readers by moving back and forth between the Democratic and Republican parties, or whether his decision was triggered by his political defeat, or his failing health, is not easy to say. Most likely all of these factors added up to his decision to move and it appeared to be a good one.

Quintus did well in Grand Rapids where he continued to deal in newspapers. For seven years he published the *Amerikaansche Stoompost* (*American Steampost*) from 1859–1866, and once again in 1884 with the *Nieuwe Courant*.<sup>17</sup> Because only one issue of this later publication survived, little is known about his publishing activities in Michigan. However, the *Stoompost* closely resembled the *Nieuwsbode*. Despite the term “American” in the title, it brought mainly a variety of Dutch and European news stories, listed new immigrants and lost relatives, clipped stories from other Dutch-American periodicals, and printed many commercial announcements. It claimed the largest circulation among Dutch newspapers in the Union. There was more continuity with the Wisconsin period in Quintus’s efforts to combine commercial, editorial, and political initiatives. As in Wisconsin, his political career in Michigan quickly faded. Though he served as school supervisor in 1861, he failed to be elected to other offices.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, his business enterprise flourished. He dealt in real estate, opened an office as a notary public (mainly to retrieve inheritances in the old country), sold life insurance, and was an agent for various shipping companies. According to the tax assessment records his property jumped from \$500 in 1850 to \$6,000 ten years later and \$40,000 in 1870.<sup>19</sup> He remained at the core of the Dutch (business) community, though religiously he moved a bit outside the mainstream. He left the

Reformed church for the mystic group of the Swedenborgians. The thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Dutch settlement on the first of October 1877 took place in his home at 18 Prospect Street, in Grand Rapids’ best neighborhood.<sup>20</sup>

After the death of his wife Catharina in 1903, Quintus moved in with daughter Jennie in Plainwell, Michigan, where he died in 1906, at the age of eighty-five. He had shown that it was also possible to make connections among the Dutch immigrants outside the religious networks and that a newspaper in the Dutch language was a necessity.<sup>21</sup>

### Conclusion

Jacob Quintus’s departure from Wisconsin ended the Dutch-language press in the state for fifteen years. It would be 1878 before another Dutch-language periodical, *De Standaard*, would be printed. This newspaper served Flemish and Dutch Catholics. In the meantime the center of the Dutch Protestants had become fixed permanently in Michigan. The Sheboygan *Nieuwsbode* had not intended this shift, but contributed to it nonetheless by reporting on the successes of the Dutch there and in other places. The Dutch Protestant colony in Wisconsin developed differently from those in Michigan and Iowa. The pioneers there did not settle with an overarching plan for the development of the area, as in Holland and Zeeland, Michigan, and Pella, Iowa. They lacked strong and visionary leaders

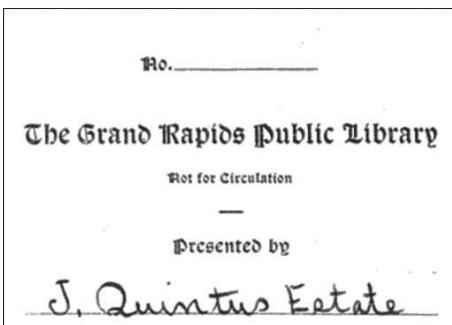


A 2008 image of the house Quintus lived in after he moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan. Image courtesy of the author.

who represented them in the state and maintained unity in times of pressure.

The average Wisconsin immigrant had sufficient means to survive without the strong community support present in other states. But the fact that railroad lines connecting the Sheboygan area to eastern and western markets were established relatively late, and the lack of symbiotic (and mutually beneficial) relationships between urban and rural settlements—as in Michigan between Grand Rapids, Holland, and their satellite villages—capped the growth in Wisconsin. These developments attracted immigrants who were less interested in following strong clerical leadership so that churches were not able to generate further cultural development.

It is unlikely that editor Jacob Quintus was aware of all these factors, even though he had the best overview to compare the conditions in the various Dutch settlements. His experiences demonstrate the differences in the Dutch immigrant experience. His unique *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* did not survive the Civil War, but other periodicals took over the role in the Dutch-American community.<sup>22</sup>



A bookplate from one of Quintus's books that is now in the collection of the Grand Rapids Public Library. Image courtesy of the author.

The first successful Dutch-American editor began his enterprise copying a Dutch example, then adapting it to American experience.

#### Endnotes

1. The southernmost portion of the province on the border with Belgium.
2. *Zierikzeesche Courant*, 27 Oct. 1837.
3. *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, 26 Aug. 1847 and Jacob Quintus, "Een terugblik over vijftig jaren," (An overview of fifty years) *De Grondwet*, 21 Nov. 1911.
4. Henry S. Lucas, ed., *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Works*, 2 vols. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1955; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) vol 2: 294-300 and 435-439.
5. H. Picard, *De Hollander in Amerika. Leerwijze der Engelsche taal door H.P.; ten dienste mijner landgenooten ter drukking overgegeven door J. Quintus, onderwijzer in de Engelsche, Hollandsche en Fransche talen (The Dutchman in America: Teaching method of the English language by H.P.; printed for my fellow countrymen by J. Quintus, teacher of the English, Dutch, and French languages)* (Buffalo, NY: O. G. Steele, 1848) 77 pp. Steele printed, bound, and sold books in the center of Buffalo at 206 Main Street. He sold

school books, Bibles, maps, stationery and planned to publish a Dutch almanac in 1849. Quintus explained in the preface that the demand for this dictionary surpassed the supply from the Netherlands.

6. Jan van Damme, "De standenmaatschappij in de Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode, 1844-1846" (MA thesis, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 1978).

7. Prospectus published in 1848 according to the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 16 Oct. 1849.

8. In the fall of 1851 Leonard (Leendert) Dooge moved to Ravenna, close to Muskegon in Michigan, and later moved to Grand Rapids. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, 1: 356-358.

9. Cited in J. Breur, "De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode. Het eerste Nederlandstalige nieuwsblad in de Verenigde Staten 1849-1861" (MA thesis, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 1991).

10. *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, 17 Oct. 1850.

11. *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 9 and 16 Apr. 1850.

12. Ibid, 3 Mar. 1855.

13. *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 29 Jan. 1850.

14. The first issue of the *Democratic Secretary* appeared on 7 Oct. 1853, but it folded after a year. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison preserves the one and only copy. Quintus became the secretary of the County Convention of the Republicans on 25 Oct. 1854 (*Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 31 Oct. 1854). The voters elected him on 7 Nov. 1854 as Clerk of Court with 930 to 737 votes (*Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 14 Nov. 1854), but he was defeated in 1856.

15. *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 16 Jun. 1857.

16. Pott returned the newspaper to the Republicans, but it folded on 8 May 1861. Jacob's wife Catharina Wilhelmina Souffrout was born in Oostburg, Zee-

land, on 8 Oct. 1824, where she later kept a store. The 1850 census listed a son of two years old: John Varded. He died young, as did two daughters, Suzanne M. Quintus who died on 13 Mar. 1851, eight months old; and Jane C. Quintus on 3 Sep. 1853, ten months old. Sheboygan County Historical Society, Burial List Wildwood Cemetery, Sheboygan Co., Wisc., block 4. A third daughter, Jennie, was born in 1854. The second son John was born on 7 Apr. 1859 and became an engineer. Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode, 5 Jun. and 3 Jul. 1858.

17. The only surviving issue of the *Stoompost* is the one of 27 Dec. 1865 preserved in Clarke Historical Library, Mount Pleasant, Michigan.

18. *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, 27 Sep. 1884. In 1862 Quintus lost the campaign as the Democratic candidate for clerk of Kent County to Peter Pierce with 2,568 to 3,152 votes and in 1866 Pierce defeated him again with 4,129 to 2,619 votes.

19. CD-ROM *Immigration Records: Dutch in America, 1800s* (Novato, CA: The Learning Company, 2000).

20. Dwight Goss, *History of Grand Rapids and Its Industries* (Chicago: C. F. Cooper, 1906) 863-864, and Albert Baxter, *History of the City of Grand Rapids* (New York and Grand Rapids: Munsell and Company, 1891).

21. *Sheboygan County News*, 28 Feb. 1906. He was buried in Hillside Cemetery, Plainwell, Michigan, in Allegan County, the home of his daughter Jennie who had married Dr. Arthur Hazelwood.

22. Robert Schoone-Jongen, "De Volksvriend and Dutch-American Connections," in Robert P. Swierenga, Jack Nyenhuis, and Nella Kennedy, eds., *Dutch-American Arts and Letters in Historical Perspective* (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2008) 183-190.

# Dutch-American Identity Politics: *The Use of History by Dutch Immigrants*

Hans Krabbendam

In 1991 Guy Vander Jagt, Republican Congressman from Michigan, succeeded in securing 220 signatures from his colleagues in the House of Representatives to send a resolution to President Bush asking him to declare 16 November “Dutch-American Heritage Day.”<sup>1</sup> In an interview Vander Jagt revealed that not all of his colleagues signed because they felt so close to the Dutch, but because they could not resist Vander Jagt’s oratorical wit. He remembered how he approached Congressman Jim Bunning, a former baseball pitcher, who



*Guy Vander Jagt (1931-2007) was born in Cadillac, Michigan, and represented Michigan's 9th Congressional District, 1966-1993. A skilled public speaker, Vander Jagt also served as Chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee. Image courtesy of the Joint Archives of Holland.*

refused to sign saying, “I don’t do that sort of thing,” and how he responded with, “Come on Jim. You pitched for the Detroit Tigers. Detroit is Michigan and Michigan is Holland, Michigan.”

It’s sort of your State.” This example of irrefutable logic persuaded Bunning and many others to sign, and President Bush Sr. duly elevated 16 November to the status of commemoration day for the ethnic heritage of the estimated 8 million Americans identifying with their Dutch roots.<sup>2</sup> Vander Jagt admitted that he had initiated this act to please his Dutch constituency, but it did not achieve the desired success.

### **Immigrant Strategies**

In 2000 the Norwegian literary historian Orm Overland analyzed the strategies used by non-British immigrants in creating their homes in the United States.<sup>3</sup> He asserts that immigrants participated early in the modern process of identity politics, because they were caught in the middle between being foreign in America and equally foreign in their home countries. Whatever they decided about maintaining or surrendering their old culture, they met critical responses from their relatives or their surroundings. A way out of this tension was to create mythical stories connecting their group’s heritage with America.

Overland identified three types of myths available to the immigrants: a foundation myth that claimed a share in the origin of the United States, a myth of sacrifice that emphasized the contribution of immigrants in America’s wars, and an ideological myth that asserted that an immigrant group had an American disposition (usually love of freedom and democracy)

before it had even emigrated. These myths were common ingredients in the popular and filiopietistic histories and commemorative addresses of Euro-American groups from 1870 to 1930, the decades of massive European immigration, and were often used in combination. Ethnic leaders deployed these strategies to strengthen their group's self-respect and a sense of continuity in order to prevent their group from anonymously sliding into the amorphous American society.

This common pattern among European immigrant groups did not mean they showed solidarity with one another. Foundation myths of one group competed with similar myths of another in order to move a step up on the ladder of privilege. When Norwegian-Americans promoted Leif Erikson as the "discoverer" of the New World, Italian-Americans considered this act an embezzlement of "their" Columbus. Swedes tried to push Finns out of the celebration of the founding of New Sweden because Finland was not an independent nation in the seventeenth century. Nor were these invocations always successful. Germans during World War I unsuccessfully deployed arguments of sacrifice in order to keep their place in the pecking order. The Irish were first in developing a myth of ideology, based on their fight against the British and their struggle for freedom. The tenuous nature of this myth is evident when we find no welcoming reception for the Irish upon their arrival on American soil in the 1840s and 1850s as "freedom fighters."

Not all uses of history were monolithic within one ethnic group. Class made a difference: typical working-class socialistic sympathies did not encourage these myths, since these myths destroyed labor solidarity. The location of the settlement, the interaction with surrounding ethnic groups, and the presence of the dominant

Anglo-Saxons determined the choice of arguments: Midwestern and eastern reactions could differ. Immigrant groups preferred to use the foundation myth, followed by the myth of sacrifice and ideology myth. We will see that different sections in the Dutch-American subculture chose different strategies.

Not only recent immigrants used their heritage to demand more respect. Simultaneously, organizations

of respectable descendants of colonial immigrants emerged explicitly to protect their specific heritage, and later in the twentieth century foreign governments discovered the same strategy to strengthen diplomatic and economic relations. Around the World War I, the Dutch minister in Washington faithfully attended the annual meetings of the Holland and Netherlands Societies in his region, singing the praises of the Netherlands as the "Holy Land of Modern Europe" (to quote an Oxford don) and raising emotional support for the Dutch position.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from these three positive myths, immigrant subcultures created negative myths. A key example of this category is the "No Irish Need Apply" story, deconstructed by historian Richard Jensen.<sup>5</sup> This widespread belief in the signs rejecting Irish



Image courtesy of the author.

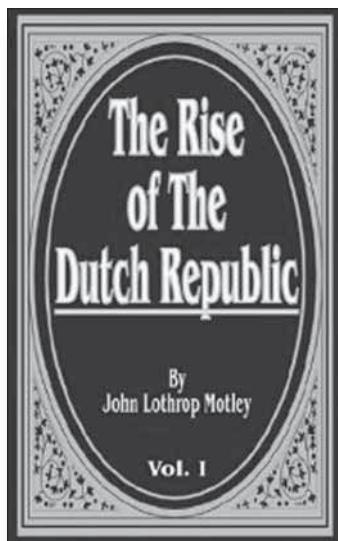
workers proved to be imaginary, apart from a few ads and popular songs. Jensen explains the persistence of this myth by showing the strong ties of working-class solidarity among the Irish, which had strong and effective collective bargaining strategies. This helped them to gain and keep considerable political power. The "No Irish Need Apply" myth might very well have been meant to issue defensive warnings not to break these bonds of solidarity by accepting jobs from Protestants or others outside the circle of control. This "negative" myth was not in competition with the "positive home-making" myth; on the contrary, it emphasized the perceived unfairness that the Irish were wanted in the American army, but not in regular jobs.

The value of historian Overland's analysis is that it transforms the

meaning of ethnic celebrations in the United States from rear-view mirrors of nostalgia to windows on the future as instruments to make America home.

### Dutch History Surfaces

The rise in popularity of Dutch history was not exclusively an immigrant prerogative. Historian Firth Haring Fabend has shown that the revitalization of the Dutch tradition took place in the early nineteenth century, when members of the Reformed Dutch Church (now the Reformed Church in America—RCA) created romanticized models of the old Batavian tribes and listed and adopted the positive qualities of the Dutch, partly to counter



*Cover of John Lothrop Motley's *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*, published in 1856, defined the image of the Netherlands in the English-speaking world.*

the dominion of the British tradition. This revival of Dutch heritage was used by those ministers who wanted to resist the Americanizing influences of revivalism and ecumenicalism that were confronting the traditional identity of the church. The arrival of a new wave of pious Dutch immigrants in the 1840s enabled the RCA to placate both sides. By welcoming the Dutch settlers, loyal to the Acts of

the Synod of Dordt, they strengthened the traditional Dutch element in the RCA, while their benevolent assistance helped the progressive agenda of advancing humanity.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, while one could conclude that groups most under pressure in American society would turn to these historical strategies first, the evidence suggests no immediate link between nativism and an effort to claim a part in America's heritage. For instance, the publication of the first Dutch-American newspaper (the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*) in 1849 was more a result of the recent wave of immigrants who needed a channel of communication than of emerging nativism. One could assume that once a group reached the status of acceptance, these three myths lost their usefulness. This appears not to have been the case, since these dynamics continue to function in official diplomatic exchanges, and they continue to be revived at the building of international relations.

While Washington Irving had placed the New Netherland Dutch in a comic light in his Knickerbocker tales, the Dutch reputation had received a serious and positive correction in the late 1840s thanks to the publication of *The History of New Netherland* by an Irish-American, Edmund B. O'Callaghan, which provided a factual treasure trove for the foundation myth. The impact of O'Callaghan's work was surpassed by the even more popular *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* in 1856 by the

American historian John Lothrop Motley.<sup>7</sup> For almost seventy-five years this book fixed the image of the Netherlands in the English-speaking world, even though it was not as well researched as his later books. The impressive sales of this book were a result of the parallels readers saw between the Dutch and American wars of independence and the increasing tension between the American North and South. The work also took an anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic perspective, both well accepted in the United States during the nineteenth century. Motley hoped to liberate the English-speaking world from its concentration on itself. He provided the arguments for the ideological parallels between the Dutch and American Republics and was aided by Douglas Campbell who, in his book on the Puritans



*Painting by Phillips Melville, of brig Andrew Doria receiving a salute from the Dutch fort at St. Eustatius, West Indies, 16 November 1776. The Grand Union flag is flying at Andrew Doria's stern and on her foremast. Courtesy of the US Navy Art Collection, Washington, DC. Public domain image.*

in England, Holland, and America, published in 1892, denied the British the honor of having nursed American institutions.<sup>8</sup>

The celebration of America's centennial in 1876 and the professionalization of historical studies in the US followed, further kindling interest in the discipline. In the 1880s

the awareness of the historical ties between the US and Holland were rediscovered and published. In 1881 an American minister in the Netherlands, James Birney, retraced the evidence of when Commander Johannes de Graaff of St. Eustatius, a Dutch possession in the Caribbean, to the returned salute of the American brig *Andrew Doria* by firing the cannons of Fort Oranje, the first international acknowledgment of the independence of the United States on 16 November 1776, and at the end of the decade the ceremonies at Plymouth, Massachusetts, triggered one of his successors, Samuel R. Thayer, to make an effort to erect a monument for the Pilgrims' departure in Delfshaven, close to Rotterdam.<sup>9</sup>

Also international affairs contributed to the growing awareness of Dutch ethnicity. The Boer Wars of the early 1880s and in particular those of the 1899-1902 years fed feelings of ethnic solidarity with the descendants of the Dutch in South Africa, who played the heroic role of the underdog. The horror stories about the concentration camps where innocent women and children suffered aroused an anti-British sentiment that lasted until after World War I. The financial and protest campaigns to support the Boers further strengthened the ties with the Netherlands, where similar sentiments gained ground. The Boers stood for the virtues of faith and courage, with which the Dutch liked to identify. Since the Netherlands was not a significant factor in European politics at the time and the Dutch-Americans were a small minority of the population, the Boer cause served in both places to strengthen their position.<sup>10</sup>

### Holland Society

In the mid-1880s societies were founded with the mission to preserve Dutch heritage. The founding of the venerable Holland Society of New

York in 1885 was a reaction of the Old Dutch colonial elite to the overwhelming forces of industrialization and immigration. Its establishment resulted from a court case where the lawyers and judges were all "Vans"—Van Siclen, Van Allen, Vanderpoel and Van Vorst.<sup>11</sup> The membership requirement of the newly founded society stipulated descent from the New Netherland Dutch before 1675 established a class barrier to prevent recent immigrants from joining. The society served to collect information about the Dutch in America, write its history, and promote the principles and virtues of the Dutch ancestors, and drew more than two hundred members in its first year. The Dutch consul general

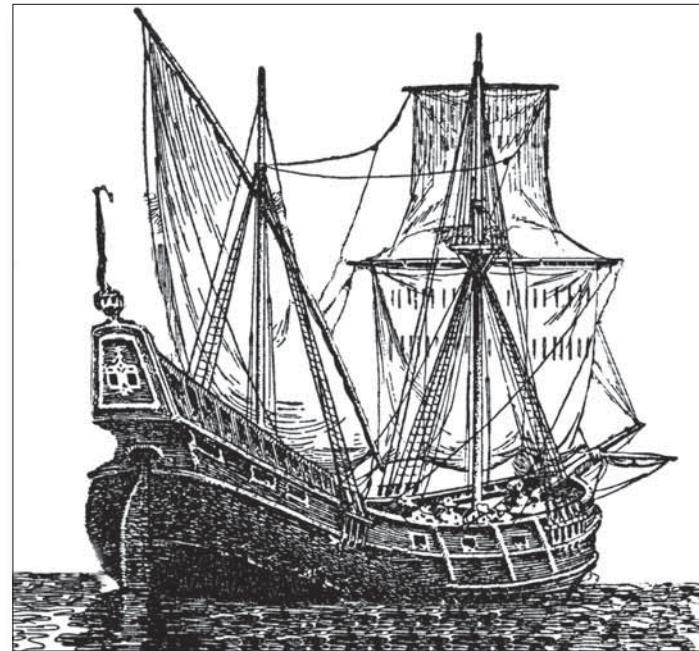
Planten provided replicas of historical artifacts which served as symbols for the courage of the Dutch shown in defending civil and religious liberties.<sup>12</sup> Soon chapters of the Holland Society were founded in other cities with a sizable Dutch-American population.

To solidify their Dutch roots, a group of fifty members visited the Netherlands in the summer of 1888 and were feted by mayors and businessmen. The society delighted in drawing publicity to its opulent dinners. They re-enacted Dutch customs in food, drinks, smokes, ornaments, and songs. Apart from the valuable publication of Dutch primary sources from the colonial period, the patrician Holland Society members composed

songs focusing on ethnic superiority such as:<sup>13</sup>

"I'm a Van of a Van of a Van of a Van  
Of a Van of a way back line;  
On every rugged feature ancestral  
glories shine;  
And all our band in kinship stand  
With all that's old and fine;  
I'm a Van of a Van of a Van of a Van  
of a Van of a way back line."

These patricians used the foundation stories of New Netherland as ammunition in progressive politics. In 1903 Robert B. Roosevelt,



A woodcut of Halve Maen (Half Moon) that Henry Hudson sailed up the river named in his honor. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

former American minister to the Netherlands, a founding member of the Holland Society and uncle to President Theodore Roosevelt, used the commemoration of the first city charter of New York in 1653 to attack New York's control by corrupt bosses in Albany. He drew from the Dutch heritage to claim the city's "birthright

of independence and self-reliance.”<sup>14</sup> This triggered a discussion to memorialize this legacy by raising funds for a statue of William the Silent, which took more than twenty years to arrive and five more years to be erected on the campus of Rutgers University.<sup>15</sup> They also anchored the Dutch-American legacy to locations in the Netherlands. In 1914 the “Dutchophile” Congregational minister of Anglo descent William E. Griffis boasted of having erected ten monuments in the Netherlands in towns with links to American history.<sup>16</sup> The Society also initiated and sponsored the celebration of the expedition of Henry Hudson, who was commissioned by the Dutch East India Company in 1609, and had a replica built of the *Halve Maen*. However, the mingled celebration of Hudson with Robert Fulton’s first steamship to navigate the Hudson River obscured the Dutch element beyond recognition.<sup>17</sup>

### Midwestern Dutch

The first wave of Dutch immigrants arriving in Michigan in the 1840s did not need to explicitly confirm their loyalty to their new country since most of them felt at home in America. They faithfully celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.<sup>18</sup> Zeeland became aware of the importance of its history in 1879, when thirty-two men founded the *Oude Settlers Vereeniging* to write their settlement’s history. Its first serious celebration was the fortieth anniversary of the founding of their town in 1887.<sup>19</sup>

Resistance against Americanization was felt most in circles of the Christian Reformed Church. In 1887 one of its ministers in Classis Holland stated that 4 July was a necessary evil. *De Grondwet* Editor L. Mulder protested against this judgment and considered it a result of a misunderstanding among the Dutch about the gap between church and society,

while he believed American society was a “positively Christian society.” Moreover, Mulder regretted that this extreme position broke the unity in the Dutch community by excluding some, as had happened in Overisel where the CRC had withdrawn from the celebration because there was no religious component.<sup>20</sup>

The most public platform for displaying the Dutch heritage was the Chicago Columbian Exposition in 1893. The Dutch presence at the Chicago World’s Fair consisted of a few exhibits of contemporary economic artifacts such as a herring schooner and a cocoa mill. The main attention was drawn to the 332 paintings—displayed across 9,300 square feet—of old and new masters. The paintings were exuberantly received and stood in stark contrast to the old-fashioned uniforms of the Dutch in the military parade, which failed to fill the spectators with awe. Art surpassed history as the vehicle of ethnic pride.

At the fair George David Birkhoff attempted to draw attention to 31 August, Princess Wilhelmina’s birthday, as a day of festivities.<sup>21</sup> Celebration of the day did not catch on until the next world’s fair in 1933. The preparation and presentation of the Dutch legacy at the world’s fairs of 1893 and 1933 triggered the founding of several Dutch clubs in Chicago, such as the elitist Holland Society in 1895 and the more humble Saint Nicholas Society in 1905, but none lasted long.<sup>22</sup> Their programs were heavily laden with historical references to William of Orange and fully exploited the common ideological basis of the Netherlands and the United States.

### More Distinction

After the turn of the century the claim of Dutch distinction became more explicit. The purest form of identity politics was drafted by Christian Reformed minister Henry Beets, who

was the strongest advocate of rapid Americanization in his denomination. Beets composed a “Song of the Holland-Americans,”<sup>23</sup> praising Dutch-Americanism on the occasion of the semi-centennial celebration of the Christian Reformed Church in 1907. Beets’ song was singled out by the publisher not only because it was considered real poetry, but especially he felt it would “fill a long-felt want in social gatherings of our people.” The song was the first entry in a collection of Dutch religious songs with English translations, but this one had little religious wording. It connected the colonial Dutch with the nineteenth-century immigrants in singing the praises of the United States. The second stanza draws the attention away from a glorious past to a promising future, while the fifth and final stanza prayed to “Infuse the best of all our past, the noblest of our traits, into the life, into the deed of our United States!” Though the lyrics created a distance from the old country and made an emotional appeal to embrace America, it also bonded the Dutch-Americans of all generations together, because they were the only ones to sing it. The song worked because the tune was that of the old Dutch national anthem, “Wien Neerlands bloed in de aderen vloeit,” a typically nationalist song with some racist undertones,

*Come ye who boast of Dutch descent,  
Sons of New Netherland,  
And ye who reached our friendly shore  
with western pilgrim band  
Unite with us in festive song,  
Song which the heart elates  
And sing the praises of our land  
Our own United States,  
Our own United States.  
  
We love the land across the sea*

We glory in its past;  
We pray for its prosperity,  
May it forever last!  
But tho we love old Holland still,  
We love Columbia more,  
The land our sons and brethren fill  
From east to western shore,  
From east to western shore.<sup>24</sup>

In the same year that this poem was published, Professor Nicholas M. Steffens of Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, expressed the pride of his ethnic group when he addressed the crowd at the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the colony. He claimed that the Dutch had become excellent citizens because they had preserved the good parts of their Dutch character. He continued with a disdainful comment on the inferiority of the recent immigrants from East and Southern Europe: "Perhaps it is good that Italians, Hungarians, Greeks, Polaks, and Russians do not establish settlements, but are soon swallowed up by the mighty American spirit, but when immigrants arrive from countries, whose citizens have something to offer that is wise to preserve, then it is a blessing for themselves as for the Americans, if they come as the Hollanders came in AD 1847."<sup>25</sup>

At the same occasion Reverend Matthew Kolyn defined the mission of the Hollander in America in a combination of all three myths: "We are persuaded that the Hollander in America has come to stay. His influence is to be powerful and lasting; it has been known and felt during the three centuries that have passed since his coming. His name is written large upon the pages of American history. His love for and devotion to the new fatherland have been unquestioned. In peace and in war, the Hollander

in America has been a patriot of the noblest type." His argument was fully historical: The Dutch had not only founded New Amsterdam, but had come in the shape of the Pilgrims, who were thoroughly Dutchified, and in the person of William Penn, who had a Dutch mother, to fulfill an important role in keeping America pure and orderly.<sup>26</sup>

Similar stories reached far and determined the positive sentiment toward the Dutch in other parts of the Midwest. Vice Consul Gerrit Klay of Orange City, Iowa, reported in 1931 that the obedient Dutch had not been involved in any criminal court cases in the past three years. "This is in accordance with a remark made by President Hoover not long ago: 'The Dutch descendants over here are never in prison and never in the poor house.'"<sup>27</sup> Though many Dutch like to read these remarks as signs of their moral superiority, they were actually results of a settlement pattern with a strong social cohesion, caused by the dominant family migration to rural areas within a tight religious framework.

The young generation inculcated these ideas: William C. Walvoord exemplified the heroic Dutch past that the students embraced at Hope College, Holland, Michigan. In February 1908 this Wisconsin student won the oratorical contest with a tale on the Siege of Leyden, "Heroism, sacrifice, and nobleness of purpose are qualities which characterize not only the defense of Leyden, but . . . [t]he American Revolution, qualities which are essential to every struggle for true freedom."<sup>28</sup> In the same year *Ladies' Home Journal* Editor Edward W. Bok awarded a prize to Hope student George F. Huizinga for his essay on what the Dutch had contributed to the development of the American West.<sup>29</sup>

### The Great War

World War I increased the stakes of

the Dutch with respect to American public opinion. In the uninformed American mind the difference between the neutral and Dutch and Germany was hard to discern since German immigrants in Pennsylvania had long been identified as "Dutch." Moreover, because of the Boer Wars, the Dutch were "enemies" of the British, who along with the Americans, ultimately, were part of the Allied defense of democracy. On the West Coast, Henry A. Van Coenen Torchiana, a former cowboy turned businessman and Dutch consul, gave an overview of the state of trade between the United States and the Netherlands in 1918. He embarked on a course of cultural diplomacy, since he was aware of the fact that "public opinion will act very largely as a jury of future trade relations."<sup>30</sup> He had no doubts about the positive judgment of the American press on the Netherlands. Confidently he announced, "American public opinion will do justice to the Netherlands and its people for two reasons: Because this public opinion is American, and therefore fair, and because the Netherlands people deserve it."<sup>31</sup> He made a fine effort to raise personal sympathy for the venerable and learned prime minister, the agonizing young queen, and the well-beloved former minister to the United States, Loudon, married to a most estimable American lady. He parried the criticism of Dutch trade with Germany during the Great War by claiming this was the right of a neutral power and necessary to provide consumption articles for its own population.

Van Coenen realized that a historical appeal to the United States for the many services rendered to it by Holland in the past would not work in this situation and he derived his arguments from common values of personal and political liberties. Moreover, he capitalized on anti-

German feelings in the United States by suggesting that trade opportunities for Dutch products in America were promising if they were of established Dutch origin. And for his own regional audience he added that California ports were the logical and promising destination for the resurgent colonial trade and he encouraged American businessmen to set up banks and transportation lines and invest in the Dutch East and West Indies.<sup>32</sup> Similar arguments confirming the mutual attachment to liberty, peace, and justice were made on the East Coast, where Counselor of the Netherlands Legation in Washington William de Beaufort aimed to clear the Dutch reputation by stating, "Our common past has no drawback in the realization of our common present."<sup>33</sup>

This emphasis on common values echoed the approach of Theodore Roosevelt, who toasted the Dutch in America at the 1890 dinner of the Holland Society in New York by extolling the virtues of assimilation and using the colonial Dutch as his evidence. He said: "The thoroughness with which the Hollander has become Americanized, and the way in which he has ceased being anything but an American makes him invaluable as an object lesson to some of the races who have followed him to America at an interval of about two centuries."<sup>34</sup>

The elaborate celebration of the centennial of the Dutch colonies in 1947 revisited the contribution of the Dutch to America. Willard Wichers headed the committee and got the Netherlands government heavily involved, so much that some locals felt the Dutch had taken over the celebration. The Dutch used this event to strengthen the cultural ties with their most powerful liberator, whose people still lent material assistance to the impoverished Dutch. Philosopher Marten ten Hoor made



During World War I a wave of super patriotism and anti-German feelings swept the United States. For the first time Dutch young men joined the US military in large numbers as indicated in the photo probably taken at Fort Custer, west of Battle Creek, Michigan. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

a sophisticated effort to prove that the Dutch Calvinists had a democratic practice, even if they did not wholly subscribe to the principle of the sovereignty of the people. But the most important feature remained the display of objects to stimulate pride in the achievements of the Dutch pioneers and emphasize "the spirit of Ebenezer, the spirit which enabled our fathers, wherever they settled to build happy homes and become useful citizens."<sup>35</sup>

### Sections and Strategies

How, when, and where did the Dutch-Americans use which strategy to prove they belonged in America? According to Overland, the desire of the Dutch was weak, "Dutch immigrants themselves do not seem to have felt a great need to trumpet their own colonial presence."<sup>36</sup> His supporting evidence is a 1921 editorial in *Onze Toekomst* claiming that the main contribution of the Dutch in America was the planting of True Religion (i.e., the Christian Reformed Church) and he is only partially right: the stronger the religious identity of a group the less it has a

need for an explicit ethnic identity. Most nineteenth-century Dutch immigrants had a strong religious attachment, which offered a sense of belonging and which neutralized the fear of being absorbed in America without leaving a trace. The Christian Reformed were more interested in justifying their existence than in making ethnic statements.

For the Americanized Dutch with weak religious attachments the historical roots gained importance. Especially for recent arrivals, the public reference to Dutch historical figures or events extended their own lineage and suggested antecedents for their present involvement in America. Their efforts to solidify their position had been prepared by historical research and a rediscovery of the Dutch roots in the mid-nineteenth century. These circumstances bore the signs of patrician ethnic societies. Simultaneously the Midwestern Dutch reached a series of commemorative years that propelled self-reflection. Outside pressure was only felt during the First World War.

The three regions with Dutch-American settlements all used history

and ideology to identify themselves. But since the situation in each region differed, they used these arguments with differing emphases. On the East Coast, the Dutch of colonial lineage used their heritage to advance political goals. In the Midwest (and beyond)<sup>37</sup> the more recent immigrants referred to Dutch history to advance moral values, while the most recent arrivals on the West Coast employed the glory of the Dutch empire to stimulate commercial activities. The foundation and ideological myths were used most, while the Dutch contributions to America's wars were much less prominent.<sup>38</sup> The ideological myth proved most rewarding since it did not need such strong historical facts—although the Dutch possessed an abundant share of that evidence—and could be more easily used in drawing parallels between Dutch and American history to stress common virtues.<sup>39</sup>

The colonial Dutch had been fully accepted and so the three myths were used mainly to counter belittling by Anglos. As the Dutch minister A. C. D. de Graeff told his Dutch-American audience in 1924: "So often in Washington society I am greeted socially

by the ladies with the question: 'How is dear little Holland?' I am sure these people feel genuine sympathy for my country. However, I take exception. . . . It is not geographic dimensions, but strength of character of the people that fixes a country's place in the family of nations."<sup>40</sup>

In the Dutch case, not attacks from outside prompted the use of these strategies, but trends in society, one of which was simply to emulate the birth of other ethnic societies.<sup>41</sup> The Dutch echoed the positions in the dominant culture, in fact confirming the hegemonic nature of Anglo culture by supporting it with their own heritage. For instance, during the Spanish-American War in 1898, the Holland Society of Chicago used the Dutch struggle against Spain to support the "liberation" of Cuba.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the Tulip Time festivals confirmed the Americanness of the Dutch-American subculture, promoting its virtues, drawing from a historical justification, and presenting a well-known stereotype in its first six decades.<sup>43</sup> These festivals strengthened the cohesion in their community, while simultaneously strengthening the ties with the



Spring festivals focused on tulips became synonymous with American views of the Netherlands, although they bore little resemblance to anything in the Netherlands. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

consumer culture and emphasizing the business ethic of America. It confirmed American stereotypes of nostalgia, simple life, and primary colors, as Suzanne Sinke and others have noticed. ☙

### Endnotes

1. This date referred to 16 November 1776 when the batteries of the Dutch castle on St. Eustatius fired the first salute to the flag of the rebellious United States. The government of the Dutch Republic waited until 1782 to officially recognize America's independence, but the commercial base in the West Indies was quick to accept a virtual reality—the Americans needed arms and munitions.

2. Martin Witteveen, "The Dutch Sentiment of Guy Vander Jagt," *DIS Magazine*, December 1997, 8-17. Vander Jagt used his Dutch background in his keynote address at the Republican National Convention in Detroit in 1980 to nominate Ronald Reagan. I do not

think that many Americans outside the Dutch subculture noticed this event. Not even the *New York Times* reported the introduction of this day.

3. Orm Overland, *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

4. *Addresses of Netherlands Society of Philadelphia*, 155, 159. Sweden started to contact the Swedish-Americans only in the 1930s, when the Swedish government needed to strengthen the bilateral relations and used the commemoration of New Sweden as a welcome and positive event.

5. See his annotated and illustrated online publication at <http://tigger.uic.edu/~rjensen/no-irish.htm>.

6. Firth Haring Fabend, *Zion on the Hudson: Dutch New York and New Jersey in the Age of the Revival* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000) 8-19, 44, 70, 214-216.

7. Alice P. Kenney, *Stubborn for Liberty: The Dutch in New York* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1975), 191-196. O. D. Edward, "John Lothrop Motley and the Netherlands," in J. W. Schulte Nordholt and Robert P. Swierenga, eds, *A Bilateral Bicentennial: A History of Dutch-American Relations 1782-1982* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1982) 171-198.

8. *The Puritan in Holland, England, and America: An Introduction to Ameri-*

can History, 2 vols. (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1892).

9. *Papers Relating to Foreign Relations of the United States 1881* (Washington, DC, 1882), 847-851 and 1889 (1890) 640-641.

10. Thanks to Michael Douma's unpublished paper "Holland Michigan and the Boer War," (Hope College 2003) and Hans Ester, "Met Lourens Penning naar het land van de verbeelding: De Nederlandse liefde voor Zuid-Afrika," *Transparant* 11.3 (August 2000) 4-9; Chris van Koppen, *De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw. Abraham Kuiper en Zuid-Afrika* (1992). *De Grondwet*, 22 February 1881: Poem to endorse a petition to support the Boers.

11. David William Voorhees, *The Holland Society: A Centennial History 1885-1985* (New York: Holland Society of New York, 1985), 6. Of course, the St. Nicholas Society was founded fifty years earlier, in 1835, but this society was more a mock-society with a high degree of entertainment and socializing in the tradition of the Knickerbockers.

12. *Ibid*, 31.

13. See article in *New York Times*, 11 January 1890.

14. Robert B. Roosevelt, "The Oldest Charter of New York," Theodore M. Banta, ed., *Yearbook of the Holland Society of New York* (1903) 234. The society continued to provide a platform for political networkings as became clear in 1924 when the president of the Holland Society of New York spoke at the Netherlands Society of Philadelphia annual banquet to encourage its members to help build a more efficient railroad connection with New York City.

15. Voorhees, *Holland Society*, 66-68.

16. *Addresses of the Netherlands Society of Philadelphia*, p. 76-81; W. E. Griffis, "Thankful America," *The Outlook* 106 (10 January 1914) 88-90. See also Annette Stott, *Holland Mania*, 78-100. Griffis believed that he had to correct the fervent sectionalism displayed by New England, because he was convinced that the true unifying forces in the United States were found in the Middle States, which had a stronger Dutch influence. Recognition of the European contributions to the United States was a rather common feature; see the series of Herbert N. Casson in the 1906 volume of *Munsey* featuring a

variety of twelve immigrant groups. The Dutch (mostly colonial) were portrayed in the November issue, "The Dutch in America," 238-242. Scholarly attention for the Dutch element in America was given in the *American Historical Association Report for 1909* (1911) by the Dutch historian H. T. Colenbrander, "The Dutch Element in American History," and Ruth Putnam, "The Dutch Element in the United States," 193-201 and 205-218. Colenbrander refuted the distorted views of Campbell.

17. Lincoln Diamant, *Hoopla on the Hudson: An Intimate View of New York's Great Hudson-Fulton Celebration* (Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press, 2003).

18. The first written record dates from 1853. *De Hollander* 5 July 1872. This was evident in 1872 when the regional celebration of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July took place in the town of Zeeland, which was visited by many citizens of Grand Rapids. *The Hollander* noticed that the community had not celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of its settlement, but that it had not prevented the organization of Independence Day to be a success. Since the Netherlands did not celebrate a national holiday, the festivities on 4 July are already a sign of Americanization.

19. *De Grondwet*, 11 March 1879 and 19 July 1887. *De Hollander*, 8 July 1874, gives the typical program of Independence Day in Holland, with music, drama, food, and patriotic speeches about the American Revolution. *De Grondwet* of 10 July 1883 called for a serious celebration of the principle of the sovereignty of the people, which had its precedent in Dutch history.

20. *De Grondwet*, 7 June 1887.

21. <http://columbus.gl.iit.edu/bookfair/ch21.html#735>.

22. Robert P. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 526-550.

23. He perfected his argument for Dutch pride in his often recycled lecture "Why we of Dutch descent claim a modest place in the sunshine of respect of our American nation with its various national origins," of which several editions survive, most recently from 1934. Henry Beets Collection, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, box 24, folder 3.

24. Henry Beets, *Herinneringen. Holland-American Songs. Holland Songs with English Text Series 1.* (Chicago: Paul H. Wezeman, 1907). It was the opening song in the Semi-Centennial Commission, *Gedenkboek van het Vijftigjarig Jubileum der Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk A.D. 1857-1907* (Grand Rapids: 1907), reprinted in Walter Lagerwey's collection, *Neen Nederland, 'k vergeet u niet een beeld van het immigrantenleven in Amerika tussen 1846 en 1945 in verhalen, schetsen en gedichten* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1982), 62. It was sung at the 400th commemoration of the birthday of William of Orange on 24 April 1933 in Chicago, but not at the visit of Princess Juliana on 12 May 1942. The *Wien Neerlandsch Bloed* was sung at the sixtieth anniversary of the Holland and Zeeland colonies held in Zeeland in August 1907 and was replaced by the historical *Wilhelmus* of Nassau in 1933 as the Dutch National Anthem.

25. N. M. Steffens, "Het zestiendig feest," *Historical Souvenir of the Celebration of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Colonization of the Hollanders in Western Michigan* (privately printed, 1908), 113.

26. Matthew Kolyn, "The Hollander in America," *ibid*, 55-64, quote on 59.

27. National Archief, Den Hague, Inventory 2.05.13 Gezantschap VS, 406 Orange City, 1919-1934, report to the Minister in Washington, 5 January 1931.

28. William C. Walvoord, *Windmill Memories: A Remembrance of Life in a Holland-American Community Before the Turn of the Century* (Cedar Grove, Wisconsin: Villager Publications, 1979) 57-58. The lecture was published in the *Anchor*, April 1908, 5-10.

29. George Ford Huizinga, *What the Dutch Have Done in the West of the United States* (Philadelphia: privately printed 1909). A *Banner* editorial by Henry Beets congratulated the winners, but regretted that the contest was not extended to include Calvin College as well (21 January 1909). Arnold Mulder received the second prize.

30. H. A. Van Coenen Torchiana, *The Future of Trade Between the United States of America and the Netherlands and Its Colonies: A Short Study* (San Francisco: Holland-American Chamber of Commerce, 1918) 9. See also the address of the Dutch minister in Washington to

the Netherlands Society of Philadelphia, 23 January 1919 (*Addresses*, 217-231).

31. Van Coenen Torchiana, *The Future of Trade*, 11.

32. A similar connection between ideology and commerce was made by Bremen skippers in 1846 when they advocated a steamboat connection between New York and their city, which would bring many Germans with a democratic tradition to the United States. M. Walker, *Germany and the Emigration 1816-1885* (1964). Van Coenen combined a business prospectus for the Dutch East Indies with a statement that the Netherlands was not a small country in the title of his book *Tropical Holland: An Essay on the Birth, Growth and Development of Popular Government in an Oriental Possession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1921). Van Coenen had been born in the East Indies.

33. *Addresses of Netherlands Society Philadelphia*, 1920, 247.

34. *New York Times*, 11 January 1890.

35. Marvin Lindeman, "A Non-Hollander Looks at Holland"; Willard C. Wickers, "Celebrating the Centennial of Dutch Settlement in Michigan, The Observances at Holland"; Marten ten Hoor, "The Dutch Calvinists and American Democracy," *Michigan History* 37 (1947), 405-416, 458-461, and 353-366, respectively. See also Henry S. Lucas, *Ebenezer, Memorial Souvenirs of the Centennial Commemoration of Dutch Immigration to the United States held in Holland, Michigan 13-16 August 1947* (New York: The Netherlands Information Bureau, 1947) 40. Even the liberal Dutch daily *Algemeen Handelsblad* issued a special booklet to commemorate the emigration of 1847 as a tribute to the descendants of the Dutch immigrants. J. A. Schroeder, *Secession and Emigration 1834-1847* (Amsterdam:

*Algemeen Handelsblad*, 1947).

36. Overland, *Immigrant Minds*, 78.

37. The Dutch communities in New Jersey, most notably Passaic, Paterson, Lodi, and Prospect Park, resemble the midwestern attitude. See Gerald F. De Jong, "Dutch Immigrants in New Jersey Before World War I," *New Jersey History* (1976) 94, 69-88.

38. One example of Dutch-Americans fighting in the wars of the American Republic is the song by Isaac Rusling Pennypacker, "The Dutch on the Delaware," adopted as the official song of the Netherlands Society of Philadelphia in 1894, which recalls that the Sons of the Beggars of the Zuyder Zee crossed the Delaware with Washington and fought against Robert Lee. *Addresses Made at the Annual Meetings of the Netherlands Society of Philadelphia. Bellevue-Stratford Hotel 1913-1930*, 11. This society was founded on 23 January 1892, on the day commemorating the Union of Utrecht in 1579. In 1913 the society sponsored the erection of a monument for Pieter C. Plockhoy in Zierikzee, honoring him as the founder of Swaanendaal, Delaware, and as a "Pioneer of Christian Civilization."

The city of Holland observed Decoration Day to honor its dead soldiers of the Civil War (*De Grondwet*, 29 May and 5 June 1877). The Holland Soldiers' Union was founded in early 1875 and in 1894 a monument was erected at the Pilgrim Home Cemetery.

39. William E. Griffis went as far as to describe Holland as a republic that invited a prince as its sovereign (*Addresses* 1914, 70). Griffis went around Holland to place ten tablets in various cities with sites of relevance to American history.

40. *Ibid*, 357-358.

41. Frank Van Nuys, *Americanizing the West: Race, Immigrants, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Lawrence, KS:

University of Kansas Press, 2002) 9-32.

The German-Americans succeeded in 1987 to have 6 October proclaimed as "German-American Day," commemorating the landing of the first group of German immigrants in 1683 in Philadelphia. See Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *The German-American Experience* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000), 364-366. The proclamation emphasized the German contributions to American culture, such as the Christmas tree, the kindergarten, music, science, democracy, and the complete integration of the German-Americans (the single largest ethnic group in the nation).

42. Overland, *American Minds*, 123.

43. Suzanne Sinke, "Tulips are Blooming in Holland, Michigan: Analysis of a Dutch American Festival," in Michael D'Innocenzo, a.o., *Immigration and Ethnicity: American Society - "Melting Pot" or "Salad Bowl"* (Westport 1992) 3-14. Janet S. Sheeres, "Klompendancing through America," in Larry J. Wagenaar and Robert P. Swierenga, eds., *Dutch Enterprise: Alive and Well in North America* (n.p., 1999) 71-82 for an overview of all tulip festivals and Dutch ethnic celebrations. As no Italian in Europe celebrates Columbus Day, nor Norwegians the Seventeenth of May, while a variety of nationalities join in the celebration of St. Patrick's Day, Tulip Time was not an original Dutch festival, but a 1929 invention combining a fair with economic self-promotion. Overland is quick to note that celebrating ethnicity remained a middle-class affair. The working class sought refuge in unions rather than in ethnic clubs, which reverberated with progress, success, and patriotism. Geneviéve Fabre, Jürgen Heideking, and Kai Dreisbach, eds., *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation: American Festive Culture from the Revolution to the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Berghahn, 2001).

# History Preserved

Allison DeWaard

**N**ow IS THE TIME to buy your ticket and travel to COLUMBUS, MONTANA (sic), land of good success and personal happiness. Here is an opportunity to gain possession of your own farm. Don't listen to those who are afraid of this. One who thinks good fortune does not accompany him, never gets ahead. Consider the many good opportunities which in that way pass us by. Do you want to improve your condition? Then write us immediately for more information about Columbus, Montana; it is a success. This message is intended for every renter who does not get the desired advantage from someone else's land. Come with us to Columbus. An excursion on the first and third Tuesday of each month. Travel expense is very low.<sup>1</sup>

Drive down I-90, and take exit 408 at Columbus, Montana.<sup>2</sup> Continue through town, and turn right onto Rapelje Road, just past the cemetery. After thirteen-and-a-half miles, turn left onto the recently-named Stagecoach Road. Drive for several miles down the dirt road, clunking over three cattle guards. From a distance, watch for two chimneys to appear among a grove of dying caragana trees.<sup>3</sup> Upon reaching the closed cattle gate, you will have to park your vehicle and continue on foot.

Already in early June the ground is dry and cracking. The wind blows incessantly, and the land holds various shades of brown and green. Next to the cattle gate, among some tall prairie grasses, lies what appears to be a pile of wood. After a second glance, however, it is evident that it is nothing



Stage Coach Road as it leaves Rapelje Road. Several miles down Stagecoach Road is the former Abram Kornelis farmstead. Image courtesy of the author.

Allison DeWaard, from Lynden, Washington, is graduating this May from Dordt College with a major in English Secondary Education. She was married 12 May and moved to Sioux Center, Iowa. She would like to thank all her teachers along the way: without them, she would never have gotten this far.



*The cast iron hand pump, installed in 1943. Image courtesy of the author.*

of the sort: it is Abram Kornelis's road grader from 1926. Abram Kornelis was my great-grandfather.<sup>4</sup>

Continuing down the dirt drive you will stumble upon an abandoned house. Over sixty-five years ago this house held life; now the windows are broken or missing, their sashes are cracked, the paint has faded to nothingness, and the boot box that was outside the door has been reclaimed by relatives. Peeking through the windows is almost like entering another world. Old tin cans and broken glass shards are scattered across the disintegrating linoleum, the wallpaper is bubbling off the walls, the furniture is long gone, and the doors eerily hang open. This house was built with careful hands, a perfectionist's hands, and all that remains is an empty frame, a photo album whose pictures have scattered to the wind.

The lilac bush on the south side manages to produce some leaves and a few blossoms, despite years of neglect. The water pump installed in 1943 stands stoically outside the front door, its handle hanging limply off to the side. A few yards to the south is an almost unrecognizable pantry and root cellar that tilts heavily to the right, its wooden door hanging on

a single hinge. The steps are gone, and grass has taken root in the dirt floor. The nails on the roof all stick out by an inch or two, having been slowly pushed loose as the heat contracted the wood. And yet, half-a-dozen jars remain on the pantry shelves, proof that life once existed in this dry and deserted place.

To the east lie a woodshed and an outhouse, although it is no ordinary outhouse: it has two seats, rather than the typical one. The wind, however, howled one too many times, and both buildings have collapsed after tilting too far for too many years.

Now, walk to the east for approximately one mile. As you walk alongside the coulee, watch out for the small cacti that litter the ground, the only plants that seem to flourish in the dry and rocky soil. Be wary of cow pies as well, although, like everything else, they are mostly dried up and scorched by the relentless summer heat.

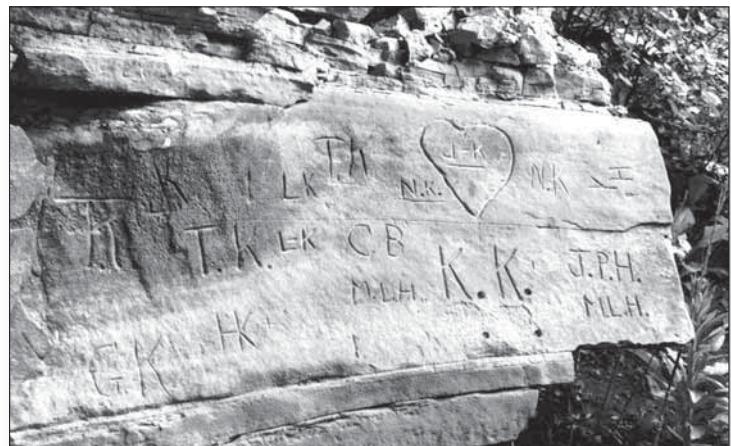
Venture down into the coulee, a place where cottonwood trees grow beside a creek that flows only a few short months of the year. Under a rocky overhang there is a flat sandstone rock, and on the surface of this rock time stands still. The initials of



*The remains of the Kornelis house among the caragana trees and lilac bushes. Image courtesy of the author.*

the Kornelis children are still engraved there—KK, TK, HK, NK, JK, GK, and LK.<sup>5</sup> A plus sign appears after my grandmother's initials, but the initials that reportedly once followed have been carefully erased. She will not reveal the youthful admirer's identity. It was not, after all, my grandfather.

Returning to the house, beware of rattlesnakes basking on the rocks of the coulee walls. Once back at the top, further east you can see Battle Butte in the distance, rising above the arid land



*Initials scratched into sandstone including those of Kenneth, Thomas, Henrietta, Niecha, John, Gertrude, and Louis Kornelis. Image courtesy of the author.*

that stretches on endlessly. Looking again at the forsaken house as you approach it, let the wind whip through your hair and listen to the history that floats on the breeze.

Years ago, advertisers like the Spoelstra Realty Company of Chicago lured people to this land, promising prosperity when all that existed in Columbus, Montana, were rocky fields where only a handful of rain fell every year.<sup>6</sup> Peter Spoelstra advertised with photos of homes, barns, and luscious crops that were never real.<sup>7</sup> The land was painted as a paradise, but it was, at least to those who came, far more of a wasteland.

Settlers moved to Montana for many reasons, but everyone had an idealistic vision based upon the lies of unscrupulous land agents. The Spoelstra Realty Company placed most of their advertisements in the official periodicals of the Christian Reformed Church, *The Banner* and *De Wachter*, catching the hearts of Dutch immigrants.<sup>8</sup> A Christian Reformed church was established near Columbus in 1915 as Dutch settlers sought for hope in a desolate land.

Abram Kornelis (1884-1971) left Joure, Friesland, the Netherlands, in 1910, attempting to outrun a broken heart. To ensure his safety, his younger brother, Sid (1887-1988),<sup>9</sup> went along to America and together they worked in New York and California. After a return visit to Holland in 1913, they came back to America in April 1914 with plans to settle on the West Coast, but they didn't make it that far.<sup>10</sup>

Abram and Sid stopped to visit a relative in Columbus, Montana, and the two also became captivated by Montana's promises and low prices. They began homesteading in May 1914. Section 6, R1N T20E, was now home.<sup>11</sup>



*The two oldest Kornelis children, Ken and Tom, during the 1920s. Image courtesy of the author.*

Abram and Sid lived in a dugout on this homestead; and today their cattle brand, KXK, can still be seen inscribed on a sandstone rock alongside the driveway.

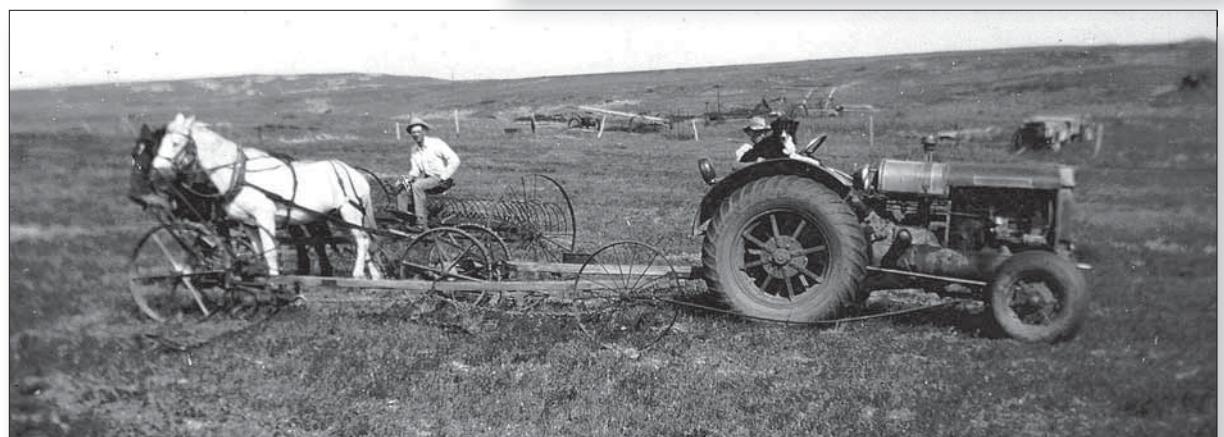
Three years after arriving in Montana, Abram fell in love with Jessie Van Dyke. They married in 1917. Jessie Van Dyke's father, Thomas Van

*Sisters Niecha and Gertrude doing the wash during the 1940s. Image courtesy of the author.*

Dyke, had also been lured to Montana. He was given photographs of wheat so tall a car was barely visible behind the bountiful crop. Little did he know that the bottom half of the car had been removed, more than exaggerating the wheat's height.<sup>12</sup> Sid married Jessie's sister, Gertie, in 1921.

Abram built this now-abandoned house for his wife, Jessie. Together they battled crop failure after crop failure; together they raised their ten children, and together they watched their two-month-old son, James, die of pneumonia in 1923; and together they fed their family on egg and cream money. Together they built a home whose foundation rested on God's faithfulness.

Because of the dry climate, traces of



*Ken on the hay rake with horses Vic and Sadie; Uncle Sid is on the tractor with Fido in 1944. The Montana land was suitable for grazing animals and growing hay. Image courtesy of the author.*



The pantry and root cellar remains, with its door hanging on a single hinge.  
Image courtesy of the author.

Abram Kornelis's home can be seen in the house that still stands today, a century later. To comply with homestead laws, my great-grandfather planted over 900 trees of five different varieties, but they stand dried up in perfect rows beside the house. When Abram's family grew, he added two bedrooms, and with them came a second chimney; now, the chimneys both stand as pillars atop the roof, though several bricks have fallen to the dusty ground.

The Kornelis family lived off land that could not be farmed no matter the equipment. But in 1944 they decided to leave; auctioned off most of their possessions; and moved to Sumas, Washington, leaving behind the false promises and dashed dreams. By 1939 most Columbus residents had abandoned their homesteads as well as their church; it had closed.

Abram continued to farm in Washington, but on a smaller scale; he raised a few cows and chickens. He worked as a custodian for the Christian school and the Christian Reformed church in Sumas, soon becoming eligible for social security. Ultimately, he enjoyed living in Washington and in 1959 Abram and Jessie

moved to nearby Lynden.<sup>13</sup> He passed away in 1971, she in 1984. Despite their many hardships, the Kornelises remained rooted in their faith, and their descendants prospered.

Today, back at the homestead, look across the horizon. Grasses sway in the wind like waves on the sea, and

the sun beams down from the enormous sky. Today, the Kornelis homestead is owned by a cattle rancher, and the floor of the place Abram once called home is covered with old knick-knacks and tin cans. Look around—it is hard to imagine this unforgiving land supporting a farming family. The advertisers had painted a false picture of prosperity to attract settlers like the Kornelis brothers, and while these lies were eventually what drove Abram to abandon his homestead, this arid climate is what allowed his house to be carefully preserved.

It is time to leave this dried-up land. Walk back through the cattle gate, making sure it is securely closed. Return to your vehicle, and slowly drive away, allowing the dust to swirl up and envelop the scene in the rearview mirror. Once the dust settles, it will be as if no one visited. Time will continue to pass on the deserted homestead, and the heat will continue to preserve my great-grandfather's history—a history of hardships, poverty, and desolation.

A history of family, of perseverance, and of faith.

My family. ☺

### Endnotes

1. *De Wachter*, 5 July 1916; advertisement translated by author.

2. In south-central Montana.

3. Caragana or Siberian pea shrub is a species of legume that can grow to a height of twelve feet or more. It was used by settlers of the West for windbreaks, erosion control, to help fix nitrogen into the soil, and its pods could be eaten.

4. He was born Abe Kornelis to Kornelis Jacobs Kornelis and Nieska Kliewes Brouwer. In the United States the surname is also spelled Kornelius.

5. Kenneth, Thomas, Henrietta, Niecia, John, Gertrude, and Louis; Henrietta is the author's grandmother.

6. Rob Kroes, *The Persistence of Ethnicity: Dutch Calvinist Pioneers in Amsterdam, Montana* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1992) chapter 3, "Windmills in Montana," 26-42.

7. David Zandstra, "Paradise Lost: Columbus, Montana." *Origins* (Vol. 11, No. 1), Spring 1993, 36-44.

8. Ibid.

9. Born Siebe.

10. David A. Kingma, *Possessing the Land: The Holland Settlement of Columbus, Montana 1915-1940*. 2nd ed. 1993.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ken Kornelis. Telephone interview with the author, 24 October 2011.

# James Koning Memoir (1906)

Robert P. Swierenga, editor  
Nella Kennedy, translator

## Editor's introduction

*James Koning (2 November 1833 — 22 September 1914) came as a fourteen-year-old to the Holland Colony of the Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte in the summer of 1848, along with his parents and siblings from Zuid-Beijerland, Province of Zuid-Holland. As the family left the Netherlands it included father Johannes (Jan), age 50 (born February 1798); mother Neeltje nee Schelling, age 42; Jacobus, age 14; Pieter, age 11; Arie, age 3; and Neeltje, age 1½, who*

*died at sea a week before docking in New York on 1 June 1848. Anna Vander Stel, age 46, a servant, came along to help Neeltje nurse her sick infant and namesake, and care for three-year-old Arie. The couple had been married on 19 October 1826. Before emigrating, six of their children had died at birth or shortly afterward. James was baptized as Jacobus and called Kobus for short. In America, he eventually took the English name "James."*

Johannes Koning was a blacksmith in Zuid-Beijerland, in the Province of Zeeland. This sizeable town lay astride the north bank of the Hollands Diep, ten miles below Rotterdam. Koning arrived in Michigan with sufficient monies to buy both a lot in town and a farm.

Officially, the Koning family belonged to the national Hervormde Kerk, but when they settled in Holland they had joined the 1834 Seceders that had left the national church. The family crossed the ocean on the Danish sailing bark, *Helene Catherine*, departing from Rotterdam on 1 April 1848 and arriving in New York harbor on 5 June.

The memoir describes the stormy first three-day crossing of the English Channel and into the Atlantic, the nine-day layover at Falmouth, England, to take on fresh drinking water and more large stones for ballast, and then the difficult ocean voyage. The ocean voyage began with a storm,

followed by days with little wind, but still "a sky-high sea" to remind them of the tempest. Koning related to his grandchildren that the sailors stood by with axes to cut the rigging loose if the masts broke. The voyage took thirty-five days, somewhat longer than normal but not remarkably so.

To reach West Michigan the family followed the usual water route up the Hudson River by steamboat to Albany, via the Erie Canal by a horse-drawn boat to Buffalo, and through the Great Lakes by lake steamer to Chicago, and then across Lake Michigan to Holland. Since the channel into Black Lake (now Lake Macatawa) was only two to three feet deep, the party had to board flatboats or rafts to get "across the bar." Men used wind power or long poles to propel the boats and rafts along the lakeshore for the five-mile trip to de Stad. The Holland Colony was about fifteen months old when the Konings arrived; it was a work in progress,

Robert P. Swierenga is the research professor, at the A. C. Van Raalte Institute, Hope College, and professor of history emeritus at Kent State University. He is the foremost scholar in Dutch-American studies, a frequent contributor to *Origins* and is currently completing work on a history of Holland, Michigan.

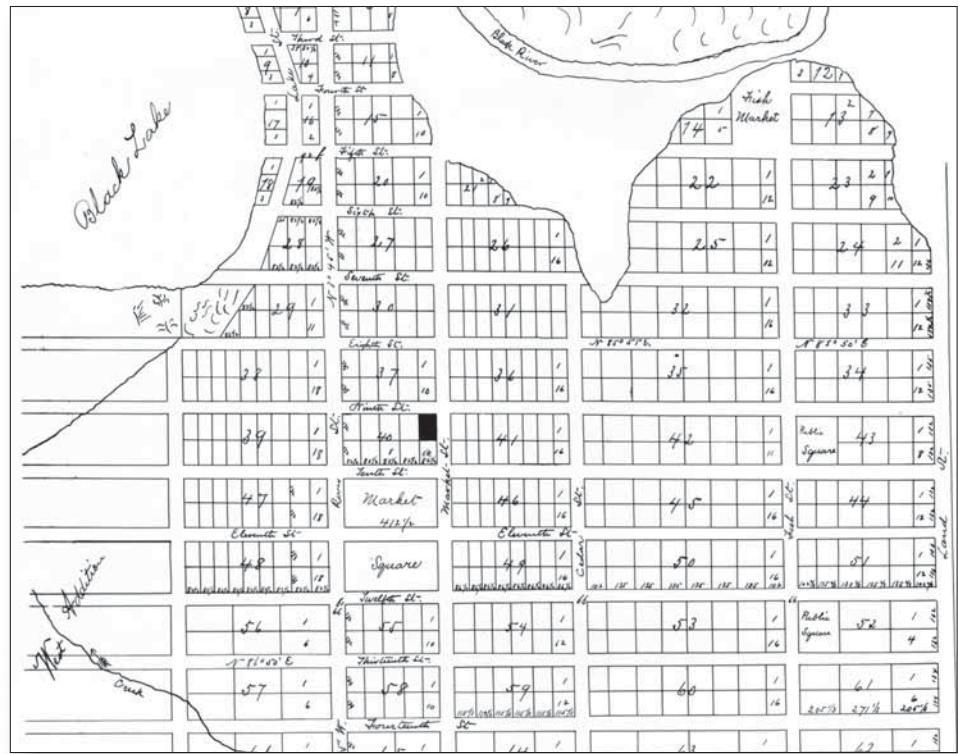
Cornelia "Nella" B. Kennedy is the former archivist, art historian, and lecturer in Dutch language at Northwestern College. Since the beginning of 2010 she has served as senior research fellow and official translator at the A. C. Van Raalte Institute, Hope College.

## Origins

with travel on 8th Street still impeded by stumps.

Settlers met the Konings at the waterfront, introduced them to willing helpers, and advised them about buying land for a farm. They arrived just when the Ottawa Indian band at Old Wing Mission, located three miles southeast of Holland (on present-day 40th Street a mile east of Waverly Avenue), decided to sell their lands and relocate to the north country at Little Traverse Bay. The mission stood on fertile bottomland along the south branch of the Black River. The Indians were asking the going price of \$5 per acre for their partially improved lands, and Koning was interested. Isaac Fairbanks, the government agricultural agent at the mission, had appraised the property. Rev. George N. Smith, government schoolmaster and preacher at the mission, was willing to sell his eighty acres, but Koning demanded the eighty-acre parcels on both sides so his sons could each have eighty-acre farms. But the Indian owners did not want to sell. So the deal came to naught, despite the best efforts of Rev. Smith.

Koning then looked nearby for a larger farm. With the help of the English-speaking Hermanus Doesburg, one of the first teachers of Holland and the future publisher of the city's first newspaper, *De Hollander* (1851-1865), Koning found the two-hundred-acre, partially improved farm of an early German settler, Gilbert Cramner. The German had come from Kalamazoo in 1843 and wished to return there. The farm lay in Section 36 of Fillmore Township, Allegan County, one mile east of the present Niekerk Christian Reformed Church and a mile north of the mission. Koning paid \$1100 cash for the farm, including a log shanty, a team of oxen and plow, a sleigh, livestock, a wood lot, and the crops growing in the field. The per-acre price of \$5 was the same



Koning's lot in Holland is indicated on this 1866 map (Market Street is now Central Avenue). Map courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

as his offer to the Mission Indians, but he also got a place to live and a cash crop to harvest that same season, all for an additional \$100. It was a better deal.

Within a few months, Koning and a neighbor replaced the shanty with a “plank house” constructed of sawed lumber. A big barn came next, but within a year health problems forced Koning to turn over the farm to a tenant, J[ames] Vander Sluis and his wife. The teenage children remained on the farm, but Johannes and Neeltje moved to Holland. They had a house erected

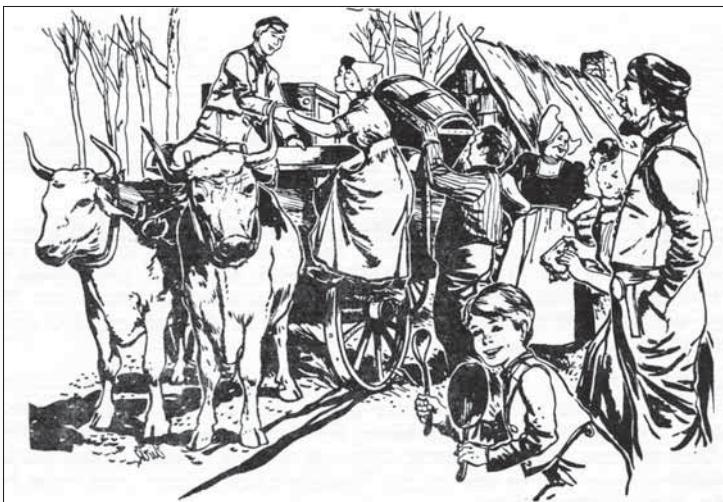


on the lot they had purchased in 1848 from Van Raalte located on the southwest corner of 9th and Cedar (Central) streets. When Johannes Koning died unexpectedly in 1852, his widow moved back to the farm and worked it again with their children.

On 8 November 1855, James Kon-  
ing was married by Rev. Van Raalte to



Built 1844-1845 for Reverend George N. and his wife Arvilla Powers Smith, the Wing Mission, located near the border between Ottawa and Allegan counties, was the first structure in the Holland area that the Dutch immigrants encountered. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



When Holland was founded, a span of oxen was still the principal form of animal power in Michigan. Derk Gringhuis illustration courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Gezina (later Cecelia) Albers (born 8 November 1832), daughter of Geert Jan and Alida. The newlyweds lived on the family farm for two years, until 1857, when James and Gezina moved to Holland, where James got a job driving the Holland mail stage. According to his obituary in the *Holland Daily Sentinel*, Koning brought mail from Grand Haven once a week and passengers and freight twice a week.<sup>1</sup> The 1860 census lists his occupation as "mail carrier."

Koning gave up driving the stage and opened a general merchandize store on 8<sup>th</sup> Street, which was lost in the 1871 Holland fire, including the counter and fixtures, valued at \$400.<sup>2</sup> By 1880 Koning worked in a stave factory in town, as did his second son Peter, and in 1900 James was a watchman in a factory (the census occupation is "night engineer factory").

The couple lived in Holland for more than half a century at 93 West 13th Street, and Cecelia bore eight surviving children, six sons and two daughters — Gerrit, Johannes (John), Jacob (James), Pieter (Peter), Albertus (Albert), Frederick (Fred), and Neeltje (Nelly). This "quiver" full of sons ensured that the Koning name

would remain prominent in the Holland area for many generations. The family belonged to Third Reformed Church. Cecelia died 22 August 1908, and James died on 22 December 1914. Both are buried in Pilgrim Home Cemetery.

In 1907, both Holland and

Zeeland commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of their founding. Gerrit Van Schelven, editor of Holland's *De Grondwet* [The Constitution] and the town's chief historian, encouraged many old settlers to write their memoirs, many of which he published in the newspaper in the next years. It is likely that Van Schelven prompted James Koning to put pen to paper, but the "Memoir" was not published in *De Grondwet*. Judging from the writing, Koning's penmanship was good, and he was able to articulate his experiences quite well, even without the use of periods or commas. The frequently misspelled words and lack of paragraphs indicate that he had not fully mastered the rules of spelling and grammar in his elementary schooling.

Mina (Mrs. Ekdal) Buys of Holland, Michigan, a direct descendant, donated the original manuscript, along with a 1996 translation by Eltine De Young-Peterse, to the Archives of the Holland Historical Trust. Nella Kennedy, chief translator at the A. C. Van Raalte Institute of Hope College, has re-translated the document. A second copy of the memoir is in the Rev. Dr. M. Eugene Osterhaven Papers at the Joint

## ADVERTENTIEN.

### Voor landbouwers.

Een frisoenlijk jongeling van ruim 20 jaren, oplangs van Zeeland alhier aangekomen, moet bekend met allerhande BOERENWERK, verlaat zo snel mogelijk bij een landbouwer als KNECHT geplaatst te worden. Adres in persoon of met franco brieven bij den Uitgever dezes.

16 Oct. 3 w.

### Land te koop.

160 acres goed land, gelegen in Town Holland, Sheboygan County, Staat Wisconsin, worden te koop aangeboden, voor 3 dollars per acre. Te bevragen bij den Heer P. SOUFFROUW aldaar,—of bij den Uitgever dezes. Brieven franco.

16 Oct.

### Hollandsch logement.

#### HET WISCONSIN HUIS.

Se. Strand, Sheboygan.

De onderstaekende heeft de eer zijn wel ingevroegd Logement aan alle Hollandsche vrienden en vreemdelingen aan te houden. Billikheid der prijzen en eenne vriendelike en nette bediening zullen iederen bezoeker ten hooren voldoen.

JOSEPH SCHRAGE.

Sheboygan, 16 Oct. 1849.

2 w.

### VERLOREN.

Eene zwart honte KOE, met een Ster op den kop, en witte voor- en achterpoten. Genoemde Koe is vier jaren oud en had eene bel aan, gemaakt K. Die deze Koe ziet, wordt verzocht haar op te houden en er kennis van te geven bij den eigenaar.

GUSTAAF WILLIAMSEN.

Sheboygan, 16 October 1849.

Bij den Uitgever dezes is ter perse, en zal binnen weinige dagen het licht zien:

### ALMANAK VOOR 1850.

Voorts zijn bij hem te bekomen:

*De Hollander in Amerika*, gemakkelijk leerboekje der Engelsche taal, prijs 37½ Cents.

*Der Kleine Deutsche*, een handboekje tot het aanleeren der Hoogduitsche taal, door C. A. BAUER. Prijs 25 Cents. Bovenstaande werkjes zijn ook te bekomen bij den Heeren P. SOUFFROUW, in Town Holland, en O. G. STEELE, 206 Mainstraat, Buffalo, N. Y.

Advertisements for land. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Archives of Holland. Rev. Osterhaven, another descendant, was a professor at Western Theological Seminary.

Henry S. Lucas might well have included this memoir in his two-volume compilation, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings* (Assen, Netherlands, 1955; revised edition, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), but the document was still in the hands of the family. We publish it here to make it available to a wider readership. Any first-person account

that contributes to the Van Raalte opus is worthy of publication, let alone the vivid picture the memoir gives of the ocean crossing and of early life in the Holland Colony.

### Memoir

James [Jacobus] Koning, born on the second of November in the year 1833, left the Netherlands in the year 1848, with his parents and two brothers and sister. The sister [Neeltje] died on the ocean a week before arrival in New York, at the age of nine months. She was born 23 August 1847.<sup>3</sup> A brother named Pieter was born 1830,<sup>4</sup> and brother Arie, born the 18th of February 1845. All were born in Zuid Beijerland, Province of Zuid-Holland, Canton of Oud-Beijerland, District Court of the City of Dordrecht. Father was born in Numansdorp and Mother in the village of Klaaswaal, both in the province of Zuid-Holland. Her name was Neeltje Schelling.

The 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1848 we left Rotterdam with the ship—a Danish bark—and so to Hellevoetsluis, and into the English Channel. After a day and a night of sailing, we were on the ocean. The following night it began to storm and the hatches were closed, and anyone who wanted to be on deck had to stay there. Everyone was below deck, except for one: a carpenter from Arnhem who already had been in America and who, with his

family, was traveling with us. One whirlwind tossed the ship completely to one side, so that we had to rest our feet against the crates on our side, and the bed against our backs.

Towards morning it calmed down and then we found out that we were on our way back to England. It was only then that we found out in what distress we had been. The carpenter, who had stayed on deck, told us the story. The name of the ship was *Helene Catherine*. He told us that sailors stood next to every mast, with an axe in hand, to be ready to cut the rigging in case the masts broke and fell overboard, so as to free the ship from the masts. The ship had lost all its masts the year before.

After having sailed for three days into headwinds, we arrived in Falmouth [Cornwall], England, in a cove, surrounded—except for where we had arrived—by large, rocky, high hills. We then found out about the reason for the return. We did not have

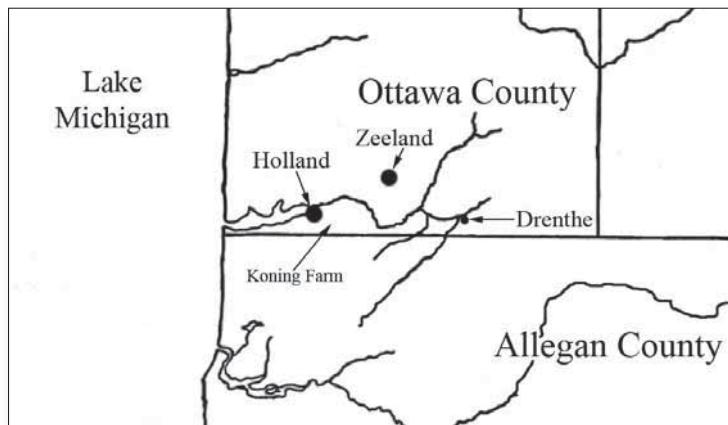
ships were of the same size as the vessels here on the lake, of the small two-masters sort. The advantage was that all the large water containers were emptied, and filled again with good spring water, so that we enjoyed having good water for the entire journey.

Nobody was allowed to disembark, so everyone had to stay on board. But when the captain went ashore, Father asked permission to join him because he wanted to buy some provisions, for we did not like hard tack. He was granted permission, and he took along one other person from among those that he took with him to America. Father had paid the costs [of the journey] for four families. I had the privilege of going along. All of the town of Falmouth is hilly, full of large rocks, even the streets. First I did not know what the clattering sound was that I heard when a woman passed me, but I soon found out that she wore spikes underneath her shoes so that she could climb the steep places.

Once on board again, we set sail on the sea the following day. We had to struggle with storms and headwinds. When the storm died down, there was no wind, but sky-high seas. By the time the sea became calm, another storm and headwind would pick up.



An illustration of chopping trees and cutting logs by Derk Gringhuis from Holland's Heritage published by the First National Bank of Holland, Michigan. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Map courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Derk Gringhuis illustration of the market in Holland courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

This was repeated until the month of June when we arrived in New York.

From there we took the steamer to Albany, and from there the canal boat to Buffalo, and from Buffalo by steamer to Chicago. From there we traveled by vessel to the Kolonie of Rev. Van Raalte, but we struggled many days to be able to anchor there. Twice we entered Grand Haven [harbor], and for several days we sailed back and forth near Holland, until at last the lake calmed and we could anchor.

In the morning Jacobus Vinke, and Jan Vinke, and Fillip Flipen [likely Philip Philipsen], and the old Bosma [likely Auke Bosma] came with two flat boats to the side of the ship, and with much exertion and might they took all belongings, and us, from the ship. At night we arrived in Holland, in the forest. Father and our family were able to stay with baker Jan Visser, who came from the same town in the Netherlands as we did. A log house had been built, with a hemlock bark roof, located on the hill which is now River Street, near the rolling mill. Others could go to find a place to sleep there, and cook food in the forest during the day.

Everywhere there were woods. Trees had been cut on 8<sup>th</sup> Street, four

rods wide [66 feet] from Kanters' hill to what was called the swamp. The trees were then cut in lengths to enable the ox cart to get through. At the time there was only one ox team in Holland. [It belonged] to old Bakker [likely Willem], who later lived in

Port Sheldon for several years. Old man [Edward] Harrington [Sr.], who lived on land away from town, also had a team of oxen. That place of Harrington is now just outside the town borders. Our family—father, mother, three brothers and the servant girl—could sleep in the attic of the old baker Jan Visser. During the day [we used] a shanty, made from poles and hemlock bark, to cook food. We spent several weeks there, for we were waiting for old man Otto Schaap, for he and his family, and some others, had departed later.

When they arrived, all of them went to look for land. In those days there were two surveyors, [Bernardus] Grootenhuis and Voorhorst [Jan Verhorst], who were acquainted with the sections of land. We had Voorhorst guide us through the forest by means of the compass, and Father Schaap, two adult sons, Visser, Pouw [Paulus] Stavast, and I all went along. Stavast had lived here for a year already; he had come with Van Raalte, as had Jan Schaap. P. Stavast had forty acres of land at the Drenthe road, two miles from Holland. The man who was our guide took us in a southeastern direction from Holland and, after walking about six miles, old man

Schaap began to give up, and considered returning. But our guide, after long pleading that the land which he wanted to show us was so good, old Schaap decided that he and I would return to Pouw Stavast's house—and there to wait for the others, with Pouw's wife.

Shortly before evening they returned to us, and Schaap and Father debated behind the log cabin whether they should go to Pella, Iowa, together to see first how it was there. I could go with them but I had to keep quiet, because they had not wanted to go so far into the forest. Schaap had two adult sons and two daughters, and a son, Jan, who had come here a year before, with Van Raalte. That son had twice claimed eighty acres from the government. That land lies half a mile from where the Niekerk church is located now. But Schaap did not like that land; it was sandy and a large portion was cedar swamp. Nowadays that is the best land. After having talked it over with his sons and wife, he decided to settle there, and so nothing came of the trip [to Iowa].

Father heard that the Indian minister [George Nelson Smith] was going to depart for the north woods with the Indians, and that he wanted to sell his farm. He had lived here for several years already, and had been sent here by the government to minister to the Indians. Old [Isaac] Fairbanks was sent by the state to teach the Indians how to farm, but the Indians had no interest in that, and did nothing but hunting and trapping.

Hermanus Doesburg, son-in-law of Schaap, had been my teacher in the Netherlands. He and his family had come along with Schaap. He could speak several languages. He took Father with him, and we went to the minister to the Indians. It was three miles from Holland, now on the Allegan road, and on the county line between Ottawa and Allegan counties.

The farm was eighty acres in Allegan County. Because Doesburg could talk [English] with him [Rev. Smith], Father agreed to take the land for that price on the condition that he could have the acres adjacent to it, which amounted to twice eighty [160 acres]. They agreed on five dollars an acre, all of it forest. That land belonged to the Indians, but because they were leaving anyway, the Reverend thought the deal would be possible. But, after inquiry, they did not want to give it up. Father wanted to have thrice eighty acres, because he had three sons, and in that way each of them would have a farm of eighty acres.

Father gave up asking the surveyor for information and he began to conclude, as he thought, that it was land [probably the additional 160 acres] belonging to speculators who had claimed it or otherwise had bought government land for one dollar and twenty-five cents an acre. That was all that the government charged for land. Then Father heard of someone who had been in the woods for years in order to hunt and trap. He already had cleared twenty acres of land, and had cut down ten acres of woods years ago. Then Father went there, three miles east of Holland. When we arrived there, Father bought two hundred acres for \$1100, and a team of oxen, a wagon, sleigh, cows and young cattle, some farm tools, and the crops in the field. We were aided by Doesburg. Fairbanks and someone else had appraised it and Father bought it all.

There was a log shanty on the land that he [the settler] had built himself, with a door and window in it—with out an iron hinge or a nail. The roof was made of split oak planks, three feet long, fastened with wooden pins between two trees, and a white ash floor, split from one log three to three-and-a-half feet thick. It was chopped with an adze, just as if it had been

planed. The chimney in the corner of the house was constructed of field stones and clay, and on the top of it pieces of split wood, piled on top of each other, to a height above the roof line, and then sealed with clay.

We had to make do with this until Father built a new plank house the following year. Father and one of our neighbors, three-fourths of a mile from us, were the first among the farmers to build a plank house. A year later he had a big barn constructed for the cattle. When all of that was finished, Father became ill and had the land worked on by someone else, and went to live in the city of Holland. It was called the “city of Holland,” but it was all woods. Furthermore, after Father arrived here he had already purchased a lot and had a house built on it. It is the lot that is now on 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Central Avenue, on the southwest corner.

Father suffered from headaches, and the doctor called it drops on the brain.<sup>5</sup> The pain radiated from the head to the heart, and he died unexpectedly, having been here for only four years. Then my brothers, mother, and I began to live on the farm until 1855.

Then I married a daughter of Geert Albers of Nieuwe Pekela, in the Province of Groningen, who, with her father, a sister, and a brother, had come to America the same year [1848]. The father left his two daughters in New York, and came here with his son of about twelve years, looking for land. He then left again for the Netherlands to get more people, who included his brother-in-law and sister, who had a big family comprised of all boys. Also a sister came along. He [Albers] had left his son here with friends until his return from the Netherlands.

When he returned, his daughters did not want to come along, but preferred to stay a while in New York, rather than live in the forests

of Michigan. After six years, Fen-nechien, the older daughter, came to visit her father, married here and did not return [to New York]. A year later the younger daughter, Cecelia, came to visit her father and married me here. She arrived here in April, and on 2 November we were wed by Rev. Van Raalte. We lived on the farm from 2 November 1855 until 1857, and then went to live in Holland. We have lived here now for fifty-one years. After a marriage of about fifty-three years, Cecelia died, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of August [1908]; on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November it would have been our fifty-third wedding anniversary. Six sons were born during that time, and two daughters, namely Gerrit, John, James, Pieter, Albert, Frederick M. and Nelly. Our first daughter died at eighteen months. ♀

### Endnotes

1. 22 December 1914.
2. “Property Losses in the Holland Fire of 1871, by Street,” Archives, Holland Historical Trust, Holland, Michigan.
3. Official Dutch records have her birthday as 24 August 1847, <http://www.genlias.nl/nl/searchDetail.jsp?val=23&xtr=16789652&vgr=3>, consulted 27 February 2012 at 11:58 a.m.
4. Johannes and Neeltje had three sons named Pieter. The first was born 9 August 1821 and died 1 November 1831; the second was born 14 August 1832 and died 13 September 1832; and the third was born 23 August 1836 and survived.
5. This appears to have been the mid-nineteenth-century medical prognosis for severe inflammation of the brain, like encephalitis or meningitis.

# My Recollections of Holland in 1852

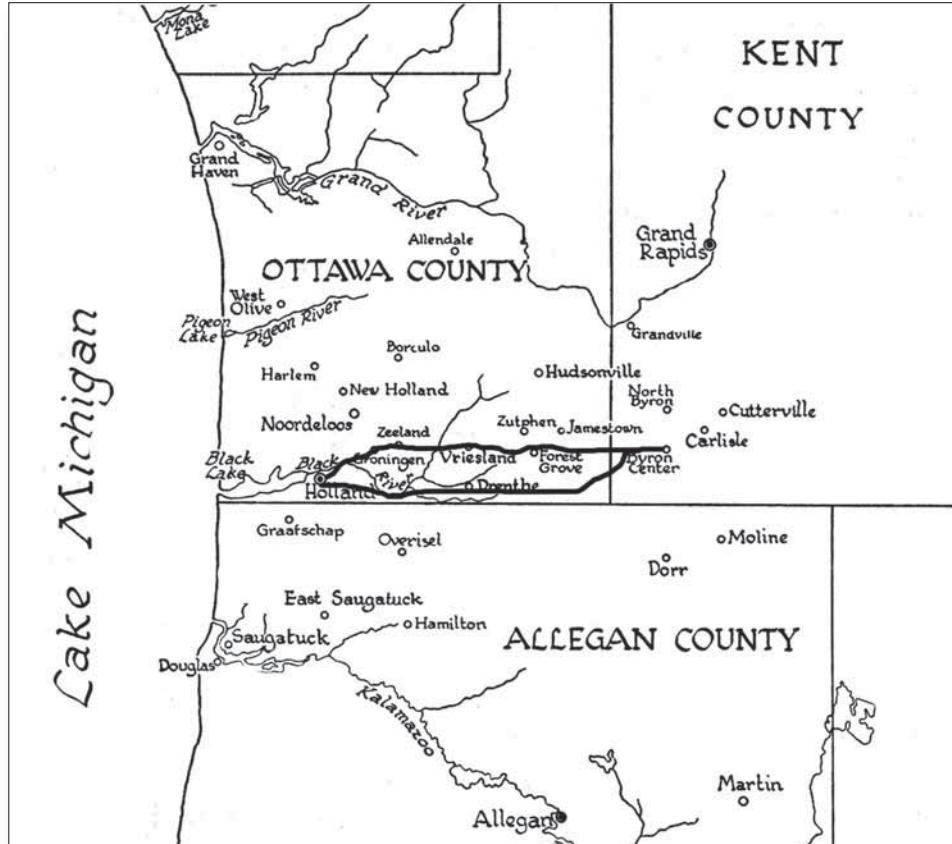
George Edward Holm

[The manuscript was published in the Grand Rapids Democrat just after Holm returned from Holland's Semi-Centennial celebration on 26 August 1897, reprinted in De Grondwet in 1911. editor]

**A**gent the semi-centennial celebration at Holland yesterday are a few recollections of my own which may not be uninteresting to your readers.

At the time the Holland colony was established by Rev. A. C. Van Raalte in 1847, I was a farmer's boy in the township of Byron,<sup>1</sup> Kent County, where Father, at that time, had been a resident two years, and I remember

very well the coming in of the colony and the coming out of the foreign settlers among the farmers of Byron and parts adjacent for such things as they were obliged to have to work with or live on, to wit: oxen, cows, corn, pigs, potatoes, sheep, etc., before they had raised anything of their own, and I remember, also, that our farmers were always very glad to see them, for a purchase by any of the newcomers



George Edward Holm was still living in Kent County, Michigan, as late as 1920 and working as a farmer. No further data has been found about him.

The route Holm took to visit the Holland Colony in 1852, just five years after the Dutch led by Rev. A. C. Van Raalte arrived. Map courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



A story-and-a-half log house built just outside Holland. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

of anything we had to sell always brought the gold, the ten-guilder gold piece being the most common, in exchange for what they bought.

The farmers in those days seldom saw any gold, or but very little money of any kind, and you may well guess that the queer, oddly-dressed strangers from over the sea were welcome guests to the farmers of our region who had anything to sell.

I also remember with what wonder my boyish eyes watched the peculiarities of these, to me, queer people, and with what amazement I would see them haul out their leather purses and count out the gold for every purchase; nor was it long before nearly every farmer had exchanged something or other for some of their golden guilders.

In my boyish mind the Hollander was a mine of wealth—they were overflowing with sacks and bags of gold and they at once became to me, a wonderful people. Whenever I saw one of them he at once became a magnet which collected the curious boy about him, that I might study his ways, his dress, and hear him talk, for sure, was he not a man who had recently sailed over the great ocean, all the way from continental Holland, to become a citizen of Michigan and help found a remarkable colony at Back Lake?<sup>2</sup>

If he had dropped out of the moon he could not have interested me more, and to visit him in that wonderful settlement, and see him at home, became one of the leading ambitions of my backwoods life. It was so much talked

about, and for the first year or so we saw some of them so often; and now and then some adventurous young man whom I knew had actually “been to Holland” that it seemed as though if I did not go there also there would be a void in my life which nothing else could possibly fill. It would be so much like visiting a foreign country, you know.

Pictures of Holland in my old geography always had a windmill prominent in the foreground.

left to the years of waiting which fill so large a space in every boy’s life who has some big thing to do and watches out for time to bring him his opportunity.

So my time came at last, five years later, in the fall of 1852.

I was eighteen; I was my own man; I had some well-earned money in my pocket, and I had not forgotten Holland and would visit this foreign country and see these curious people in their own famous colony.

At that time there was far from being any sort of a decent road from Grandville to the colony. I was an expert woodsman and cared little for roads when I wanted to go anywhere, but I must have a comrade and so, for company, persuaded a young farmer friend, about my age, Otis “Ote” Freeman<sup>3</sup> by name (I think he is living yet) to be my companion during the voyage, and together we shouldered our rifles and trucked out westerly through the woods to find a way, or make one, to Holland.

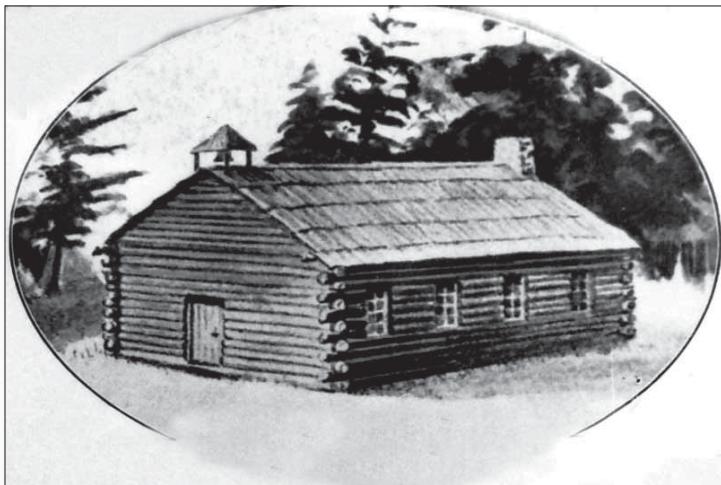
Think of that now, ye scorching cyclers who think nothing of a run down there and back the same day a wheel,<sup>4</sup> or ye happy Ottawa Beachers who leave your pleasant homes in Grand Rapids and alight at your cottage door six miles beyond Holland in an hour. Behold the changes time has wrought—and how little it is you know of the pleasures of pioneering.

Freeman’s people had dealt a good deal with the Hollanders. My friend Ote could talk with most of them



An early log house, near Holland, typical of the early structures built by the Dutch immigrants once they learned how to build log structures from their American neighbors. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Would this Holland in Michigan have a windmill? Verily, how could I ever enjoy life unless I went to see? Yes, I would go; but when, or how was



A drawing of the log school built by colonists. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

quite well, and besides, he knew some of the Zeeland farmers, and at the cabin of one of them was where we brought up at the end of our first day's jaunt, tired, wet, and hungry, for a damp November snow had been coming down all day, and our tramp had been "through bush and brake" without much thought, or care, for roads. Indeed, the most welcome road was the unblazed forest path, for the roads of those days, in that region, at that season of the year, were double roads, that is to say there were always two, where you found one, and one of them was usually a foot or two below the other. Therefore the woods walking was much more preferable.<sup>5</sup>

Our good host's name was Yntema—which I do not suppose I spell correctly.<sup>6</sup> He had a son about our age, whose given name was Otto, who had mingled with the Yankees enough to speak English very well, and I remember we were made very welcome, indeed; also that the provender was abundant and good, and that the evening passed very pleasantly. The distinguished (?) young visitors were entertained by the exhibition of many quaint and curious things which had been brought from the old country, not the least among which that interested me was a huge Bible published

key. And the pictures that were in that book! Why, I almost think I am looking at them yet. And in it, as a part of it, there was also a wonderful map, showing what was known of the Americas, for the western continents had then only been discovered 155 years. Except for the Holy Land I had never seen any kind of a map in a Bible before. This one showed Newfoundland, with a strip of Canada, as far west as the Niagara Falls, the ocean coast from the St. Lawrence River to Florida, the golf (sic) of Mexico, Mexico, Southern California,<sup>8</sup> with the northern part of South America and the West India Islands.

There have been some changes in American maps since that day!

Mr. Yntema also had a watch which was nearly related to this venerable book in point of age—a watch purchased by his great-grandfather

in 1647<sup>7</sup>—just two hundred years prior to the settlement of the Michigan Holland colony. Its staunch covers were half an inch thick and it was bound and clasped all over with silver, and if I remember right its central clasp was fastened with a lock and

nearly a century and a half before and which (according to our notes made at the time) "still regulates the sun and tears the moon wide open."

His daughter<sup>9</sup> also, who was a rosy cheeked young maiden of sixteen, showed us many old country articles of head gear, one single ornament of gold being valued at \$250,<sup>10</sup> together with any other thing quaint and queer, because we had never seen the like before. She then opened a large cupboard and exhibited some three hundred Sunday school books, which the children of New York had given to the children of the "Drent settlement" wherever that was.<sup>11</sup>

The books, she said, "were the best of all," and thus do worthy pioneers find many aids.

But I must not linger too long, though, indeed, my five years' dream of a "foreign shore" was now being realized and my weariness had faded completely out.

We retired at bedtime and were up before the sun, for the strange city was still half a dozen miles away, and that was the acme of my dream.

Our kind host and his family gave us the pleasant "stirrup cup" of coffee, and the simple breakfast of their people, while Otto accompanied us a mile on our way to be sure we took



The first church building in Holland located on the site of the current Pilgrim Home Cemetery on 16th Street, west of Fairbanks Avenue. Van Raalte's home was a few blocks north of this church. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

the right path, bade us a cheery good-bye, urging us to call on our return and tarry yet another night.

Now, as some of the descendants of this family are doubtless living in that township yet, I desire to thank them again for the pleasant and profitable evening spent with them in their pioneer cabin 17 November 1852.

We struck the village of Holland at the head of Black Lake at about 10 o'clock in the morning, and as we did not leave it until near four in the afternoon, we had ample time to "do" the town. Yes, and as sure as I am an honest historian there was the Dutch windmill! Surely I was on the dikes of the old land only, perhaps, this one was not built for pumping.

It was nearly a mile to the hotel; and I, therefore, reserved its examination until after dinner, as, unlike the erratic Don Quixote, I could not think of attacking a windmill on an empty stomach.

Holland village at that time was five years old, and contained six or seven hundred inhabitants. There were seven stores, two hotels, a bakery, a tinner's shop, a tailor shop, a clock and watch repairing and jeweler's shop, besides various mechanical shops, and wagon and blacksmith shops, such as became any new village where there are no idlers. It also had a church which cost \$800, a school house, and a printing office. We were in most of these places during the day, concerning some of which permit us to speak later on.

In the printing office we found two intelligent lads fourteen or fifteen years of age, and I still have among my relics some "dead" copy in the Holland language which one of the boys gave me, which at that time was a great "take" for me being in a foreign language. Candor compels me to say I have never read it.

As soon as we had put away our dinner we made a straight wake for

the windmill. You could not keep me away from it another moment. Indeed, it was a wonderful thing to me. It was a sawmill, and I think there was also a simple run of stone for grinding corn, and as the mill was not running that day it was open for inspection. I went all over it. The tower must have been seventy-five or eighty feet high, for it is down in my notebook that I climbed nine pair of stairs or ladders, before I came out on the balcony which surrounded its cap, on a level with the pinion of those mammoth wings, which had a sweep of at least a hundred feet. The framework of these great sails was light except the main arms, and covered with sailcloth, when in operation, arranged in some way so they could be furled when there was too much or too little wind to run the mills properly, or when idle, as at the time of our visit.

From the balcony I could see Lake

joys of my journey, nor have I ever seen anything since in that time equal to it. I brought it away with me and have it in memory still; though in my many subsequent visits to Holland in after years I was never able to tell where it stood. I do not think I was there again for nearly twenty-five years, and then everything was changed.

My trip had not been in vain. I had found the windmill, and my last view of it, as we left the village that afternoon, I thought very like the pictures in my old geography, as it stood in relief against the western sky and the great lake beyond.

Another thing which interested me very much was a monstrous clock in the watchmaker's shop. The sun, moon, and some of the stars circled round its honest face from east to west in quiet succession, while it also had a calendar arrangement which

told us the year, month, and day, and I shall long remember the day I was there—18 November 1852. My notebook says so, and I'll make my "happy David"<sup>12</sup> it is true, as it was the first rare thing of the kind I had seen, and you may be sure I was going to remember it. Calendar clocks are now as common as mos-



*In 1851 this building became home to the Pioneer School in Holland. It had been built in 1847 to house orphans from the epidemic that year but was not needed for this since families took in all these children. From an illustration in Wynand Wicheris, *A Century of Hope, 1866-1966* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968) 30.*

Michigan, six miles away. It was the first view I ever had of it and that was another big thing, though I had sailed its entire length some seventeen years before, when less than half a year old.

This giant windmill was one of the

quitoes, but they were not forty-five years ago.

Truly this Holland was a wonderful country.

I remember also, that we made several attempts to buy something,

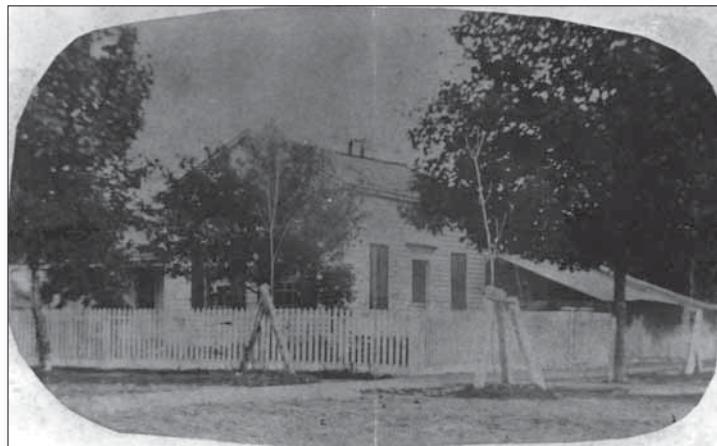
but as the tinner had no tin sidesadles,<sup>13</sup> or the wagon maker any carriage plows,<sup>14</sup> or the blacksmith any ready-made snow shoes, we went, as we came, empty-handed, except for rifles and supplies of the staff of life, procured from the bakers.

To look back at it now, our boyish pranks were at once impudent and silly, but it was such fun to see those honest mechanics stare at us when they came to understand our absurd requests. They were men who never joked, if, in fact, they knew what a joke was, their lives had been, and were, too much in earnest for any such nonsense, and if it were possible I would even now beg their several and collective pardons for any annoyance we possibly gave them that November afternoon. If they thought of us the second time after we were gone, they probably voted us a pair of harmless lunatics who did not know what we were talking about, and so suffered us to go in peace. Perhaps it was the windmill that had loosened our tongues. I have often been called a windmill since, but, somehow, never took much pride in it; not as much as I ought to have done, considering how many years I had yearned to see one.

The weather that afternoon was not the most pleasant of November days. There were occasional snow squalls, the sky was heavily overcast, and toward night it set in for a steady storm, but this did not balk us of our intent to camp that night on the bank of Black River.

At that time many of the houses in the village of Holland were built of logs, though, perhaps a majority of those in the immediate village were frame. They were all a good deal scat-

tered. Very few of them were helping "hold t'other fellow up." And as to Domine Van Raalte's church that was something very grand for the time, in an architectural way. We were fortunate enough to find it open, with the sexton in attendance cleaning up, sweeping out and dusting, and so, without let or hindrance, we walked in. The sexton greeted us pleasantly, but do not recollect that we attempted any conversation with him. The church was a block-house, built of square-hewn timber, and for size was perhaps 50x70. Inside it was very like other churches; although at the time I was not very familiar with them except that in the roof were two great ventilating flues. I remember to have thought them very warm blooded



Built in 1851, the house of Derk Te Roller, at the corner of Central Avenue and 9th Street, was one of the buildings that Holm would have seen. The house was destroyed in the 1871 fire along with much of the city. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

worshippers, but, perhaps, they were not much used in winter, or, perhaps, that was the plan in the old home country—but, doubtless, they knew their needs much better than I—so we departed without suggesting any alterations.

I presume there are many of the present residents of Holland who will remember this pioneer church.

One thing more before leaving the village on our return trip.

We had quite a pleasant chat with

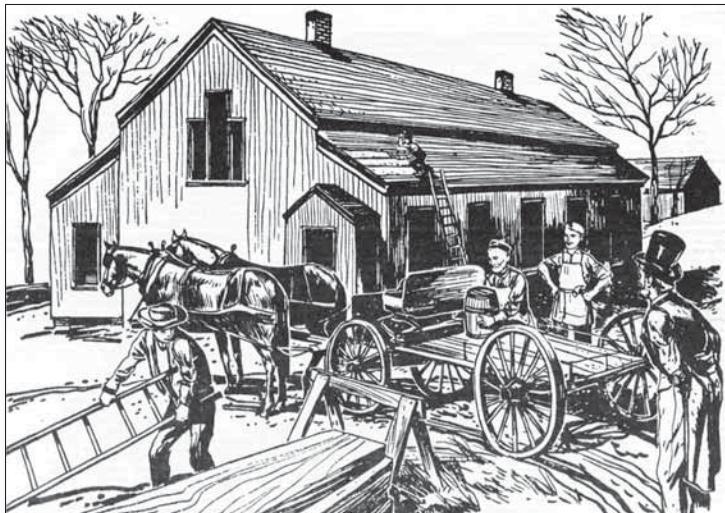
the two bright boys we found in the printing office, both of whom spoke English fluently. They had great faith in the future of Holland and, as I remember, were strong in the faith that Congress would soon grant them a sufficient appropriation to make an elegant harbor there—one of the best, in fact, on the Michigan shore—but, if alive now, those lads must be looking for it yet, as I do not recall that Congress has ever done any such thing. Nature long ago seems to have done its full share to that end, but mighty little help has it had from any other source, as such meager appropriations as have ever reached that point, have been but driblets, scarce sufficient to keep the sand out of the nose of their still prospective excellent harbor;

and yet, perhaps, enough for some congressmen to harp on when he wanted the Holland vote. I told the boys I hoped they would get it, but that I did not believe it would bother them very soon, as Frank Pierce was president, and I never took any stock in his desire to improve the rivers and harbors of the North. I think they must be waiting for that appropriation yet.<sup>15</sup>

But, as this is not a political essay, we will hasten on through the snowstorm to our camp on Black River,

remarking, as we leave the pioneer village, that we do not remember to have found but two streets in it, and this we named respectively Stump street and Mud street, for reasons which would have been apparent had you traveled them in the fall of 1852.

Our "camp" on Black River was an improvised affair. I don't know how far it was from the village, but we arrived there just on the edge of a dusky, stormy evening and, under the arching hemlocks and cedars, where



Derk Gringhuis illustration of the market in Holland courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

storms or snow never come, soon had a roaring fire going. Our camp was near a deserted clearing, with the ruins of a shanty thereon, from which we laid in an ample supply of fuel and prepared to be comfortable.

For beds we abstracted some of the roofing of the aforesaid shanty, to wit: two huge slices of hemlock bark about four feet long and three feet wide. These had curled up quite a bit, like a concave lens, and when laid up, "slantingdicular" against the roots of a tree, with a big fire in front and a covering of hemlock boughs ten feet above you, became a warm, dry nest—fit for any explorer returning from a foreign shore. We camped thus for the fun of the thing—not because we had to—and, behold, even to this day, that camp is called "The Camp of the Valley."

Our next business was supper, and two or three squirrels and a partridge, which our rifles had gathered in, were soon dressed and broiled on crotched sticks, with no salt or seasoning except ashes and smoke. As we broiled we caught the savory drippings on large slices of Dutch bread, and as these drippings dripped deliciously, what more was wanting to make that repast such as many another weary

been any settler within a mile or so they must have thought pandemonium had broken loose down by the sluggish river. It was a great lark.

It must have been about 9 o'clock when it became apparent we were to have company. The lads in the printing office, when we told of our camping idea, had warned us of the wolves but what did we care when we heard them howl, either in answer to the delicious odor of our broiled game supper or the song and shout of the campers. It did not matter. The branches hung low on the trees which embowered us, and wolves do not climb trees. We had a good fire, plenty of fuel and ammunition, and so let the "varmints" howl, if it pleased them. Noise seldom kills anyone, and your wild wolf is as big a coward as your human one, if you face him and tell him you do not care a fig for his music. I had camped among them before and all we cared about it was that it meant a watchful night for two weary young fellows who had been on their feet since 5 o'clock in the morning. All there was of it we must woo Nature's sweet restorer as homeopath doctor gives his pills—alternately. So we took turns standing guard through the long night, and if we took an

explorer, on occasion, would be glad to get? It was a rare treat. As we had nothing to hurry us and no dishes to wash up, or table to clear away, we broiled and ate, and ate and broiled, for nearly two happy hours, making the wild woods resonant with shouts and song. Had there

occasional shot at a gleaming pair of eyes in the woodsy blackness beyond the circle of our campfire it more with the expectation of scaring than killing any of the fierce howlers with which we were surrounded. We kept our fire going and did not even climb a tree.

At about 3 o'clock we broiled and devoured the balance of our game and were ready for marching orders at the first crack of day. We saw no sign of wolves after daylight except their tracks in the snow, at a safe distance, all about our camp, which we left without regret.

At 10 o'clock we secured a breakfast at a Hollander's cabin on the far frontier of the colony, and that night lodged with a Yankee friend within five or six miles of Freeman's home, mine being several miles further on.

And thus it was that not until about noon of the fourth day from our starting out, I sat down with "Ote" to dinner in his own home, as I had often done before, and while we did ample justice to what was set before us, entertained the family with the history of our grand expedition to Black Lake.

Such was Holland forty-five years ago, and one of the ways of getting there.

For myself, I felt abundantly paid for my trip, and I have never been there since without thinking of my youthful visit, or looking in vain for "Stump street" or "Mud street," for in my mind wandering whither had flown the mighty windmill, which was such a marvel of unchained power in my boyish eyes.

Once, more than twenty-five years after my first visit, being booked for a stump speech at Holland I prefaced my talk with a lively reference to the old-time tramp and what I saw, and how it impressed me, at the time, with pleasant comments on the progress they had made, to the great delight of my audience. In that audience

sat many a grand gray head who was there when I came out of the woods with my rifle in November 1852.

And now it is fifty years since they first came, and forty-five since I first visited them, and to-day the stranger would be very far from taking that thriving city for a foreign port.

The wild woods where we camped, begirt with howling wolves, have been swept away. The small openings in the woods, here and there, miles apart, where the pioneer colonist started his farm, have melted into each other, and the bright village of Zeeland now stands where, possibly, not a tree was

cut on that stormy November day in '52, when my friend and I made our tramp to the famous colony.

At that time Grandville was a smart village and it was a somewhat mooted question whether Grandville or Grand Rapids was to be the coming city of the Grand River alley. It is not so mooted now. Holland has long since taken its place among the thriving cities of Michigan, with its college, its extensive business houses and immense factories, its more than healthful and pleasant summer resorts, there is no reason in the world—when they get that harbor appropriation

the printer spoke of in '52—why this city, founded upon principles of the staunchest integrity and ever maintained along the same line, should not be the Chicago of Michigan, with a port sufficient for all the commerce of the Great Lakes.

Yet another fifty years—though we be not here to see—Holland will remain, nor is there any reason why it should not be the principal lake-shore city on the eastern coast of Lake Michigan.

That is where I put it and I'm not to take it back. ♫

#### Endnotes

1. In the southwest corner of the county, adjacent to Ottawa County.

2. Now Lake Macatawa.

3. Born November 1834 in New Hampshire. In 1900 he was living in Nelson Township, in northern Kent County.

4. During the 1890s the safety bicycle (both wheels the same size) became the item for younger people to own. Grand Rapids had its own factories, banked wooden race track, and two magazines devoted to the "wheel craze."

5. At that time of the year the wagon trails would be very muddy and walking on solid earth was preferred to having every step sink into the ooze.

6. Holm had the correct name. This was Hessel Ottes and wife Klaaske Douwes Yntema. Otto was born 7 January

1834 in Friesland, the Netherlands, and was given the name Otte.

7. This was almost certainly an early edition of the *Statenvertaling* (states translation) or *Staten Bijbel* (Dutch for States Bible) ordered by the government of the Protestant Dutch Republic and the first Dutch translation of the Bible from the original languages, first published in 1637.

8. Southern California probably refers to Mexico's Baja Peninsula.

9. Sjouwke, later in Michigan, Susan Yntema.

10. For centuries, women of means from the province of Friesland wore a helmet of gold covering the crown and back of their heads, and often with golden rosettes at each ear. Since women wore lace caps these helmets

were not visible to any but the closest family members. It was the means to store surplus value; gold not needed was added to the helmet, or in times of need it was clipped from the helmet.

11. Drenthe, Michigan, is in southeastern Zeeland Township, approximately five miles from Zeeland, and about three miles south of the route Holm and Ote had traveled. Holm probably didn't know of the place because of the dense forest cover at the time. Today the terrain is open farm land.

12. Probably Holm means "affidavit."

13. A tin storage box.

14. A harness component.

15. In fact, since 1867 the US Army Corp of Engineers has been responsible for dredging the channel between Lake Michigan and Black Lake.

# Immigration Journey Under Sail

Eugene Westra and Robert P. Swierenga

**U**ntil steamships replaced sailing vessels in the second half of the nineteenth century, crossing the Atlantic to America could be a life-or-death decision for emigrants. Most were landlubbers who feared the sea. They thought long and hard before deciding to board a three-mast freighter as “human cargo,” along with a hundred or more passengers of all nationalities and social classes, for a journey of forty to sixty-five days, depending on wind and waves. During the 1840s some ten thousand Dutch emigrants embarked from Rotterdam and Amsterdam for the United States.<sup>1</sup>

The Netherlands and American governments both enacted laws to safeguard the passengers, but the legislation always lagged behind the actual conditions, as the shipping companies stayed one step ahead of the regulators. The sailing vessels were poorly managed, and port authorities sometimes rejected a vessel as un-seaworthy just before departure and the passengers had to find another ship. Most emigrant ships were three-masters, could carry three to four hundred tons, and were built to carry freight, particularly bulk products from North America. When emigration began to increase, the cargo holds were modified to accommodate passengers for the return trip. Carpenters built crude wooden bunks where the passengers slept and stowed their luggage. Shipboard conditions were crowded, dirty, and unhealthy.<sup>2</sup>

Shipbrokers representing the vari-

ous shipping companies fanned out across Europe, selling tickets to prospective emigrants. The major Dutch shipping firms were Wambersie & Crooswijk and Hudig & Blokhuizen, both of Rotterdam. Rev. Albertus Van Raalte hired Hudig & Blokhuizen in 1846 for his group of one hundred on *Southerner*. In 1847, Wambersie & Crooswijk offered to bring emigrants to New York “as cheaply as possible—in fact, for 30 guilders [about \$12] each.” Transatlantic ticket prices in 1846-1850 ranged from 30 to 45 guilders [\$12 to \$18] per person, with an additional sum of 35 guilders [\$14] for provisions while aboard ship.<sup>3</sup>

Food for the voyage was the responsibility of each passenger, according to lists of provisions provided by shipping companies. The ships provided potable water held in wine vats; as a result, the water picked up a vinegar flavor. The ships also supplied bitters (for seasickness), lemons, prunes, herring, and beer for birthday parties and celebrations. Cholera, small pox, diphtheria, and other diseases often resulted in death, so stones or sandbags were also taken aboard for burials at sea.<sup>4</sup> The mortality rate was an awful prospect for the sea journey, as high as 6 percent in 1847 during the peak of the Irish famine migration. In later years the rate dropped to 2-3 percent. Fortunately, the better general health of the Dutch and their penchant for cleanliness enabled them to cheat death more often than emigrants from other countries. A tally of the Dutch on the US ship passenger lists in the 1840s

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Map of the water route from New York to Holland, Michigan, via the Hudson River, Erie Canal, and Great Lakes. Map courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

found only 147 died en route, a rate of only 11 per 1,000. Over two-thirds were children under the age of fourteen. The inland journey westward via the Erie Canal and Great Lakes also took a toll, although no mortality statistics were kept. After 1850, with the coming of steamships and new regulations, deaths at sea dropped dramatically.<sup>5</sup>

Other than bad weather, the monotony of the ocean passage was broken only by passing ships, sightings of large schools of fish, mealtimes, Sunday religious services, psalm-singing, simple children's games, and burials at sea. Almost every passage encountered severe storms. Jan W. Bosman, bound for Milwaukee, writes of his experiences aboard the *Revenue*, sailing from Rotterdam to New York. The American ship had a German captain.

We went on board on 25 April, in the evening. Our quarters were hardly fit for passengers. Such was the stench below deck that my wife's first thought was that she could not stand it. . . . There were fully 100 passengers between decks. . . . All went prosperously at first, but later we had storms and contrary winds. Our small vessel frequently was engulfed by the sea. On such occasions, one heard groans and anguished cries, as one can readily understand.<sup>6</sup>

During the sea voyage the immigrants passed the time seeking information about docking in New York, making arrangements for their baggage, finding an immigrant hotel, and buying tickets for the trip inland. Frequently, the captain or crew would offer advice about these concerns. Johannes Remeeus, aboard the *Fedes Koo* en route to Boston in 1854, wrote of such help.

When we were drawing near to Boston the captain called me to his cabin. It was difficult for us to understand each other, but he informed me that he would gladly map out for us our trip inland. He advised that we should not listen to anybody—English, Germans, Irish, or Hollanders—no matter how elegantly they might be dressed or how refined their manners. I informed my fellow passengers about his suggestions and nearly all of us accepted them.<sup>7</sup>

The same captain warned of "runners" who would board ships as they docked and sell unnecessary services at exorbitant prices. J. B. Newhall offered a clear warning about such swindlers in his *Hand Book for immigrants*:

There is likewise a class of persons in all the large Atlantic cities (more especially New York) called "runners," a set of harpies who make a trade of fleecing and robbing emigrants of

their money and their time, and I fear they would be none too good to rob him of his luggage if they could get a good opportunity . . . These men are worthless vagabonds.<sup>8</sup>

It was a common practice for immigrants to secure a letter of introduction from some official in order to avoid runners and to meet helpful contact persons. Remeeus described his letter from the commissioner of emigration at New York, which simply requested persons "to help us on our journey as quickly and as cheaply as possible and protect us against swindlers."<sup>9</sup>

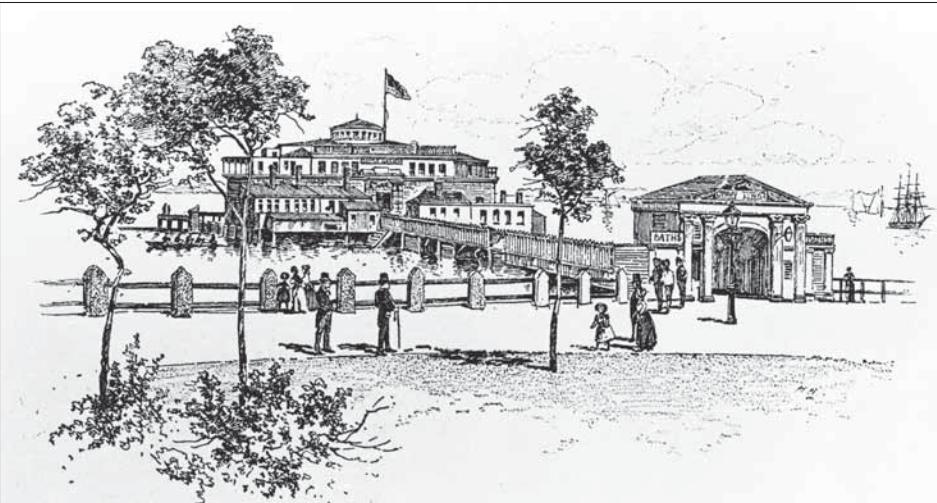
With the opening in 1855 of the first government immigration processing hall, Castle Garden, on the tip of Manhattan Island, only licensed agents were allowed to sell tickets for steamboats, canal boats, hotels, and stevedores. Immigrants were also given health checks and advice from immigration officials.

### Immigration Agencies in New York

Rev. Thomas De Witt, pastor of the Marble Collegiate Reformed Church in New York City, and members of his congregation formed the Netherlands Society, which arranged for trustworthy Dutch-speaking agents to meet every ship at the docks and direct their kin to a hotel for the night or place them directly on board a night steamboat to Albany. The aid society was independent of the church, although church members served on the board and supported it financially. Rev. De Witt used the pages of the official church paper to solicit funds for the support and aid of immigrants.<sup>10</sup>

De Witt informed the wider Reformed Church membership about the aid society in the 4 February 1847 issue of the denominational newspaper, the *Christian Intelligencer*:

Public attention has lately been aroused to the destitute and unprotected condition of [Dutch] emigrants



Located in Battery Park at the southern tip of Manhattan in New York City, Castle Garden became an immigrant receiving center in 1855, welcoming more than 8 million immigrants before it was closed on 18 April 1890. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

arriving on our shores, who, until within a short period had no point where to apply for advice and protection; consequently, they too often fell into the hands of designing persons, whose chief object was to plunder them of the little money they possessed, and under the pretense of friendship, offering advice which too often led to ruin.

Information having been received that some ten thousand emigrants were about leaving the Netherlands for this country, affords us much pleasure to observe, that a few gentlemen, natives of Holland, have formed an association, called the "Netherland Society," which must be of great advantage to their protection and guidance, as well as for others who may hereafter migrate from that part of Europe, whence they arrive equally strangers to our language and our customs, and requiring the aid which will now be extended for their welfare, and especially to protect them against innumerable frauds which emigrants have heretofore been the victims of.<sup>11</sup>

De Witt's society became linked with Wyckoff's organization, the Protestant Evangelical Holland Emigrant Society of Albany. Wyckoff, pastor of the Second Reformed Church of Albany, had responded to a letter handed

him by Rev. Van Raalte, leader of the first large Dutch group, which arrived in late November 1846, requesting the

Knickerbocker Dutch to assist the young Dutch immigrants.

The response to Van Raalte's "Appeal to the Faithful in the United States" was warm and inviting, as seen in an editorial in the *Christian Intelligencer* of 26 November 1846:

Come on, friends, though we have no money to bestow, we can direct you to suitable locations, give employment to your mechanics, furnish land for you farmers to cultivate till they shall get lands of their own, and aid you in various ways, so as to make your circumstances comfortable, and expedite those important objects you have in view in leaving your native country.<sup>12</sup>

Revs. Wyckoff and De Witt established a network of immigrant aid societies to speed the Dutch on their

way to the Midwest. A key group in Detroit was a committee of seven men established on 11 February 1847, following the arrival and wintering over of the Van Raalte group.<sup>13</sup>

### The Journey Inland

After the initial reception by Rev. De Witt's committee in New York City, the immigrants were taken to a steamboat for the trip up the Hudson River to Albany. The boats ran at night and meals were served on board. When the Hudson froze over in the dead of winter, the immigrants took the train to Albany, which ran along the opposite shore. The train was more expensive, despite being unheated, and upon arrival the immigrants had to carry their luggage across the ice to the city of Albany.<sup>14</sup>

Anne De Vree emigrated in 1846



Castle Garden began as Castle Clinton, a fort built to defend New York Harbor during the War of 1812. The fort closed in 1824 and was reopened by the city as Castle Garden, a cultural center and theatre. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

and wrote about steamboating on the Hudson during the winter:

We left New York by steamboat and went up the Hudson River. I cannot recall how far we steamed, but I remember that we were caught in ice so that we had to travel further by railroad, which had just been finished. We then proceeded to Albany where we arrived late in the evening of December 24, 1846. To get into Albany, we had to walk over the ice, because the ferryboat was frozen fast in the ice. But

the Lord was with us and guided us, so that we all arrived safely.<sup>15</sup>

There were many obstacles that confronted the immigrant over which a society of helpful people had no control. Natural barriers of rivers, waterfalls, ice and snow presented a challenge for the faith expressed by Anne De Vree. At such times the aid and guidance was provided through faith and confidence in God.

The city of Albany was the eastern terminus of the Erie Canal. The canal offered the most inexpensive mode of travel to the West. Immigrants from northern Europe came to Albany by rail from the port of Boston or by steamboat from the port of New York. Arend Jan Brusse, a Dutch immigrant on his way to Milwaukee, wrote of the trip via Boston. "At Boston we were put into the cars of a freight train that slowly took us to Albany. Arriving at Albany we had to stay there for a day, and stopped at a German hotel. While there the Rev. Dr. Isaac Wyckoff passed by. Hearing us speaking Dutch, he stopped and took some of us to his home."<sup>16</sup>

Dutch American residents of Albany advised the newcomers regarding travel on the Erie Canal. A former Amsterdammer said, "Don't be afraid on account of your baggage. If it has been put on the car in Boston, it will arrive in good order at Buffalo. But as soon as you reach Buffalo you will have to look after it in order to have it shipped across the Great Lakes." Advice like this brought confidence and security to the immigrant. Yet, concerns were still present upon hearing news about a cholera epidemic in the western states. News like this brought on depression, but the meeting of old acquaintances and greeting new friends gave relief from the apprehension.<sup>17</sup>

The immigrant aid society of Albany secured steerage or deck space



*Drawing of canal boat traffic on the Erie Canal. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

on Erie Canal boats for the trip to Buffalo, New York, a journey of ten days to two weeks, depending on traffic and water levels. Ole Knudson Nattestad, a Norwegian immigrant to Wisconsin who traveled on the Erie Canal in 1837, described the canal boats in detail. "In the afternoon we went on board on the canal boat here in Albany. These boats are all the same size. They are about 30 ells long [about 93 feet] and 5 ells wide [about 8 feet] with room for freight in the center and a cabin at each end with costly curtains in the windows and painted floor with carpets; the other furniture in the rooms was for the most part polished."<sup>18</sup>

The canal boat company expected only moderate passenger traffic, and by 1846 the boats were overcrowded and the conditions gave much discomfort. Arend Jan Brusse traveled the canal in 1846 on his way to Milwaukee and he wrote of his experience. "At Albany we got on an immigrant canal boat.

The horses were going nearly always on a walk in the day time. I walked a good deal of the time by the side of the boat. It was a slow and tedious way of traveling. Our daily fare on the boat was bread and milk, which we bought along the route of the canal. After being a week on the canal boat we reached Buffalo."<sup>19</sup>

For a more expensive option, the immigrants could travel by train through New York State to Buffalo and avoid the slow and monotonous canal trip. The train trip lasted two



*A drawing of river traffic at Albany, New York. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

days, in contrast to the two weeks on the canal.<sup>20</sup>

The Erie Canal boats stopped frequently to take on supplies along the way or to be locked up or down.

The immigrants went ashore and purchased their own food from stores that specialized in the canal trade. In many of the towns adjoining the canal, Hollanders had settled and established farms and businesses. With letters of introduction from Wyckoff, the immigrants sought out these future compatriots for assistance and guidance. Many hailed from Gelderland and Zeeland. As historian Henry Lucas noted: "It seems only natural to conclude that Zealanders from western New York who had already become more or less Americanized should . . . help other Zealanders coming directly from the Netherlands, many of whom tarried for some time in Pultneyville, Rochester, and other places."<sup>21</sup> The other places were East Williamson and Lancaster, which were located ten miles east of Buffalo. At every canal stop the Dutch immigrants found sympathetic Hollanders to give support and helpful advice about handling the baggage in Buffalo and how to secure passage from Buffalo to Detroit.

Upon arrival at Buffalo, Dutch immigrants were advised to collect their baggage and remain with it until booking passage on a lake steamer or schooner. The schooners went under sail and were slower, taking about four weeks on average from Buffalo to Chicago. A cabin was available for \$20, which was a reasonable cost for immigrants.<sup>22</sup>

Steamboating on the Great Lakes began in 1818, with side-wheel packets that carried twenty passengers. By 1836 ninety steamboats were arriving at Detroit in May and, soon after that, one hundred boats arrived every day. By the 1840s, steamers were equipped with propellers. In 1846, there were approximately 250,000 passengers arriving and departing Buffalo.<sup>23</sup> The steamer *Madison* was the largest on the lakes, with a length of 210 feet and a breadth of 52 ½ feet. It could carry

two thousand passengers, but the crowded deck allowed less than five square feet per passenger for sleeping. The trip to Detroit lasted two days and a night. Fuel stops for wood were made as needed at Cleveland

and Toledo. Sunday layovers were common. Often the immigrants found Hollanders in these cities and presented them with letters of introduction from Wyckoff to obtain advice and assistance.<sup>24</sup>

Wyckoff also sent letters of introduction to contacts in Buffalo, Detroit, Kalamazoo, and Chicago, requesting that they assist immigrants on their westward lake journey. One was Isaac Van der Poel at Buffalo, who helped immigrants negotiate contracts for steerage space.<sup>25</sup>

Once the immigrants were aboard the "lakers," captains showed an interest and concern for the naïve newcomers. E.B. Ward, captain of *Great Western*, the vessel that carried Van Raalte's group to Detroit in November 1846, even hired the immigrants to work in a shipyard at St. Claire on a steamer he had under construction. Some ten families that remained in Detroit received hospitality from a Congregational minister.<sup>26</sup>

During the shipping season, the lake steamers and schooners sailed through the lakes to Chicago. Immigrants who could afford the fare took



Derk Gringhuis drawing of a schooner off the channel between Black Lake (Lake Macatawa) and Lake Michigan. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

the railroad to Kalamazoo, the western terminus in late 1846. Winter travel made the railroad a necessity. The Erie and Kalamazoo Railroad (later the Michigan Central) was built in 1840 and was the first rail line west of Buffalo.<sup>27</sup>

These railroads were used by the Committee of Seven, an immigrant aid group at Detroit, then the state capitol, formed to expedite the movement of Dutch immigrants to Michigan. Attorney Theodore Romeyn, of Dutch American ancestry, led this committee, which enlisted the support of the major political leaders. Rev. De Witt related Van Raalte's experiences in a report in the *Christian Intelligencer*.

On reaching Detroit, he [Van Raalte] was kindly received by ministers and Christians there; provision was made for the temporary accommodations of his family, and letters of introduction were given to him, to ministers and laymen in the interior of the state and farther west. He writes that he was uniformly received with kindness, and that Evangelical Christians cherished and expressed a lively interest in the proposed settlement of religious emigrants from Holland.<sup>28</sup>

The immigrants bound for Milwaukee via Chicago needed little hospitality in the Windy City. The shipping companies simply transferred baggage to schooners or steamers without incident. By this time, the immigrants had learned the “ropes.” The supply of food lasted easily until the immigrants reached their destinations, since seasickness had greatly reduced their appetites.

Johannes Remeeus recalled the trip to Milwaukee in 1854.

Finally we were on the boat. They collected our tickets and then threw them away. There were few passengers, and not many of them immigrants. The day was sunny and beautiful. We were so tired that we fell asleep and consequently saw little of Lake Michigan. The Great Lakes are bodies of fresh water. But ships sailing on them frequently encounter dangerous storms—as serious as those on the ocean, and thousands of immigrants have found untimely graves in the waves of these lakes.<sup>29</sup>

The period from 1845 to 1855 was marked by very heavy traffic on rivers and lakes by steamboat. Storms and fires took a toll in lives during these years. The greatest tragedy suffered by any immigrant group arriving in America during the nineteenth century occurred off Sheboygan, when the propeller steamship *Phoenix* caught fire from an overheated boiler due to negligence by the captain and crew, and the vessel burned to the waterline several hundred yards offshore during the early morning hours of Sunday, 21 November 1847. Of 277 passengers in steerage, 219 died, including 145 Dutch immigrants, mostly from the villages of Winterswijk, Aalten, and Wisch/Varsseveld in the Achterhoek region of the Province of Gelderland. It took several months for the news to reach relatives and friends in the Netherlands, where it spread quickly and literally stopped further immigrations in its tracks for a time. Of the twenty-four Dutch survivors, genealogists at the Sheboygan County Historical Society have determined that their offspring today number 4,000. The number of Dutch Protestants in the Sheboygan area would be double or triple that number but for this disaster.<sup>30</sup> Eventually, the Gelderlanders and Zeelanders kept on coming, and soon the villages of Oostburg, Cedar Grove, Gibbsville, and Alto became thriving agricultural centers.<sup>31</sup>

### Conclusion

The waterway journey from the Netherlands to the American hinterlands was a rigorous test of human endurance, resourcefulness, and faith. Infants, children, and the elderly were at the greatest risk of dying en route. During the seven- to twelve-week trip from the home village to the destination village, the immigrants encountered many unexpected hardships and tragedies. In many respects, the first Dutch emigration wave of the 1840s came a decade before steamships and railroads greatly eased travel. By 1860, the railroad trunk lines to the Midwest were complete and immigrants could reach their final destinations with relative ease.

It has often been said that the Northern European emigrants came to America and established themselves without assistance from the populace or government officials. This was not true for the Dutch. Throughout their journey, they received guidance, advice, spiritual encouragement, and material assistance. Emigrant aid societies, both in the old country and the new, abetted the travelers. Sea captains, with some notable exceptions, gave consideration and advice. When the ships docked at New York or Boston, aid groups and benevolent individuals found accommodations and transportation for the Dutch immigrants. Letters of introduction

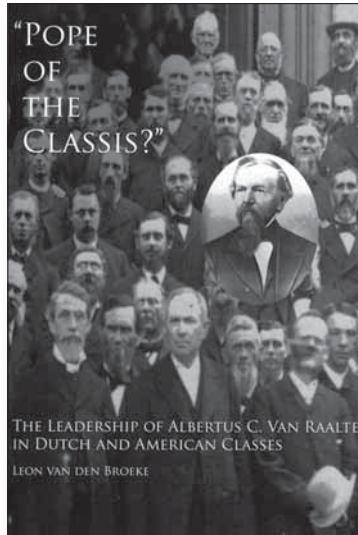
and recommendation speeded them westward, from De Witt in New York City, Wyckoff in Albany, Van der Poel in Buffalo, Romeyn in Detroit, and Rev. Ova P. Hoyt in Kalamazoo. Dutch settlers who had arrived earlier also extended aid and advice along the way. This truly human response to the “stranger” and “sojourner” strengthened American society. The acts of kindness woven into this immigrant story enrich the meaning of the lifted lamp beside the golden door. ♫

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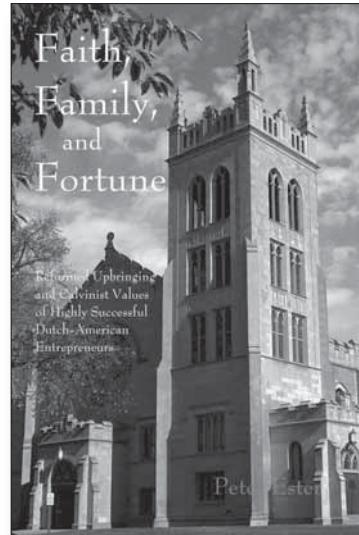


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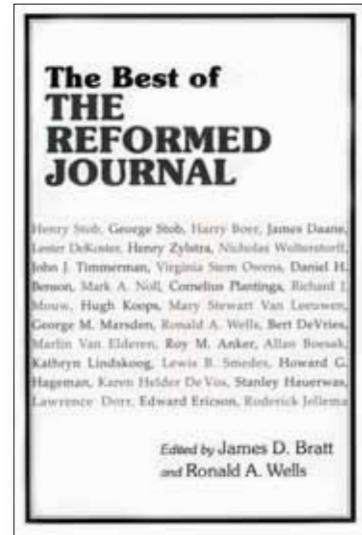


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