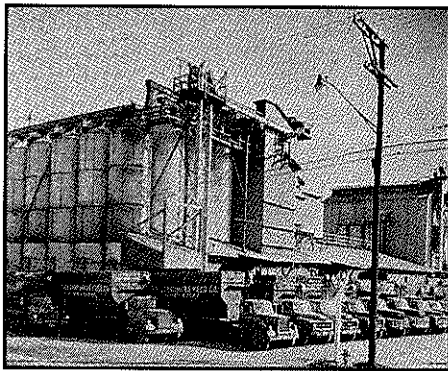


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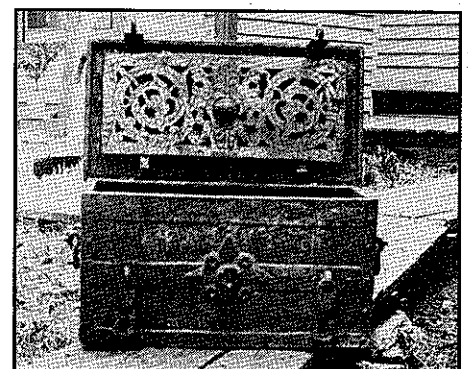


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*Origins* is designed to publicize and advance the objectives of the Archives. These goals include the gathering, organization, and study of historical materials produced by the day-to-day activities of the Christian Reformed Church, its institutions,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



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# Dutch Survivals in Bellflower, California

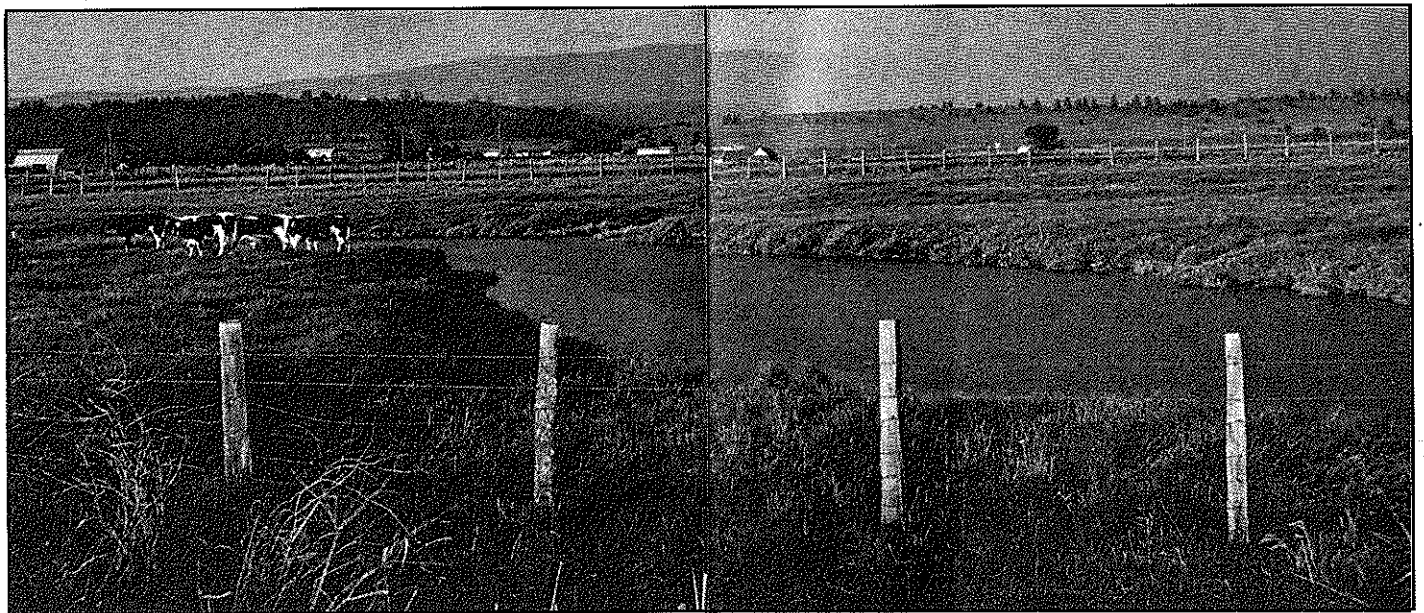
by David Bratt

David Bratt is a graduate student at Yale University in American Religious Studies. This paper is the product of his graduate research and writing.

*Landscape (inside front cover) Crusader 1960.*

Bellflower, California, is nestled at one of a thousand intersections of that glorious beast, the southern California freeway system. One of its main arteries, Interstate 605, empties onto Spring Street, a thoroughfare that connects Bellflower, Cerritos, and Artesia. Travelers escaping the freeway at this exit would be struck (if they were inclined to notice) by the juxtaposition of southern Californian old and new. To their left they would see George Verhoeven's Feed Store, which was at one time a hub of the prevailing economic structure of the area: dairy farming. That system is a dinosaur in Bellflower today, as reflected by the words "For Sale" plastered across the store's sign. To their right they would see a massive conglomeration of automobile dealerships: the Cerritos Auto Square. Truly this multiblock monstrosity captures the stereotypical essence of life in present-day southern California in one stunning visual image: independence, mobility, and pursuit of the good life with all the trappings a consumer culture has to offer.

Yet it was not George Verhoeven's Feed Store or any other economic institution that anchored the Dutch community here. Rather, it was an elabo-



rate network of churches, schools, a rest home, and other institutions connected to them that has offered the essential organizing principle for the lives of these people. These institutions have survived the arrival of the automobile and the suburbs it made possible. They have helped the remnant of a one-time Dutch farming community to survive as well.

Netherlanders first began to arrive in the Bellflower area around 1920, in search of land on which to establish their dairy farms. Dairy farming had long been a prominent occupation in the Dutch countryside; though the Dutch who came to southern California had to adjust to a substantially different climate, they did so with occupational customs which had sustained their culture for many years. Many came directly from the Netherlands, but others came by way of settlements in the Midwest, Montana, and Canada. They quickly adapted their farming to their location by developing a system of "feed lots" that took on the appearance of a kind of dairy assembly line. These farmers began to buy food for their cows rather than growing it themselves. Bringing in grain grown in areas to the north was cheaper than irrigating their own land, and this new system allowed them to carry on larger operations with less land—a combination that would prove to be fairly lucrative as a growing Los Angeles demanded more and more dairy products.<sup>1</sup>

Immigrants to the Bellflower area came mainly from the northern Netherlands; the province of Friesland was most heavily represented. Friesland was predominantly rural and almost overwhelmingly Protestant (more specifically, Reformed) in its religion. The Reformed in Friesland, as throughout the Netherlands, affiliated with one of two main religious traditions: the state church (Hervormde Kerk) or a secession movement that began in



(above) Feed Company in Crusader 1955, p. 102.

(right) Salt block in Crusader 1955, p. 103.

1834 over demands for a more pietistic, conservative religious life. This movement, the *afscheiding*, significantly effected the Dutch migration to America that took place in the mid-nineteenth century (most of it from rural areas of the Netherlands). Because the settlers of Bellflower came from Midwestern, Canadian, or Netherlands farming communities, they were more than likely rooted in this Seceder tradition. The Seceders "continued a long line of dissent within the Dutch Reformed Church," a line that would be perpetuated by the Dutch in America. Some of those who migrated here were satisfied that the Dutch Reformed Church in America had avoided the sins of its parent state church, but others objected to its overly Americanized traditions and seceded again, forming the Chris-



tian Reformed Church in 1857.<sup>2</sup>

The first church established by the Dutch in this area was a Reformed Church in America congregation, founded in Hynes (present-day Paramount) in 1925. This did not satisfy all the Netherlanders, some of whom went on to found a Christian Reformed Church in Bellflower in 1927. Some of these founding members had transferred from the CRC in Los Angeles, presumably looking for work among their Dutch brethren some twenty miles southeast. The *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* reported in 1928 that the church had nearly

doubled in membership after only one year (to twenty-one families) and that "signs at present point to a steady growth in the future" since "there are many non-churchgoing Hollanders living in the immediate vicinity of the church and there is ample opportunity for doing mission work."<sup>3</sup>

In the following years these churches faced not only the gathering of "non-churchgoing Hollanders living in the immediate vicinity" but also the absorption of thousands of Dutch Americans who moved into the area looking for work during the ensuing Great Depression. The establishment of these churches had signified not only that the Dutch were here to stay but also that Dutch religion (in the Dutch language) had made this area "safe" for migration from the small Dutch-American towns of the Midwest. In these lean years prospects for farm ownership in the Midwest seemed bleak, particularly for children of large families who would not inherit a piece of land large enough to make a living on. During this time when Midwesterners swarmed into southern California, Dutch Midwesterners joined the migration en masse, and many of them headed for the Bellflower area in search of jobs with the dairymen or elsewhere (the shipyards of Long Beach, for example). By 1940 the Reformed Church in America could boast three separate congregations in the area, with a combined total of 641 communicant members. In the same year the Christian Reformed Church was maintaining three area congregations of its own, with 674 communicant members. The new arrivals in this wave of migration came primarily from northwest Iowa and southwest Minnesota, two Dutch strongholds in the Midwest.<sup>4</sup>

In 1935, First CRC called Reverend Gareth Kok to be its minister. This decision proved a vital one for the Dutch community. Reverend Kok be-

lieved he had been called to this pastorate for two reasons: he was a Frisian and could therefore relate to his Frisian congregants (he could also deliver sermons in both English and Dutch), and he was an advocate of Christian schools. Sentiment in the rapidly growing church had arisen for the founding of a Christian school in Bellflower, and supporters considered Reverend Kok to be a valuable leader in their efforts. When he arrived, he began to speak in area churches on the necessity of a Christian school. Having found the necessary support, leaders organized the Bellflower Christian School in October 1935. It was never run by any church; its leaders

were members of area Christian Reformed congregations, and it was supported not only by CRC congregants (as Christian schools generally were in other areas) but also by some RCA members.<sup>5</sup>

The establishment of the Christian school in Bellflower was a crucial step in building unique institutions for the Dutch Reformed. It represented the empowerment of a mind-set which held that religious institutions, indeed religion itself, should reach beyond the bounds of mere piety. Religion was to play an active role in the everyday society of Dutch communities. It was a mind-set rooted not merely in Old World cultural interests, but more directly in Old World practices and beliefs. For these people the Christian school was not simply an agent for the preservation of Dutch culture; in fact, the Dutch language was never spoken there. What was preserved instead was a way of looking at the world, one which had demanded a system of Christian schools in the Netherlands and which demanded a



*Rev. and Mrs. Gareth Kok.*

similar system in the United States.

This way of looking at the world was propagated, defended, and implemented primarily by one man, Abraham Kuyper, who dominated the culture of the Netherlands for more than forty years. Between 1860 and 1910 Abraham Kuyper served in positions from pastor to newspaper editor to Prime Minister of the Netherlands, and his relentless work for the establishment of Reformed institutions in the Netherlands continued to influence Netherlanders in the United States to demand similar institutions.

Kuyper's impact on Dutch religious life, particularly in conservative Calvinist circles, cannot be overestimated. He "held the Netherlands' attention, wrote much of its political and cultural agenda, and in the end reshaped some of its fundamental structures," according to James D. Bratt.<sup>6</sup> Kuyper formulated a comprehensive ideology which intended

not to copy the past, as if Calvinism were a petrification, but to go back to the living root of the Calvin-

ist plant, to clean and to cause it to bud and to blossom once more.<sup>7</sup>

The effect Kuyperian ideology would have on institutional life would be remarkable. He envisioned a world motivated by ideas, by obedience to "first principles," by obedience or disobedience to the will of God. He postulated, long before the rise of postmodernism, that "no intellectual activity, including the natural sciences, was impartial or value-free or without presuppositions." Such a belief necessitates separate Christian (and Reformed) institutions of education; the public schools could claim to teach no religion, but in doing so they created one of their own. True believers, then, had to raise their children in educational systems that taught in accordance with proper Reformed principles. To that end, the Netherlands of Kuyper's time established separate school systems for Protestants, Catholics, and others even as it established separate newspapers, labor unions, and political parties—all along religious lines.<sup>8</sup>

Though Kuyper's theories pertained to "every sphere of life," because of their idealist roots, they could be most easily applied to education. In America, private, religiously oriented schooling caught on early in this century among the Christian Reformed in particular. By 1921 they had established a national system of support for Christian schools, the oldest such continuing system of Christian schools in the United States, according to Melinda Bollar Wagner. When support for this movement arose in Bellflower, it was plugging into a network that linked the four corners of Christian Reformed America in the need for curricula and teachers. Teachers could be provided by the denomination's institution of higher learning, Calvin College, which could guarantee both sound Reformed principles and teachers who could be accredited. Already Bellflower looked to Calvin Seminary for training its ministers; now the college would send it teachers as well.<sup>9</sup>

With the Christian school in place, parents no longer had to worry about sources of authority in their children's

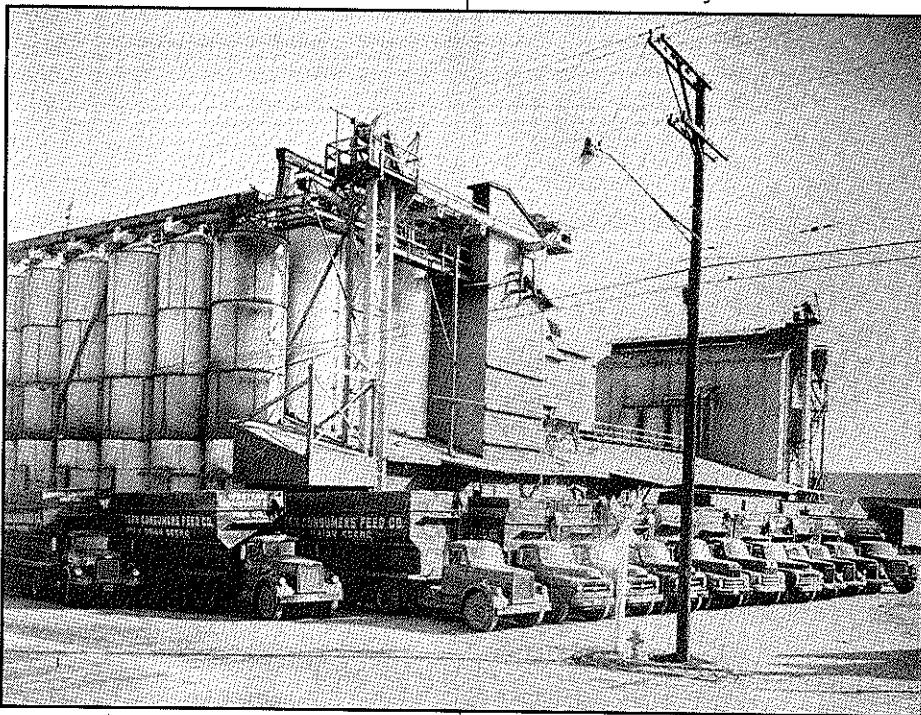
education that might conflict with their own. Their children did not have to live out the dilemma so poignantly portrayed in Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted*:

... it was better not to question the teacher's world. The wise fellow kept his mouth shut and accepted it; he came to believe in a universe, divided as it were into two realms, one for school and one for home, and each with rules and modes of behavior of its own.<sup>10</sup>

In the Bellflower Christian School the teachers were actually in the employ of the parents; the "divided universe" was avoided altogether. In fact, since funds for the school were solicited through the churches, the Christian Reformed in Bellflower were spinning a seamless web on the local level, one that was becoming closely linked to a national network of similar ethnicity and religious belief.

This network functioned as a sort of ethnic and religious supply line, offering Bellflower and similar communities the opportunity to have access to a broader pool of workers, leaders, and ideas. Both religion and ethnicity were vital to the network; they functioned in a constantly changing symbiosis. At first, when the Dutch language was still the primary means of communication in immigrant communities, ethnicity and religion were synonymous. As these settlements matured, however, the language slowly became less important, particularly in the lives of young people. Yet the ethnicity persisted; it provided safety for a community that was wary of "melting pot" America and its ameliorating Protestantism. These people came from a heritage that had nervously protected its orthodoxy for years, in both Old World and New World contexts.

*Western Consumers Feed Company, Crusader 1960, np.*



Thus, even when the Dutch language had all but disappeared in these communities, ethnicity still served to undergird religious truth.

The combination of ethnicity and religion is crucial, because it results in two different scenarios for Dutch-American life. The Reformed Church in America had deeper roots in American soil than did the Christian Reformed Church; from the beginning, it had found a friendly home in the New World. Not prone to the secessionist tendencies of the CRC, not bent on the scrupulous maintenance of Old World traditions, the RCA (earlier known as the Dutch Reformed Church in America) was dedicated to reaching out to its new nation. By the end of the eighteenth century the RCA had added seventy-three supplementary articles to the eighty-four in the Canons of Dordt, a crucial document of theological purity in the Hervormde Kerk. Jacob Van Hinte sees this as a sign of the "changed concepts of the Americans," the fact that the church in America early on bore a decreasing resemblance to its

Old World parent institution.<sup>11</sup>

The RCA churches in the Bellflower area reflected something of this philosophy. Though they were founded by immigrants and maintained a somewhat narrow ethnic identity in their early years, they became examples of how the RCA would sustain its life in southern California. By 1942 the RCA had founded a "community church" in nearby Lakewood; by 1985, three of the area churches (and many more in surrounding areas) no longer included the word "Reformed" in their names. "Community" seemed a more appropriate moniker for assimilating and reaching out to the diversifying neighborhoods. With the increasing dominance of the automobile in southern California culture, the RCA opened a series of drive-in ministries. By bringing in young Robert Schuller (who had been educated in a Reformed college and seminary in the Midwest) to begin this work in Garden Grove, the RCA guaranteed that one such ministry would eventually attain international recognition in what would become known as the Crystal Cathe-

dral (still currently affiliated with the RCA).

By contrast, members of the local Christian Reformed churches seemed suspicious of their surroundings. They were finding enough support from Midwestern migrants, whose needs were keeping them sufficiently busy. By 1942 a Christian high school was established to complete the Christian-education system up to the college level. For those inclined to pursue a college education, Calvin College beckoned them "back east" to Grand Rapids, where they could continue a Reformed education while they met potential spouses from Christian Reformed churches throughout North America. This led to the dispersal of some Bellflower young people to other points on the Dutch ethnic map, and it brought in others from those enclaves. Marriage was vital to the building of links between Christian Reformed churches. And it was the existence of such links that established Bellflower as a vital point in CRC "geography" when southern California beckoned Midwesterners with its

*Niekerk Hay Company, Crusader 1960, np.*



promise of the good life in the 1930s and 40s.

By 1945, then, a young couple could leave the less promising conditions of Michigan or Minnesota for the rapidly expanding paradise of the Los Angeles metropolitan area. They could do so knowing that they could take spiritual shelter in the institutions set up by their denominational kin. They could go to the home of Reverend Kok (which they did in large numbers) or some other minister to inquire about employment. He could direct them to the dairymen, whose expanding operations required more and more hired help, or to other connections he might have. He could refer them to congregational members for help in finding housing. They could settle down in a church and plan a family that

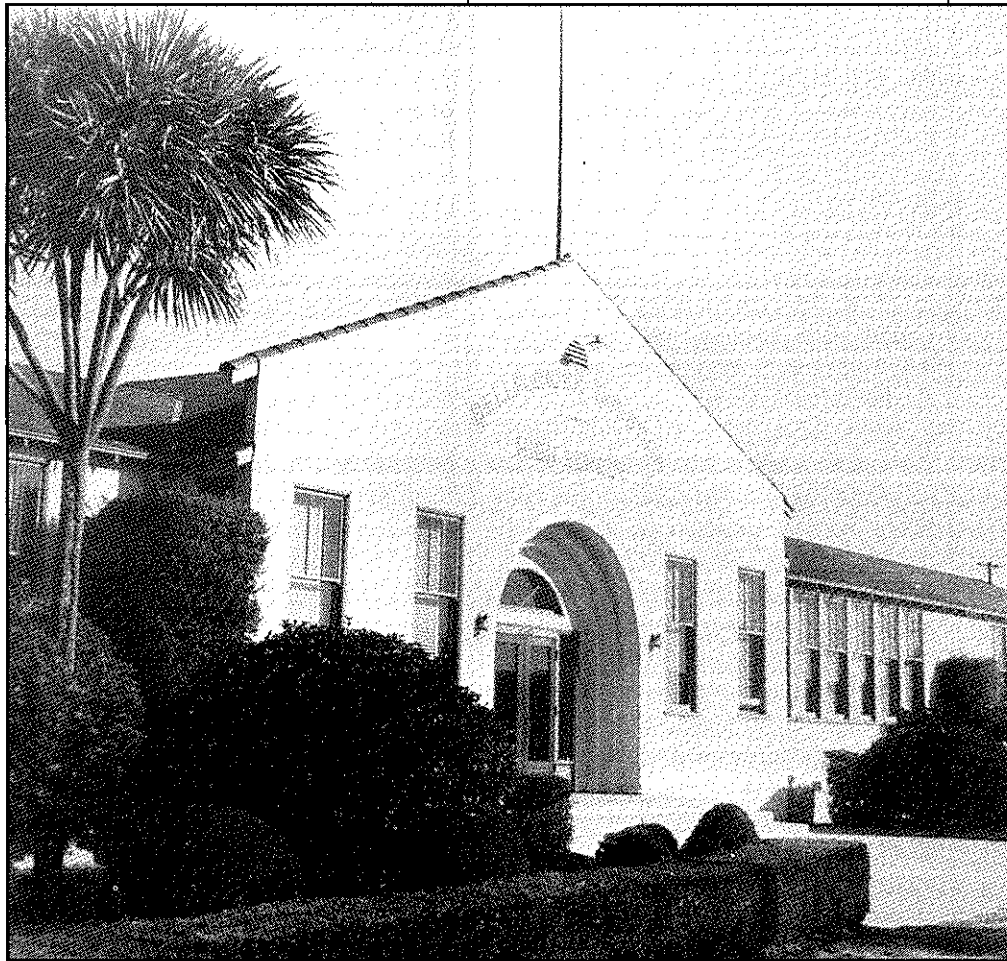
could be educated in Christian schools (in retrospect, Reverend Kok considers the establishment of the Christian school to be the "spark plug" for Dutch migration from the Midwest). All this while they pursued the economic potential of this rapidly expanding area and basked in the California sunshine.<sup>12</sup>

In his study of religion and migration within the United States, Samuel S. Hill has suggested that "Migrants have been shown to be more likely to adapt to the level of religious commitment of the new region" than to carry with them those levels established in the region they have left behind. While region is the dominant factor in Hill's analysis, he does mention a "tendency to import churches similar to ones left behind in the old location in hopes of... providing a spiritual home

in the new place of residence." Truly, this was what happened in Bellflower. Migrants brought their traditions with them from the Midwest; if they adapted to the "level of religious commitment" of anyone, it was the people in this smaller community, not in the broader cultural setting, who provided the model. The churches of the RCA, then, adapted to their changing environments more than their Christian Reformed counterparts did, but even in this adaptation they were conforming to patterns associated with their national denomination. The CRC also followed its national pattern in Bellflower by refusing to change in the face of a changing community. This served to reinforce its national denominational links. Hill's treatment of ethnicity is limited to characterizations

of certain regions (the Midwest in particular); he does not seem to account for the transportation of ethnicity from one region to another, evidenced in places like Bellflower. This ethnicity would be enforced in Bellflower by the arrival of new Dutch immigrants during and immediately after the Second World War, who found relief from the ravages of war in the New World of southern California.<sup>13</sup>

Immigrants arriving in the Bellflower area affiliated with the churches of both denominations. This first posed a problem for the RCA churches, which by 1947 had abandoned all worship in the Dutch language. That year RCA members organized Second Reformed Church of Artesia to minister exclusively to the incoming Netherlanders. Some area CRC churches still held one service in Dutch, but it was clear that this language was on



*Bellflower Christian High School, Crusader 1955, p. 2.*

the way out here as well. Ten years after the RCA organized its "Dutch church," the CRC did the same, forming Rehoboth CRC of Bellflower. By 1960, with Second Artesia numbering 550 total members and Rehoboth CRC totaling 435, the two churches were serving close to a thousand native Netherlanders between them.

The limited English-language skills of these new arrivals posed something of a problem for a Dutch-American community drifting slowly away from its ethnic roots, if not from its ethnicity. The immigrants had to find some form of menial labor in which their limited English would be of minimal hindrance; many of them found employment with the dairymen, who often still had at least a passing knowledge of their mother tongue. For the children, however, there was no such cushion. They enrolled in the Christian school system in large numbers but found little help there for learning the language of their new surroundings. Administrators at the schools tried to find American students who still knew enough Dutch to help them out in class, but such students were increasingly difficult to find in the 1950s. These students had to adapt quickly in order to keep pace in the classroom.<sup>14</sup>

The strain of absorbing immigrants from the Netherlands after World War II demonstrates the evolution of the Dutch-American community in the Bellflower area. The new Dutch families came to churches whose names seemed familiar but whose relationship to the Old Country had weakened over time. Southern California had been good to this community, and it had adapted well. Still, the Christian Reformed clung to their traditional systems, and even some RCA members continued to send their children to Christian schools. In the 1960-61 school year only twenty-two families (out of an overall total of 653) sending children to these schools did not attend

churches of one Dutch pedigree or another.

If this Dutch-American community was slowly becoming more American, it was showing signs of age as well. The earliest settlers were getting to the point in their lives when they needed more specialized care, so the churches founded the Inland Christian Home in Artesia in 1954. This was perhaps the clearest sign that the Dutch had become a more or less permanent presence here; retirees wanted a rest home here so that they could be close to their families and to the community that had served them through most of their adult years. It also was the logical conclusion to lives lived in the insulation of what was now a "cradle to grave" system of religious institutions. The Dutch elderly could be among fellow church members, in the care of Christian helpers, and near their families all the way through increasing frailty to the moment of death. The home was supported through fees paid by its residents and through offerings from the churches. The elderly of the community no longer had to go back to Iowa or Minnesota to be among loved ones in their remaining years; they could now take advantage of the warmer climate and religious support available in Artesia.

In retrospect, it was vital to the Dutch-American presence in Bellflower that all these institutions were in place by 1960, for the coming decade brought the beginning of monumental transition for this area. Southern California arrived with full force on the doorsteps of these Dutch-Americans, and in the process it swept dairy farming out of that area. Those who wished to continue farming sold their land (at a spectacular profit) and moved elsewhere. Those who stayed became suburbanites, then city dwellers, without any control over the process. The established institutions were severely tested in the process. The Reformed

churches deliberately changed; the Christian schools changed somewhat, though their power structure remained virtually unchanged. The Christian Reformed churches shrank dramatically, but though some of them folded altogether, many persevered with their uniquely Dutch-American but severely diminished congregations.

We have already examined the community orientation of the area's Reformed churches. One example was the Artesia Reformed Church, which became New Life Community Church. As befits a church in ever-developing southern California, it also established a drive-in ministry and other outreach programs that have made New Life Community one of the fastest-growing churches in the RCA. This church capitalized on the opportunity presented by an expanding and diversifying audience for its evangelical message. In the process it used the formula of its fantastically successful cousin, Robert Schuller's ministry in Garden Grove, with smaller but still impressive results. Other area Reformed churches were not so bold about this as New Life, but the pattern of embracing the expanding community was established nevertheless.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps such a pattern is predictable for churches suddenly faced with rapidly expanding neighborhoods, especially in the particular social environment of southern California. But the Christian Reformed churches refused to follow it. Changing worship styles involved a revocation of customs dating as far back as John Calvin's Geneva; this denomination, and the mind-set on which it was founded, existed to preserve, rather than to adapt. Covenant theology, with its emphasis on infant baptism, had always worked within the context of a lifetime spent in the church. Dutch Calvinists had never pursued revivalist notions, had never invested much energy in evangelism; history had

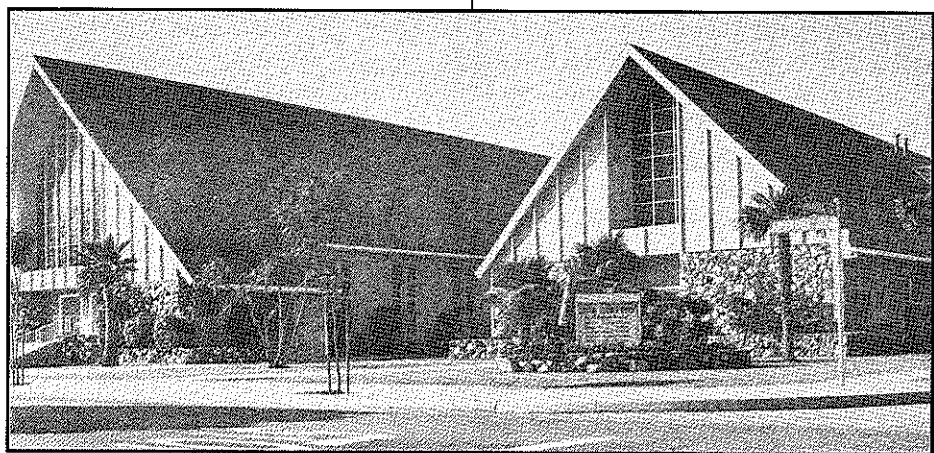


*Bellflower Christian Reformed Church.*

shown such pursuits to be paths to theological folly. And so the Christian Reformed in Bellflower continued to shelter their truth through pedigree and tradition. It had not failed them yet; it would not let them down now, even as they lost thousands of members to relocation.

A look at the destinations of the people who left these CRC churches testifies to the triumph of this traditional ideology as much as does the perseverance of the institutions they left behind. For example, during the period of 1960-1980, more than 80 percent of the people who left First CRC of Bellflower for another church found a new church home in another Christian Reformed church. Some simply fled Bellflower for the greater affluence of the Anaheim area; others left through marriage and went to other CRC settlements; the vast majority looked for other places to work on farms. Rising property taxes were making farming in Bellflower a poor investment; more lucrative alternatives could be found elsewhere, and both farm owners and farm workers left in search of these opportunities. But they went almost exclusively to other Christian Reformed areas. Many went forty miles northeast to Chino, where a settlement almost as old as Bellflower boasted all the same institutions—churches, Christian schools, and a Christian rest home—with lower taxes and cheaper land. Farther north, Visalia, Hanford, Modesto, and Ripon beckoned with rich farmland and Dutch-American Christian institutions of their own. Some went even farther north to the Christian Reformed establishments of Lynden, Everett, and Enumclaw, Washington. Some ventured east into the desert, planting similar “colonies” in Arizona.

If those who stayed in Bellflower



witnessed an atrophy of their churches, they saw something different in their school system. The Christian Reformed students who left were replaced by students of other denominations moving into the area. Apparently the features which had made Christian education attractive to the Christian Reformed (apart from its ideological and traditional values) now lured non-CRC members as well: a solid Christian educational system that provided a “safe” education in a world of rapidly changing moral values. Whatever the attraction, by 1975 about 40 percent of the families with children in these schools were not Christian Reformed. The schools were beginning to take on a more ethnically and racially diverse makeup without changing much of their philosophy or the ethnic or religious makeup of their staffs. Even in 1975, by which time the student body was quite diverse, over 80 percent of the Christian school teachers and administrators belonged to area Christian Reformed churches. The schools that produced so many teachers for this national Christian school system (Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI, and, more recently, Dordt College in Sioux Center, IA, and Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL) continued to do so; the machine seemed anything but broken, and no one intended to fix it. As had always been the policy, parents had to

sign a doctrinal statement saying that they agreed with the historic principles of “the Christian Day Schools as found in the Reformed communities.” The statement has never been altered to reflect a growing diversity. It is a document rife with Reformed covenant theology, summarizing the basic beliefs set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dordt, and the Belgic Confession, the “three forms of unity” of the Dutch Reformed tradition.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps parents from other denominational backgrounds were finally accepting what Christian Reformed parents had believed for the past one hundred years: no public school system could be value free. When the Protestant grip on the public schools began to loosen, conservative Christian groups of all kinds began to advocate separate Christian educational systems. Perhaps, in some unexpected way, America was being made safe for Dutch Calvinism. While the RCA churches of the Bellflower area reached out with evangelicalism and contemporary ministries, gaining many adherents in the process, the CRC teachers and administrators had stuck to a time-honored philosophy and had attracted students of other backgrounds. Both camps, oddly enough, had won substantial victories with their contrasting approaches in the population upheaval that characterized Bellflower in the Sixties and Seventies.<sup>17</sup>

Certainly the institutions we have examined have done a remarkable job of staving off the problems of modernity for a group of Dutch Calvinists in southern California. For the Christian Reformed, they were shelter in a storm of change, shelter that even managed to harness some of the wind of that change. They did not always closely examine the ideology they passed from one generation to the next. Indeed, in retrospect it would be fairer to say that the ideology boiled down to certain traditions which were handed down because they worked. The forces of the secular world were often eschewed in realms where they were most innocuous. For example, Christian Reformed churches developed young people's organizations for both boys and girls, modeled on the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts (in both appearance and activities), in order to keep their young people within the bounds of their local churches. Imagine a group of white Protestants shielding its children from the Boy Scouts!<sup>18</sup>

Still, even if southern California was not transformed by the remarkably tenacious system of social institutions established in Bellflower, the Christian Reformed did manage to defend their community against the constantly attacking foe of the "modern world" with amazing success. They prepared themselves, in Bellflower and settlements like it, for the onset of modernity long before it arrived in force. Their traditions, which so often went critically unexamined, nevertheless proved to be a potent defense against a modern southern California (and America in general) that threatened to lure them away from their traditional faith.<sup>19</sup>

By 1980, members of both Reformed denominations could see the handwriting on the wall concerning their futures. In the RCA, this year saw the opening of the Crystal Cathedral, pro-

claiming the successes of a loosely Reformed message in its southern California setting. In Artesia, New Life Community Church was growing at a staggering rate of 84 percent each year. Down the street, Second Reformed Church, which after the war had ministered to hundreds of new Dutch immigrants, closed its doors for good in 1977, selling its property to a growing Pentecostal ministry. The CRC saw its numerical presence in the area stabilize in 1980, though the median age of its congregants was on the rise. Its own immigrant church of the Fifties, Rehoboth CRC in Bellflower, closed its doors that same year. In December 1980 subscribers to the denominational magazine *The Banner* received an issue whose cover featured a photograph of two wooden shoes in flames. "It's Time to Burn the Wooden Shoes," the caption read, a message that may have struck particularly close to home in Christian Reformed Bellflower. If the system was to endure, its advocates might have to tinker with it somewhat. Then again, that system had never let them down before; it might survive these challenges as well.

#### Endnotes

1. Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlands in America* (Groenigen, 1928; trans. Grand Rapids, 1985), 808; Henry S. Lucas, *Netherlands in America* (Ann Arbor, 1955, rept. Grand Rapids, 1989), 444.
2. For more background on the religious nature of Dutch migration to America during this period, see James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids, 1984), 3-13 ("Secession and Its Tangents").
3. Chester J. Droog, *The Reformed Church in America: Classis of California* (Los Angeles, 1985), 7; *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* (1928), 164-65.
4. *General Synod Directory of the Reformed Church in America* (1940), 230; *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* (1940), 5. Arrivals and departures in these churches will be extrapolated from an examination of the records of the First CRC of Bellflower. This is the case because it has historically been one of the largest churches in the area (and the "mother" of several area CRC congregations,

none of which apparently left under any controversy).

5. Interview with Reverend Gareth Kok, October 15, 1991. See also the booklet *Fiftieth Anniversary of the First Christian Reformed Church of Bellflower, California*, 14. The reason for the RCA support is difficult to determine; it may have come in part from ethnic association or from fears concerning an inferior public school system, according to Reverend Kok.

6. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism*, 14.

7. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1898; Grand Rapids, 1961), 171.

8. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism*, 18. "Abraham Kuyper and Neo-Calvinism," the second chapter of this book, is the best available short summary on Kuyper's thought and work. For a more biographical work on Kuyper, see Frank Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids, 1960).

9. Melinda Bollar Wagner, *God's Schools: Choice and Compromise in American Society* (New Brunswick, 1990), 22.

10. Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (New York, 1951), 248.

11. Van Hinte, *Netherlands in America*, 62.

12. Interview with Reverend Kok, October 15, 1991.

13. Samuel S. Hill, "Religion and Region in America," *Annals of the American Association of Political Science Scholars* 480 (July 1985), 132-41.

14. *General Synod Directory of the Reformed Church in America* (1960), 243; *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* (1960), 16.

15. Interview with Harold Tiemmans, former superintendent, Valley Christian Schools, October 14, 1991.

16. The story of this transition, both in the Bellflower area and throughout California, can be found in Droog, *The Reformed Church in America: Classis of California*.

17. Membership records, First CRC, Bellflower. No recent comprehensive history exists on these other Dutch settlements of the West, for the older ones (Lynden, WA, Hanford or Ripon, CA) see Lucas, *Netherlands in America*.

18. Statistics on denominational affiliation are taken from the directories of the Christian school system, 1960-61 and 1975-76.

19. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism*, 220. For a succinct summary of the battles over public education and for its relationship to immigration and ethnicity, see Lawrence Cremin, *Popular Education and Its Discontents* (New York, 1990), especially 104-18.

20. For a look at Kuyper's somewhat radical socioeconomic critique, see his *Christianity and the Class Struggle* (rept. Grand Rapids, 1950).

Dutch folk made their first appearance in Redlands, California, in 1903. This fascinating town is located in the San Bernardino Valley about sixty-five miles east of Los Angeles, with the San Bernardino Mountains forming the eastern and northern skyline. The community's name comes from the peculiar color of the local soil.

As late as 1883, Guachama Indians of the Shoshone tribe lived in the valley. They called it "The Palm of

In all the books about the early history of Redlands there is a large information gap. That gap concerns the Dutch, a significant portion of Redlands' population and history. Very little is said about the Dutch and their activities and achievements.

The book *Going Dutch in Redlands* by William Gabrielse is an attempt to fill that gap. It contains an essay entitled "The Dutch as Such," which gives reasons for the lack of information and a list of Dutch families and individuals who came to Redlands between 1911 and 1945, where they came from, and where they went. However, the main feature of the book is a series of family histories based on taped interviews with some of the early pioneers and their children. The stories stress the human-interest angle, the joys and sorrows, the work and play, the strong Christian commitment to family, church, and school. They tell what it was like to live and grow up Dutch in Redlands. The book is available at \$10.00 per copy from William Gabrielse, 1024 Occidental Drive, Redlands, CA 92374

# Going Dutch in Redlands

by  
William  
Gabrielse



1963 Bird's-eye view of Redlands—the dark areas are all orange groves.

the Hand of God." Later, Mexicans and Spaniards resided here, and Christian missions were established by Spanish missionaries. Soon thereafter all the manual labor was done by "Christianized" Indians. Indian and Spanish place names are still found in the valley.

The town of Redlands was settled and organized in 1888. Most of the early settlers had heard about Redlands from their medical doctors because of its beauty and its healthful climate. Doctors in the eastern part of the country sent their patients to this area to regain their health, especially those who had asthma, tuberculosis, and other respiratory ailments. Not all regained their health, but many did, and some proclaimed so with exaggerated testimonials. John Baur wrote in *Health Seekers*, "I came to Redlands to die. When I left home [in the East] I had but one lung and it was almost gone. I couldn't speak above a whisper and I had no appetite. I have been here only two weeks and now I have three lungs, I ate three mules for breakfast and am going to try it for another week."

Because many of the health seekers were wealthy, they invested their money in Redlands, purchasing land, businesses, and orange groves and building their mansions. Perhaps for the first time in history, a frontier was settled by wealthy invalids and their families. They came not to seek a fortune, but to spend it. The Chicago millionaires named their streets Dearborn, Wabash, and La Salle. New England plutocrats built their mansions in the New England style. As the population increased, so did

the price of property. When newcomers asked what would be the best to raise in the valley, they were told, "Raise the prices." In the year of the town's organization, statistics reveal that the valley already had a thousand acres of peaches, twelve hundred acres of grapes, a thousand acres of apricots, six hundred acres of oranges, and plantings of pears, walnuts, figs, olives, lemons, and plums. However, the navel orange thrived most successfully on the area's climate, soil, and abundantly available irrigation water. Redlands, the millionaire's mecca, became the "Navel Orange Capital of the World."

To this area, renowned for its beauty, wealth, agricultural productivity, and healthful climate, the Dutch came in the early decades of the twentieth century. In preparation for a resource book entitled *Going Dutch in Redlands, California*, its author W. Gabrielse, compiled interviews and stories from those who remember the experience of settling in Redlands.

The family of Susie Flystra Braaksma came to Redlands from Little Falls, New Jersey in 1910 because, "It seemed like it was always either wet or cold there." An aunt and uncle had moved to Redlands in 1906 because the aunt had pneumonia every year when she lived in the East. Susie's mother had bouts of malaria, and so the Flystras followed.

Tilly Wierenga Nymeyer reported, "I came to Redlands in 1918 with my parents and two younger sis-

*Redlands Christian Reformed Church picnic in 1919.*





1919 Sunday school outing to Idlewyld resort area, 25 miles up the Palm Pines Highway

ters. The weather was so bad in Michigan." Her father was told by his doctors, "If you want to live another winter, you will have to go to California." When he arrived at the Orange Street depot, Mr. Wierenga said, "The air is so round here." "We never could figure out why he used that word, but evidently he was really impressed," Tilly explained.

Similarly, Hendrikus Lappinga, a successful farmer in Western Michigan who suffered from asthma and rheumatism, upon his physician's advice, moved to the favorable climate of Redlands in 1922.

Not all needed to be prodded by a thoughtful doctor. Andy Van Voorthuyzen's father returned one day from working in a Muskegon, Michigan, factory and said, "Vrouw, ik wil naar California gaan [I want to go to California]. I am sick and tired of this miserable Michigan weather." The family agreed and moved to Redlands in 1921.

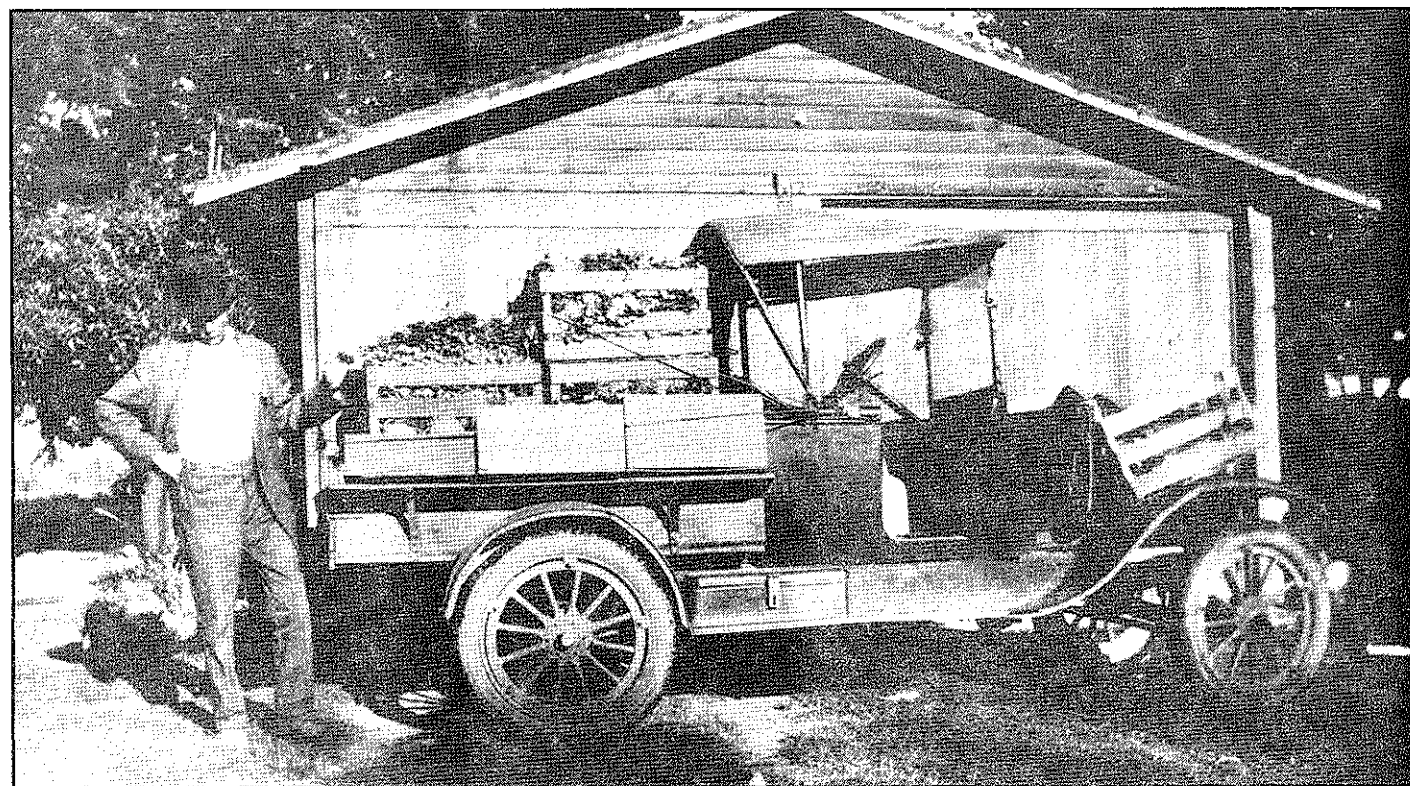
These Dutch who came to the San Bernardino Valley in the first three decades of the century had no difficulty finding employment. The wealthy folk who had previously established themselves in the community were eager to hire them and usually got more than their money's worth. Indeed, some would hire none but Dutch. Some examples of the occupations and employment emerge from the recollections of the

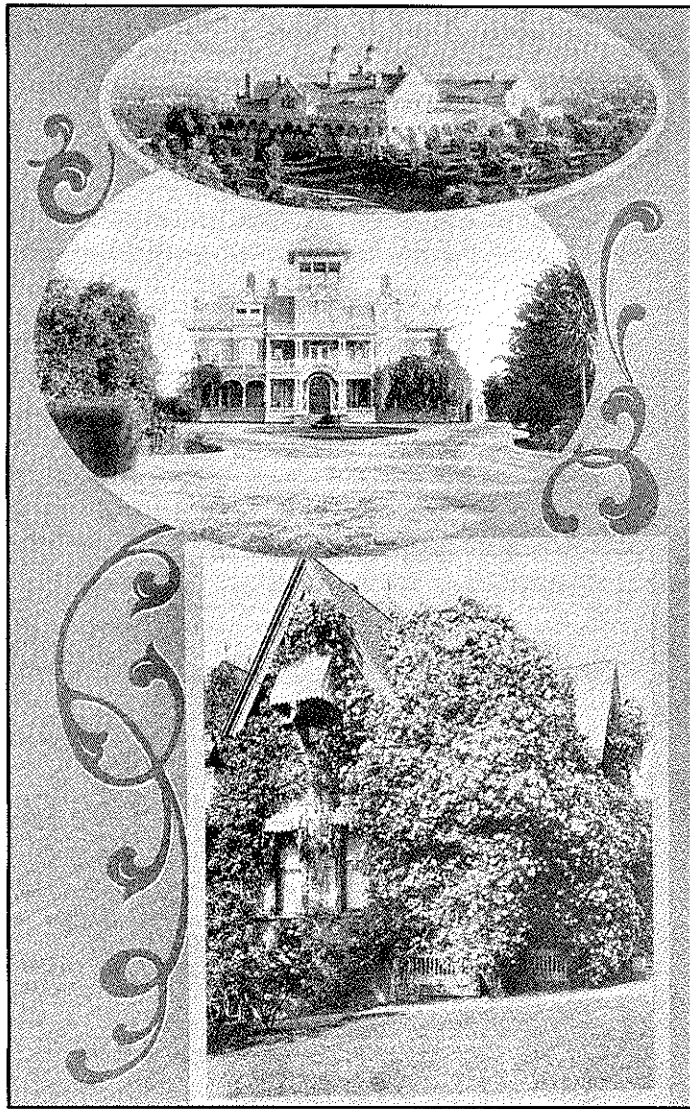


*(left) Barney Leest "patron saint" of Dutch Redlanders.*

*(right) 1950 First Christian Reformed Church, Redlands (in Banner Aug. 25, 1950)*

*(bottom) Unidentified truck garden farmer loaded for market, 1925.*





"Typical Redland Homes" in Out West Vol. 19, 1903, p. 571.

#### Dutch in Redlands.

Susie Braaksmas family raised produce for market on seven acres until "the Japanese came in and could raise the stuff more cheaply."

The Wierengas bought some land north of Redlands where the grass and weeds were so high "all you could see was the top of the horse's head." People said, "Old man Wierenga isn't very bright. What does he think he can grow in that swamp?" But Wierenga knew what he was doing. He put in big tile and drained the area, and "you never saw such crops as we raised there—tomatoes, Kentucky Wonder beans, corn, strawberries, rhubarb—all to supply the merchants

in Redlands, San Bernardino, and Riverside."

Sue De Heer remembers how her father did all the gardening for a whole row of houses. Andy Van Voorthuyzen's father also worked as a gardener for a wealthy family for forty-seven years. Other families took advantage of the excellent business opportunities in the valley.

The Christian Reformed church organized in Redlands in 1911 was the first church of that denomination in all of California. News of this event and of Reverend Jacob Bolt's arrival as the first pastor was carried in the denominational church paper, *De Wachter*, and that notice encouraged the influx of Dutch families from all parts of the country. Because these families did not bring the wealth that the earlier non-Dutch had, the deacons of the Redlands church were hard pressed to provide assistance and sometimes had to request financial help from the home congregation of a newly arrived family.

In 1921, Barney Leest, a charter member of the church, commented on the growth and stability of his congregation: "Who would have thought this ten years ago? People then said: 'Oh, in that sunny California our Holland settlements will not prosper; it is too warm there for our cold-blooded Hollanders.' Yet, besides the Redland's congregation there are now three other churches and four mission stations in our state. It was said our people were only transients and would not stay in one place, but over half of our people own their homes and farms here in Redlands and they are coming right along. They are also making a decent living; better than out East. And many came out here broken in health, who by God's blessing in southern California sunshine have regained their health again. Yes, once more, God has blessed us abundantly" (*The Banner*, Nov. 17, 1921, p. 715).

The growth of the Dutch element in Redlands is another example of American social mobility. From its meager beginnings, this community has now burgeoned into a population of sixty thousand, and the Dutch presence in the community is shown by the existence of a Reformed church, two Christian Reformed churches, a Protestant Reformed church, and several Christian day schools.

Indeed, many of the residents of Redlands who are of Dutch descent agree with the native Americans that their valley is "The Palm of the Hand of God."



*Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs, Rabbi  
1846-1876.*

# *Samuel Myer Isaacs:* **The Dutch Rabbi of New York City**

by Robert Swierenga

**D**utch blood runs thick in the veins of American Jewry. The first Jews to settle in New Amsterdam in the 1650s were Dutch, and a continuing trickle of Jews from the Netherlands followed in the next centuries.<sup>1</sup> During the great period of European migration, 1800-1915, an estimated 10,000 Dutch Jews immi-

Robert Swierenga, Professor of History at Ohio's Kent State University, is the leading historian in Dutch ethnic studies. His pioneering research in and his compilation of vital statistics, census records and similar sources has provided an enduring foundation for socio-economic, historical, and other related studies.

grated to the United States. Most came from the Jewish Quarter of Amsterdam, which was the largest Jewish section in all of Europe, and they settle in New York City, where half of all Dutch Jews in America lived in 1880.

Just as the Dutch comprised a minor part of the European emigration to America, so the Jews made up a small portion of the Dutch emigration. But Dutch Jews were far more likely to emigrate than other Netherlanders.<sup>2</sup> They were a highly mobile, urban people who began emigrating to England and America during the Napoleonic conquest (1795-1813), at

least three decades before the Van Raalte-Scholte migrations of 1846-1847.

One of these early emigrant families was that of Myer Isaacs, a prominent merchant-banker in Leeuwarden, who suffered great financial reverses during the Napoleonic wars because of international trade restrictions and naval blockades.<sup>3</sup> By 1814 Isaacs was so strapped that he decided to emigrate to London with his family, leaving his property and debts behind. The family settled in Spitalfield, a district of East London that was a Dutch Jewish center.

The Isaacs family were devout Jews,



members of the Leeuwarden Synagogue, whose 600 seats made it the largest in the Netherlands outside of the main centers in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague.<sup>4</sup> Myer Isaacs entered the rabbinate in London, and four of his five sons also became rabbis, including Samuel, who was ten years old when the family moved to London. At this age Samuel was young enough to learn English without a Dutch accent, an ability which earned him many speaking engagements in America, where sermons and public addresses in English were much preferred to the customary Yiddish or German.

Samuel attended public school, but as an orthodox Jewish teenager he also studied Hebrew, the Talmud, and Jewish history in the synagogue school and under the tutelage of his father. After completing his education, Samuel taught Hebrew for a time at the Jewish Orphanage of London, and in the 1830s he became principal of a Jewish day school. This position enabled him to become well connected in the wider Jewish community. He developed a life-long friendship with the famed Anglo-Jewish banker Sir Moses Montefiore, who shared his devotion to Palestine. He also became acquainted with Solomon Hirschell, the Chief Rabbi of the Great Synagogue of London and the leading rabbi in the entire British Empire.

The year 1839 marked the major turning point for the 35-year-old Hebrew educator. He was married in the Great Synagogue by Rabbi Hirschell himself, but shortly before the marriage he had decided to emigrate to America with his bride in response to a call from New York's newly founded Ashkenazi (Germanic) congregation, Bnai Jeshurun (Sons of Israel), of which he became the first preacher and cantor. The trustees had offered Isaacs the position without an interview after a "scrutinizing vigilance" of his creden-

tials and upon the recommendation of a trusted intermediary in London. Undoubtedly, Isaacs' unique ability to preach in perfect English was a major factor in his appointment. A few days after his wedding, Isaacs and his new wife took their "honeymoon" trip to New York aboard the Brig *Emery*, arriving, after a stormy two-month voyage, on September 10, 1839.

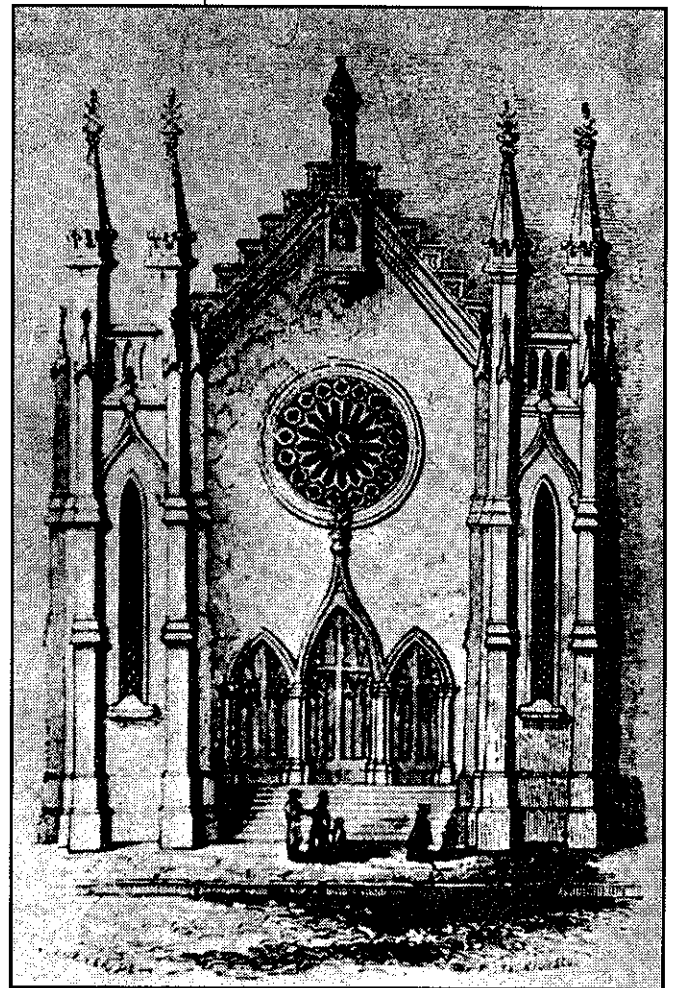
Isaacs' title was *chazzan*, which signified the chief religious leader, who acted as reader (cantor) at the services and conducted weddings and funerals. The *chazzan* was recognized by the Gentile community as the minister of the congregation. Isaacs also preached on special holidays and every Sabbath service before the New Moon. Regular preaching in the vernacular language, following the model of Protestant ministers, was just then entering the synagogue.<sup>5</sup>

Reverend Isaacs ministered at Bnai Jeshurun Synagogue for five years, until the congregation split because of ethnic rivalries. Isaacs and at least twelve other Dutch Jewish families, in addition to a number of English families, withdrew from the increasingly German synagogue and formed a new congregation, Shaaray Tefila (Gates of Prayer).<sup>6</sup> Such splintering over Old World nationality differences was endemic in America among both Jews and Christians. By 1860 New York had twenty-seven synagogues, and each na-

tionality or sub-regional group worshiped according to its customary ritual.

Isaacs served Shaaray Tefila for thirty-three years, and his tenure was the high point of Orthodoxy in New York Judaism. He devoted his pulpit to the defense of pure religion undefiled, calling the faithful to observe the full Mosaic law, the Levitical dietary rules and purification rites, and especially the Sabbath. Honoring the Sabbath was difficult for Jewish retail merchants because Saturday was the major American shopping day, and state and local Sunday-closing laws often kept Jewish businesses closed on that day as well, until they won legal exemptions.<sup>7</sup>

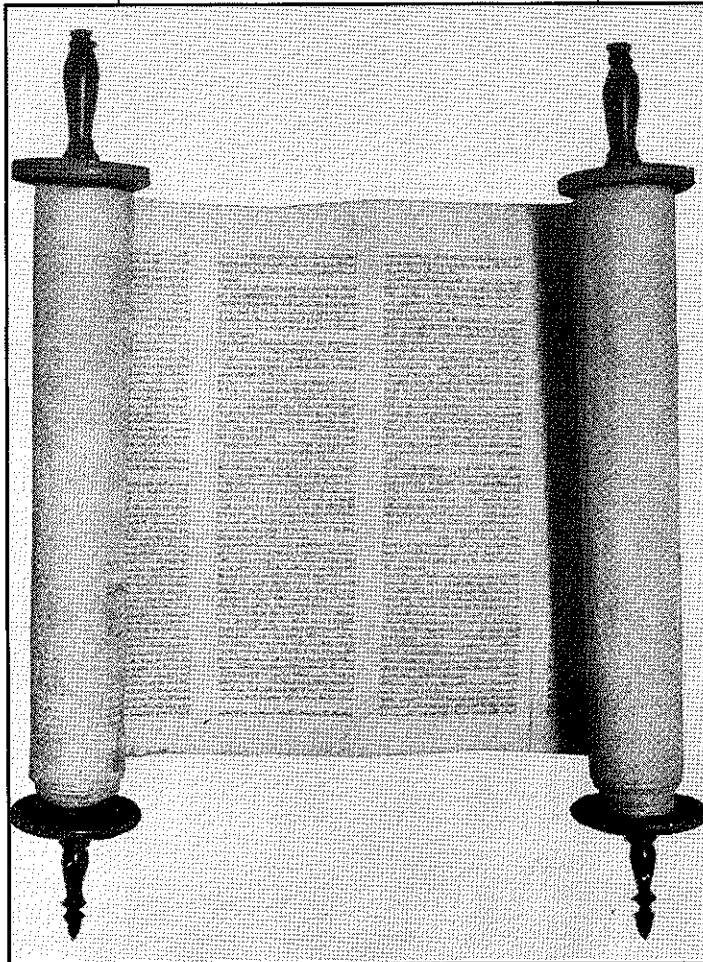
Wooster Street Synagogue of Shaaray Tefila Congregation 1847-1866.



Reverend Isaacs' second theme was to uphold Orthodoxy against the new Reform Judaism that German Jews were bringing to America in the 1840s. Among other worship practices, Reform introduced mixed choirs and instrumental music, integrated seating, prayers in English, abolition of head coverings and calling men up to the Torah, and confirmation for young women as well as young men. Reform congregations also were lax in enforcing religious discipline.

Isaacs challenged these new ideas "from the fertile fields of Germany, where everything grows fast, although not always wholesome." What is at issue, he warned, is that Jews are "assimilating our system to that of Christianity. . . . Shame on those Rabbis who have A.D. in their thoughts." In 1840, within a year of his arrival, Isaacs led a movement to exclude nonobserving Jews from membership in Bnai Jeshurun. But the majority favored benign tolerance, and Isaacs had to bide his time. He lamented, "In the days of yore, violators were . . . publicly stoned to death, . . . but now . . . we court their society, give them the first honors in the Synagogue, [and] call them up to hear that law recited which anathematizes the Sabbath-violator. . . . We behold the hands of sacrilege destroying the ten commandments. . . ." There is no place for a doctrine of "the *minimum* God, the *maximum* man," he thundered. Such strong sentiments led historian Hyman Grinstein to declare that Isaacs was "without doubt the most ardent exponent of Sabbath observance in New York City prior to the Civil War."<sup>8</sup>

Isaacs also admonished the women



Torah Scroll

of his congregation for not washing in the ritual pool (*mikveh*), which he had carefully constructed in 1833. He even attributed the recent deaths of several young married women in the congregation to God's anger at their direct disregard for the law of purity.<sup>9</sup>

Isaacs' goal was to safeguard the rank and file of American Jewry from Reform.

My object is . . . to prove, from facts, that our system of worship, apart from its *temporalities*, is the best of all systems; and to adduce evidence that adding or diminishing, abrogating, or altering our form of prayers, handed down to us from the Men of the Great Synod, . . . at the will or caprice of men, who,

however well-intentioned, are yet tinctured with the spirit of the age and are not capable of judging correctly or dispassionately—that reforms so instituted—will lead to inevitable ruin in our polity, and tend to unfetter the chain by which we have ever been riveted in union and in love. . . .<sup>10</sup>

Clarion calls such as this put Isaacs at the forefront of Orthodoxy's defense in New York and throughout the country.

Shaaray Tefila prospered under Reverend Isaacs. In the 1860s the congregation relocated from midtown to uptown Manhattan, thus following its members to newer upscale neighborhoods. Because of the "flourishing condition" of the congregation, their chazzan's workload was so heavy that the trustees in 1865 hired an assistant "to conduct the service according to the ancient liturgy with the

accepted tunes, leaving the duties of Preacher more especially to the veteran of the New York pulpit."<sup>11</sup>

In 1857 Samuel Isaacs carried the fight against Reform to the wider Jewish community by launching a weekly periodical, *The Jewish Messenger*, which he made an effective organ for Orthodoxy. He wrote ringing editorials against Reform and enlisted others, including his son Myer S. Isaacs, to contribute essays, stories, and poems that nurtured Orthodoxy.<sup>12</sup> *The Messenger* also promoted Jewish charities, day schools, orphan asylums, and the creation of a national board to present a united front for American Jewry.

A few years before his death, Isaacs took yet another bold step to save historic Judaism. To stem the growing secularization among the young, he

agreed somewhat reluctantly to support a radical plan proposed by another Orthodox rabbi to prepare a liberalized and simplified Ashkenazic worship rite (*minhag*) acceptable to all American synagogues. The time for nationality synagogues with distinctive rites had passed, Isaacs believed:

Portuguese and German, Polish and Hollander, in connection with the manner of worshiping Israel's God, are names that should, long ere this, have been erased from our nomenclature. . . . The badge we all should have proudly worn is that of 'American Jews'; . . . signifying that the circumstances which had given origin to marked differences in ritual had ceased to exist, and that the necessity for reconstructing another [rite] perfectly uniform, and more comformable to our changed condition, had arrived.<sup>13</sup>

Isaacs in 1875 published the revolutionary proposal and warmly endorsed it in his *Jewish Messenger*, but the plan was stillborn, even though it stimulated widespread debate. It pleased neither the ardent Orthodox nor the Reform movements. And Isaacs' declining health and approaching retirement made it impossible for him to carry the crusade. Except for a universal worship rite, he opposed any change in law or custom that deviated from the traditional ritual of worship, and he especially opposed any plans to remove Hebrew from the prayer book. Judaism was, he thought, a religion based on traditional law that could only change slowly with the authority of generations, and it must keep its link to the ancient land of Israel.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to his ministerial and journalistic work, Isaacs promoted the customary Jewish causes of charity, Palestinian relief, and religious education. His motto was "not to touch the worship, but to improve the worshippers." A colleague aptly characterized him as a "humble Jew to whom the

needy turned with confiding looks; with affection." His early editorials in *The Messenger* advocated the founding of Hebrew orphanages by harping on the disgraceful case of a Jewish orphan placed in a Christian institution and converted there, all because no Jewish asylum existed. The Hebrew Benevolent Society of New York was smitten by this charge and established the Hebrew Orphan Asylum in 1859. Subsequently, Isaacs worked assiduously to combine all Jewish charities in the city by organizing the United Hebrew Charities in 1873. He also helped establish Mount Sinai Hospital (1852) and served as its first vice president.<sup>15</sup>

Internationally, he crusaded for Palestinian relief, and as early as 1849 he began long-term fund-raising efforts. In 1853 he became treasurer of the North American Relief Society for Indigent Jews in Palestine, a position he held for many years. When news came of a massive famine in Palestine in 1853-1854, Isaacs was the "first to take action; the other ministers followed his lead." He mounted the first national campaign in the United States for the relief of Jews overseas. Reverend Isaacs' exceptional efforts earned him the accolade of "champion of charitable institutions."<sup>16</sup>

Isaacs also promoted Jewish education, decrying the fact that Jewish children sat under Gentile teachers in the public schools. In 1842 he converted his congregation's afternoon school into an all-day English and Hebrew School, called the New York Talmud Torah and Hebrew Institute, with the Dutch-born Henry Goldsmith as teacher of Hebrew. Although the school began strongly with 80 boys and was one of

only three such schools in the entire country, it failed within five years because of financial difficulties. Isaacs was not easily discouraged. A few years later he opened a Hebrew high school and taught Hebrew there himself. In 1852 his congregation again founded a day school, the Bnai Jeshurun Educational Institute, which boasted an enrollment of 177 pupils within a year; but it too had to close after three years (1855) because of insufficient students. The Hebrew free school movement struggled because the New York state legislature had secularized all public schools by eliminating Protestant textbooks and allowing local school boards to choose daily Scripture readings. In Jewish neighborhoods only Old Testament passages were read. Jewish children began flooding to the public schools thereafter, and all Jewish schools had closed by 1860. Nevertheless, in 1865 Isaacs finally succeeded in establishing the Hebrew Free School in New York, which flourished for many decades.<sup>17</sup>

The Dutch rabbi particularly decried the lack of Hebrew seminaries and colleges to provide educated leaders:

Synagogues are crying aloud for ministers, and there are none to respond to the call. Jewish children are hungering for religious food . . .

OFFICE OF  
**"The Jewish Messenger,"**  
 243 BROADWAY.  
 REV. S. M. ISAACS & SONS, Editors and Proprietors.

*"Jewish Messenger" masthead*

and there is none to supply the desideratum; and this in free and happy America! Where are our collegiate establishments? Where our theologian institutes?

In 1867 Isaacs achieved his goal by helping to establish Maimonides

College of Philadelphia, the first theological seminary for Jews in the United States. Unfortunately, the college failed after a few years through no fault of Isaacs'.<sup>18</sup>

Besides his religious activities, Isaacs also involved himself in "political" issues, especially efforts to defend Jews worldwide against anti-Semitic outbursts and to unify Judaism in America. Only a year after his own immigration, the famous Damascus Affair of 1840 provided the first opportunity. This international crusade, which aimed to rescue a number of Jews imprisoned in Syria, is sometimes considered the beginning of modern Jewish history because it aroused a latent national consciousness and identity. Isaacs and Henry Hart, another Hollander at Bnai Jeshurun, served on a seven-member committee of correspondence to coordinate a petition drive calling on the American government to intervene. Out of this effort, Isaacs joined with Rabbi Isaac Leeser, the conservative leader of Philadelphia, to help unify all American Jews. In 1849 and 1850 Isaacs sent out numerous appeals for an all-Jewish convention or synod to promote the "welfare of Israel" by developing a uniform synagogue government and by establishing Hebrew seminaries and colleges to provide educated leaders for the future. Reform leaders refused to cooperate, and the unity movement failed.

At the outset of the Civil War, Isaacs made yet another attempt to restore law and order to the disjointed and religiously confused Jewish community. He proposed through the pages of the *Jewish Messenger* that the learned and esteemed Orthodox Rabbi Abrahm Rice of Philadelphia be elected Chief Rabbi of the United States, since American Judaism was a body without a head to guide it. The proposal met with a storm of criticism from independent-minded Jewish lead-

ers, and Isaacs was forced to abandon his plan.<sup>19</sup>

Isaacs also joined the Jewish protest chorus against the Papacy in the infamous Montara affair of 1858-1859, which involved the supposed "child stealing" and baptism of a Jewish child by Italian Catholics. Isaacs chaired a combined committee of all twelve synagogues in New York City, which sponsored a mass meeting of 2,000 persons, both Jews and Protestants, to petition the American President to intervene with the Vatican. When this effort proved unsuccessful because American Jewry was too disorganized, Isaacs in 1859 led in the founding in New York of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites. This board expanded into a national organization of all Orthodox congregations that safeguarded Jewish civil and religious rights at home and abroad.<sup>20</sup>

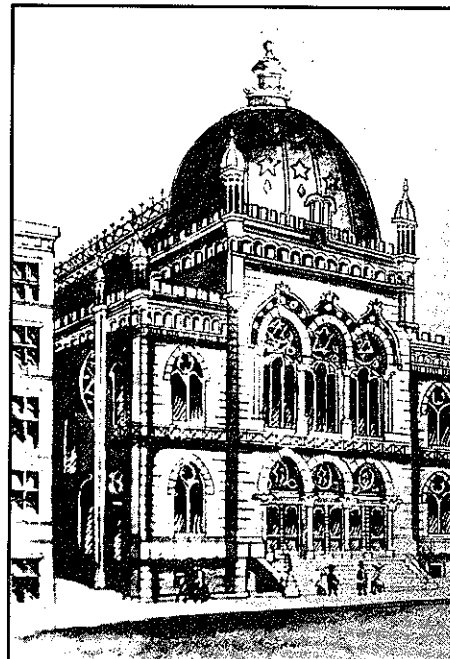
Reverend Isaacs' public activities and unusual facility in the English language gave him high visibility. Jews and non-Jews alike greatly esteemed

him, and Protestant intellectuals and clerics particularly respected him. In 1845 several professors at Yale College and the mayor of New Haven invited him to lecture on the topic "On the Present Condition and Future Spiritual and Temporal Hopes of Jews." When Shaaray Tefila dedicated its new Wooster Street Synagogue in 1847, many Protestant clergymen attended, and several spoke to the congregation.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1850s, Isaacs endeared himself to the Northern public by using the pages of the *Jewish Messenger* ardently to advocate the anti-slavery movement, even at the expense of losing his Southern readership. "We want subscribers," he editorialized, "for without them we cannot publish a paper, and Judaism needs an organ; but we want much more truth and loyalty." Isaacs was well acquainted with prominent anti-slavery leaders, such as Professor Calvin E. Stowe, husband of Harriet Beecher Stowe and a prominent philo-Semite, and in 1856 Isaacs campaigned for the anti-slavery candidate, John C. Fremont. But Isaacs refrained from preaching anti-slavery sermons, not wanting to bring "politics into the pulpit." During the Civil War he strongly defended the Union cause "with or without slavery," and after President Lincoln's assassination he was one of two ministers selected to give prayers at the public memorial services in Union Square.<sup>22</sup>

Although never formally ordained, Isaacs was one of the leading Jewish ministers in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. One of his colleagues called him the "Father of the American Clergy." His funeral service at Temple Shaaray Tefila in 1878 was the largest Jewish funeral of the century. Every synagogue and Jewish organization in the country sent representatives. Isaacs was a religious leader of major influence, a renowned journalist, and a mover and shaker in

44th Street Synagogue of Shaaray Tefila  
Congregation 1869-1894.



Jewish affairs. Throughout his long career he was the featured speaker at some forty-seven synagogue dedication ceremonies across the country.<sup>23</sup>

But he was most honored for his defense of Orthodoxy. Colleagues eulogized him as "a faithful proponent" of Judaism who "lamented the increasing defection amidst our ranks; the prevailing disloyalty to the sinaitic covenant." An eminent Christian clergyman, in a glowing tribute sent to Isaacs' sons, described their father as "a bulwark of strength against the infidelity and godlessness that are growing upon us in this great city. His firm devotion to God's holy word brought him into direct and cordial sympathy with us Christians. . . . May his mantle rest on his children. Your father's death is a public calamity. Who shall fill his place? Our city could better spare millions of its money than one such resolute watchman and soldier in its moral defense."<sup>24</sup>

Ironically, within two years of Isaac's death, Congregation Shaaray Tefila began going over to Reform, led by the new minister, who not surprisingly described his predecessor as "rigidly, obstinantly orthodox." The conservative Dutch contingent resigned in the face of this revolution, along with their English and Polish compatriots. Most of the German Jews, who tended toward Reform, remained. Thus, the end of Dutch leadership marked a crucial turning point in the history of the Shaaray Tefila congregation.<sup>25</sup> More broadly it signaled the waning influence in American Jewish life of the traditional British-Dutch-Polish amalgam, which had succumbed to the overwhelming numbers of German immigrants.

Reverend Isaacs, like his Dutch Calvinist counterparts in the Midwest, was a fiery champion of the old ways in religion. He was largely responsible for shaping unorganized New York Jewry into a coherent, articulate, and

respectable community. As the first English-speaking preaching in Ashkenazic congregations, Isaacs used the pulpit to preserve historic Judaism through strict religious observance, Hebrew education, and community self-help organizations. In the early years he was second only to Isaac Leeser of Philadelphia as the most influential orthodox rabbi in America. This son of Friesland, whose family fled the oppression of Napoleon, cut a wide swath within American Judaism. He placed pen and podium in the service of Orthodoxy and valiantly fought against the forces of secularism and liberalism that were rotting the roots of the Jewish faith in the rising age of unbelief.

#### Endnotes

\*The author is writing a book on Dutch Jewry in the United States, and this article is based on that research.

1. The best survey are David De Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone: Early Jewish Settlers 1682-1831* (New York, 1952); Hyman G. Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York, 1654-1860* (Philadelphia, 1946).

2. The Netherlands ranked tenth among European nations in overseas emigration and seventeenth in the USA among national groups. Of an estimated 86,000 Dutch immigrants to the USA between 1800 and 1880, Jews numbered about 6,500, or 7.5 percent. For the period 1880-1920, Dutch immigration totaled 165,000, of whom Jews numbered 3,500, or 2.0 percent. Their overall proportion of the Dutch emigration was 4 percent, twice their percentage of the Dutch population.

3. On the Isaacs family and son Samuel, see E. Yechiel Simon, "Samuel Myer Isaacs: A Nineteenth-Century Jewish Minister in New York City" (Ph.D. diss., Yeshiva University, 1974); Charles Rezcickoff, "Samuel Myer Isaacs," *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, 1948), 5:594; Moshe Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism: The Historical School in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia, 1963), 340-42. Davis and all other Jewish historians erroneously describe Isaacs as an Englishman or as English born.

4. On the situation of Jews in Friesland, see H. Beem, *De Joden van Leeuwarden* (Assen, 1974).

5. Israel Goldstein, *A Century of Judaism in New York, B'nai Jeshurum, 1825-1925: New York's Oldest Ashkenazic Congregation* (New

York, 1930), 76, 80-81, 92-93.

6. Simon Cohen, *Shaaray Tefila: A History of Its Hundred Years, 1845-1945* (New York, 1945), 22-25.

7. Davis, *Emergence*, 134-38, 340; *The Occident* (1847), 5:382-94.

8. *The Occident* (1847), 4:542, 239; Cohen, *Shaaray Tefila*, 9; Grinstein, *Jewish Community*, 340, 342.

9. Rabbi I. Harold Sharfman, *The First Rabbi: Origins of the Conflict between Orthodoxy and Reform* (Malibu, CA, 1988), 145-46.

10. *The Occident* (1844), 2:284.

11. *The Occident* (1868), 26:93; Cohen, *Shaaray Tefila*, 18-26.

12. Grinstein, *Jewish Community*, 216-17, 366-67.

13. Davis, *Emergence*, 162-65.

14. Davis, *Emergence*, 165-67, 431-32, 298, 308.

15. *The Jewish Messenger*, May 31, 1878; Grinstein, *Jewish Community*, 160-61, 436; Davis, *Emergence*, 60-64, 70, 78, 129-30.

16. Grinstein, *Jewish Community*, 446-47; *The Occident* (1852), 10:170, 263; (1854), 11:503-04; (1860), 18: 202-03.

17. *The Occident* (1843), 1:470-73; (1865), 23:190, 238; Grinstein, *Jewish Community*, 231-34, 244-45; "Samuel Myer Isaacs," *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, 1901), 6:635; Davis, *emergence*, 38.

18. *The Occident* (1849), 7:137-39; Simon, "Samuel Myer Isaacs," 107, 131-32.

19. Sharfman, *First Rabbi*, 687-88.

20. Grinstein, *Jewish Community*, 217, 430-35; *The Occident* 1859), 17:83, 86-87, 193-94, 218-20.

21. *The Occident* (1845) 3:526; (1847), 3:224; (1849), 7:614; Bertram Wallace Korn, *Eventful Years and Experiences: Studies in Nineteenth-Century American Jewish History* (Cincinnati, 1954), 50-51, 57.

22. *The Occident* (1845), 3:526; (1847), 4:224; Davis, *Emergence*, 110-11.

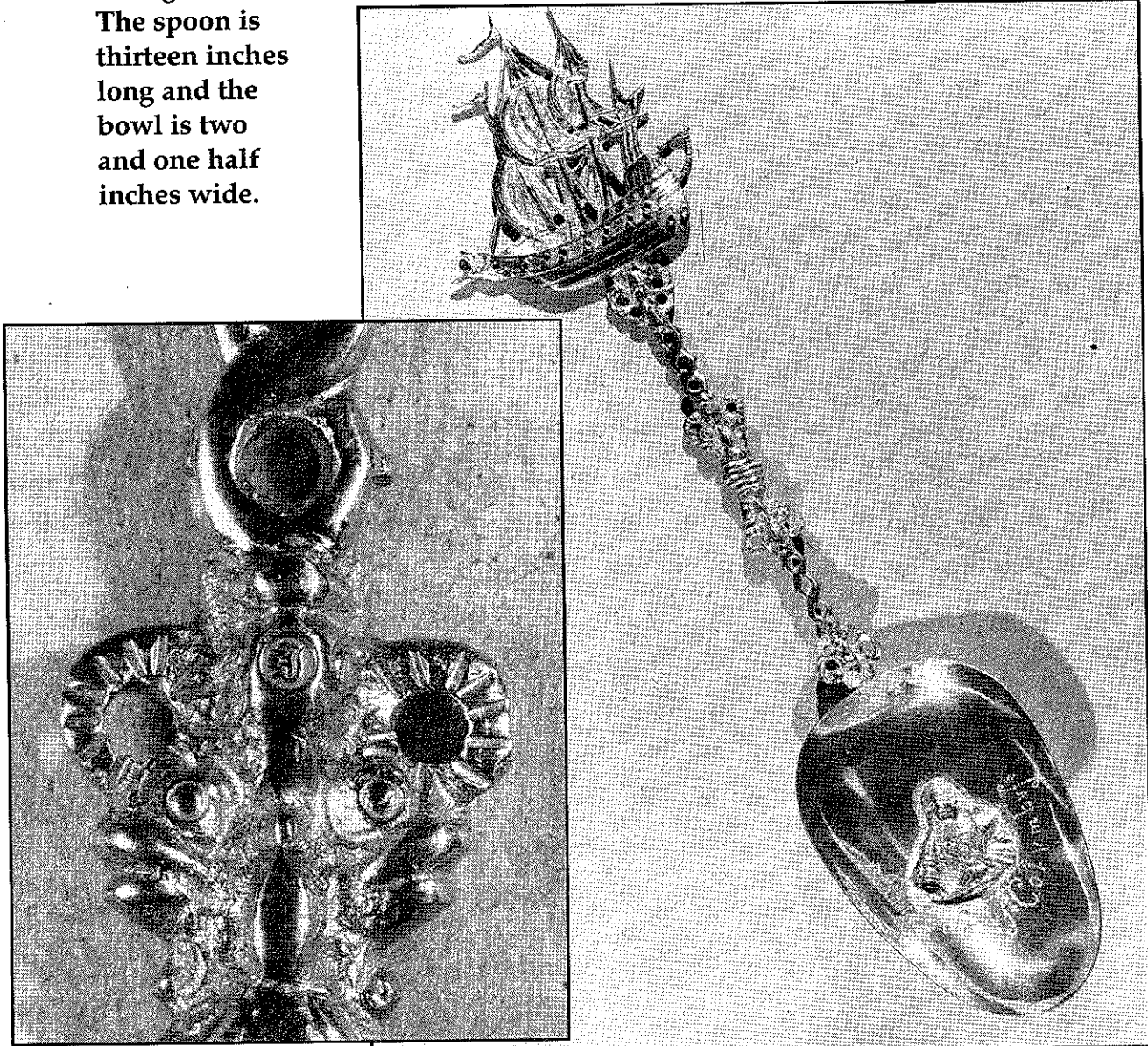
23. Simon, "Samuel Myer Isaacs," 1; Davis, *Emergence*, 2.

24. Obituary in *New York World*, May 21, 1878; *The Jewish Messenger*, May 31, 1878.

25. Cohen, *Shaaray Tefila*, 28-35; *The Jewish Messenger*, May 31, 1878.

**T**his Dutch silver spoon is hallmarked 1893. It was made in the Netherlands and commemorates the four-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. Note the likeness of Columbus in the bowl and the Gothic "J" hallmark clearly visible in the enlarged inset.

The spoon is thirteen inches long and the bowl is two and one half inches wide.



# Worden Street in the Twenties

## Growing Up Jewish in a Dutch Neighborhood

by June Horowitz



The author—June Warsaw Horowitz at 1043 Worden Street SE. ca. 1925

June Horowitz is the archivist of Temple Emanuel in Grand Rapids and a long-time member of the city's Historical Commission. She speaks frequently to Protestant groups who have an interest in the Jewish faith.

Once there was an enormous standpipe at the corner of Franklin Street and Fuller Avenue, and those brave enough to climb its steps claimed they could see all the way to China. At age eight I was a devout coward and was afraid to climb so high. But when the standpipe was razed and the reservoir hidden underground across the street in Franklin Park, a lovely picnic grove of old oak trees was sacrificed in the name of progress.

Franklin Park was such a big part of our lives. Grand Rapids boasted that there was a public park within one-half mile of every resident. We played there and swam there endlessly and attended school potluck suppers in the Franklin Park Community House. Every single election day without fail we were routed out of bed before daybreak so we all could file over to the community house to "save the country" with my parents' votes. Although both were native born, their appreciation of America was enormous. And my father, especially, taught us repeatedly to accept every nationality and religion, particularly our Dutch neighbors.

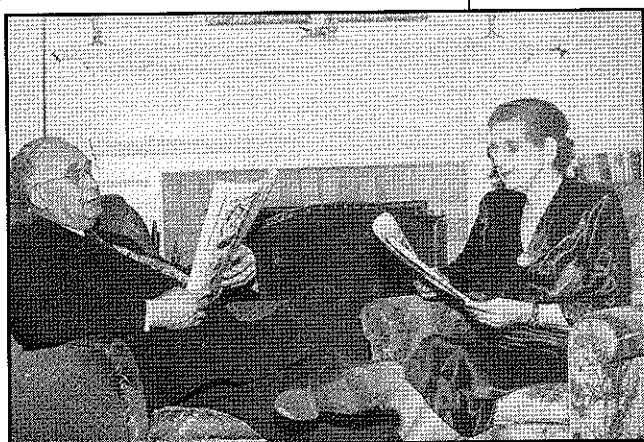
Those good people established the mores of the neighborhood. All of them were Christian—and we were



Neighborhood friends Harmina, Mamie, and Billy Wessels. ca. 1925

Jewish. They called us the "People of the Book" (Old Testament). They were wonderfully kind, although they tended to rebuke my father for cutting the grass on Sunday, and most of their children were hermetically sealed up at home on their day of rest.

My favorite friend was named Harmina. She had a long blond pigtail down her back and seemed always to carry the newest family sibling on her



(left) Abe and Lena Warsaw. 1948

(below) Neighborhood friends (l-r) Gerald Ham, Don Warsaw, Bob Cooley, Jud Davis, Ed Bunjenoor, George Greenfield. 1930s



hip. One day when I was eight years old, she stopped to help me carry wood back to the coal-bin chute. That was 1921, and we have remained fast friends to this day. She invited me to her home frequently, but I was never asked to eat there. Her family read the Bible before dinner every night. Her beautiful mother sewed all their clothes and reused the basting threads and did miracles with the twenty-five cents worth of pork steak that Harmina was sent to buy at the shopping center at Kalamazoo and Alexander.

The whole area from our block to Fuller was under development, and one day her young brother Bill was run over by a builder's truck. He was

unhurt, thanks to the soft, sandy soil from a forgotten sea which once must have covered the area. Her father made delicious root beer and had an enviable job at the gas company. One day the neighborhood buzzed with the rumor that he had been fired. Wasn't he actually home on a Saturday? Thus the five-day-week was introduced to Grand Rapids.

Our school was Alexander. Not the current fresh new building or even the older structure that used to be behind it. Our Alexander was a large stone school right on Alexander Street. Our teachers were Miss Harvey and Miss Orr and Miss Leonardson, who called us "little people." Our assemblies were held in the spacious halls, and that was

also the location of our famous music-appreciation classes. Music was very big in Grand Rapids in the Twenties. Even the elementary schools had orchestras and bands, and the high schools boasted an all-city symphony orchestra.

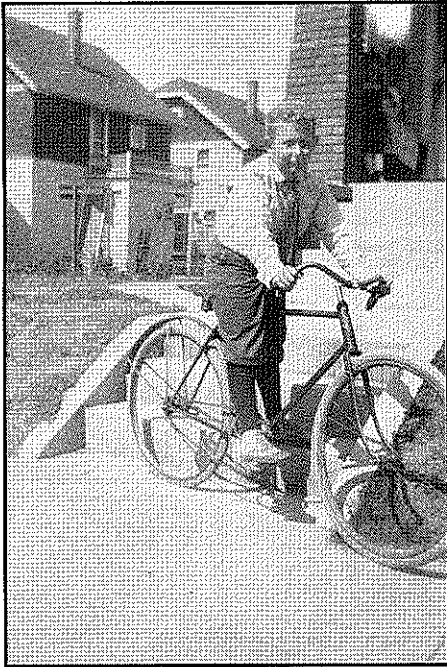
The clock in the school's hall was given in memory of my brother who died unnecessarily in those pre-penicillin days. The shadow of his death touched my mother all the years of her life until she died at 100 years in 1988.

The public schools were scarcely secular. Each day began with the Pledge of Allegiance—and a prayer, the latter always reflecting the Christian background of the teacher. Every Wednesday afternoon the Christian Reformed children were excused for catechism—although even as an elementary student I questioned upsetting the afternoon session for a mere fifteen minutes of released time.

I remember the day the entire school paraded up Neland Avenue. Perhaps because I was lame and slow, I was required to head the parade. All of us had to sing loudly "Onward Christian Soldiers," a song that did not exactly warm my Jewish heart! And then . . . there was the terribly traumatic period between Thanksgiving and Christmas when school was a solid mass of Christianity—Christmas carols, Christmas trees, Christmas presents, Christmas art. It seemed that we just could not have survived those weeks every year without the calm stability of our mother and father and their dedication to Judaism. We—my parents and brother and sister and I—attended our own religious school and the Friday night services. "Why don't you have services on Sunday as all decent people do?" I was sometimes asked. And always we were prepared for the Monday-after-Easter-Sunday attacks on us, thanks to the incendiary Rev. Fuller.

There are other memories, particu-





*Newton Warsaw, 1930s*

larly the women with enormous goiters hanging over their collars because our Michigan soil was so deficient in iodine. Later, chocolate iodine pills were distributed in the classrooms, and later still iodized salt was introduced.

Every year my mother invited all our teachers for lunch. One year my father was out of town but sent a rose for each guest.

And before Alexander School recedes forever into the mists, a gentle bow to the classmate named Hillis Rigterink who defended my halting steps on the playground and tied the shoelace on my immobile foot so many times. He became a physician, but he died young because he needed a transfusion and no blood of his type was available.

There is so much more to recall. I attended huge Chatauqua meetings with my Christian friends. In addition to the religious speakers there were entertainers of many persuasions, a bonanza to most of the audience, who eschewed movies.

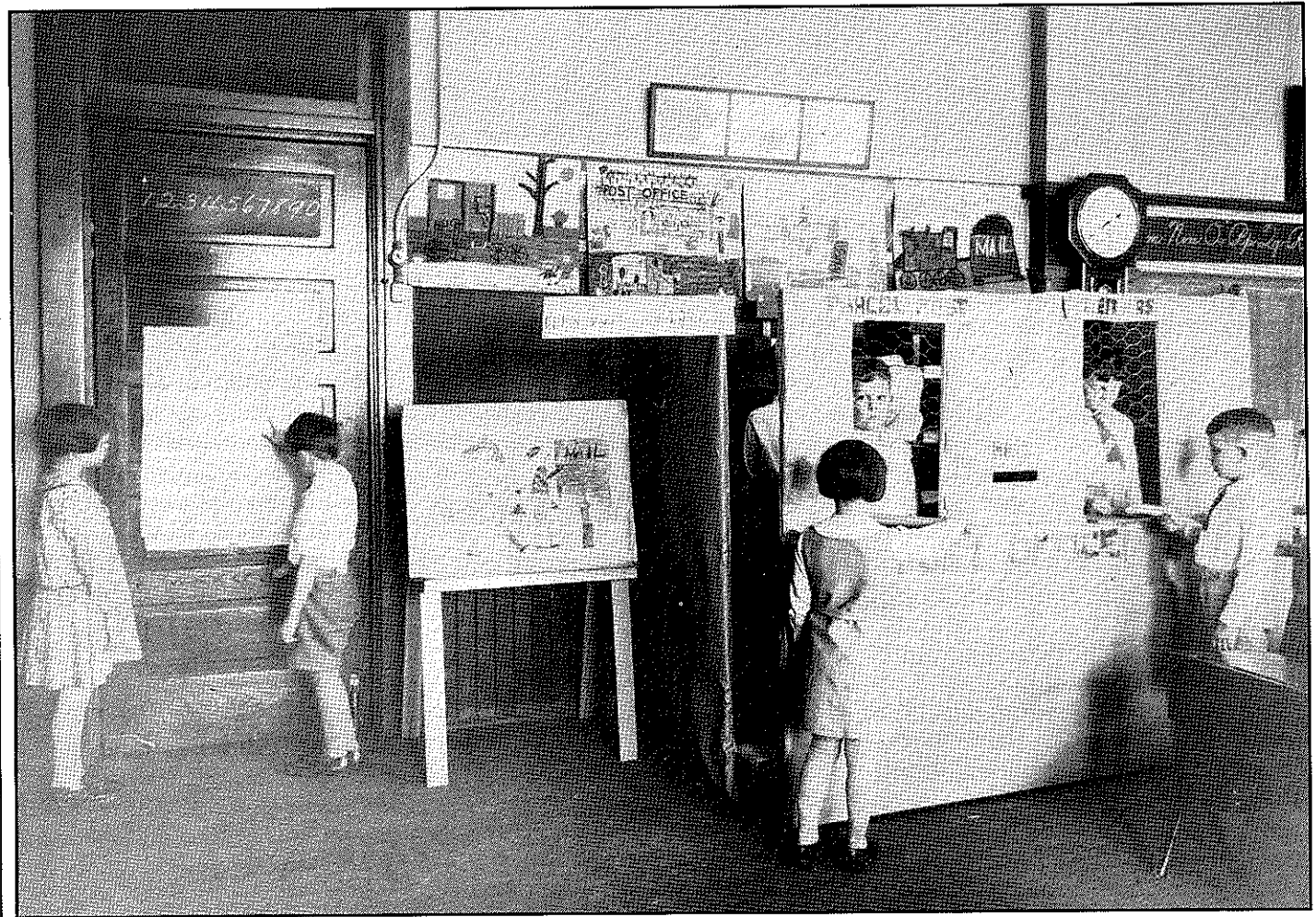
- One summer I attended Bible school at Plymouth Congregational Church on Franklin Street with a friend.
- In the summers we played baseball or tip-up right in the middle of Worden Street.
- We took "long" hikes to Silver Creek near the present Iroquois Middle School.
- We rode our sleds down the enormous hill on Neland Avenue near Dunham Street, where the city thoughtfully closed the street for our purpose.
- Winters, our parents each day left home after carefully picking the correct ruts in the snowy streets to take them to their destination.
- We were accustomed to removing our shoes before entering some of the super-clean Dutch homes.
- We shared scary forays on Halloween and made divinity fudge when my mother "let."
- We loved the huckster's vegetable wagon and the old horse which pulled the cart bringing us rye bread each week. The driver of the cart was named Dreisen, father of our good Mayor Abe Drasin.
- When the diamond-shaped cards placed in the neighborhood windows summoned the ice man, we took advantage of his absence to take chips of delectable ice from his wagon.
- The boys chewed the smelly black tar that frequently resurfaced our street.
- Mother boiled her laundry in a huge copper kettle and hung the clothes outside to dry.
- We were very modern and sported a water heater we could light before our baths. If you hesitated a moment, the heater

would explode with a flash that removed your eyelashes!

- Like every other neighbor, we had a "fruit cellar" in our basement, which stored mother's home-canned goods and, in our case, the ritual wine she made every year for Passover. Drinking was unknown in our home except on the special holidays, when the horrendously sweet grape wine was served to the adults.
- There are also memories of the older brother, who died when I was five years old.
- All of us suffered from croup, virtually unknown today.
- There was a gas jet in our upper hall for use whenever the electricity failed, and near it was a Citizens Telephone to supplement the Bell Telephone downstairs.
- The lady next door attempted to convert us weekly, and the family on the corner inappropriately invited us over to listen to Father Coughlin, a virulent anti-Semite.
- Quarantine signs blossomed frequently in that neighborhood of children.
- Kind Mrs. Paulson from across the street sent us a huge round of cheese each summer from the farm where she served as children's nurse. Her employers were named Loeb, later notorious in the Leopold and Loeb murder case. In the extended hierarchy of the Jewish family, I was the cousin of the innocent victim of that murder, Bobby Franks.

Recently my niece bought a "starter house." As I walked into it, memories tumbled from the walls. It was a Boylan house, duplicate of 1043 Worden Street of blessed memory. For a few moments, the world—and I—were young again!

*Alexander Street Public School, Second Grade, 1932, interior.*



## A Dutch Family and its Iowa Roots:

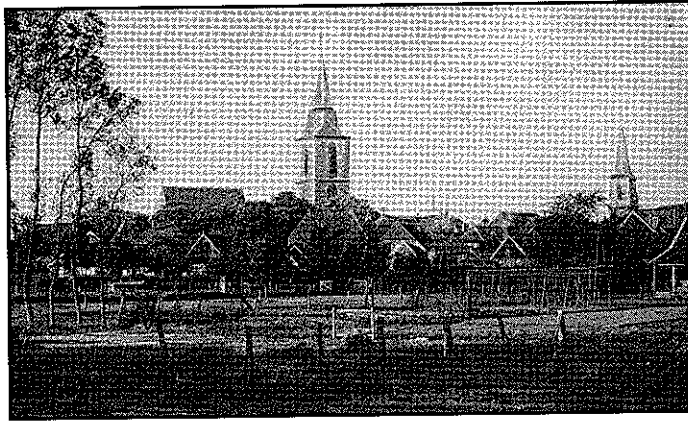
### *Introduction to and Commentary on a Letter Written by Hendrik Beltman on April 18, 1878*

by Brian W. Beltman



Brian W. Beltman is the youngest son of William and Alys. He lived on the family farm for twenty-one years, attending school through Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, and then earning a Ph.D. in history at the University of Wisconsin. Ultimately he settled in Columbia, South Carolina, where he is married to Darlene Stover, a native of that state with a respectful appreciation for her family ties. They have two children, Jessica and Matthew. Only time will tell whether they will be more Dutch or more southern. In either case, it is hoped they will treasure the sense of history that comes with knowing about family tradition and origin.

*Hendrik Beltman and his wife  
Aaltje Nyhof ca. 1865.*



### The European Setting and Arrival

In 1877, at the age of 44, Hendrik Beltman (1833-1911)\* and his second wife, Janna, who was 34, and their two children, John Henry and Hendrika, ages 12 and 10 respectively, emigrated from the Dutch town of Winterswijk in the province of Gelderland to the United States. Janna Grooters, who had married Hendrik on September 20, 1867, was the stepmother of the two children.\*\* Their natural mother, Aaltje Nyhof, who had married Hendrik in 1863, had died from pneumonia on May 15, 1867, twelve weeks after the birth of her daughter.

Prior to his emigration ten years after the death of his first wife, Hendrik's occupation in the Netherlands had been farming, and he had excelled in buying and selling cattle. Undoubtedly the limited prospects in Winterswijk for sustaining or improving the family's level of financial well-being compelled Hendrik and Janna to decide to migrate to America. Perhaps their greatest concern was for the future of their children if they stayed in Winterswijk. Whatever the precise cause which tipped the scales in favor of leaving all that was familiar to them, the Beltmans chose the bold course of relocation across the ocean, anticipating a better life in a new place.

The Beltman family of four left their Dutch homeland in the early spring, departing from Rotterdam, with several other families, including Carl Wissinks and the Mennings. They took passage on the *W. A. Scholton* of the American Steam Navigation Company, and they arrived at New York City on July 24, 1877. Although the ship's passenger list officially described Hendrik Beltman as "not well to do," he was clearly not an impoverished immigrant, as his purchases of land, livestock, and equipment during his first year of settlement testified. This family had not been driven to emigrate by extreme deprivation; rather, they were moving as part of a rational and practical adjustment to improve their condition in life and to secure a better future. The best pros-

### View of Winterswijk, the Netherlands

pects for that appeared to be the booming prairie regions of the American Midwest, where other Dutchmen had already established clannish settlements which promised a good livelihood among people of similar ethnicity and values. From New York the Beltmans traveled by rail to their ultimate destination of East Orange (Alton), Iowa, in the northwestern corner of the state, in Sioux County. Here a Dutch community had been rapidly developing since 1869, initially in Holland and Nassau Townships and the townsite of Orange City.

Proximity to other Dutchmen and the availability of land in a pioneering area probably influenced the family's decision to settle near Orange City, but another consideration was also at work. Janna's brother, Berend Jan Grooters, had moved to Sioux County before the immigration of the Beltmans, so they were relocating near a relative. They were, in effect, part of a migration chain. Berend assisted the family in the critical matter of land purchase by making the financial arrangements for a tract in advance of their arrival. Thus, on February 17, 1877, a warranty deed from the original land speculator (who had paid the fee of four dollars for a homestead patent only the day before) was issued to Hendrik Beltman for eighty acres of land two miles south of Orange City. Hendrik paid \$500 in cash for this parcel. Here the family settled and established their first home and farm. The residence which Hendrik built as soon as possible during the first year was a simple four-room plank house, undoubtedly reflecting the practical concerns of necessity and survival. The land upon which he settled was not, however, entirely virgin prairie; some of it was already cropped and waiting to be harvested when the immigrants arrived. From this location, in April 1878, Hendrik Beltman wrote a letter to his relatives in Winterswijk. The letter was addressed to W. Grooters, Hendrik's cousin by marriage. What follows is a translation of that letter by Alys Eringa Beltman, a granddaughter of Hendrik by marriage.

### The First Letter

Orange City, Iowa

April 18, 1878

Dear Cousin and family:

I am sitting down to write a letter to let you know that we are still all fresh and healthy and have been all this time. We have had, with the Lord's blessing, a prosperous journey, and we have all arrived in good health at our relatives'. Our brother and his wife and

children are all in good health too.

The land that our brother bought for us pleases us well. There were good crops on the land, which were worth as much as the land cost us. We were very busy because the crop was ready to be harvested when we got here. When that was done, we had to build our house. We built a fine home.

We have forty laying hens and two turkeys, which is the extent of our livestock. We have bought only enough furniture to get along with except that my wife has a new cabinet for clothes.

We have had a very mild winter and an early spring, which pleased us well. We have been busy planting trees. We staked out a grove where we planted 2,000 trees. Most of them are about ten feet tall, and 150 fruit trees are as thick as my arm. We have planted grapevines, plums, pears, and so forth.

In March we sowed all our barley, wheat, and oats. Everything—sowing and reaping—is done here with machinery. They have machines that cut the grain and

(following page) View of barn and other buildings, including horses, car, and family members.

In 1910, four years before this photo was taken, John Henry Beltman built a new barn for his farm operations which measured 60 feet by 36 feet and stood 30 feet high, complete with a fancy cupola. Family members pictured include, from left to right, Henry (home from college for the summer) and William, both holding the span of four horses, and Gerrit, as well as those in the new auto: father and mother in the front seat, John in between, and daughters Alice and Fannie in the back seat.

(below) In 1914 John Henry Beltman had this family picture taken in front of his farm house, which had been extensively enlarged and remodeled only two years earlier. Family members pictured include, from left to right, Gerrit, Henry, Minnie, William and John (both seated), mother Jacomina, Alice, Fannie, and father John Henry. Jennie, the oldest daughter, was not present for the photo taking; she was now married. John Henry was also apparently the proud owner of a new 1914 Model T Ford. The years of 1900 to 1915 were prosperous ones for many farmers; historians refer to this era as the "Golden Age of American Agriculture." The air of prosperity reflected in this picture of the Beltmans and their family home would seem to substantiate this historical characterization.



bind it into shocks. These cost \$300. We rented an old one for one year, for which we paid \$12. We can also cut grass with it.

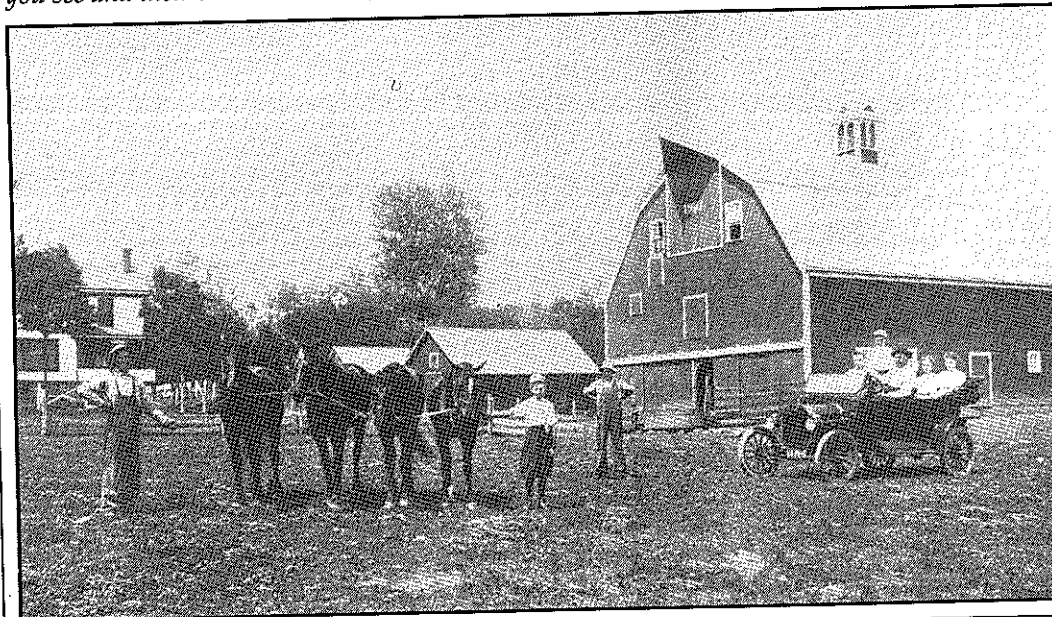
We are well pleased with being here, and we have bought another farm with it, which is eighty acres and has a house and barn on it. It cost \$800. We have rented it out for one-third of everything that is produced there. We have rented it out for a year to people from Gelderland. We have another eighty acres added to ours, which we will farm ourselves. We paid \$700 for this eighty, and it lies right next to ours but does not have buildings on it.

We have three work horses, two are 6 years old, black, and one is 5 years old and is brown; and I paid \$100 for each of them. I also bought a wagon from S. G. for \$80, and two cows; I paid \$26 for the one and \$27 for the other one. We still have three hogs, and we have already butchered three hogs. The fattened hogs are not very expensive—they cost 4 cents a pound. Butter costs 10 cents a pound and eggs cost 10 cents a dozen. Wheat costs 92 cents per bushel, which is fifty-six pounds by Dutch weight and American money. We still have about \$200 worth of wheat that we can sell.

Now I am going to stop writing with my pen, but not with my heart. Please be so kind as to write back soon and tell us how your daughter Jansjen is. With heartfelt greetings from all of us.

H. Beltman

*Please give our greetings to Pelwyk and his wife and Ten Houten and Heessen and his children. Also the uncles that you see and their children and S. J. Mentink and all the friends*



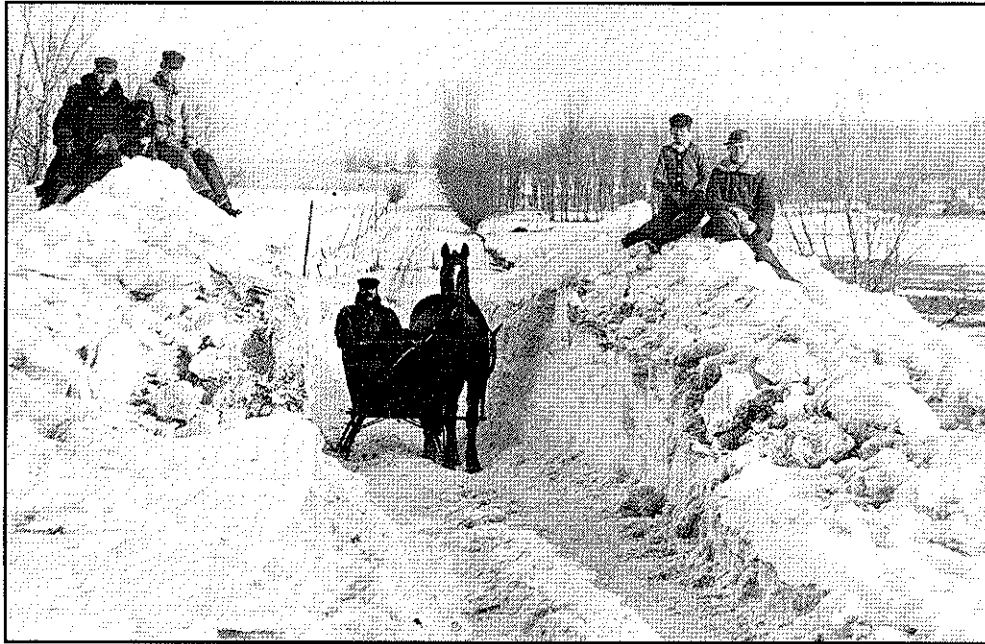
*and old neighbors who are interested and ask about us. Also write how Hanna is and the farmer at Koolenberg and what kind of a minister you have. Here we have no service . . . [rest of sentence is illegible]. Greetings again from all of us and from him who is named Hendrik Beltman. Give my compliments to the notary Deskssen and write back soon.*

#### Notes on the Letter

A few references in this letter of 1878 deserve amplification. Near the end of his remarks Hendrik raised the issue of community church life, a vital aspect of a settlement's social fabric. During 1877, the same year the Beltmans arrived in Sioux County, area farmers and townspeople determined that a church was necessary for the vicinity of East Orange, Iowa. This was a fast-growing community about three miles east of Orange City, clustering near a station depot built in 1872 for the St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad. Ten years later, with the arrival of a second line, the Northwestern Railroad, town citizens changed the name of the village to Alton. In the meantime, twenty-seven families from town and countryside joined together to organize the East Orange Reformed Church, and in June 1878, Reverend John Warnshuis and his family arrived from the Abbe Reformed Church of Clymer, New York, to take up pastoral responsibilities. Hendrik Beltman and his family were charter members of this congregation and helped build the first church sanctuary, which parishioners dedicated with an appropriate ceremony on June 12, 1880. Hendrik served in the church as deacon and elder. This church would become an essential part of the lives of the Beltman family into the fifth generation. On Au-

gust 2, 1991, a great-great-granddaughter of Hendrik was married in the Alton Reformed Church; numerous relatives, many of them active members of the church, attended the wedding.

In his letter of 1878 Hendrik indicated that he had purchased a second and third parcel of land of eighty acres each during his first year of settlement. However, these transactions were a bit more involved than suggested in the correspondence. Hendrik personally made the second



Winter scene near Alton, Iowa ca. 1910.

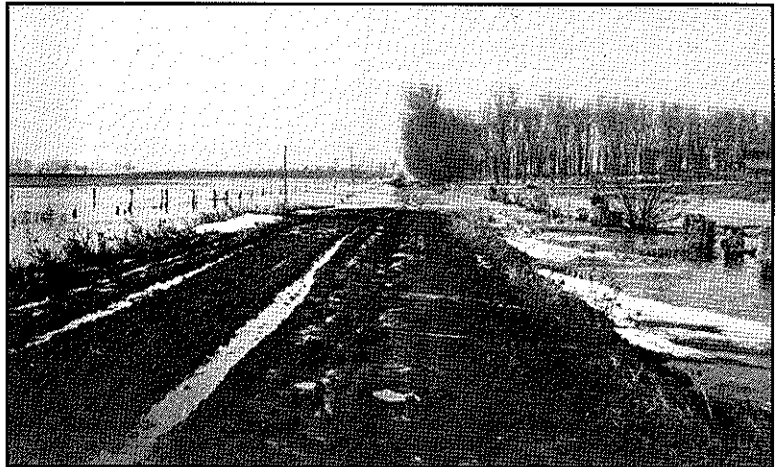
Same scene in the spring.

acquisition, which had farm buildings already on it, and turned it into a tenant farm. He was then both owner-operator and landlord within his first year as an immigrant farmer. He paid \$762.50, about \$9.50 per acre, for this tract, which he bought from the settlement's principal colonizer, Henry Hospers, under terms which included assuming a previous mortgage of \$500 at 10 percent interest. Hendrik made a cash payment of about \$250 and received the warranty deed for this land on January 26, 1878. About one-fifth of this tract was a poorly drained slough. Although this was unsuited for tillage, it did produce the grandest of prairie vegetation: five- to six-foot-tall slough grass, which, when cut and cured, became premium hay for horses.

The third piece of land acquired by Hendrik was controlled by Berend Jan Grooters, who had acquired rights to it by filing an application for a homestead certificate on August 28, 1877. (That original homestead certificate is presently in the possession of the author.) Although Hendrik presumably had some role in the cultivation of this land, perhaps in partnership with his brother-in-law, he did not achieve title to the land until October 10, 1888. Grooters was the true owner for ten years, during which time he encumbered the land with mortgages by refinancing four times, so that by 1888 a lien of \$1,050 at 7 percent was against the property. This

Hendrik assumed and extinguished as part of a consideration of \$2,900 which he paid to his brother-in-law. On this third eighty acres, immediately adjacent to where the Beltmans lived, there were no buildings, but within less than a year and a half the family built a four-room story-and-a-half house on this location.

This residence was constructed to be the home of Hendrik's son, John Henry, and his wife, Jacomina Van Amerongen, who were married on March 6, 1890, at the ages of 24 and 19 respectively. The couple lived on this family farm until their retirement in the late



1920s, when they moved to Alton. During their marriage of forty-one years, they raised eight children. Interestingly, Hendrik's daughter, Hendrika, was also married on March 6, 1890. She married William Guerink, and ultimately they had a family of seven children. This couple initially took up residence in the house and on the land which had served as rental property for a number of years, and they remained living there until the late 1890s. At that time Hendrik and Janna moved to Alton, where their church was located. When they left their farm, the Guerinks moved onto it; they lived there until 1920 and then relocated to Orange City. The eighty acres where the Guerinks began farming was consolidated with the acreage of John Henry and Jacomina in the late 1890s to form a farm consisting of a quarter section of land.

**The Children and Their Descendants**

John Henry and Jacomina, like his parents, were active in the Alton Reformed Church. John sang in a men's choral group, taught a Bible class, and served as deacon, elder, and treasurer in the church over a period of twenty-two years. When occasionally the church was without a resident minister, John would take charge of the services. Jacomina was an accomplished organist, having served as an organist in a large urban church in Amsterdam prior to coming with her family to the United States when she was 18. She also had singing ability. Her talent in music assisted the congregation in the singing of the Dutch Psalms.

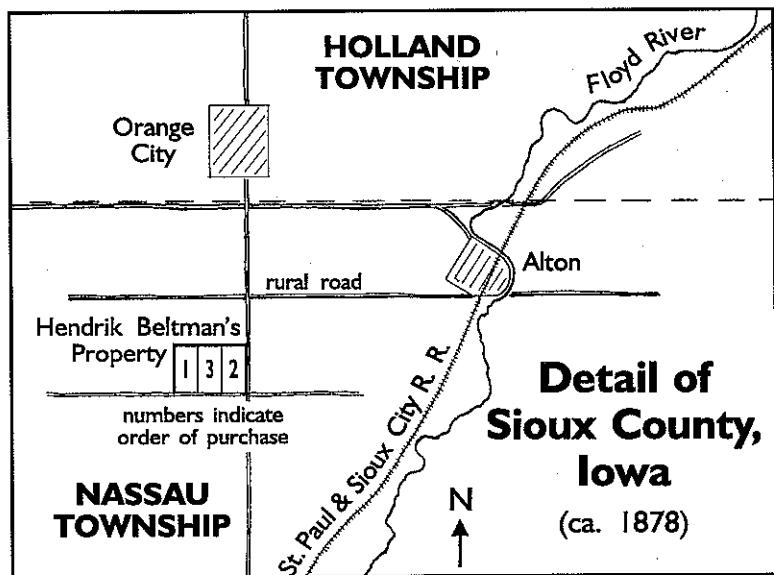
The John Beltman family of parents and eight children were visible parishioners; the church, in turn, shaped their social and cultural perspectives and nurtured their values. The impact was most dramatic upon the oldest son, Henry II (1893-1984). He graduated from Hope College in Holland, Michigan, and Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey; became an ordained clergyman in the Reformed Church in America; served as a missionary to China from 1920 to 1926; held a term as president of synod in 1949, and ended a long life of pastoral service as a minister to the elderly with the Garden Grove Community Church in Orange County, California. This is the church of his nephew Robert Schuller, son of his sister Jennie (the oldest daughter of John Henry and Jacomina) and Anthony Schuller, and therefore great-grandson of Hendrik Beltman. The Reverend Robert Schuller, also from the Reformed Church in America is a graduate of Hope College and Western Theological Seminary who now heads the television ministry broadcast nationally and internationally which is known as the "Hour of Power."

William Beltman, the youngest son of John Henry and Jacomina, acquired the family farm by purchase from his father. The appraised market price was \$125 per acre, and he and his wife agreed to pay \$20,000 for the farm on March 31, 1943. In less than three years they paid off the farm debt, an accomplishment largely due to the substantial agricultural income realized during wartime. William, who had been born on January 16, 1903, lived on the farm for sixty-nine years and there farmed diligently and successfully until his retirement in the 1970s. He married Alys Eringa on February 21, 1934, and they had three sons. Their middle son, Dennis, born on December 9, 1939, was married on December 22, 1967, to Dawn Van't Hul, and they have three sons. Dennis and his family have oper-

ated the farm for almost twenty years now on land which has belonged to the Beltman family for over one hundred years. The farm has been designated a Centennial farm by the U. S. Department of Agriculture. This historic land consists of the second and third tracts of land bought by Hendrik Beltman and later owned by his son John Henry and John Henry's son William. The first parcel of land purchased by Hendrik was later occupied at one time by Hendrik's grandson Henry Guerink, a son of William and Hendrika Beltman Guerink. Today a portion of this land is also owned by Dennis Beltman.

With the passing of time the pioneer Hendrik Beltman thus turned over ownership and operation of his land to his heirs. He and Janna continued their life together for almost thirty-five years, until August 12, 1902, when Janna died at the age of 59. After her death Hendrik Beltman married a third time, on April 29, 1904, to Grada Scholten, a widow living near Alton. Hendrik was then 71, Grada 60. Grada, a native of Gelderland and born on January 4, 1844, was first married at the age of 22 to D. J. Scholten in Zutphen, the Netherlands. In 1868 they had immigrated to Chicago, where other Dutchmen had established urban ethnic neighborhoods. In 1871 they moved to Sioux County and settled on a homestead near Alton. To this union were born eight children. Grada's first husband died in 1902. She died on November 24, 1939, at the age of 95, having outlived her second husband, Hendrik Beltman. The patriarch Hendrik had died of pneumonia on November 21, 1911, after an illness of only six days. He was 78 years old at the time of his death.

Hendrik's daughter-in-law came from the Van Amerongen family. Jacomina Alida was born on June 16,







*Catechism class taught in district school by Rev. Lubbers (center) 1914.*

1870, the third of four children of Gerrit William Van Amerongen II and Femmetje Lamberta Roosma. Gerrit was born on January 10, 1834, in Amsterdam; Femmetje was born September 7, 1839, in the Netherlands. (According to family oral tradition, the father of Femmetje, Barteld Roosma, was gardener for the king of the Netherlands.) They were married on September 3, 1857, and

immigrated to Orange City in 1888. Gerrit died on February 7, 1917, in Houston, Texas, at the age of 83; Femmetje died on June 19, 1903, in Orange City at the age of 63.

Jacomina, mother of nine children, one of whom died in infancy, lived to be 60 years old, dying on April 22, 1931, in Orange City. Her husband, John Henry Beltman, lived until September 6, 1959, dying at the age of 94.

The third generation heir to till the Sioux County land was William Beltman. While living with his widowed father on the family farm, William got married at the age of 31 to Alys Eringa, then 24, in the home of her relatives. Alys, born on September 27, 1909, was the youngest of six children of Ulbe Eringa and Maaikje P. Rypstra. Ulbe was born on April 21, 1866, at Hylaard, the Netherlands, and he immigrated to Hull, Iowa, in 1892. Maaikje was born on December 25, 1872, at Engelum, the Netherlands, and she immigrated to Hull in 1893. They were married on November 22, 1893, and settled near Running Water, South Dakota, another Dutch settlement. There they farmed for about three decades before retiring in June 1926 to Orange City, where the Eringa family became part of the First Reformed Church. In time Alys met and married Wil-

liam, and their marriage was to last fifty-five years. William and Alys lived on the Beltman family farm until April 1972, when they retired to Alton. Although the social and church life of the William Beltman family was centered for years in nearby Orange City, where they were active members of the First Reformed Church, in their retirement William and Alys joined the Alton

Reformed Church, thereby establishing ties with the original church of the Beltman family in America. William and Alys's oldest son, Norman, his wife, Karel Hutchison (who is of German descent), and their two daughters, Sheila and Sharla, are also members of this church. Norman serves as Sunday school teacher and has held positions as deacon and elder of the church. He is also the mayor of Alton. His oldest daughter, Sheila, a fifth-generation American Beltman, was recently married to Jesse Van De Stroet in the church begun in 1877 with the help of Hendrik Beltman.

The third generation of Beltmans also became a part of the church's historical record in another way on March 29, 1989, when William, the last surviving third-generation sibling, died at the age of 86 after an illness of fifteen days. His wife, Alys, now 82 years old, is still active in her community and her church, and she continues to live in Alton, less than three miles from where her son Dennis and his family farm on land which has been an integral part of the Beltmans' lives for five generations and for almost 120 years. Dennis and Dawn and their three sons are members of the First Reformed Church of Orange City. Their oldest son, Paul, attends Northwestern College in Orange City; their second son, Thomas, attends Hope College; their third son, Daniel, now in high school, has yet to make a choice as to higher education. The linkage to land, community, school, and church thus remains strong into the fifth generation, and it demonstrates a persisting Dutch cultural identity.

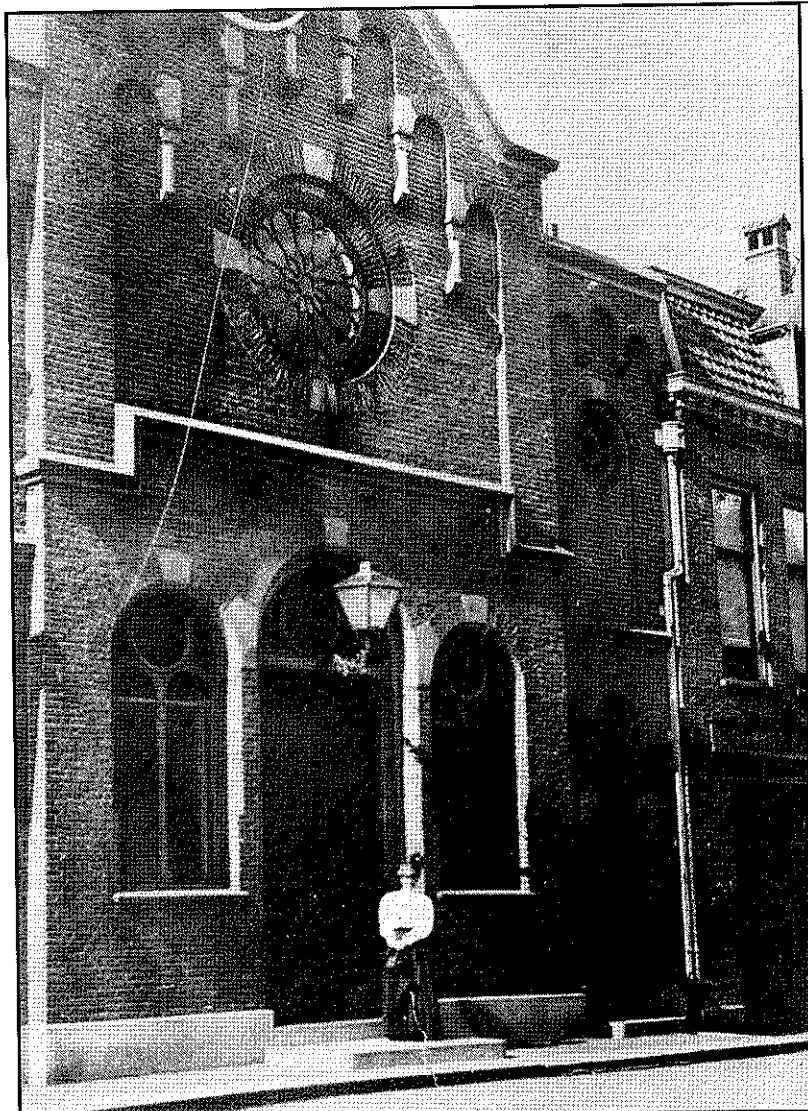
Hendrik Beltman's letter of 1878 was written in Dutch, the native language of the immigrants. Except for the translating skills of Alys Eringa Beltman, no one among the contemporary Beltmans would have been able to read Hendrik's letter. It would have remained a mere curiosity to the family, treasured aesthetically and sentimentally but never understood nor appreciated culturally or intellectually. Herein lies another dimension of the ethnic heritage of the family. Hendrik spoke and wrote in Dutch. John Henry, representing the second generation of Beltmans, was bilingual, but clearly preferred to express himself in Dutch. The writer can distinctly recall hearing as a child his grandfather, John Henry, tell stories in Dutch, make comments in Dutch which small children were not to hear, and, most indelibly, give *long* mealtime blessings in Dutch which never seemed to end and which made no sense to the restless, hungry children gathered round the table. William, of the third generation, was fully Americanized and spoke and wrote in English, but he was also conversationally at ease in Dutch. His wife, Alys, a second-generation American, is more bilingual than her late husband, and

she has devoted considerable time to translating Dutch documents, including many letters and a one-hundred-page memoir of her father, Ulbe Eringa. The fourth generation of Beltmans have, with a few exceptions, lost the ability to communicate in Dutch; for them it is a historic relic occasionally resorted to for a quaint word or phrase, much as one would bring out an antique keepsake or family heirloom for the sake of nostalgia or bemusement.

The legacy of the Beltman family is infused with a strong sense of their Dutch heritage. Through ties to the land, the community, and the church, through marriage patterns, through choice of educational affiliation, through an appreciation of family history and genealogy, and through the gossamer veil of memory the Beltmans have retained their Dutch ethnicity to a very large degree. Yet that ethnicity is not ethnocentrism, for the family has also set about the business of becoming assimilated into the mainstream culture of America. The dispersion of family members across the country, the variety of their careers and livelihoods, and their intermarriage with people of other cultural backgrounds by the fourth generation and beyond cannot be described adequately here, but these developments are, nevertheless, no less significant than the retention of Dutchness. When the family was still very Dutch and even now as it becomes more Americanized, the sense of family was and still remains strong. Indeed, at least two cousins of the fourth generation experience much pleasure in detailing the family's genealogy and maintaining an accurate record of its progeny. That effort also reinforces the Beltmans' Dutch heritage.

\*He was born to Hendrik Beltman and Henrika Scheggetman, at Borculo, the Netherlands, on January 28, 1833.

\*\*Janna was the daughter of Jan Hendrik Grooters and Willemina Grooters, who lived in Eibergen, the Netherlands. Janna was born in 1842 in Borculo.



H. P. Scholte's church in Utrecht. 1845

# An Elusive Peace in Pella

by Muriel Byers Kooi

Muriel Byers Kooi is an authority in the history of Pella, Iowa. Her writings on H. P. Scholte and the Pella area have been published widely.

Among the leading pastors of the Dutch secession in 1834, Rev. Hendrik Pieter Scholte was a clear anomaly. Although he helped organize the separatist movement, he was himself ejected from that group in 1840. More than A. C. Van Raalte, H. De Cock, and the other founders, Scholte was an individualist, and his financial independence enabled him to follow his dreams.

He dreamed above all about creating a pure church, and he detested the idea of a folk church, that is, a church whose members were defined by birth and baptism into the local parish. So he opposed the baptism of infants when their parents were not confessing church members. He also resisted synodical authority to establish general church rules. He argued instead that each congregation should make its own rules. It was the second of these views which led to his deposition in 1840. He then became ecclesiastically independent and continued to serve a cluster of loyalists who, for the most part, accompanied his immigration to the United States.

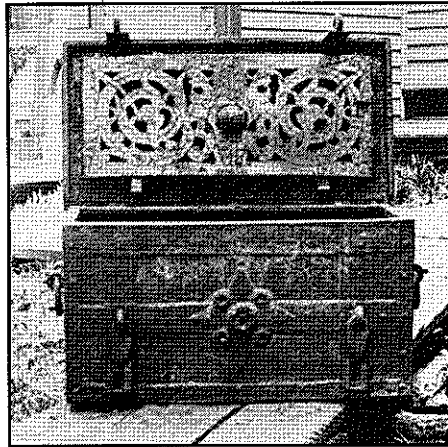
After his arrival in Pella, Iowa, Scholte's independent and individualistic inclinations blossomed even further. The following account by Muriel Kooi provides ample evidence of this development.\*

Ironically but not surprisingly, members of *de kolonie* in Pella, founded in 1847, were soon at odds with each other regarding religious ideas. But the 1854 breach between Scholte and his congregation which resulted in his ejection from the pulpit stemmed from a property dispute. The controversy concerned a parcel of land which Scholte had set aside as a church lot in 1847. The lot belonged to Scholte, and he had concluded that the town square was not the ideal setting for the church,

so he made plans to sell the land as business sites.

Tensions mounted when Scholte informed the church officers that the property had not been deeded to the church. A group of seven then retaliated by claiming that the land belonged to the congregation even without a deed, that possession over a seven-year period established the grant's legality, and that the gift could not be annulled. Scholte persisted in his contention and arranged to locate the church elsewhere. He remained adamant in the face of his consistory's urgings that he confess and correct his wrongdoing. When the case came to court, Scholte won the suit, but by then (1854) his ministry to the independent Christian Congregation had ended. Long before that event, however, Scholte's exceptional behavior and attitudes had created confusion and discontent in his congregation.

The pastor's inattentive behavior was already evident in 1848, when he left town on business while the congregation drafted papers of incorporation. Although he never signed the document, he was neither displeased nor pleased about the congregation's actions. He declared that the church could and should run itself. When four



(above) Iron chest used to carry the settlers' money and valuables from the Netherlands to Pella.

(right) Mareah Krantz, the second wife of H. P. Scholte. 1847



of his elders urged him to exercise his ministerial office more professionally, he declared that he was serving both God and the congregation by pointing the way to self-sufficiency.

At first the congregation prospered rather well under the direction of its elders and deacons, but in 1849 Scholte's frequent absences led to a crisis. The pastor was apologetic, asked forgiveness for his wrongdoings, and promised to conduct the afternoon services every Sunday. The elders

agreed to lead the remaining services.

But peace continued to elude them. Complaints about the preaching of the elders were rampant, and Scholte's array of business and political activities also aroused discontent. One small group with a high regard for traditional Reformed church rules split from the Christian Congregation in 1851 and met in its newly constructed "Little Brick Church," but the group rejoined the original congregation after Scholte left in 1854.

Ultimately, in 1856, the original Pella congregation established ecclesiastical ties with Van Raalte's Michigan group, but until then controversy continued to disturb the Christian Congregation. Differences arose between members of Baptist and Reformed persuasions



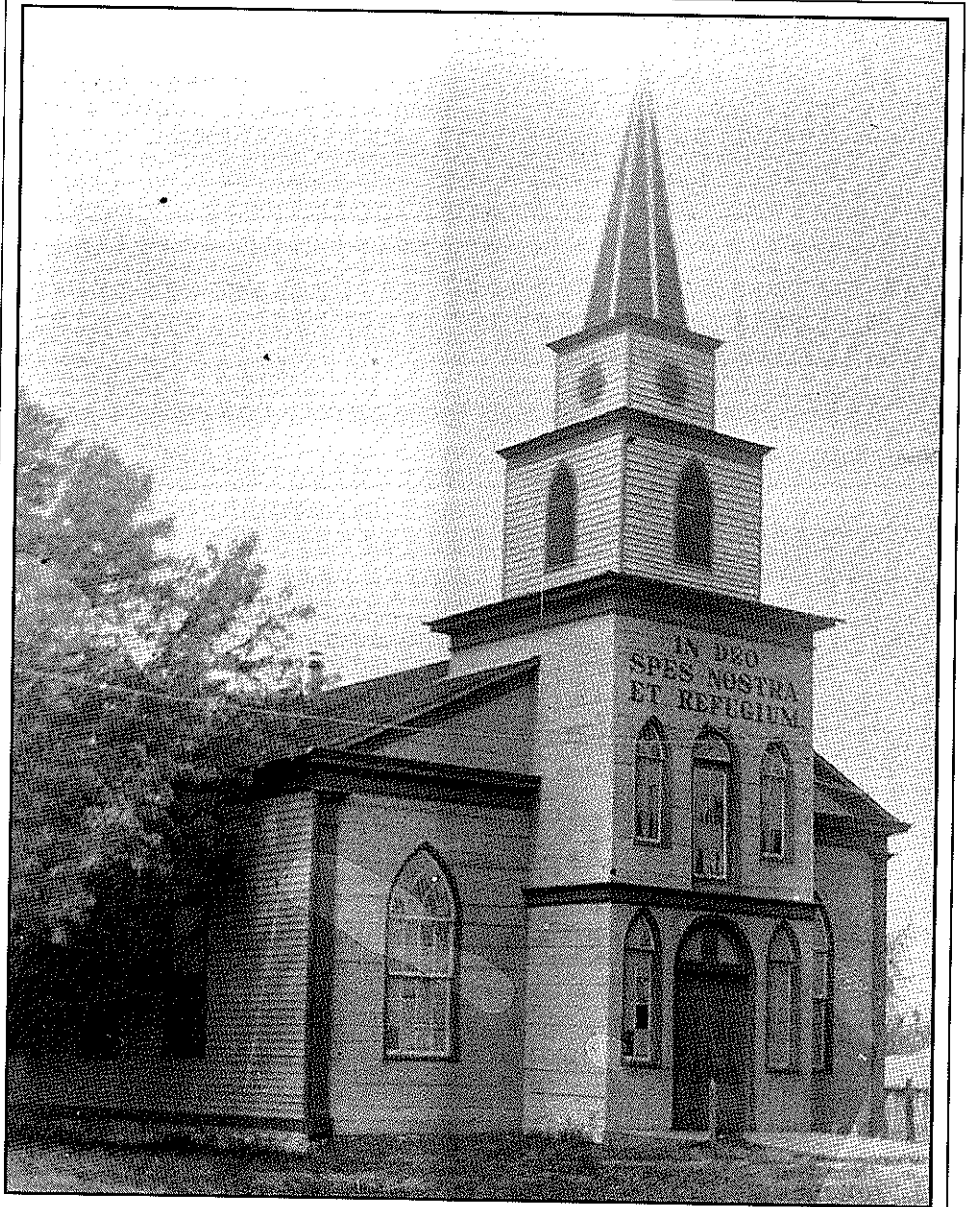
J. J. Michmershuizen's Iowa Paint Shop in which Scholte's people worship for a short time.

and the continued practice of congregational independence created internal controversies. In 1856, with some direction from Rev. A. J. Betten, the congregation contacted Michigan's A. C. Van Raalte, who reorganized the group as the Protestant Reformed Holland Congregation.

Meanwhile, H. P. Scholte continued to serve a faithful following which gathered in a paint shop until the completion of its new sanctuary. Scholte constructed this white frame building with his own funds, and it attracted about 120 adult members. Because he received no salary, he continued, as in the past, to be his own man. He was an excellent preacher, but he was frequently away on private and public business. On these occasions lay leaders conducted the worship services. At its peak Scholte's church attracted about 200 adult members, who appointed lay committees to conduct the ordinary business of the congregation. Committees also supervised the liturgical calendar, which included bimonthly Communion services. When Scholte died, the congregation disbanded, and Scholte's dream of a free church also vanished.

His church building, with its ringing declaration "God is our Hope and Refuge," fell into ruin and was eventually razed in 1916. A replica of that building on display in the Pella Historical Museum continues to memorialize Scholte's ideal. "The Dominie" is thus remembered as a man of many talents who rarely compromised in a controversy. He was "his own man," doing what he perceived to be the Lord's will.

\*Additional information is available in Lubbertus Oostendorp's excellent biography, *H. P. Scholte: Leader of the Secession of 1834 and Founder of Pella* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1964).



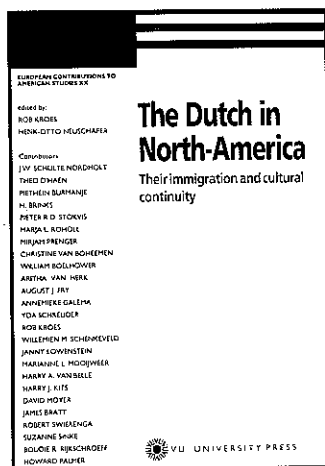
(above) The Scholte church built in 1857.



(left) Communion service used in Scholte's church.

# BOOKS

**The Dutch in North-America, Their Immigration and Cultural Continuity.** Edited by Rob Kroes and Henk-Otto Neuschäfer. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1991. \$49.50.



In this volume of the *European Contribution to American Studies* series, the editors have gathered papers given at the 1990 Netherlands American Studies Conference held in Middelburg, the Netherlands. From various sociological, historical, literary, and religious perspectives, the contributors confront the reader with sweeping generalizations or fresh theories about the Dutch-American immigration experience and those who participated in it. Also included are studies of specific geographic areas or thoughts about certain elements of Dutch-American culture.

Among subjects considered are poetic sources for Abraham Kuyper's optimistic visions of America, the anti-emigration stance of *De Bazuin* (a Dutch

language newspaper controlled by the Theological College in Kampen), and the significance of sickness and death as reported in letters mailed from the Netherlands to the New World. Also discussed are Dutch emigration policy, emigration propaganda films, seventeenth century Dutch-American poets and esoteric literary themes. Creating time and space and the use of symbols in Dutch-American fiction intrigue one essayist who writes at length about these and other literary techniques employed in fictional sketches of the Dutch-American ethnic environment and the characters who made it what it was and is.

Not creatures of fiction, but Dutch-Americans who lived and breathed, are encountered in separate sections. Here we find the economically successful Frisians in Whitinsville, Massachusetts, Reformed and Roman Catholic Dutch in Wisconsin, Dutch Reformed schismatics in Amsterdam, Montana, and Dutch-American Civil War veterans who had only a mild interest in politics and cared little about the plight of slaves. Not often written about, but found in this volume, are the Quebec Dutch, Dutch Jews, who after two generations in America, had neither a strong Dutch heritage or orthodox faith, and the socialist dreamer, Frederik van Eeden, who founded an unsuccessful settlement in North Carolina. More successful is the annual St. Nicholas celebration in Victoria, British Columbia retained for the benefit of children and grandchildren of Dutch-Canadians.

In still another essay we meet "elderly Reformed Dutch," "middle-aged Reformed Dutch," and "young adult Dutch" and from the author's observations we learn how those in each group define themselves as both Canadian and Reformed. Also noted by the writer are the differences in life style and religious values as exhibited by these folk and their relatives in the Netherlands. Other varied topics are Dutch-Indonesians in the United States, the domestic mores of Dutch immigrant women and about twenty pages devoted to Dutch-America and its continuing uneasy one hundred and fifty year relationship with an American culture often simultaneously hostile and accommodating.

Whether you read all twenty-five contributions or choose among them, you will come away with the notion that scholarly curiosity about the Dutch in North America is alive and well. Furthermore you will gain an acquaintance with both the scholars in the field and their views on a multitude of issues.



# FOR THE FUTURE

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

The "Brickyard": Zeelanders in Grand Rapids  
*by Henry Ippel*

Memoirs of Rev. Arnold Brink

Letters to Canada by G. G. Harper

The South African Boer War *by H. Ippel*

"Silk City": Reports from Paterson's immigrant mill hands *by H. J. Brinks*

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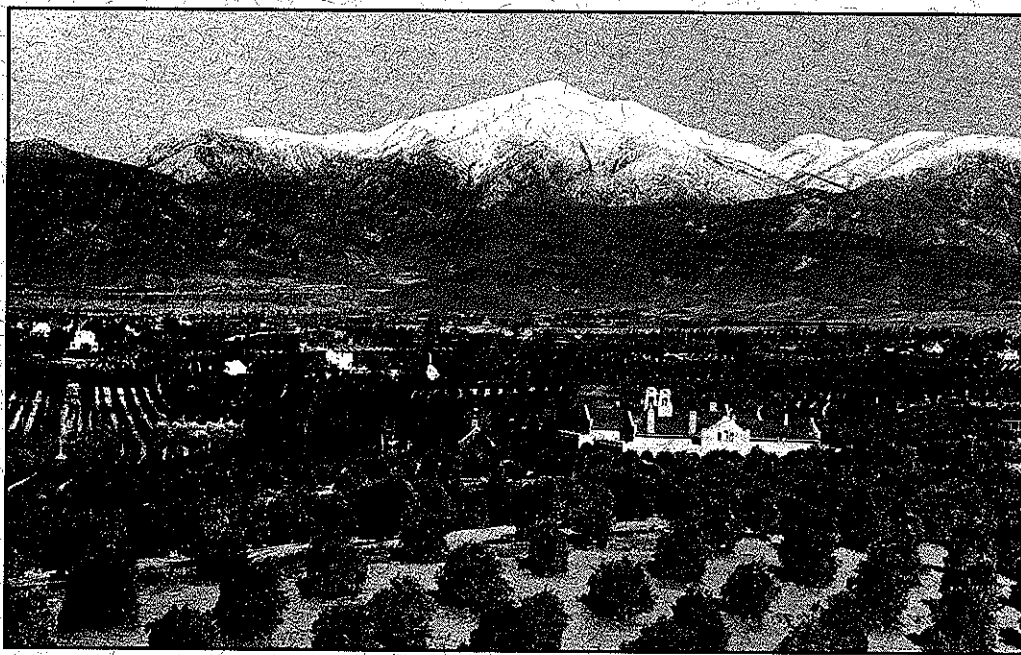
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