

Origins

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Volume XXIV • Number 2 • 2006

Historical Magazine of The Archives

Calvin College and
Calvin Theological Seminary
1855 Knollcrest Circle SE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546
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Origins is designed to publicize
and advance the objectives of
The Archives. These goals
include the gathering,
organization, and study of
historical materials produced by
the day-to-day activities of the
Christian Reformed Church,
its institutions, communities,
and people.

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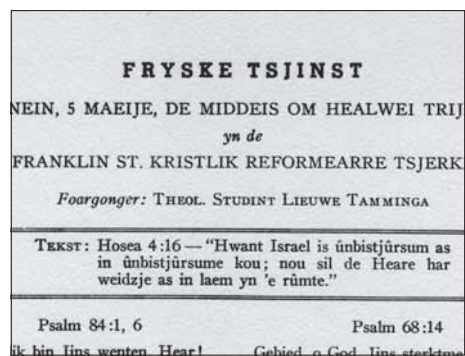
Cover photo:

*Bernard Fridsma in the Netherlands
in 1948, sitting at the tiller of a canal
boat like the one his father had owned
and operated.*



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Time to Renew your Subscription

As we have in the past, we are using this column to notify you that it is time to renew your subscription. An envelope for renewing your subscription is included in this issue; this saves the cost of a separate mailing for renewal. As it has since we began publishing in 1983, subscriptions are \$10 (US) per year. Gifts in addition to the \$10 are acknowledged as charitable gifts to *Origins* and we are grateful for this generosity.✉

This Issue

Noted educator and author, Dr. James Schaap of Dordt College presents his elegy of the life and work of Frederick Manfred, one of the literary giants from the Dutch-American community, who profoundly influenced Schaap's own life. Harry Vander Kooij, long a resident of the region, provides an account of the Holland

Marsh, Ontario, area, where a number of post-WWII Dutch immigrants settled but whose naming had little to do with the Dutch. The long life and extraordinary career of Dr. Bernard J. Fridsma are recalled in the article by Janet Sheeres. Moving to the southern part of the Netherlands, we have the translated memoir of Jacob Maasdam, a leader in the first years of Pella, Iowa; and we continue the travel account of G. J. Buth, a Dutch dairy farmer and veterinarian, visiting his relatives in Grand Rapids during the summer of 1949.✉

Available On-Line

In March 2006, *Wij, Eenvoudige Drentse Lui: Landverhuizers uit Drenthe* (We, Simple Drenthish Folk: Emigrants from Drenthe) by historian Ger de Leeuw was published in the Netherlands. The book tells the story of emigrants from the province, their reasons for emigrating, and their experiences after arriving in West Michigan. Among the useful data sets in the book is a list of all those emigrants, 1845-1872. De Leeuw provided a copy of this list of the 370 families or individuals to

Heritage Hall in an Excel spreadsheet. We translated the data into English and reformatted them into the PDF file linked to our web site (http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/drenthe_emig.htm). Each entry contains the name of the person, age, occupation, community of origin, family size (unless traveling alone), religion, economic status, and reason for emigrating. Surnames were reformatted and alphabetized according to English conventions. Also new to our website is a copy of the worship program of the fiftieth, and last, Frisian-Language worship service held in Grand Rapids last May. The program also contains some basic historical information of the fifty worship services. The programs can be viewed at http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/Fyftichste.pdf with images from the service at http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/Fiftieth_Frisian.htm.✉

News from the Archives

During the summer we organized and opened for research eighteen cubic feet of Calvin College records. Of these, eight cubic feet are from the

college's 1984 and 1994 accreditation self-studies, which detail the college's development during a roughly fifteen-year span. The remaining ten cubic feet are from the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship, founded in 1976 as the first of the college's five research institutes as a place where Christian thinkers can reflect upon issues of public concern across academic disciplines. Over the years, dozens of books and countless articles, lectures, conferences, and related public presentations have resulted from this effort.

We also opened for research twenty-eight cubic feet of denominational records of the Christian Reformed Church in North America's (CRCNA) World Missions and Chaplaincy offices. The World Missions material, access to which requires permission, details the efforts of various agencies during the 1970s and 1980s in reshaping missions to encourage more indigenous participation and leadership. The chaplaincy material, some of which also requires permission to access, details both the military and civilian dimensions of this program and how the civilian chaplaincy program

has changed during the past forty years.

Our volunteers continue various translation projects having to do with classical and congregational records. The early minutes from Dispatch, Kansas, CRC were completed and are currently being typed and then will be proofread. Indexing of *The Banner* continues. A volunteer is collating data on post World War II immigrants in Canada. Another volunteer began a better organizing and indexing of our collection of family histories. As we noted in the past, this work is becoming more pressing with time, as fewer and fewer of our constituents are able to read Dutch.

We accessioned seventy-seven cubic feet of records in seventeen transfers during the summer. Among the larger transfers were records from the Calvin College provost; CRCNA Inter Church Relations Committee; and Robert Recker, professor at Calvin Theological Seminary, 1960s–1980s.

Son of Secession: Douwe J. Vander Werp, a biography of a leading early minister among the Dutch Reformed in North America by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres was published by *Origins* and

the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America (see book review section). Published by William B. Eerdmans and available for \$25, the book is available to *Origins* subscribers for \$20 at the *Origins* office.✉

Staff

Richard Harms is the curator of the Archives; Hendrina Van Spronsen is the office coordinator; Wendy Blankespoor is librarian and cataloging archivist; Boukje Leegwater is departmental assistant; Dr. Robert Bolt is field agent and assistant archivist. Our capable student assistants are Renee LaCoss and Dana Verhulst. Our volunteers include: Rev. Henry DeMots, Ed Gerritsen, Fred Greidanus, Ralph Haan, Dr. Henry Ippel, Helen Meulink, Rev. Gerrit Sheeres, Janet S. Sheeres, and Rev. Leonard Sweetman.✉



Richard H. Harms

Frederick Manfred: An Elegy for the Man

James Calvin Schaap

I met Frederick Manfred in a bookstore in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, in late November of 1966. I wasn't looking for him, but I stumbled across his name, a name I wouldn't have recognized a couple months earlier, before my first trip to northwest Iowa, a region Manfred, a native, loved to call "Siouxland." I don't know what I might have been looking for that day, but it wasn't his name or the book I found, a paperback novel titled *The Secret Place*. I bought it, then left the store, that book in an inconspicuous brown paper bag, its own secret place, you might say.

Just a few months earlier, I had gone to northwest Iowa and enrolled at Dordt College, in Sioux Center, primarily because I thought I wouldn't be quick enough to make the Calvin College basketball team. At Dordt I thought I had a shot. In 1966, college choices—at least in my family—were considerably narrowed by tribal identity: Dordt, like Calvin, was one of our schools, a place where good Christian Reformed kids were encouraged to attend, sometimes even required. For me, high school classes in literature or history or foreign language had been little more than starting blocks to get to the gym or the practice field. When I left for college I had no greater aspirations than to become a coach someday—teaching, well, whatever.



Frederick Manfred (Feike Feikema) was inextricably rooted in a region of the plains that he called Siouxland. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

In a dorm room full of rowdy guys, I heard the man's name for the first time—"Manfred," some guy said, sneering a bit because he claimed the name was phony. "His real name is Feikema," a local kid said, "Feike Feikema, and the guy writes dirty books."

Adolescent male snickering.

"There was this sign along 75—used to say 'Doon—home of Frederick Manfred,'" another kid said. More snickering. "Somebody cut it down. They don't like him much."

How come?

Shrugged shoulders. "You know—dirty books."

A native of Wisconsin, James Schaap is a professor of English at Dordt College since 1982. He has published novels, historical short fiction, and meditations, as well as short stories and essays for periodicals.

"He's from here?" I said.

"Yeah, from Doon."

Where's Doon?

Thumbs up and over the left shoulder, pointing north.

I'd never heard of a writer, a novelist, actually being born and reared someplace close. Besides, writers lived in books and novels, not in dirt and harvest and the shady ambience of compost. Writers were city folks—educated. Snobs. The best ones were prophets. Writers didn't milk cows.

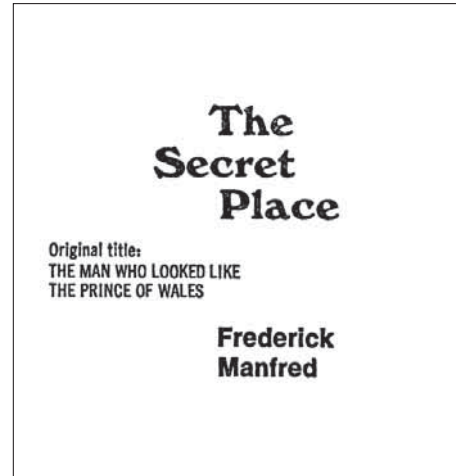
Then I went home to Wisconsin, waltzed into a bookstore, and found this novel, *The Secret Place*. "Frederick Manfred."

I'm sure I didn't show my parents, who wouldn't have understood the attraction; if they had, they wouldn't have approved. They likely would have seconded the hostility of those upstanding, sign-dumping Doonsters because my parents preached righteousness as fervently as they opposed dirty books. Meanwhile, their son was nineteen, and the Sixties were happening all around me. I had my own enthusiasms.

The Secret Place was the novel that brought Manfred most dishonor among the good folks of Doon, Iowa, not only because of its graphic sexual content, but because local people felt used, the story line so closely mirroring a saga many of them remembered—how a local boy got two girls pregnant in too short a span, both out of wedlock. Local people felt what the subjects of literary work have felt for centuries—used. One of their own,

Feike Feikema, had taken a story that belonged to them and spread it all over as if it was the world's business.

Susan Cheever, in a recent inter-



view about her famous father, John Cheever, says that being fictionalized, as she was in her father's work, is "ten million times more painful" than being written about in non-fiction, "much more dangerous because much more painful for the people it may be based on." As a fiction writer myself, I believe her. But, back then, I had no notion of the sensitivities of Manfred's neighbors, nor did I have any idea there existed a prototype narrative.

I read *The Secret Place* during

Thanksgiving break, then returned to Dordt College and told my English instructor that I'd like to do a research paper on it, a novel she'd not read, even though she knew Frederick Manfred, at least by reputation. Not long before, President B. J. Haan had buckled under to a local church group who vowed to stop giving to the fledgling college down the road if Feikema's books were right there in the stacks of the library, no one supervising. To Haan's credit, he didn't toss them, but he did put them behind the desk so students had to ask.

I don't remember what grade I received on that research paper, but it's still somewhere in my files I'm sure, because I studied *The Secret Place* in a way devoted freshman college students are still asked to study literature. I read that novel closely, outlining theme and motif, in a way I'd never read anything before. I read earnestly.

Sometimes I wonder if I wasn't, even then, trying to save this man I'd never met, if not from the wrath of his villagers, then from the flames of hell others in the neighborhood were stoking. I admired his rebellion, his prophetic character. Somewhere in *The*

Secret Place I wanted to find what people once called "socially redeeming value," in spite of the racy cornfield passages that made my hormones pulse.

I may have wanted to baptize Feike Feikema, but it's far more obvious, in retrospect, that with that novel Frederick Manfred baptized me. When I read certain passages—a couple of young fornicators meeting



One of six brothers who all stood over six feet tall, Manfred, at six feet nine inches, towered above his 1934 Calvin College teammates. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

self-righteousness head-on in a smoke-filled consistory room, for instance—I felt a conflict that wasn't at all new, but as familiar to my perceptions as church peppermints drawn discreetly from a black suit coat.

I date my own birth as a writer to that novel and that freshman English paper. Before reading *The Secret Place*, I had no idea my life, and the lives of those around me, was worth a story. Fred Manfred made it vividly clear to me—even though I'd never considered it before—that I didn't have to be Jewish or urbane or sophisticated or snobbish or even particularly “literary” to write stories about real people in real time, in a landscape no more than a day's hike away.

Fred Manfred made me want to write stories, and that may well be the most significant reason why I wanted to save him. *The Secret Place*, a novel also published as *The Man Who Looked Like the Prince of Wales*, may well be totally forgotten to everyone but me, but today that book sits in honor behind ancient glass on the Manfred shelf of the oak library you can't miss when you walk in our front door.

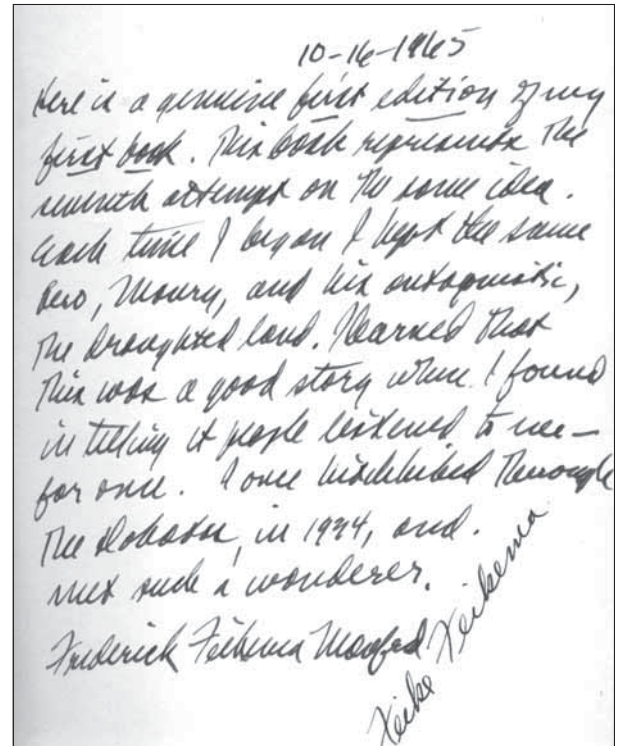
Two years later, the staff of the Dordt College *Diamond* drove north to Luverne, Minnesota, to meet with Mr. Manfred. I was one of them. I remember the Sioux quartzite wall of

the sprawling home he'd built into the edge of Blue Mound, and I'll never forget the cupola up above, an eagle's nest, 360 degrees of windows and book shelves, including the very definitive collection of his own. I remember him standing there, pointing south, then telling us that on a clear night he could see the radio tower of Dordt's station. And I remember being comforted by that gesture—somehow we still mattered.

Frederick Manfred was so huge he made me feel diminutive. I remember his immense hands, long fingers permanently crooked from some accident. And I remember his passion, as everyone who ever met Frederick Manfred will. That sheer passion for life stormed over everything and everyone. My fellow staffers had to slug their way into a conversation that wasn't dialogic at all, but a running monologue that never once grew wearying. The man was a presence. Even those who dislike his writing will say it: Fred Manfred wasn't so much an artist as a force, like the wind, or the Plains themselves, the world from which he'd come, their emerald edge in Siouxland, where every season's weather comes in spades.

When we left the place he called Roundwind, we descended the curving, steep road through swaying prairie grasses all around. I'd asked no questions while we were there, and I'm sure I said little on the way home. I'd met a man, a presence, who was unlike anyone I'd ever known.

That night I'd also begun to hear stories I'd hear time and time again



Manfred's inscription in his novel, *The Golden Bowl*, "Here is a genuine first edition of my first book. This book represents the seventh attempt on the same idea. Each time I began I kept the same hero, Maury, and his antagonistic, the droughted land. I learned that this was a good story when I found in telling it people listen to me—for once. I once hitchhiked through the Dakotas, in 1944, and met such a wanderer." From the Manfred Collection in the Archives, Calvin College.

through the years—how he had crawled for miles through the prairie so he could feel exactly what Hugh Glass had in the legend that became *Lord Grizzly*. I listened to him go on and on about running to high school every day—seven miles each way, Doon to Hull, to Western Academy. I heard Calvin College stories, how he'd

1 What I learned from Frederick Manfred

There's a voice in all of us—I call it the internal commentator or the “I. C.” or “I see.” It's the voice that won't let other people get away with things. It's the voice that questions and doubts. Good writers have to listen to the IC; they have to pay attention to what that voice says.

2 What I learned from Frederick Manfred

There's no such thing as writer's block. Writing is like farming. When you get up in the morning, you got to do the work. The cows have to be milked. That's it.

left Siouxland for Michigan, packing the only two books he'd ever owned—the Bible and Shakespeare.

Even more, I began to understand things about writing, about the necessity of endless research into Native ceremonial pipes and dances and buffalo—and the sheer joy of learning. I looked through notebooks scribbled full of his long-lettered handwriting, interesting names and comic and frightful anecdotes he didn't want to forget, things he'd use someday, he told us.

I left Manfred's home in silence that night, having met a writer.

In graduate school, in addition to everything else, I read texts that helped me identify who I was and the ethnic and religious ethos that was my birthright—Calvin's *Institutes*, and the novels of Peter De Vries and Frederick Manfred. So when I returned to Siouxland in 1976 to become an instructor in English at Dordt College, I knew much more about this man Feikema, this presence, and I remembered that he lived only an hour north. But it took the dying wish of an old man to get me back to his home.

That dying man was Harry Abma, a man I'd met in Arizona, a retired postal worker, an eccentric little man in a beret, who scooted about the Valley of the Sun in a VW bug. In Arizona churches full of retirees in the mid-70s, Harry was unique—single, literary, often very lonely, and guilt-ridden. In our quiet talks after church on Sunday mornings, sometimes he'd cry, hair-trigger, profoundly saddened, he told me, by the life he'd lived, a life that had begun in Siouxland, where he was born. I never asked much about what kind of mess had piled up in the wake of his years, but in his Arizona retirement he was very much alone; whatever

family he had seemed to care very little about him or his circumstance, perhaps with good reason.

I was studying Thoreau and Emerson, and he was reader—and a poet, mostly a devotional poet, but sometimes a little racy too, an untrained, Dutch Reformed John Donne maybe. Profound spirituality in the Dutch Calvinist character, at least historically, has never seemed to eradicate a sometimes profligate earthiness quite unknown to contemporary evangelicals, and that inelegant mixture was especially evidenced in farm folks I met in Siouxland—especially men, who brandished a hybrid spirituality, as much a part of this earth as it is and was a part of heaven to come. Mr. Abma was a Frisian *and* he was a Christian: my guess is that Fred Manfred would have liked that wording.

Abma had but one-quarter of a lung, and wherever he went his

oxygen tank was never far behind. He knew his life was ending, he told me, and he wanted to go home to Rock Valley, Iowa, his birthplace. He wanted to die in his native Siouxland.

Even before my wife and family moved back to Iowa, Mr. Abma did—he got a room in the Manor, showed me his letter of acceptance in fact. When, a year later, we moved to Siouxland too, he used to call me occasionally, tell me about the Bible studies he'd set up at the home, then reminisce a bit about Manfred because he'd read 'em all, he told me, every last word of Feik's work—life-long reader and admirer.

I knew Harry was dying. So one day I told him I'd see if the two of us could drive up to Luverne and visit the man whose work he'd always loved. Mr. Abma was older than Feike, he said, but the two of them had grown up in the same world.

Fred had some healthy years as a writer, and some wearisome droughts. Somewhere along the line, with few royalty checks coming in, he'd lost the big house he'd built into the Sioux quartzite of Blue Mound, and was then, 1977 or so, building another big-shouldered, very male, home quarters on the edge of a hill north of the Rock River, east of town.

I did some research to determine the protocol—one didn't simply drop in on the novelist Frederick Manfred. I checked with the *Doon Press* editor, Harold Aardema, probably his closest friend in his hometown, and Harold pointed the way, told me to stop in at the drug store in Luverne and talk to the druggist, who was, in a way, Manfred's neighborly gatekeeper. As I remember, that drug store carried every novel Manfred had ever written, even those out of print.



From the dust jacket of *This is the Year* by Gregg Press.

All the way through my research, I got green lights when I made it clear that I wanted to bring a dying man up to meet another Frisian Siouxlander, something of a Make-a-Wish project, I suppose. That'll be fine, the druggist said after phoning and checking with the novelist.

So Harry and I followed another long gravel road to the site where Fred was, once again, building a house—and there he was, expecting us. He put down the axe he had in his hands—he'd been chopping wood—and walked through the sticky topsoil, the driveway not having been graveled, straight up to the car. By that time in his life, Harry Abma could barely walk. Beside him in the front seat sat his oxygen tank.

Fred didn't wait for us to get out of the car, although I stepped out quickly, thinking it decorous to make formal introductions. Manfred didn't stare warily or expect genuflection. He simply walked over to the passenger side, ignoring me, swung open the door, and thrust that huge hand inside. "Well, I'll be," he said. "Harry Abma. I've read your poems for years in the *Doon Press*. I'm so happy to meet you."

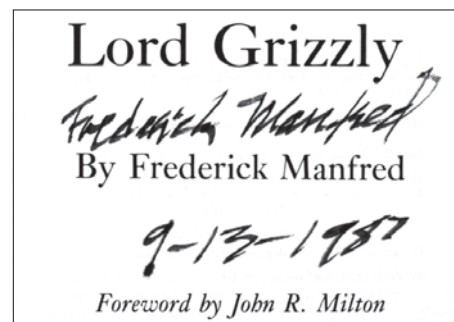
Abma was speechless, but only for a while. Soon enough, the two of them were talking and chatting, using their beloved Frisian tongue to swap jokes they wouldn't have told in Sunday school. I didn't know Frisian so I didn't catch the punch lines, but the chortle is a universal language.

I don't know that, here below, Harry Abma could have been the recipient of a greater blessing late in his life than Feike Feikema knowing his name, praising his poems, and shuckin' and jivin' in the Frisian tongue. I'm not sure he needed the oxygen once we started back up that gravel road.

But the amplitude of the old man's emotions was extraordinary, and we

were barely out of earshot when he broke into tears. "Here in all that time that he and I talked together, I never once brought up the state of his soul," Harry told me, sobbing. It wasn't the first time that I tried to drag him out of despair, and I did again, with lines he would have expected—"salvation, Mr. Abma, belongs to the Lord."

Not long after came the publication of *Green Earth* (1977), Manfred's chronicle of life among the Dutch Reformed in the early decades of the twentieth century. I'll let others declare on the novel's success, but I'll offer this: in no other book ever written can one get as abundant an account of northwest Iowa life among the Dutch during those years. Love it or hate it, *Green Earth* tells a Siouxland saga; and if anyone would like to walk that ground again, it's the first book one ought to read.



From the copy of *Lord Grizzly* in the collection of the Archives, Calvin College.

Harry Abma was gone by the time *Green Earth* was published, so, soon after its publication, I wrote a long review of that novel, a review Harold Aardema stuck in the *Doon Press*. I addressed the whole essay to Mr. Abma, without using his name, tried to convince this man in glory that Fred was doing all right, that things were okay with his soul. A paragraph or two of that review was quoted in *People* magazine soon thereafter, when they did a feature on this giant, small-town novelist whose chronicles celebrated the lives of people who despised him.

3 What I learned from Frederick Manfred

All stories are C's—that is, they all have openings the writer leaves for readers. Sometimes, given your audience, those C's have to be a little more closed than at other times—almost O's in fact. But they should never be O's exactly because readers have to be part of the story, part of piecing things together.

Most-read words of my life, I believe.

Frederick Manfred remembered me from that second seemingly invisible visit, perhaps because he thought it was good of me to bring that beret-ed old aficionado up to meet him just months before the oxygen tank was retired. From that visit, Fred remembered me. Besides, he knew I taught literature at Dordt College.

Frederick Manfred stood 6'9". In the late 20s, the basketball coach at Calvin saw this huge presence show up on campus and almost immediately recruited him to play ball, even though Feike had not played a quarter of high school ball at Western Academy. Back then, competitive athletics were basically aerobics for town boys. Fred wasn't.

Aldert Venhuizen, a student manager for the basketball team in those years at Calvin, once told me that his job for half a season of practices was nothing more or less than teaching Feike Feikema to rebound, which he attempted to do by shoving him in the lower back whenever a shot would go up during scrimmage, creating a sense of timing Fred had never learned.

Tall and gaunt, his shoulders broad as a double-tree, Manfred's sheer physical stature filled a room—and that was before he started talking.

Because, in the late 70s and 80s, he knew me—and because he knew Dordt—he liked driving down highway 75 from Luverne to meet with my literature classes. With time, the sharp edges of the old scandal had dulled a bit, enough so that it didn't seem an abomination for Feike Feikema to appear in a Dordt College classroom, at least it wasn't as unthinkable as it might have been a decade earlier. Still, discretion advised me not to carry the news into local papers.

Mr. Abma's questions about Fred's soul, about his salvation, weren't questions he alone had raised, of course; and there was that matter of sexuality—not to mention violence, loads of it in some of the Buckskin Man Tales, *Scarlet Plume*, for example, buckets of blood and gore from the Indian wars. "Was that Christian writing?" people asked, rhetorically. Those books were nothing at all like the Sugar-Creek Gang.

Manfred used to tell me that there was, in the Middle Ages, Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower, two significant English poets. Chaucer loved the miller and the wife of Bath, sinners and the saints, loved every one of them. Gower could sing praises only to God, not to life.

Fred said he wanted to be a Chaucer, chanting the tales of all the Siouxland pilgrims. He wanted to chronicle the joy of the very earth he loved between his fingers and toes. He wanted to celebrate life, not eschew it for dreamy visions of the hereafter. The good Christians of Siouxland didn't know quite what to make of that. In a way, to their minds and souls, Manfred loved life a bit more than good Christians should. He used to say that his grandfather, an outspoken atheist, had the best answer of all to impertinent spiritual questions—"God is in me, and I'm smiling."

I knew his grandfather's answer would not have been what Mr. Abma

FREDERICK MANFRED
BLUE MOUND
LUVERNE, MINNESOTA 56156

Image courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

was looking for, had he taken the time to ask the question he didn't.

The first time Fred Manfred visited a class of mine I had no idea how it might go. I had spent some time having my students read passages from some of the novels and a few poems from *Winter Count*, and I'd promised him that his appearance wouldn't require a thing—all he needed to do was field questions.

And those questions came. One kid raised his hand and brought up a scene in *Green Earth*, when, soon after his profession of faith, Free and his buddies hang out. In the novel, a couple of the guys, multi-talented, tune their expressive flatulence into music, if you can believe that—"The Star-Spangled Banner," or so Manfred would have us believe.

"Mr. Manfred," one of my students said, "in that passage, are you making fun of profession of faith by having them fart the way they did?"

I don't remember how Fred Manfred answered the question, but what I'll never forget is the way he grabbed me, shocked, the minute the hour ended. "That kid said the word *fart* right in class," he said. I'd never guessed that Frederick Manfred's sensibilities could be so easily violated.

It was one of those moments when something happens that blows our expectations into oblivion. I thought I knew Frederick Manfred. After all, I'd read many of his novels. But the man was even bigger than I'd determined, and there was more to him than I'd guessed—which is, I've come to believe, true of most of us.

The Dordt College chapel was being built just then, and I took him

there. Construction crews were still all around, and the dust on the stage was a half-inch thick. Everywhere you looked there were canvas drop cloths, but the place was closed up and warm, cavern-like and spacious, a work-in-progress.

Down the center aisle we walked together, this huge man looking up and around, as if the unfinished ceiling was lined with stars. Together we stood, center stage, looking out over open stretches where eventually the pews would sit, and he was astonished, almost speechless.

"If you would have told me, when I was growing up," he said, more reverentially than I could have guessed, "—if you would have told me that someday my people would have a beautiful place like this, right here in Siouxland, I wouldn't have believed you."

It was the "my people" that struck me, but maybe it shouldn't have. Through the years, I heard him, time and time again, refer to his ethnic and religious roots in very, very loving ways.

And I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised either when, after showing off the chapel, we stopped at the office of the college president, the Reverend B. J. Haan. Once again, I didn't know what to expect. It hadn't been all that long before that the Reverend President Haan had capitulated, to a point, to an outraged constituency ready to burn books.

I took this man who was becoming my friend to the President's office, where we waited for a few minutes. Once he discovered the secretary was married to another English department member, Mike Vanden

4 What I learned from Frederick Manfred

You really can't write all day long. You got to chop wood.

Bosch, another writer, he wouldn't let her alone. That too was typical Manfred.

But then B. J. stepped out of his office, a man half the size of the giant Manfred. I don't know that they'd ever said a word to each other before in their lives, but without any introductory fanfare they hugged, the two of them embraced, perhaps because they understood each other's stature and callings, perhaps because they both loved the world God gave them in Siouxsland. I don't know why. Then they talked like old friends, swapped stories—a God-giftedness they both shared.

That night, the novelist Frederick Manfred came to the Schaaps' house for dinner, for the first time, the first of many. For several years after, I took van loads of students up to his house, just as I had gone when I was an undergraduate myself.

Fred was never happier than when he could entertain. My students found him and his passions astonishing.

Nothing pleased Fred Manfred more than similar kinds of visits to his alma mater, Calvin College, especially in the last decade of his life. He would talk about those trips for weeks ahead of time and weeks afterward. He felt lionized at Calvin, and the joy was almost too great for him to bear.

His Calvin pedigree was precious to him. He loved to tell the story of how, once when he was living in St. Paul, he'd attended a lecture at the University and asked a question of the speaker, an academic whose name or topic I don't remember at all.

The man had immediately pointed. "You went to Calvin College. I can always tell questions that come from Calvin College alums. They ask questions nobody else asks."

The unique shape of those Calvin questions he would have attributed, I'm sure, to Prof. Harry Jellema, the legendary professor of philosophy, a man he himself lionized.

He cherished his Calvin education, and was equally proud of the fact that he had done very poorly in his freshman English class, failed it in fact, because he hadn't written to the standards of course or the instructor, but then, neither was he particularly interested.

The Manfred oeuvre includes tales from his Calvin years. The best way to read those stories is in the trilogy *Wanderlust*, a fictionalized memoir (he called the form a "rume") that includes more than his college experience. Those stories were published separately in three volumes: *The Primitive* (1949), *The Brother* (1950), and *The Giant* (1951)—not a quick read.

His work flow went like this: start the morning up by reading through everything he'd written the day before, editing inflexibly, then go on for four hours or so, that's all. He was more than happy to trumpet his skills as an editor, but then, even rebellious Calvinists can be woefully short-sighted. Almost everything he wrote was a tome.

Frederick Manfred, like Peter De Vries, was likely as much reviled as beloved by

5 What I learned from Frederick Manfred

If you don't know what a grasshopper tastes like, and you need to know for a story, go out and find one and figure it out for yourself.

those who didn't leave his and their ethnic and religious roots. Undoubtedly, the break he made from those he himself called "his people," left scars. On the other hand, when Feike Feikema became Frederick Manfred, he also carried with him the longings of what was then, certainly, a clanish people for the kind of highly profiled place Manfred gained in American culture, an aspiration to be truly and successfully "an American." *Lord Grizzly* was much admired; for



Manfred speaking during the 1983 homecoming at Calvin College. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

its success, Manfred was nominated for—and just about won—the Pulitzer. In his own way and in his own time, Feike Feikema “made it,” and many of his people were proud of him because of the way he step-laddered out of the ethnic ghetto.

But he came along at a time when leaving the tribe behind was neither simple nor sympathetic. Life among the Dutch Reformed, mid-twentieth century, was stifling to some, comforting to many—a significant force, an identity, that one couldn’t leave without some heartache. We’re not talking simply about wooden shoes or tulips or Scripture texts in the language of the old country, embroidered and framed and hung from a nail in the parlor; Frederick Manfred had those hangings, and he loved his heritage—no question. But that heritage has an undeniable faith component that Mr. Abma wondered about, as did others, even those within the clan who very much admired the novels Feik was writing.

To my mind, Frederick Manfred was deeply influenced by modernism, the prevalent intellectual worldview of his time and the cultural and intellectual milieu of, at least, the American Depression. After leaving college he traveled to the East Coast, where the roughshod farm kid with the Calvinist pedigree walked in on the substantial political questions of the day, questions which were, during those years, sometimes answered better by socialism and communism than capitalism.

In New Jersey and later in Minnesota, he met what his own people would have called “leftists.” They were bright and they were influential and they were many. His many years of cloistered Christian and Reformed education did not stand up well against the prevailing modernist views of faith and spirituality—that Christianity was little more than a remnant

of primitive mysticism that would, soon enough, disappear among the masses, just as it had already disappeared among the enlightened. That never happened, and Fred died before the advent of our post-modern milieu, when spirituality, in all its manifestations, is flowering, sometimes madly.

His father, Frank Feikema, may well have prompted the most beautiful writing Fred Manfred ever did, a loving elegiac biography in *Prime Fathers*.

But what remained in him of the faith in which he grew was the beloved, yet searing memory of his deeply religious mother, whom he idolized, a woman named Alice Van Engen. His mother’s vibrant and gracious spirituality must have glowed like a dawn, if you listen to him. She is in his novels. Her death ends *Green Earth*, and offers his readers—and his people—an explanation of how he considered himself liberated from the cultural and spiritual strictures of his tribe, a tribe he never really stopped loving, strangely enough—and respecting.

In his daughter’s memoir, *Frederick Manfred: A Daughter Remembers*, Freya Manfred remembers the way her father always extolled his mother’s beauty and grace. But she also remembers her father—and quotes him—admitting that his mother’s early death (he was seventeen when she died) was something of a blessing: “‘. . . I’d have had an awful time explaining my vision to her or going up against her,’ he said, ‘because she never yelled at me. If I did something wrong, or she thought I hadn’t been entirely honest, she’d just look at me sadly and I’d feel terrible, deep in my guts.’”

The caricature of stern Dutch Calvinism would have no currency if it weren’t, in part, true. Fred Manfred remembered and undoubtedly experienced dour religiosity, preening self-righteousness, and outright

hypocrisy amid the Siouxland Dutch, and Fries, from which he’d come. But it wasn’t sharp tongues that kept him wondering about God, even arguing, I believe; what never left him was, instead, the loving embrace of his godly mother, what she was and what she represented.

His liberation comes in the final powerful pages of *Green Earth*, when, on her death bed, Ada (his mother) tells Free (read Feike) that she wants him to be a writer *even if* she’ll never see him in heaven someday. She wants him to be true to what he is.

But to know that he himself felt, in a certain way, blessed by her early death, for the reasons he gives, can’t help but make us question whether the liberation he celebrates in *Green Earth* is purely fiction and not memoir at all. No one will ever know. Only two characters are privy to that death bed scene—Free and Ada, son and mother.

Most critics of the work of Peter De Vries maintain that even though you could take the boy out of his boyhood Calvinism, the ambience of that world—its powerful religiosity—never really left him. The same can be said for Frederick Manfred.

Elsewhere in her memoir, Freya Manfred remembers how, close to his

6 What I learned from Frederick Manfred

Fiction — stories — are all about cause and effect. One of the great things about living in a small town is the fact that you can see it in life. You see a kid on the street and read in his walk, his father’s own style of using his hands or the size of his step. Generations are like exercises in cause and effect.

death, her father once asked her a question she thought strange: "What do you suppose God will have me do when he gets me into the other place?"

To which his daughter replies: "I didn't know you thought there was another place."

It seems, he did.

At his burial service up in the cemetery on the hill above Doon, his daughter read a story that was read again, later, at a memorial party he had himself ordered up, a story that later aired on National Public Radio, albeit altered a bit. That story epitomizes the relationship Frederick Manfred maintained with the faith tradition from which he'd come.

You can read it for yourself in his daughter's memoir, but I'll summarize it quickly. When the doctors discovered a rapidly growing brain tumor, Fred was scheduled immediately for surgery. An hour before, a young female hospital chaplain, someone Freya Manfred describes as "wearing a brightly flowered dress with a white lace collar and carrying a small white Bible," dropped by to see him. Hospital policy.

When she told Fred that she was there to see how he stood spiritually, he immediately asked her about her background. She told him she was Catholic—although only by upbringing; and he told her in no uncertain terms that Roman Catholics had a great history. Do you know it?—he asked. She didn't. Well, you should, said Manfred, and then, characteristically, began to hold forth on Aquinas and all manner of Roman Catholic history.

When he stopped to catch a breath, she bridged the question again—"But how are you doing spiritually? Perhaps I could guide you along," she told him, sweetly.

"Have you read much philosophy?" Fred asked her. When she shook

her head, he recommended Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Schopenhauer, Plato.

No reaction.

"What about poetry?"

Fred said, booming, I'm sure, and now on a roll.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Maybe I should," she said.

Manfred created a reading list—"Chaucer, Whitman—and don't forget Dickinson, my personal favorite," he told her.

Once again, she tried to broker her mission into the lecture. "I came here to find out what your relationship to God might be," she said sweetly, stroking her white Bible.

And then Manfred told her that he simply wanted someone else. "My background was Christian Reformed," he said. "You wouldn't have one of those Christian Reformed guys right here, would you?"

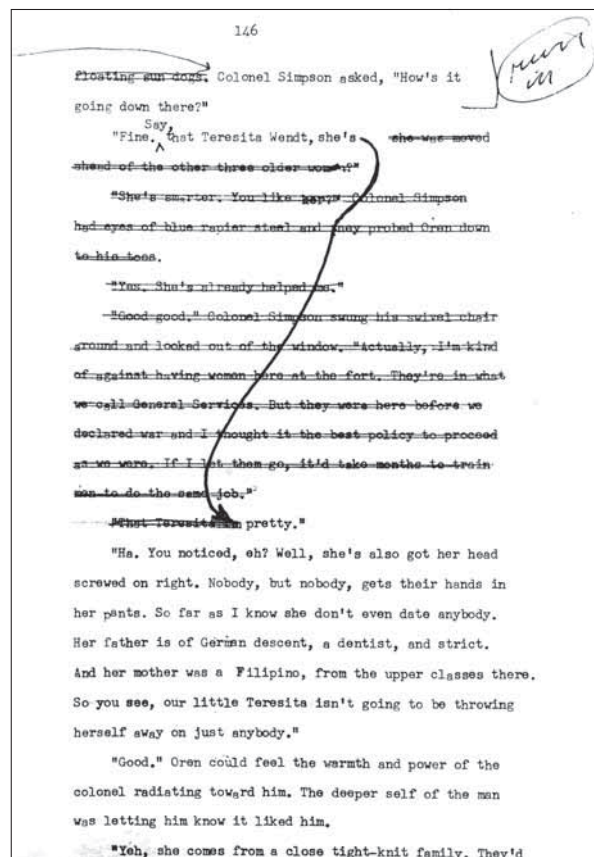
"You mean a minister?" the young lady said.

Freya quotes him like this: "No, just anyone who's raised Christian Reformed. Someone who's sick here in the hospital like me. Aren't any of your patients Christian Reformed?"

The woman told her she didn't

7 What I learned from Frederick Manfred

To feel respect and awe at the giant swaths of land and sky in Siouland, the yellowing trees in September, the ochre and green of corn and alfalfa, and the slowly swirling mares' tails in the broad azure sky.



Edited page correction by Manfred of the manuscript for *Flowers of Desire*. Image courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

think she knew of any, and he told her that if she'd find one to "rustle him up."

"Rustle him up?" she responded.

"Bring him around here so I can talk to him. I like to argue with those guys—it perks them up," he said. "Send him over and we'll talk. It'll do him some good, and me too."

That's a story Fred himself would tell, I'm sure, even embellish a bit, if he could. I feel his own voice in it, in me, as I tell it. I know he'd approve.

A few weeks later, Frederick Manfred was in the hospital, dying, even though he didn't believe it himself. Harold Aardema called me and asked if I'd like to ride up to Luverne with him and visit, so we did.

On the way up, Harold told me that he'd been a bit disappointed with Fred because his youngest brother, Ed, a life-long resident of Doon, a man who

was just a bit mentally retarded, had recently died after a long illness. Harold lamented the fact that Fred hadn't really paid significant attention to his younger brother during that time, hadn't visited him as he should have. I could tell that Harold was hurt by what he thought was Fred's inattention.

Harold knew Fred as a man, not just as a lion. I remember Harold telling me how Fred had stopped at his home in Doon and wept when his marriage broke down. Fred had just picked out a burial site in the Doon Cemetery, where he wanted to be buried, "guts and all," as he instructed his children later. That day, on our way up to Luverne, Harold, in a mission of mercy, admitted that, in not paying attention to his youngest brother, Fred had let him down.

We spent an hour or so in the hospital, Harold on one side of the bed, me on the other, and Fred loved the visit—I know he did. But when the topic of Brother Ed came up, Fred turned to me and said, "You know, Jim, I always wanted to write a story from the point of view of someone like Ed—you know, someone not totally there. To get the voice right, you know? To get that right—wouldn't that be something?"

Freya Manfred claims that her father told her that his brother Ed's death affected him deeply, and I have no doubt that it did. But that day, at

that moment in time, with Harold sitting just across the bed, Fred's brother's death seemed to me to mean very little to Frederick Manfred.

Throughout his life, he taught me so many things that I don't know that I can possibly remember them all. But that moment I'll not forget, coming as it did in the wake of Harold Aardema's lament. When Fred looked at me and talked to me as a writer, I couldn't help think of what I was already coming to understand about the process of writing fiction—how it is that sometimes writers who so carefully breathe their souls into their work can begin to love the worlds of their novels more than the worlds in which they live. Storytellers—the really great ones—can and sometimes do abide more comfortably in the neighborhoods they create than they do in the here and now.

"Writing," the essayist and historian John Milton writes in his book, *Conversations with Fred Manfred*, "is the absorbing purpose of Fred Manfred's life."

That realization made me uncomfortable, and still does. But I wonder too, whether that very passion isn't essential to creating really great fiction, really great art.

I know another story about Fred, about his drive, his passion, something which sometimes I believe is its own species of monomania. He gave his all to his work, everything—writing was a calling/obsession. I may well be writing these words right now because it was. He was a gargantuan

figure, an immense presence, a writer first of all. If he weren't, we all might not be remembering.

A friend of his told me this story. After fielding successive rejections and suffering the resulting pain, Fred rose up in anger. "I will not be stopped," he told this friend. "I will not be stopped." He was fiercely angry.

Such Promethean will, admirable as it can appear from afar, feels, in the wrong place and time, like a cousin of whatever it was that pushed along Ahab, the Captain.



In 1983, thirty-nine years after graduating, Manfred took obvious delight in shooting a basket during the halftime of the homecoming game. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

8 What I Learned from Frederick Manfred

Some things that happen to you, the things you can't forget—there's a reason for that. You better pay attention to them. In the middle of those things, there will be something you can pull up and abstract, something important.

Once upon a time, one of my students, young and female, an aspiring writer, took it upon herself to visit Manfred's house on her own. I don't know what happened between them, but she told me, brimming with anger and bitterness, that she would never go back, accompanied or unaccompanied. He was, at the time, sixty years older—or more—than she was.

Frederick Manfred taught me some things that he didn't think of as lessons in craft. He was, without doubt, my literary father; but I've come to understand, for better or for worse, that I'd never give up so much of what he did to be a writer. That too is a lesson I learned from him.

But what about Harry Abma's never-asked question?

Fred Manfred used to say he stayed in Siouxland because he didn't want to leave the place in which he'd grown up, the land he'd looked over as a boy and loved. He liked to tell the story about a time when as a kid, when he sat out back of one of the farm houses where the Feikemas lived and looked over the endless acres and the broad sky full of sunset. He'd just finished Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth*, and he'd realized much of that novel had happened in the neighborhood. He looked over the open fields and told himself he knew so very little about the history of that land, about the stories that still seemed to him to be lodged in the earth beneath his feet.

What prompted him to try to be a William Faulkner or a Thomas Hardy, to cut the whole world out of one of its small corners, was the desire to tell the stories of a real place, its history, its sorrows, and its joys.

Check out his canon sometime: that's what he did. That was one of the reasons he wouldn't leave Siouxland for New York or St. Paul, even though staying in Siouxland meant living in small towns like Doon and

9 What I learned from Frederick Manfred

"It was all marvelous. I don't regret a minute of it. Even the pain and hunger were sweet to have. It was life, not death, and all moments of life are very precious."
— inscription on the grave of Frederick Manfred

Luverne, the places his own literary mentor, Sinclair Lewis, quite obviously hated. He loved small towns, he used to say, because of the extensive networking one becomes heir too, the cause-and-effect of generations, the way one sees a father or a grandfather in the manner by which a grandson walks down the sidewalk.

I mention that now because I've come privy to inside information as a result of the networks he himself appreciated in small towns, where the webs grow thick and sometimes stifling, even to those who abide within them. Here's a story I know, a story for Harry Abma, and a story for me.

On the day of his death, Frederick Manfred was not resting easily. His doctor, one of my own ex-students, described the reason for his death that day, Freya says, as "Central Nervous System Lymphoma." Fred Manfred died, like my own father, fighting. He died, really, of a kind of physical exhaustion. He and his biological systems tried everything they could to stay alive, battling cancer and sepsis and pneumonia. That massive body of his worked as hard as he had at anything in life. But lost.

On that last visit Harold and I had made to visit him, Fred told us what he'd told his doctors before he'd

gone into brain surgery, weeks before, in the Sioux Falls hospital. "I told those guys to be careful when they go in there," he said, pointing to his head. "There are at least three or four good novels up there yet in those synapses."

"I don't think so," Harold told me, sadly, when we left. "Hear that rattle in his breathing?—that's not at all good."

I'd never before heard what some call "the death rattle."

Harold was right. The physical systems that would have lent him strength to type those unfinished novels on the old black Remington weren't enough to keep his systems running. As I said, the morning he died, he was particularly restless.

One of his nurses is an old friend, and she told me sometime later that when she noticed Fred was agitated, she asked if she could pray with him, and he nodded, and they did. The two of them prayed together. And that was helpful, she told me. He seemed to find some peace.

Then he died.

I don't know if, legally, I'm supposed to know that story; but I'm glad I do because it's as close as I need to come to answer Harry Abma's unasked question.

His daughter records what may well be the last words Frederick Manfred ever penned: "Patience and brilliance is all," his very last journal note. March 30, 1994.

But those words were not his last. I know. And besides, Mr. Abma, salvation belongs to the Lord.

Just a few weeks ago, I needed a picture of a country graveyard, so early one Saturday morning I headed out to Doon, where the cemetery hugs the rolling hills of the Rock River, a setting that offers a graveyard even more wordless gravitas. I can understand why Feike Feikema wanted to be buried there, looking down at

his beloved Doon to the east, and across the spacious fields of corn and beans to the north, fields that, even in winter, don't shed their spacious grandeur.

That morning I wasn't looking for his grave. It was cold—January—and I was looking for a photo that would feature the long shadows laid across stripes of snow and columns of stone by an early morning sun—just looking for something touching, really, trying to get something visually stunning.

That's when I stumbled on the burial site of a woman whose story I would know absolutely nothing of if I'd never read the novel, *The Secret Place*, a novel I bought four decades ago in a bookstore in Sheboygan,

Wisconsin, a novel that changed my life.

I know that good people felt used by that novel, even though the young woman buried beneath the marker where I stood probably suffered no abuse at all from Frederick Manfred, years later, when *The Secret Place* was published.

I met that woman, a prototype, in the pages of a book. She died at just twenty-one years of age, the stone says, way back in 1920. Still, that morning, it seemed to me that I knew her, or at least *of* her; and I couldn't help wondering how many people on the face of the earth, even among her own descendants, had any inkling of her story.

"Till we meet again" the stone says, in mossy text.

I stood there beside her grave, sorry that she'd died so young, and sorry too that Feik Feikema caught all that rage from the town he loved when he was just trying to tell a story.

But that morning in the Doon cemetery, I was also thankful for a story that made that very burial site alive with this even bigger story I'm telling, I guess, a sprawling story that will end only when the sun sets forever over the open spaces of a landscape Frederick Manfred loved and called Siouland, a real tome that won't be finished until the very last story of this broad land has finally been told. ♪

Holland Marsh

Harry Vander Kooij

In 1791 Samuel Holland,¹ a major in the British Army and Surveyor General of Upper and Lower Canada, came to survey the area northward from Toronto. The region contained a water route from Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay via Lake Simcoe, with a portage west of present-day Aurora. Holland's name came to be associated



Major Samuel Johannes Hollander, 1728–1801, who proposed draining what would be called Holland Marsh. Photo courtesy of the author.

with the river that originally drained about 20,000 acres, including the area of the marsh, flowing into Lake Simcoe. The river had a landing at the southeastern boundary of the marsh.

Although a corduroy road (logs laid crosswise) and a floating bridge were built between Holland Landing and Bradford in 1824 by Robert Armstrong, the area did not attract early settlement. In places the river's course was barely discernable from the marsh reeds, which were flanked by swamps and hardwood brush on the higher elevations. John Galt of the Canada Company, a venture

attempting to open former crown land to settlement, observed that the area was “a mere ditch swarming with mosquitoes, flies, bullfrogs and water snakes.”²

A number of early settlers ventured onto the marshland and attempted to partially drain sections. Peat from such drained areas was used for fuel, or as rich soil for agriculture, but the area remained too wet, so these efforts were abandoned. Still, the idea of using the bog persisted. The plan that came to be favored called for lowering the Washago outlet of Lake Couchiching, north of Lake Simcoe, thereby lowering the water levels of Lake Simcoe and the Holland River, which would allow the Holland Marsh to drain. But shoreline property owners on Lake Simcoe, who anticipated great damage from such a scheme, prevented this idea from progressing beyond the talking stage.

The first significant industry on the marsh developed after 1880 with the harvesting of grass and reeds. The hay was much in demand in Toronto and other urban centers as mattress stuffing. Initially strong hands and scythes were used. Later horse-drawn mowers did most of the work. Horses were ferried across flooded areas in flat-bottomed scows. To prevent the horses from becoming mired in the soggy ground, flat boards were strapped across the bottoms of their hoofs. With these the horses could step along, much like someone on snowshoes. This haying business reached its peak about 1915.

With his family, Harry Vander Kooij immigrated to Canada in 1947 and the Holland Marsh region became his home. Now retired and living in Barrie, Ontario, his career was with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation.

A few years previous to this, David Watson, a young farmer from the Scotch settlement, a hamlet just west of Bradford, of which only a Presbyterian church remains, sparked renewed interest in draining the marsh. He was convinced that large parts of the Holland River Valley could be developed into agricultural land once it was drained. He invited William Henry Day,³ a professor of physics at the Ontario Agricultural College (now the University of Guelph) to do some testing in the marsh to ascertain the feasibility of draining. About 1910, after carefully examining the marshland and surrounding watershed, Day concluded that draining some of the marsh was possible without lowering the water level in Lake Simcoe.

Watson's enthusiasm for the project had a contagious affect on Day. The next year Day built up a small plot of land from one to two feet and planted it with produce. He reported, "All the vegetables matured, the quality being excellent, the celery carrying off the prize at the local fall fair."⁴ He found that the black muck and organic material was almost identical in composition to the well-known onion lands of Point Pelee, south and east of Windsor, Ontario; the celery land at Thedford, Ontario (west and north of London); and the well-known celery fields of Kalamazoo, Michigan.⁵ As a result of these satisfactory results, he was able to form a development syndicate that purchased about 4,000 acres of marshland. In spite of his enthusiasm, Day was not able to convince the nearby municipalities to become involved. When World War I began, the effort was shelved.

In 1923 Day resigned from his position at Guelph and moved to Bradford. He began an energetic campaign to interest the townships of King and West Gwillimbury (the Holland River is their common boundary), the Village of Bradford, and the owners of over

7,000 acres of land in the vicinity in draining the marsh. Following the circulation of a petition, the proposal to drain the marsh was approved under the province's Municipal Drainage Act.

On 16 April 1925 a contract amounting to \$137,000 was awarded



Professor William Henry Day, 1870–1938. Photo courtesy of the author.

to the Toronto firm of Cummins and Robinson to drain the marsh. Initial calculation indicated that the cost of the work would be \$21 per drained acre. Key to the effort was the digging of a drainage canal around the project area. Plans prepared by Alexander Baird, an engineer from Sarnia, called for a canal 17.5 miles long, with an average depth of 7.5 feet and a width from 38 feet to 70 feet. Excavated material was to be dumped on the marsh side of the canal, wide enough to carry a road. As with many major projects, there were unforeseen complications, and delays were time-consuming and costly to overcome. Furthermore, the early economic ill effects of the Great Depression took a toll. But in 1930 the canal project was complete.

During this same time an area of about 200 acres, known as the Bradford Marsh, was diked and drained. Also in 1930, Day had thirty-seven acres under cultivation, on which he had grown lettuce, celery, onions, carrots, and parsnips. These sold

for a total of \$26,000, or an average gross yield of \$702 per acre.⁶ These were striking numbers and boosted the professor's optimism. He had two acres of lettuce maturing each week for eleven weeks and looked forward to the time when Holland Marsh would supply head lettuce for all Canada during the summer season, rather than having to be imported from California and other places in the United States. But, due mainly to complex land entanglements with the ownership syndicate, depressed agricultural conditions due to the economy during the Great Depression, and the general lack of experience of the landowners in muck farming, little progress was made in dividing the land and developing farms. Within a few years many of the plots had been abandoned or taken for tax arrears (non-payment of taxes).

Even before the drainage work promoted by Professor Day began in 1925, the marsh was widely known throughout Ontario for its production of "swamp whiskey." Police raids rarely ended in arrests, as the moonshiners knew the ways of the swamp and were able to escape the pursuing police officers. Marsh stills reached their peak production period between 1923 and 1928 when all legal sale of liquor was banned in Ontario. In spite of the numerous police raids and eighteen liquor-related deaths, people still came from miles around to buy a jug.

In 1930 John Snor became sufficiently interested in the marsh, so much so that he came to visit Bradford and some people who had started farming. At that time Snor was the representative of the Netherlands Emigration Foundation.⁷ Among the Foundation's mandate was investigating potential settlement locations for Dutch emigrants. During the 1920s several Dutch families had come to Canada. Some had settled in the

Hamilton and Chatham areas, where they had found seasonal farm work. As the Great Depression took root, however, such work became scarcer and those who were not naturalized citizens were in danger of being deported if they continued to be a financial burden. Snor sought ways to avert such deportations. Under the federal settlement program and in association with some major landowners he developed a plan to relocate immigrant families to the marsh. In 1933 he arranged to have 125 acres of undeveloped land subdivided into five-acre parcels and further divided the strip in Concession and King Townships into lots with 50-foot frontage and set aside for houses the settlers would build themselves. He further arranged financing—with each family getting \$200 from the federal government, \$200 from the provincial government, and \$200 from the Dutch government. With this \$600 the settlers could make new beginnings. Each would spend \$200 on material for a house, a two-story frame structure measuring 16x20 feet; the material was just enough to complete the shell without insulation. Another \$200 was used as a down payment to acquire the five acres which was considered a normal-sized market garden in those days. The remaining \$200 was set aside for living expenses for the first twenty months. The remainder of the \$500 land cost—\$95 per acre plus \$25 for the house lot—would be paid in the years following.⁸

Snor enrolled fifteen Dutch families, an Englishman, and a German. In June 1934 the men arrived to start developing the land and building their houses. One of the men moved a 20x20-foot hen house section to the marsh from Hamilton, and it became the communal living quarters for about a dozen men, most of who slept on the floor. There were no



Entrance sign of the 1934 Dutch settlement. Photo courtesy of the author.

conveniences; the men used the canal to bathe and wash their clothes.

The building materials provided included eleven 8-foot cedar poles for each house which enabled the men to build their dwellings three feet above ground level, a precaution against possible flooding. In the fall the houses were completed to the point where the families could move in. None had running water, which was carried by pail from a community artesian well; an outhouse was built in each backyard. That first winter was cold and harsh, so cardboard and other materials were used to cover the cracks in the walls to reduce drafts from the cold winds that swept across the open terrain. Stoves were kept red hot by burning tree roots that had been plowed up from what must have been a forest on the site many years earlier. The residents in nearby Bradford were relieved on cold winter mornings when they saw smoke rising from the chimneys of the settlers' houses.

With spring came the field work. The settlers also decided that their colony needed a name. It was agreed to name it Ansnorveldt—a combination

of the Dutch words “aan,” “Snor,” and “veld;” meaning “on Snor’s field.” In a ceremony to mark the official naming, they raised Canadian and Dutch flags and spoke a few words.

An important question that faced the settlers was education for their children. The Glenwith Public School was two and a half miles away, over a road with steep hills, and there were also concerns about their children getting lost in snowstorms, so a school was built on a one-acre lot at the north end of the settlement (today a youth center is on the site). The land was donated and most of the work was done by volunteers. It was completed in time for the start of the school year in September 1935. William Mulock, Postmaster General, was one of the guests present at the official opening of Public School S. S. 26.

For the men in the henhouse in the summer of 1934, Sunday had been a welcome day of rest. In keeping with their Calvinistic background, they adhered to the biblical instruction “six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God, on it you shall not do any work.” And so, for as many as had transportation, they would return to their respective communities. Those who stayed behind conducted their own church services by reading a prepared sermon and singing hymns.

After the houses were completed and the families had moved in, the residents gathered in their homes each Sunday to worship; each home hosting the worship service, in turn. This arrangement came to be known as the “traveling church,” with each person old and young alike required to bring his own chair. That first winter some fifty people crowded into the small houses twice each Sunday, attending services where the men took turns reading Dutch sermons, since they had not yet sufficiently mastered English.

When the floors in their houses began to sag from the weight during the meetings, they knew something had to be done. They did not have much money but, after many collections, a cash balance of \$75 was on hand and a loan of \$175 was secured with the signatures of a dozen or so men who had little other security to offer. They constructed a 20x20-foot church building on a vacant lot at the south end of the settlement and, on 21 June 1935, dedicated it to the Lord's service, with Rev. John Bolt from

Hamilton officiating. The first wedding, on 17 October 1937, was that of Tony Sneeep and Nelly Rupke. Sneeep was the carpenter of the community; he had taught the men the basics of construction for their houses and was the only worker paid in the building of the school and the church.

In 1938 the Holland Marsh Christian Reformed Church was organized with a membership of eighty-eight people. In 1940 the congregation received its first pastor, Rev. Martin Schans, who had previously served the

and in the congregation's fellowship, especially on Sundays; all wrestled with similar problems. Once a year they forgot about work and loaded into trucks and whatever vehicles they had and traveled to Innisfil Beach, on Lake Simcoe, for a picnic, games, and fellowship.

As the community grew, so did the number of children attending the local public school. The public school board included members who did not have the same Christian perspectives on education as the founding members. When enlarging the school building to accommodate growth was to cost the local taxpayers \$5,000, some of those in the Reformed faith decided to establish their own school. It would offer the same basic education but with a fundamental difference: it would be Christian rather than public. Most of the adults in the settlement had attended Christian schools in the Netherlands and they desired to have the same spiritual care for their children. A school society was established and in 1942, for \$150, a three-acre lot was purchased. Due to the wartime shortage of building materials, however, they could not

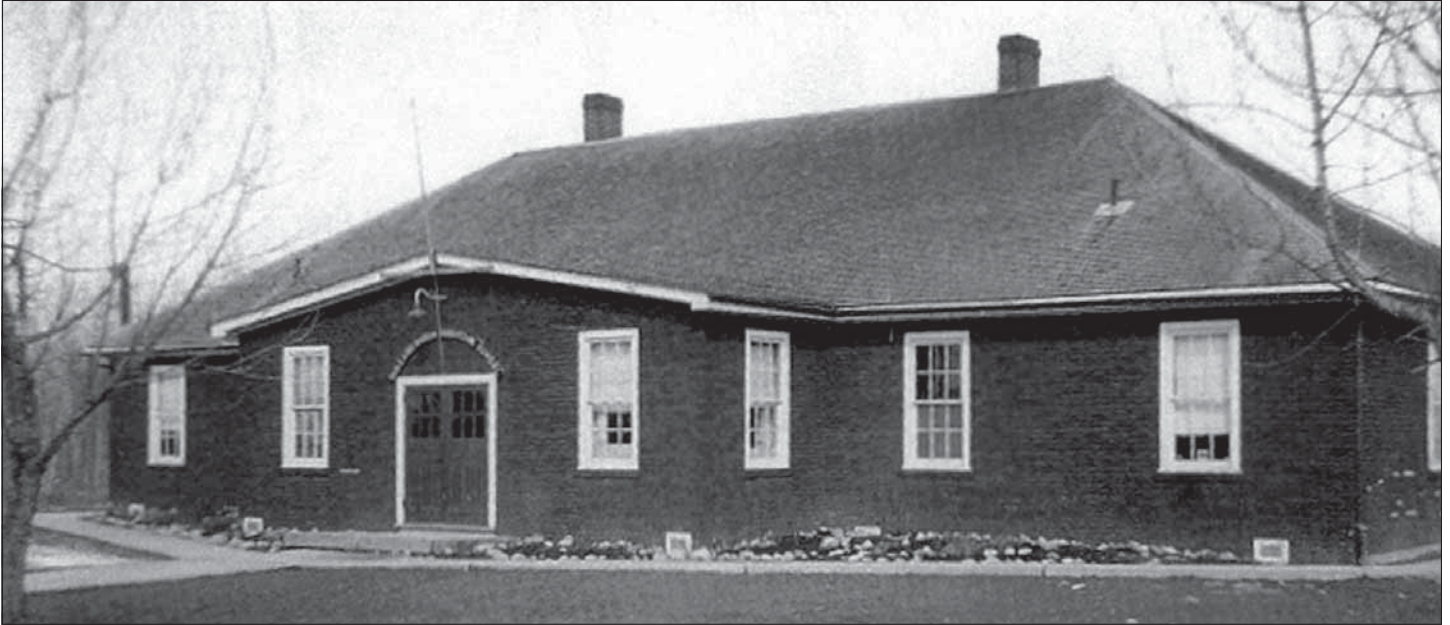


The Holland Marsh Christian Reformed Church building was built in 1935, but the congregation was not organized until three years later. Photo courtesy of the author.

Christian Reformed Church in Redlands, California. The Holland Marsh church played a cardinal role in the development of the marsh as a community. While difficulties abounded, its members found comfort and courage in the Bible



The Holland Marsh settlement in about 1935. The gambrel roof style opened the upper floor volume and was a distinctive feature of an architectural style called Dutch Colonial. Photo courtesy of the author.



The Holland Marsh Christian School was assembled in 1947 from two former army barracks, Photo courtesy of the author.

obtain a building permit. They then obtained permission from the church to rent the consistory room and on 15 February 1943 the school opened with nineteen children. Since that time and several buildings later, the school has grown to about 275 students.⁹

Some have called 1947 the year of the great invasion of the marsh, as in June of that year the first wave of post-World War II immigrants arrived. Ten or more families settled in the marsh as farm help. I was among them—with my parents, one brother, and five sisters. We came over on the *Waterman*, a troop carrier with no conveniences for family travel. But it was an exciting experience for an eleven-year-old boy wearing coveralls and wooden shoes.

Dad, who had been a self-employed market gardener in the Netherlands, went to work in the fields of his sponsors. I also went to work in these fields together with a group of kids ranging in age from ten to fifteen years. We crawled up and down the 2000-foot-long rows of onions and carrots, pulling weeds. When the foreman gave us a break at the end of the row we often engaged in wrestling

matches or would see who could jump across the ditch if we were near a wide one.

In 1949 my dad bought one of the original settlement houses which had been enlarged but still stood on its raised foundation of cedar posts. A modest down payment made him the owner of a \$2,600 house to accommodate the family which had grown to nine children. During the following years, while he worked for other growers, Dad rented some land which we worked in the evenings.

In 1953 Dad thought the time was right to start his own business; he rented fifteen acres. Much of the work was done by hand, his and those of the many other capable members of the family. That year I had a full-time job in the local grocery store, which provided just enough cash to pay for the family's groceries. A bumper harvest in the marsh that first year led to very low prices and made for a poor start. The farm income was just enough to pay for the rent, seed, custom work, containers, and other items. Dad returned to his former employer for work during the winter.

Early in 1954 my father bought thirty acres of excellent land without a down payment. This was a very large parcel for that time and it kept us all very busy during daylight hours. In early fall there was a lot of rain which made harvesting very difficult. Then, on Friday, 15 October 1954, everything came to a sudden stop when remnants of Hurricane Hazel roared in and flooded the marsh. The rainfall of more than seven inches was too much for the surrounding canals, which also collected the runoff from the surrounding highlands. The rain, together with the strong northerly winds, prevented the water from its normal flow into Lake Simcoe, causing sections of the dike walls to washout. By late evening, attempts to sandbag and close several gaps were abandoned; all night long the water kept pouring in. People were evacuated and others moved to the second floors of their homes to be rescued by boat the next day. The depth of the water ranged from about two feet at the east end of the marsh, where we lived, to about the ceilings of the houses at the west end. Fuel tanks, crates, outhouses,

wagon platforms, houses—anything that could float did. The De Peuter family and our family, then with twelve children, were startled when our houses began to float. To keep the houses somewhat level, we kept running from the low areas to those rising in the bobbing houses. After a few miles' journey the house lodged against Highway 400. That same night, after bringing my parents and siblings to Bradford, I returned to our house with my buddy who worked for us. We went to bed upstairs, since all work was abandoned. The next morning I looked out and saw a tranquil lake under a bright sunlit sky. The only thing wrong with the view was that houses, barns, trucks, and farm equipment were sticking out of the water.

The big cleanup began shortly after the closing of the breaches in the dike. Pumps were brought in and with twenty-five of them in place, running

constantly, they moved 200,000 gallons per day. On 17 November, after nearly four weeks, the marsh was cleared of water. Everyone got involved with cleaning and repairs. Busloads of Mennonites from the Kitchener area tackled some of the toughest jobs. The beautiful late fall weather was ideal for the cleanup and repairs. By spring everyone was ready to get on with the task of working the fields and the relatively normal process of seeding and harvest resumed.

Life goes on in the Holland Marsh, which is the richest vegetable-growing land in Ontario (referred to as the salad bowl of Ontario). Just one acre of this good organic soil will produce nine hundred 50-pound bags of onions, or 1,200 bushels of carrots, or 25,000 heads of lettuce. It has come a long way from the time that Professor Day harvested his first crop and won a prize for his celery at the local fall fair, but he had seen the direction.↪



The Christian Reformed Church in 1948, after two enlargements. It was replaced in 1960. Photo courtesy of the author.

Endnotes

1. Holland was born in 1728 near Nijmegen, the Netherlands, and had served in the Dutch army prior to joining the British army.
2. "Holland Marsh—Its Reclamation and Development," Immigration Branch of the Ontario Department of Planning and Development, 1949.
3. Day was born 10 September 1871 in Fenelon Falls and graduated from the University of Toronto in 1903. He was appointed head of the Physics Department at Guelph in 1906.
4. Albert Vander Mey, "And the Swamp Flourished," 1994.
5. See: Herbert J. Brinks, "Celery," *Origins* vol. 16, no. 1 (1988): 31-34.
6. Vander Mey, "And the Swamp Flourished."
7. The Netherlands Emigration Association, a private government-subsidized organization that provided reliable information to emigrants, was created in 1913 to curb abuses in the way potential emigrants were recruited. Ten years later the Dutch Emigration Centre was begun to provide advance payment in the form of a government credit to cover the costs emigration, but the funds had to be repaid. In 1931 the two groups merged into the Dutch Emigration Foundation. http://www.nederland-australie2006.nl/geschiedenis/au/html/land-verhuizers_voorbereiding2.html, visited 18 August 2006.
8. Vander Mey, "And the Swamp Flourished."
9. The 1950 graduating class totaled eleven, including the author.

Jacob Maasdam's Memoir, 1831–1840

Robert P. Swierenga and Muriel Kooi, editors; Michael Douma, translator

Editors' note: Among the nineteenth-century Dutch Immigrants were a number, particularly from the southern Netherlands, with strong pietistic roots. Maasdam's narrative of his conversion and experiences in the secession movement in the Netherlands during the 1830s is a vivid account of how some of this pietism found expression, and how some pietists saw both good and evil working in all aspects of life.

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Introduction¹

Jacob Maasdam² was born in Zuid-Beijerland, often called Hitzert.³ His father was Gerrit Maasdam [1765–1831] and his mother Adriana den Tuinder [1777–1834].⁴ From that union nine children were born.⁵ The father of this large family provided an honest life for his family.⁶ His life was filled with many struggles and adversities, and finally illness called him home to the Lord at the age of sixty-five on the 23rd of May in the year of our Lord 1831. His life was exemplary and edifying; his life was a pious, godly walk, so that his name will be remembered with blessing. This pious and God-fearing man led his family in prayer, asking that the Lord would be merciful to them. The Lord has confirmed this to some of his children, but not yet on them all. When the father [Gerrit] was on his deathbed he called all his children to him and gave them earnest instruction, in particular to his son Jacob, who was eighteen at that time. The instruction was that he should think about the lessons, warnings, and advice given to him. “I can no longer counsel you,” said the dying father, “but think of these things after my death.” These words ran through to my soul and cut deeply into my heart and I cried as I left. This while he breathed his last breath, content and comforted by his wife and children.

The widow was left with seven children, two daughters who were married, and five sons still at home; the youngest was thirteen and the

oldest twenty-seven.⁷ Father was dead and buried and was missed, and it became quite obvious shortly after his death that the children were not walking in his footsteps. All sorts of godlessness were manifested in them and Mother had the least knowledge of God and did not admonish or reprimand her children but allowed them to continue in their sin. The Lord, who is a jealous God and a destroyer of his enemies; let us feel his displeasure.

In 1832 I was included in the conscription for the national militia. I was very anxious because of this, fearing that I would be conscripted, which did happen. This struck us as a visit from the Lord, because we had not listened to His voice and had not acted upon the admonitions of our father. This influenced some of us, but the hearts of others were not humbled. For me the impact went deep, for when I stood in front of the mayor, I vowed to the Lord that I would live a godlier and more conscientious life and I prayed that He would spare me.

I was part of the draft lottery at Oud-Beijerland.⁸ With a trembling hand I pulled my number out of the bottle and it was sixteen, which seemed a good number.⁹ As a result, all fear left me; I forgot the Lord; I sinned more than before, and served the world more than before. This lasted two months from March until the latter part of April in 1832. One Sunday evening I was walking with my friends and Jacob Baay came up behind



Location of Maasdam's home and other locations where he lived and visited.

us and tapped me on the shoulder and asked, "Must you continue to sin, hasn't it been long enough? What would you do if the Lord should call you? Don't you know that then you would be lost?" These words pricked my heart and I had to agree that if I continued on my present course I would indeed be lost. My conscience awoke again and I became very fearful and depressed just as I had been years before when a child. Guilt weighed heavily on me until the next morning when this lifted along with the clouds and early morning dew.

The Lord knows His own (2 Timothy 2:19, [NRSV]): "But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Let everyone who calls on the name of Lord turn away from wickedness.'" He lifted me out of the miry clay and put me in the kingdom of His son. He was the faithful one. I was unfaithful. How could He love a sinner like me? Oh, the wisdom of God in sending His only begotten Son

to come to earth in the flesh! For the salvation of those who are always at enmity with God and his followers, the Lord renewed mankind from an enemy to a friend, from unwilling to willing, from darkness to light, from death to life—a new and spiritual life in him, shaped into a new and spiritual man, as it is written in the holy book, born again. In a birth from above, John 3:6, which occurs through belief, 2 Colossians 2:12, given with Him in baptism in which you are also revived in Him through belief in God.

This almighty work of God then became the work of transforming me. It showed me how I was lost in Adam, but also that there is salvation in Christ, although at first this was not clear to me because of the darkness in me. Yet the Lord did not let His work lay half finished, but He began and completed His work. This action of God transforming me took place in 1832, in the latter part of April. Soon after that I noticed that some who were called to army service were rejected and then others were called in their places. And so, my turn came, which depressed me greatly, yet I had to stay the course. I had acted as though the Lord could do nothing to me. When I was in need, I called on Him and gave promises to listen to Him, and then when I thought I was saved I did not keep those promises. Anyone who reads this or hears this being read, I advise you not to do as I have done. Because who has ever quarreled with the Almighty and had peace; or who could ever refuse His hand? Not I or any other creature can do that.

I was called-up and sent to Arie

Blaak, the constable in The Hague, and from there to Leiden, where I became a part of the 5th infantry division. From Leiden I was sent to Utrecht to the *Rijks Hospitaal* [government hospital] because I had had pain in the left side of my chest for a long time. I was there for six months. After having endured much pain there, I was excused from service because I had been hospitalized. I had to return to Leiden until my discharge papers came in April 1833. This release made me unspeakably happy, because I was very afraid of living among such godless people as servicemen. I had not been able to pray or read freely and I became a caged bird. I was separated from the men and labeled a fanatic.

Upon my return home I learned that my oldest brother, Steven, had died. This was the second misfortune in my parental home, the result of having disobeyed the Lord. I had suffered much hunger while in the hospital because I sent my money home to help support the family. Upon returning home I promised Mother that I would stay with her as long as she lived and that I would support her. I was with her a year and a half when the Lord took her away from us on the 10th of September 1834. The next month, on 10 November, half sister Willempje, the wife of Gijsbert de Laat, died. Our sister Jaapje, who was married to Willem den Boer, came to live with us.

Then a significant change quickly occurred. Jaapje was very stingy and so living with her was very difficult. My youngest brother, fifteen years old, left home because he was being mistreated by Jaapje. Everything I earned I contributed to the household. However, I wanted to keep a little money so that I could go to church elsewhere, but this was not allowed. This put me off and I decided to move to the village of Piershil, an hour from Hitzert.¹⁰ Soon after, I also left. There, in 1835, I established

myself as a cooper and boarded with Bastiaan Agoort.

Having been there for a year, one Sunday morning I went to Hitzert to worship in Hendrik Barendregt's carpenter shop with the Lord's people who were part of the *afschieding* [secession], even though I had not yet become a seceder.¹¹ This was because I, to my shame, then still loved the world more than my Savior Jesus Christ. As early as 1833, a year before the *afschieding* led by Rev. [Hendrik Pieter] Scholte, then preacher at Doeveren, Genderen, and Gansoyen [Noord Brabant], I had had a serious quarrel about religion with the preacher at Zuid-Beijerland (Hitzert).



Rev. Hendrik Pieter Scholte was a prominent influence in Maasdam's life. Image courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

This quarrel occurred in the church about the catechism and the free will of man and God's power over man. The minister taught that man has a free will and can do good or evil as he pleases and he can also repent. Thus faith or belief was the result of man, who can work out his own salvation. And, if a man has done enough good deeds, then he can become a new creature, in other words, then he can win the favor of God and the Lord would grant him salvation. He also taught us that the Old Testament was

no longer valid; the temple of Solomon had fallen.

I protested against these and other terrible heresies and was called to appear before the elders. I took a few of my students along as witnesses. They quickly left me, wanting nothing more to do with this. The consistory itself was hostile toward me; the congregation slandered me, so that nearly everyone was opposed to me. However, I stood steadfast in the Lord and appeared before the consistory eight times. Members of the consistory made me out to be my own god and worthy to be torn apart by four horses, because I, as a child, had defied the dominie and brought dissent into the congregation. The last time that I was in their midst the consistory had the civil authorities fine me fifty guilders, and threatened that if I did not stop challenging the minister I would be imprisoned. I questioned the consistory if they found such things in God's word, since I had never read such things, and that it appeared clear enough to me that although they called themselves Reformed, their actions made them appear just the opposite. I knew that the Lord will judge and everyone will have to explain their actions. I had done as much as I could there, knowing the Lord was with me. I left their meeting with the words of the Apostle, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

Very soon after that I again went to Hitzert for the Sabbath. I became unwell and went to my sister, married to Willem den Boer, in Piershil. I lay in bed there and became so ill that in the evening of that same Sunday I no longer wanted to live. Late Monday night the *Curelijn*¹² said that I was dead. But, a quarter of an hour later I was sure that I was alive, and on that same day regained by senses and the pox appeared, and after five weeks I

recuperated. My sister very faithfully nursed me back to health and when I had regained my health, the hand of the Lord came upon her youngest child who was six months old. God, however, restored the child. But then my sister fell victim to the same disease and died. This was once again very difficult for me, and all the more so since I had never seen the fruits of conversion in her. This happened on 10 July 1835; she was thirty-one.¹³

After this I decided to again move from Piershil to Hitzert and board with my brother. There I again became ill and recovered with nearly no help. This sorrowed me; when I again recuperated I left and boarded with Hendrik Barendregt. While I was there his wife died, so I left and boarded with Antoon Smaal, where things improved for me.

Meanwhile, I actively searched for a wife and choose Maria Adriana Breure. I made my wishes known to her in a letter, after which I talked to her in person. We had a lot in common, but her parents offered much resistance. But what the Lord of eternity has brought together no man can keep apart. Since I had been reborn in the Lord I had the fiery desire to conduct myself in the word of the Lord. A path for doing this was opened in 1839 when I went to the revered and very learned Dominie Scholte in Utrecht and received training from him.¹⁴ I practiced the principles of the Hebrew language and after that studied church history and theology. Having been there for about a year, circumstances prevented me from continuing my studies.

But, we were married on the 27th of November 1840. I was twenty-seven years old and my wife twenty-six. The prospects of earning my bread in an honest manner were not promising, but the Lord can advise those who are on the darkest paths, and this he did for me. I followed the advice of

Koenraad De Jong, who was with me for a time at Rev. Scholte's, to go live in Noordeloos.¹⁵ Because of circumstances, my wife stayed at her parents' house and I boarded with Cornelis Koek. My wife and I were separated from each other by ten hours [travel time]. But when the frost came I could not work any more and went to Hitzert and was with my wife through the winter.

I rented a house in Noordeloos to begin living there in May, but this didn't start until the 11th of June 1841 because my wife was confined to bed at her parents' house because of childbirth. Our firstborn came into the world on 18 March 1841. Her name was Elizabeth. She was very intelligent and pleasant and well-mannered but as pleasing as she was, death did not spare her. After we had her for about fourteen months she was suddenly torn away from us without warning after a day and night of seizures. She passed away on 27 May 1842 and was buried in Noordeloos. We will see her again when the Lord Jesus Christ returns and all the saints with him. Then death no longer will be, and we will not be separated but will be reunited. May we eternally glorify and praise Him who has loved us and bought us with His own blood.

Having lived in Cornelis Rengeling's house for nearly three years and having worked as a cooper, a son was born to me on 13 September 1842. His name was Leendert. We were living there very quietly and contentedly, when a member of the Seceder congregation of Utrecht came unexpectedly, sent by Dominie Scholte, saying that I must go at once with him to Utrecht and from Utrecht to Amsterdam, since a man had to speak to me about working in God's kingdom. This news terrified my wife and me. There was no time to prepare. I went [to Amsterdam] with him and Dominie [Antonie] Betten who was

the minister at the Seceder church at Noordeloos. In Amsterdam we met Dominie Scholte and a Mr. Tiddy, an agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society, who told me why I had been asked to come. They proposed that I become active in the distribution of Bibles, to go visit people in their homes, and to speak with them about the way of salvation and to proclaim Jesus Christ, etc.

After I asked a few questions and they had given me a satisfactory answer, I accepted the task of trying to win miserable sinners unto salvation. But they [the Bible Society] resisted the focus and source of salvation. Instead of putting Jesus Christ and Him crucified first, they read the law of God and said that man is doomed. Thus they drove men away from Jesus Christ. They propose the law for men, whose situation is damned. They could not learn of God and Christ, the



Rev. Antonie G. Betten, a friend of Maasdam, also immigrated to Pella, and became a minister in the Reformed Church in America. Image courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

crucified, in whom we can see that God cannot let the sinner go unpunished, since he would not have given over this beloved son to pay for the salvation of the sinner.

I returned to Hitzert where everything went well and many agreed with me but, when I came to Utrecht, I had a strong urge to go to Maartensdijk

about two hours from Utrecht to teach the catechism. There was quite a difference of opinion between me and the pious ones there, so much so that they did not wish me to teach them any more. Truly scorn, slander, and heresy I received from them. I was easily able to endure this because I was fully convinced in my heart that I had taught them nothing other than what is in the Bible.

Church leader

I shall now write about the events in Hitzert when I was not yet a seceder. I have already alluded to this in the preceding pages. In the beginning of my stay in Utrecht it continued to be hard. I boarded in the house of C[ornelius] van der Meulen, who is now a minister in Zeeland, in the city of Goes.¹⁶ He lived next to Dominie Scholte. That week a sentry, or guard, was posted at the front of the door, so that when we went out, it was very difficult to reenter. Yes, this happened one Sabbath day after we had partaken of the Lord's Supper at Takken's house,¹⁷ when W[ynand] Gardenier, who is now a minister in Zeeland, and I returned home.¹⁸ The daughter of Dominie Scholte also was with us and she pushed through to enter Dominie Scholte's house, where a guard seized her and dragged her out of the entryway and slapped her. But finally we were able to get around them and went inside. Once on another Sabbath we had gathered in the church building when the police came with six officers and twenty-four soldiers with loaded guns to force us out of the church. With battering rams they broke the door open so that they could get to us.

The police officer spoke very angrily toward Dominie Scholte and told him to leave, otherwise he would have the soldiers force us to leave. Seeing these armed men, Dominie Scholte thought it best for us to

disperse on our own and prevent further incident, since some might perhaps have sacrificed their lives, so we all went to his house.

Another circumstance took place while I was a student at Utrecht. A rumor was being spread from the village of Bunschoten, which lies near the Zuider Zee, that there were many conversions there.¹⁹ So I went with four others to verify this report. Betten, Steketee,²⁰ and Gardenier were my travel companions. Having arrived there in the evening we came to Reintjepoort's house.

While there, two soldiers entered the house thinking that there would be preaching. But this was not our intention. Many people quickly gathered to see us, and it was our wish to see them and listen to them. Soon strange new converts came to me, but I made no remark nor spoke about this. Meanwhile I was requested by Reintjepoort to ask a blessing on the meal. After this, I offered my prayer and asked the Lord that He might lead us with his spirit and see to it that His work might be evident among us and offered my thanksgiving to the Lord in prayer.

When I finished, a good many of the people left for another place. We stayed there awhile and talked to the elder. He told us how the Lord brought his wife and two sons to repentance. The Holy Spirit had suddenly brought them into ecstasy so that they became very nervous and this caused a terrible twitching and spasms in their bodies so that one could hear the very bones moving in their bodies. Such a rattle sounded in their bones! This continued for a short while and then they were born again. They glorified the Lord with psalms and songs and were so gladdened by this wonderful privilege that had been given to them.

Yes, the elder testified that before his wife was crippled, but after she awoke



Scholte shunned denominational affiliation and his congregation built this structure for their independent congregation. Soon after organizing, the congregation joined the Reformed Church in America, despite Scholte's views on the matter. Image courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

from her ecstasy, she was healed. He was so overwrought by the events that he could not tell us about this without jumping up and down from his chair; he was very nervous as well. After he had told us all of this, we went to Rientjepoort and from there we went to the house of another. There we found several young people between the ages of twenty and thirty years of age. When we came into the house they sang Psalm 25, but the song stopped at once with our entrance and everyone went silent and would not speak. But after a little time had elapsed a few began to speak about the love of the Lord. Yes, they too were drunk with love so that a girl sitting next to a boy sat in his lap. From time to time more boldness began among all those who sat there, that they began to speak again. Meanwhile an old woman, who had been in bed, came in. She came in her nightclothes with her wooden shoes and a scarf around her head. This old woman, seeing how the girl was sitting in the lap of the boy, said she was not filled with love of the Lord. "Yes, now she is in the wine house of her heavenly bridegroom." The girl,

hearing this, said, "Yes, never have I enjoyed the privilege to be free in nature or to sit in a boy's lap, but now I have a spiritual freedom." Upon this the old woman hugged another and kissed her and began to dance and to sing, in the manner of many others with her.

This surprised me. Steketee stood close to the girl and Betten and Gardenier and I sat by the fire. I winked to Steketee to come by me, but he shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know." I mentioned to him that I wanted to pray together, which he found a good idea. I tapped my hand on the table two times, because there was no opportunity to call out above the song and dance. After I had done that, they all stopped. I said, "Friends in the Word of the Lord, I see that there was a congregation that also was filled with the Holy Spirit and they were consistent in the teachings of the Apostles, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer, and while you also appear to be filled with the Holy Spirit, you certainly feel the need to pray, which Christians of all times have needed so much." Now they looked at each other, asking, "Can you pray, poor wretch?" They answered each other, "I cannot pray, poor wretch." To this I replied that if we are so filled with the spirit as they are, we should be able to pray. Then Steketee said that I should pray, since they could not. Then I asked the entire group whether there was anyone who objected to me praying. They answered, "No, no one." So I prayed to the Lord that He might give these people a quiet and merciful spirit and that they might not be so publicly zealous and that they might not slander His name, because now the work of the devil showed itself among them and that they should take care that nothing of the devil should be seen as the work of God.

When I had ended the prayer, there was a terrible cry from the gathering and many others, who in religious ecstasy, could not speak nor cry. At this

point Reintjepoort entered as a man possessed by the devil foaming at the mouth. The mass of people gathered around me with raised fists, saying that it was better for me to have a millstone around my neck and for me to be thrown into the sea, than that I bother one person of this small group. Then my comrades flew out of the house, but I remained seated. After they had spoken the anathema on me, they took a vote and sang Psalm 68 verse 1: "Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered; let those who hate him flee before him," and following verses to me.

Meanwhile De Hartoch [den Hartog], who was the elder, came inside and they told him what evil I had done to them. But I also began to speak with him and I asked him whether he had been converted according to the word of the Lord, and he answered me, "Yes." Then I asked him whether we were converted as these other people have been. He answered, "No. Now you had been converted according to the Word of the Lord, and they are not converted as you are, then is their conversion from the devil." I admonished him to persevere and called out the devil.

The people, having seen and heard that the elder agreed with me, grabbed me and threw me out the door. It was night and very cold because it was freezing, so we decided to go back to Utrecht. It was twelve o'clock when they threw me out the door and we were six hours from the city, the whole journey was lonely and not very pleasant. Gardenier had to stay in Amersfoort,²¹ because he is a lamb and was not able to travel as far, but Betten, Steketee, and I continued and went the six hours to Utrecht, even though we were very tired.

When many who call themselves God's children heard this, they felt sorry for me because of the way I had been treated. One cannot know whether there were converts among them and if there were, then it grieves my spirit.

The Bible says not to not extinguish the spirit, which was an evil I had not done. But it was not long thereafter that the Lord convinced everyone that this work was not of Him but was of the heart, because their zealotry was all in public. Instead of white linens on their bed they had black. And the women wear black caps, and their clocks use pebbles and rope instead of copper weights and chains. Still other things that they did turned other pious people away.

Still another case occurred in Noordeloos. There was a division in the congregation as there was in most of the congregations in our Fatherland. The main cause of the division was the issue of child baptism. One side said that all children must be baptized; the other said only the children of believers should be baptized. Those who advocated that all the children should be baptized said that the children of the believers were not in the covenant of God, that they did not count their children as belonging to the Lord [due to family relationship] but all children were outside the covenant. They also proposed an external church and an internal church. To the external church belonged all those who believed in the truth and were one with the truth with which they preached. The others said "No"; there is but one church, it is the same church internal as well as external, which revealed itself as a city on a hill. There were still many other issues.

At one time Dominie [Simon] Van Velzen came and preached. I went into the house where Van Velzen was, prior to preaching, to ask him whether he had come in the name of the Lord, because it was needful to heal the division and not to make it any wider. After I had spoken with him and the others for two hours Jan Vogel wanted to throw me out of the house. But I requested first to light up my pipe and give thanks to the intercession of another; this was allowed. When I was done I kept

speaking and admonishing, so that Jan Vogel became so angry that he told me again to leave the house, because otherwise it would turn out badly for me. I answered him that it was evil of him to turn me out, because he would disgrace himself for turning out someone filled with the devil. I warned him that his hands would not again hit me, because what would the world say about that? Then he got up and angrily left Gerrit den Boer's house. But soon thereafter I had to leave, because it was time for Dominie Van Velzen to preach. This man was also terribly angry at me, because I had said many things about him that were scandalous for someone who wanted to be called a servant of the Lord. The things that I said about him could be read in the journal, *De Reformatie*, written by the Rev. Scholte. From this and other circumstances there existed a bitter hate and enmity against me. People do not get what they want, except when it is in the will of the Lord.

Yet a few more of my activities in the congregation of Hitzert. At the beginning of the secession we were followed closely and were not allowed to gather with more than nineteen persons,²² so that by necessity groups of seceders gathered at five different places, so that one Sunday I also had to preside over one of the assemblies. Many times I was elected to go to the classical and provincial gatherings; also two of those were delegated to be sent to the King. H[endrik] Barendregt and I were named those two, to ask for freedom of religion. On this occasion I also took my wife along to visit her aunt.

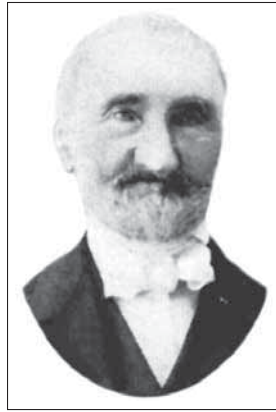
Editors' conclusion

Maasdam closes his account abruptly, probably in 1840, when the Christian Seceded Church of Hitzert delegated Barendregt and himself to go to the King to request "freedom of religion." The outcome of the trip is not disclosed, nor did Maasdam later recount

his activities in the ensuing nine years in the Netherlands and nine more in Pella. Accounts of these events come from other sources, especially the journal and letters of Jan Hospers.

The religious persecution and hard times due to diseases in the potato and rye crops prompted 10,000 seceders to immigrate to North America in the years 1846-1849, including the Reverends Scholte, Vander Meulen, Betten, and Gardenier, and the laymen Barendregt, Koenraad De Jong, Adrianus Den Hartog, Ernst Takken, Jacob Baay, Jan Steketee, and Jan Vogel; all are mentioned in Maasdam's memoir.

In the spring of 1849 Maasdam, age thirty-six, also departed with his wife Marie Adriana, age thirty-five, and their children, Leendert, age seven; Elizabeth, age four; and Jacob, age one. The family sailed on *Franziska* with a group of 235 fellow Seceders, all bound for Scholte's Pella Colony, with Maasdam, A. C. Kuyper, and Jan Hospers selected as leaders. Hospers chronicled the voyage in a journal, which was recently published in *Iowa Letters: Dutch Immigrants on the American Frontier* (2004). The six-week trip began on 3 May and ended in Pella on 17 June. It was tragically marked by ten burials at sea and two interments in Albany, New York. After several committals of bodies to the deep, according to Hospers, on Sunday 13 May



Another of Maasdam's acquaintances from the Netherlands, Jan Hospers became a prominent leader in Pella and in the church there. Image courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

Maasdam preached from I Corinthians 10, warning the people huddled between decks in rough seas not to put God to the test by unfaithfulness. At another funeral he preached and led in singing Psalm 103, a favorite of the Seceder faithful for its promise of God's everlasting love in life or in death. On 11 May Maasdam preached again and Jan Hospers taught catechism. Kuyper led the singing from the Genevan Psalter, since he was very musically inclined. The trio of leaders were also asked by the ship captain to appoint men to "swab the decks" during the voyage, and the Dutch, interested in cleanliness, readily complied.

When the *Franziska* passengers arrived in Pella after the arduous and emotional trip, they received a hero's welcome. Scholte and his 1847 vanguard group, which had been led by Maasdam's good friend Hendrik Barendregt, were there, as were several who had remained in St. Louis to work for a time. Kommer Van Stigt, in his 1897 *History of Pella*, mentions that the 1849 immigrants were "considered more enlightened and better educated." Scholte's early Christian Church, Van Stigt writes, "was also benefited by the acquisition of such men as Jacob Maasdam and A. C. Kuyper and Jan Hospers." Those three men were accepted as leaders without any formality. They lightened the burdens of the early leaders, especially in the performance of Sunday preaching services. Until a few months before his death, Maasdam served without remuneration. His steel-trap mind earned him the moniker "the walking concordance," for he could and would quote Scripture verbatim—book, chapter, and verse.

During the two years prior to Maasdam's arrival, Scholte had seen to the organization of his Christian Church in Pella, one he emphatically declared would not be affiliated with any denomination, including the Dutch Reformed. His church was not to be subject to any synodical system.

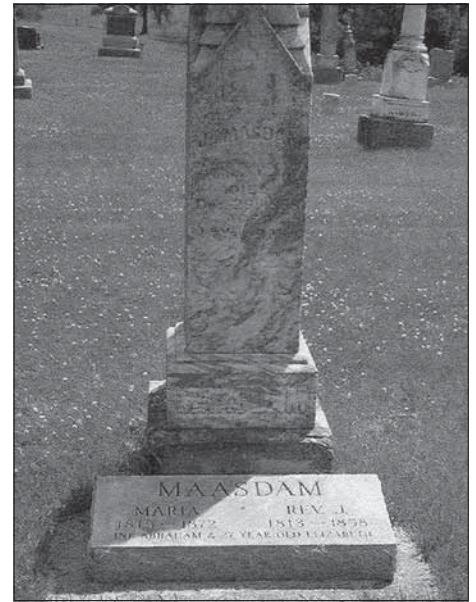


A view of Pella in 1847, about a decade before the Maasdam family arrived. Because the first structures were built of sod and prairie grasses, it was also referred to as "Straw Town." Image courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

Immediately upon arriving in Pella, Maasdam became a combatant in controversial affairs dating from Pella's very founding. Schism had not been left behind in Holland and was prevalent again in their lives as Dutch-Americans. One bitter conflict arose when Scholte reneged on giving to the church two building lots on the west side of what is now the town's Garden Square. Maasdam was named the chairman of a consistory committee formed to discipline Scholte. The upshot was that the consistory barred Scholte from his pulpit at the Christian Church. Maasdam was asked to devote his entire time to pastoral duties and he happily accepted. The consistory offered no salary; it had always been his delight to serve the Lord, he said. Rev. Betten joined him in this ministry after giving up leading a new

Reformed group that he had briefly supported.

Maasdam lived in Pella less than a decade before his untimely death on 29 December 1858. He left behind his wife and children, including Maria who had been born in Pella soon after their arrival. He was buried in Grace-land Cemetery, the kerkhof of the First Reformed Church, located one mile north of town. Maasdam's grave is graced with an engraved stone that states: "At rest in the silent tomb, Life Minister of the Gospel at Pella, This was his expectation and hope, December 29, 1858, Aged 44 years and 9 months." The family plot includes his wife, infant son Abraham, and 27-year-old daughter Elizabeth. A newer and more readable stone states simply their names and dates. The older stone is ravaged by time and the inscription is difficult to read. ☞



Maasdam's grave marker in Pella. Photo courtesy of Robert Swierenga.

Endnotes

1. This is a translation from the original manuscript in Dutch preserved by the family of Leendert and Marie Hagen Maasdam. It was passed to younger relatives, William Maasdam and his wife Cora Van Dam Maasdam, who gave it to Martha Lautenbach, the late Pella historian. Lautenbach, in turn, gave it to Jan Handley of Ankeny, Iowa, a great-great granddaughter of Jacob Maasdam. Some years ago Handley's friend, Kathleen Kallemyn of Des Moines, Iowa, translated the original document for the family. Handley kindly provided a copy of the document and the translation to Muriel Kooi. Capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing and idiomatic usage have been altered where necessary to produce a more readable text.

2. For unknown reasons Maasdam refers to himself in the third person in the first two paragraphs.

3. Jacob Maasdam (1813–1856) was born in the village of Zuid Beijerland (then known as Hitzert) on the island of Beijerland (also known as the Hoekse Waard) in the Province of Zuid Holland. He and his siblings were baptized in the local Hervormde Kerk, the national church. A gifted and devout leader,

Maasdam died in Pella, Iowa, at the age of forty-five.

The island of Beijerland, astride the Oude Maas and the Hollands Diep, was long noted for its pietistic religious culture. The Nadere Reformatie (Later Reformation) of the seventeenth century took strong root in this poverty-stricken region south of Rotterdam.

4. Gerrit and Adriana both had been married previously; Gerrit to Apolonia Verschoor (1768–1803) and Adriana to Leendert de Hek. Adriana and Leendert de Hek had one child, Magdelena, who died in 1804 at five months. Gerrit and Apolonia had six children: Maria and a stillborn twin in 1796 (Maria died after fifteen days); Willempje, 1796–1834 (married to Gijsbert de Laat and mentioned in the text); Maria, 1798 before 1805; Hendrik, 1802, died at 2 weeks; and Apolonia, 1803–1804.

5. Maria, 1805–1805; Jaapje, 1806–1836; Steven, 1808–1833; Klaas, 1809–1824; Arie, 1810–1890; Jacob, 1813–1858; Abraham, 1815–1894; twins Adrianus, 1817–1820 and Isaäc, 1881–1882.

6. He was a cooper.

7. Maasdam is counting his half sister Willempje in the total, but not

including her in the age range. She was born 25 December 1796 and would have been thirty-four at her father's death; she had been married to Gijsbert de Laat since 1825. Jaapje, his oldest full sister, was twenty-seven; she had married Willem den Boer in 1830.

8. Oud-Beijerland was a larger municipality in the northern part of the Hoekse Waard, about five miles north of Zuid Beijerland.

9. A number not likely to result in actual conscription.

10. Piershil was another small village in the Hoekse Waard, five miles north northwest of Hitzert.

11. The Secession, or Afscheiding, began in 1834 with calls for reformation in the national or state church. King Willem I, as titular head of the church, together with church leaders, condemned the protestors and tried to suppress them. Police and soldiers harassed the religious dissenters; neighbors scorned, ostracized, and blacklisted them.

12. This is not a Dutch word; perhaps it means healer (the Dutch verb for healing is *cureeren*) or doctor.

13. In 1835 Maasdam first identified with the Secession and worshiped in a

house church in his friend Barendregt's home in Hitzert. The congregation was formally organized in April 1836. Barendregt was a follower of the Reverend Hendrik P. Scholte.

14. He boarded with another student of Scholte, Cornelius Vander Meulen, who would later lead a large group of Zeelanders to found the colony of Zeeland, Michigan.

15. Noordeloos is located to the north, in the Abblasser Waard region of the Province of Zuid Holland.

16. Cornelius van der Meulen (born 1819 in Middelharnis, Zuid Holland, and died 23 August 1876 in Grand Rapids, Michigan) led his Goes congregation to the Zeeland, Michigan, colony in 1847.

17. This Takken might be Ernst

Takken, who emigrated from Utrecht in 1854 to Van Raalte's Holland colony, or Henry Takken, who immigrated to America before 1850.

18. Wynand Gardenier (1819–1856) immigrated to the United States in 1853 and in 1854 accepted a call from the First Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan, where he died on 13 March 1856.

19. The decision to suppress the reform movement made it grow all the more. However, some like the so-called "Black Stocking" group led by a man named Reintjepoort in Bunschoten, carried their newly found religious liberty to excess and even to ecstasy and sexual license. Bunschoten, along with its conjoined twin village of Sparkenburg, both in the Province of Utrecht, were known

as stern, pietistic communities.

20. Three Steketees, Jan, Jacob, and Cornelius, immigrated with Rev. Vander Meulen's congregation of Zeelanders to Zeeland, Michigan, in 1847. It is unknown which one was Maasdam's companion, but we suspect it was Jan, the leader of one of the three ships.

21. Amersfoort is a large city in the province of Utrecht.

22. The government misused an old statute of the Napoleonic code (articles 291, 292, and 294), which forbade regular public assemblies of twenty or more persons for religious, political, or literary purposes without official permission, subject to fines of f100 (\$40) on clerics and consistory members for each offense.

Bernard J. Fridsma: A Frisian Ambassador in the United States

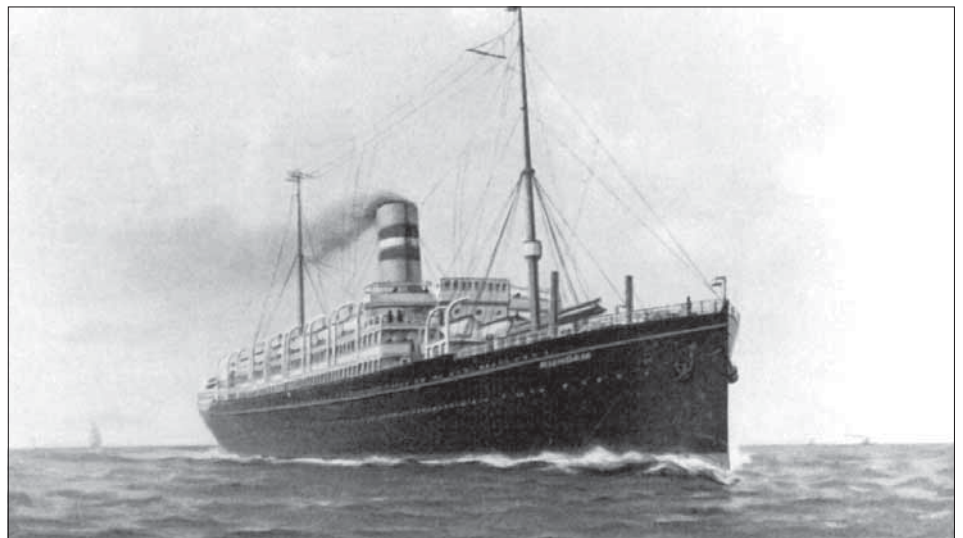
Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

On 12 October 2005 Dr. Bernard Joukes Fridsma, emeritus professor of Germanic languages at Calvin College, passed away in Grand Rapids, Michigan, at one hundred years and nine months of age. In November, seventeen banker boxes—the Fridsma Collection—arrived in the Heritage Hall Archives located in the Hekman Library. Many of the documents, including seventy annual diaries from 1932 to 2002, are written in the Frisian language and will take an expert, not only in Dutch but Frisian as well, to sort out. The material is in Frisian because Fridsma carried on a life-long love affair with his native Friesland. And Friesland did not forget Fridsma either—on 15 January 2005, his one hundredth

birthday, Scharnegoutem, the village of his birth, held a special church service in his honor. This love affair began, surprisingly enough, not in Friesland but three thousand miles away in America.

Of course many Frisian emigrants paid homage to their *heitelân* (fatherland); several groups even named their settlements Friesland. But Fridsma took his admiration for all things Frisian beyond the usual, and his is an unusual immigrant story.

The family immigrated to the United States from Scharnegoutem when he was six. While still in his teens he began reading Frisian literature and, as he absorbed the stories of great Frisian authors, his own life story was dramatically formed.



The Fridsma family came to the United States on *Rijndam*, a different sort of vessel from the canal boat the family had operated in the Netherlands. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres is a historian, genealogist and author; whose most recent work, Son of Succession, is reviewed in this issue of Origins. She is president of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies.

America

To emigrate or not to emigrate? That question troubled Bearend's father, Jouke Fridsma, who bought, shipped, and sold peat from his canal boat based in Scharnegoutem. His eldest son, Meindert, had immigrated to the United States and wrote glowing letters from New Jersey. Still, Jouke wasn't sure. Finally, Meindert wrote, "Father, if you cannot make up your mind, let the Lord do it for you. Put your boat up for sale for a good price and if you soon get a buyer, see that as a sign that you should emigrate." Who could argue with logic like that? Fridsma put his boat up for sale for a thousand guilders and the next day a young man bought it—no questions asked.

The family left for America in early March 1911. *Lytse Bearentje* (Little Bearend), who was barely six at the time, had attended school in Friesland for only a few weeks. As the *Rijndam* pulled away from the pier in Rotterdam and the family waved goodbye, he had no idea how much the province would draw him back.

Once in the United States, Bearend, renamed Bernard, entered the American public school system. Compared to the small school in Scharnegoutem, the twenty-room school in Passaic, New Jersey, with students of many different ethnic backgrounds, almost overwhelmed him. But, like so many other immigrant youngsters, he quickly adapted to his new environment. By the time the United States entered the First World War, Bernard was singing enthusiastically with his fellow students such patriotic songs as "America, I Love You." The principles of democracy, as stated in the United States Pledge of Allegiance with the words

"... with liberty and justice for all," resonated deeply with him. The rights of people, cities, and states to govern themselves, choose their own leaders, and decide their own destiny were principles he wholeheartedly endorsed. Anything less seemed intolerable to him. In September 1918, Bernard enrolled in Clifton High School. There he became acquainted with the great English classics and, as he put it, "the beauty of the world of literature began to open up for me."

Bernard might never have given his birthplace another thought had it not been for his voracious appetite to read everything that came into the house. When one of his sisters subscribed to *Yn ús eigen Tael* (In Our Own Language), a bi-monthly publication of *It Kristlik Frysk Selskip* (The Christian Frisian Society), he began to read it as well. Since the books in his home had been either in Dutch or English until that time, written Frisian was a new phenomenon to him. The stories, poems, and articles inspired him to want to learn to write the language as well as to be able to read it. When he learned about a new publication dedicated to the study of Frisian language and history called *Swanneblommen*, he decided to subscribe to it. He also

ordered his first books in Frisian on Frisian history, poetry, and language. Soon he was deeply engrossed in the language and the struggles of the Frisian movement to maintain an ethnic identity within the larger, dominant, Dutch culture. At fifteen he joined the *Jongfryske Mienskip* (Young Frisian Community) and began receiving its weekly publication, *Frisia*. "The ideal set forth by this organization," Fridsma wrote later in his memoirs, "was one I could embrace heart and soul, and to its realization I felt I should dedicate my life, that is to say of course, as much as I could in distant America."

It would have been very understandable had he, at some point as an adult, decided he no longer had an interest in what possessed him as a teenager. No one would have given it another thought if he had left the Frisian cause behind to immerse himself in American culture. However, what makes his story so compelling is that he never abandoned his boyhood ideals. Indeed, ensuing years only increased his fervor.

In the fall of 1920, the Frisian speaker and writer Sjouke de Zee toured the United States visiting the various Frisian societies, including



View of Paterson, New Jersey, a few years before the Fridsma family arrived. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.



While on the faculty of Grand Rapids Christian High School, Fridsma (seated at the far left) served as the sponsor for the student periodical the Emblem. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

Utspanning troch Ynspanning (Expanding through Effort) in Paterson, New Jersey. It was Fridsma's first opportunity to hear a genuine Frisian speaker. He enjoyed the evening but was disappointed in the quality of the presentation. He was also disappointed in the aims and goals of the American-based Frisian societies as a whole. In his opinion, "There were no credible cultural programs, no distribution or sale of Frisian literature, no courses in reading and writing the Frisian, no Christian commitment."

Calvin College

After receiving his high school diploma in 1922 he went to work in an office, but soon realized that clerical work was not for him. Since many of his role models in the Frisian Movement were educators, Bernard hoped that by becoming a *skoalmaster* he might find a position in Friesland and return to live there. But there was also a more immediate, practical reason for becoming an educator, namely funds. The family finances were not sufficient to allow him to study. There

were, however, grants available from church organizations for young people who wished to become teachers in the growing Christian school system. Fridsma applied and was accepted. In September 1924 he arrived in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to begin his studies at Calvin College.

At college, as a conversation starter about his favorite subject, Fridsma hung a *Fryslân kalinder* on his dormitory wall. It aroused the curiosity he had hoped for and allowed him to share his fondness for *it heitelân*. His Dutch history course also provided an opportunity to promote his cause. Assigned to write a thesis on some aspect of Dutch history, Fridsma wrote a paper entitled "The Place of the Frisians in Dutch History" in which he addressed such topics as, Do the Frisians have a place in Dutch history? Does the average Dutch history book do justice to the Frisians? And does the history of the Netherlands include a complete history of Friesland? Eerdmans, a book publisher with Frisian roots, published the paper and soon it was discussed in

various journals in Friesland and the United States. Although it was hailed by many—especially Frisians—as an argument long overdue, it raised many critical eyebrows as well. Some faulted Fridsma for being too strident in tone and too provincial in outlook. However, the little brochure solidified his reputation as a champion for the Frisian cause. He was asked to contribute to such diverse journals as *De Stim fan Fryslân* and *The Young Calvinist*. All along he carried on an extensive correspondence with editors and other interested and interesting persons in the Frisian Movement.

After graduating from Calvin Fridsma stayed in Grand Rapids. In January of 1932 his hope of becoming a *skoalmaster* became reality when he agreed to teach German and Latin at Grand Rapids Christian High School. In Grand Rapids he met Dorothy Ann Van Dyke, who would become his wife. There was only one drawback—Dorothy could not speak Frisian. "Anyway," Fridsma said, defending his choice, "she had about her so much that was attractive that I overlooked the matter. In the course of time, I promised myself, I would teach her Frisian."

Gysbert Japiks

Grand Rapids housed a large enough Frisian immigrant population to have its own Frisian society, *Friso*. Like many other *Fryske Selskips* in the United States, *Friso* existed largely for socializing purposes, filling their evenings, according to Fridsma, "mostly with folksy readings without much substance." In December 1933 a small group of Frisians met together and founded a Christian organization, *Gysbert Japiks*, with its purpose "... to study Frisian literature, music and song." Fridsma thought the organization had promise. In a matter of months he became a board member and influential in drafting



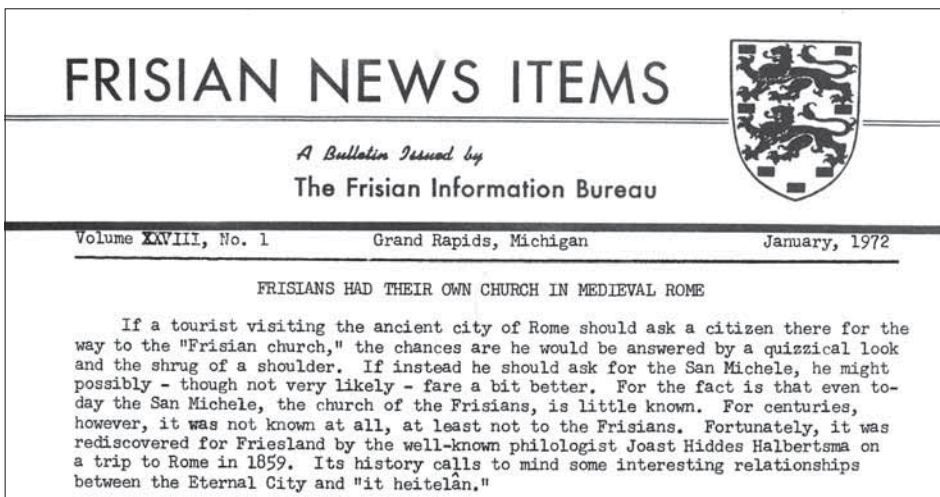
For many years West Michigan Frisian immigrants met at events sponsored by the Gysbert Japiks Society, named after a prominent Frisian author who inspired literature written in Frisian. Image courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.



The worship program from the first Frisian-language worship service organized by Fridsma, and held in Grand Rapids in 1957. He saw to forty-eight more such annual services. The fiftieth, and last, was held in 2006 after his death. Image courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

a more refined charter to include phrases such as "... to foster appreciation for the Frisian heritage and to work toward its enrichment, to study Frisian history, language, literature and movement, and to give moral support to the Frisian Movement in the homeland." The Grand Rapids Gysbert Japiks Society affiliated with *It Kristlik Frysk Selskip* in Friesland as a *krite*, a regional branch. Finally Fridsma had found a base from which

he could promote his passion. And promote he did. For the new society he immediately ordered a Frisian New Testament, twenty-five copies of the songbook *Hwa sjongt mei*, twenty copies of *Yn ús eigen Tael*, and forty-five copies of *De Stim fan Fryslân*. The New Testament and songbooks were intended for the society, but the periodicals he put on sale at the next meeting where they quickly sold out. Official dues-paying membership soon grew to 150, with attendance reaching 300 at some meetings.



Fridsma produced the Frisian News from his home, serving as editor, reporter, and business manager. Image courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

Fryske Tjerketjinst

When, in the fall of 1935, Rev. B. D. Dykstra from Orange City, Iowa, offered to conduct a Frisian church service, Gysbert Japiks sponsored the first Frisian-language church service ever held in the United States. Some 500 people crowded into the Fourth Reformed Church on Ionia Avenue. For many, even among the immigrants who had grown up in Friesland, it was the first time they had sung the Psalms in Frisian and had heard the gospel in their native tongue. This

first Frisian-language church service was received so enthusiastically that it became an annual event.

The War

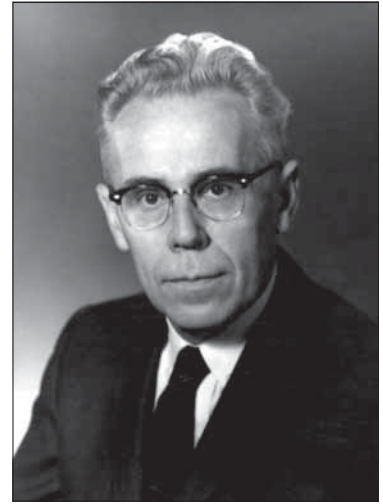
By 1941 the increasing war action interrupted the stream of published materials coming from Friesland. Correspondence ground to a halt as well and the once flourishing Gysbert Japiks Society lost some of its vitality. The members were growing older and no new ones were joining. Still, the staunchly faithful Frisians in America empathized with their fellow Frisians suffering in *it heitelân*. Would this not be a time for them to do something to show their solidarity? E. B. Folkertsma's 1930 pamphlet, *Selsbestjûr foar Fryslân*, was read and discussed and a plan began to germinate to assist the Frisian Movement if and when they would push for autonomy after the war.

Unaware that her words would burst that seed into bloom, Queen Wilhelmina addressed her nation on 6 December 1942 and spoke of the future of Dutch colonies after the war. These colonies, she promised, would be given greater freedom and self-rule. Fridsma, reading the speech, seized the opportunity to draft a letter to the Queen. He praised her for her regard for freedom and then, on behalf of all Frisians living abroad, begged her to also consider the same standard for her Frisian people, namely greater freedom and self-rule. Fridsma realized that if his 1500-word document were to carry any weight, it would need more than just the signatures of the members of Gysbert Japiks, who hailed it as a masterpiece. Other Frisian societies in the United States were enlisted to sign and did. In the end the document also had the endorsement of many well-known Frisian-Americans and other Dutch-Americans who were influential in politics, education, and publishing before it

was dispatched on 30 October 1943. However, like his earlier publication, "Do the Frisians have a place in Dutch history?" this declaration, too, was alternately lauded and derided. And dismissed—the Queen never replied.

The Queen's presumed indifference, however, did not mean the document quietly faded away. Indeed, its publication brought the cause of the Frisians once again onto the pages of the press and before the reading public. To stimulate this interest and keep it alive, the Frisians in the United States recognized the need for a Frisian Information Bureau with a monthly bulletin to disseminate any and all news about Friesland. The first issue of *Frisian News Items*, dated January 1944, launched an impressive forty-five years of publishing. In 1980, at age seventy-five, after thirty-six years as editor, Fridsma handed over the reins. With today's technology—word processors and high-speed copy machines—production of a monthly newsletter may not seem such a large task. But at that time each issue had to be typewritten on a manual typewriter, then mimeographed and mailed out.

In spite of all the hard work, Bernard's personal life flourished. He married Dorothy and during the summer months pursued a PhD in German language and literature from the University of Michigan. When in 1946 Calvin College's enrollment suddenly shot up to 1,245 (due to those returning from military service) from the usual 400, Calvin offered Fridsma a teaching position. He accepted and for the next twenty-four years he served the college with distinction as professor of Germanic languages. Besides his demanding teaching schedule and his busy home life—he and Dorothy had three sons—Fridsma continued his work for Gysbert Japiks and the Frisian cause. There seemed to be no limit to the work. After the war he again imported a steady stream of



The 'official' portrait of Professor Fridsma at Calvin College. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

Frisian literature and other materials for distribution in the United States. (Post war immigrants from Friesland eagerly read these materials. They also breathed new life into Gysbert Japiks.) He wrote prodigiously, including a "Survey of Frisian Literature" for the *Dictionary of Living Literature*, a history of Friesland in English, and a Frisian-English dictionary, and encouraged and assisted scholarly endeavors in Frisian literature. Even in his retirement years Fridsma found joy in teaching many second-generation Frisian immigrant students the language of their ancestors. For nine years he taught an "Introduction to Frisian" course at Calvin, using a text that he developed.

Not only his students but many others researching their Frisian heritage also benefited from Fridsma's campaign to promote the Frisian cause in America. The Calvin College library has a sizeable collection of books on Friesland—its history, culture and people. Again, it was Fridsma who, in the early fifties, had approached the library's director and asked him why there were no books on Friesland in the library. With many students from Frisian background, Fridsma argued, there was a real need. The director



In 1948 Fridsma visited the Netherlands and here is pictured at the tiller of a canal boat like the one his father had owned and operated. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

concurred and appropriated an annual amount for Frisian literature and history materials.

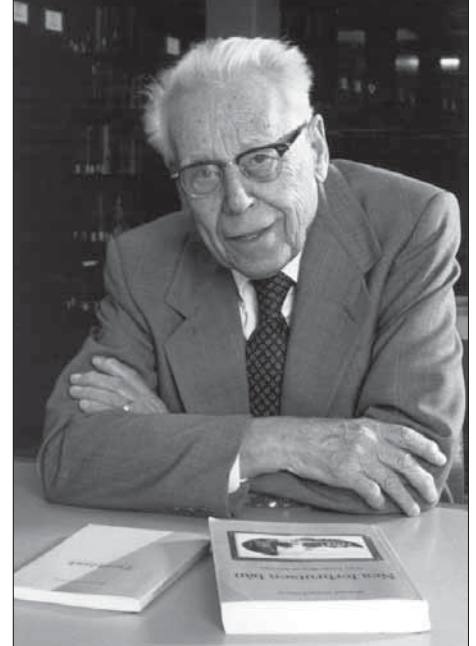
Fridsma's unflagging devotion to the cause of Frisian autonomy had gained him many friends and much recognition. So much so that by the time he made his first trip back to Friesland, in 1947, he was welcomed by many noted figures in publishing and literary circles. The Frisian press also took note and covered his entire trip. He visited all the people with whom he had corresponded and over the years that had become near and dear to him. "I met them all you

know—Fedde Schurer, Douwe Kalma, E. B. Folkertsma, Dr. Wumkes, Ype Poortinga. . . ." And, as he mentioned the names of many others, his face reflected the pleasure at reliving the experience. "And look at what we have accomplished! Frisian is allowed in school and church as well as the marketplace. Frisian is used in television broadcast-

ing and other media. It is no longer a second-rate language."

His autobiography, *Nea Ferbrutsen Bân*, is as much the story of the Frisian activity in the United States as it is his own story. The two are so intertwined they cannot be separated—for Fridsma and Friesland are one. He is one of the very few Americans included in the *Encyclopedie van Friesland*, and the *Encyclopedie van het Hedendaagse Friesland*.

Asked if he had any regrets about his life he said, "I would have liked to have lived in Friesland for at least a part of my adult life, but I think



Fridsma in 1993 with a copy of his autobiography, *Nea ferbrutsen ban* (Never Broken Bond, subtitled: 60 years of Frisian Activity in America: the Memoirs of Bernard J. Fridsma, Sr.) Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

God wanted me here in America, to promote the Frisian cause in this country." Czeslaw Milosz, the Polish author and Nobel laureate, once wrote, "Language is the only homeland." In that sense Bernard Joukes Fridsma lived a great part of his life in his homeland. ☞

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Personal interview by author, October 2000.

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Our Trip to North America, Part II

Summer 1949

G. J. Buth, Nieuwe Tonge
[Gerrit Johannes Buth, 1905-1977]¹

Translated from the Dutch by
Gerrit W. Sheeres

Annotated by
Richard H. Harms
Calvin College Heritage Hall
Summer 2005



A view of the downtown area of Grand Rapids at about the time of the Buth visit. Most of the streets run north-south or east-west, but in the very center they run on the diagonal, perpendicular to the former river bank. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

A native of the Netherlands, Gerrit W. Sheeres is a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. He is a volunteer in the Archives translating records from Dutch into English.

Tuesday, 5 July. Hot again. We decided to stay home today. The ladies are busy doing the wash. In the afternoon Gert, Uncle John's son, telephoned that he was coming with a Dutch gentleman to visit us.

We were curious who that might be. After a short time both appeared

and it turned out to be Dr. Linthorst Homan, who was on a government mission. We found out that he lives in Groningen. Two months ago he had come here via KLM. He had visited Canada first, where he had consulted with several people from other nations about economic

matters. He is chairman of the National Plan Foundation. He had seen quite a bit of America already. His brother is representative of the Queen in Drente, and it was nice that recently he had been in Middelharnis, where he had discussed the plans for the bridge. The National Plan Foundation is being financed by funds

from the Marshall Plan. In passing I asked him what he thought about the plans for this bridge of Flakkee. He thought that it would be built in time, but that right now other projects had priority. It was interesting though to exchange opinions with such a prominent leader. One of the things he mentioned was that he had interned with dentist Sykens. Thus we meet people in faraway America who are acquainted with Flakkee. Toward the end of the visit we had a highball.

In the evening we went to Ann, daughter of Uncle Dirk, who is married to George van den Berge.² His grandparents came from Colijnsplaat. He still knew quite a bit of Dutch and she spoke broken Flakkeese. They were very hospitable and friendly people. We dined on the lawn in front of the house, which was nice. They have four children, three daughters and one son. It was quite late again before we went to bed.

Wednesday, 6 July. Today we were scheduled to go to a show near Lansing [in Williamston, Michigan]. The plan was that four of us would go, Martin Jr., Uncle Dirk, Pete and I.

The trip there was about seventy-five miles. Martin Jr. had been requested to judge Holsteins. The cattle came from this [Kent] county. Everybody brings his best animals and that way you get quite a show. Everybody does his best, of course, to be eligible for

first prize. The show ended around five and we left to return to Belmont since we had been invited to Uncle Dan's birthday party.

The ladies thought we were way too late, but we told them diplomatically that we simply could not have made it sooner and they were satisfied with that. Aunt Maatje had prepared a delicious dinner for the occasion. The birthday party was slated to be held at Uncle Dirk's farm; he is married to Martha.

It is customary in America that only the older generation visits at the birthday of parents. Miny as a foreign niece, of course, was allowed to come along. Even though the temperature had gone down somewhat, the men stayed on the porch for a while when the ladies went indoors. The letters from Uncle Jacob and Mother Buth, having arrived in good time, were read with great interest by all. After all, blood runs thicker than water. All kinds of things were discussed; a lot of old memories were recalled, which Uncle Dan enjoyed the most. We finally settled around the table for a midnight snack. This too was prepared very well; and again, celery, olives, pickles, and radishes were part of the snack. We had experienced similar snack times on previous visits with cousins consisting of sandwiches, homemade cakes, and coffee.

Americans always put a lot of effort into preparing food and setting the table. Martha, Dick's wife, certainly knew how to do this well. They have a comfortable home and the farm buildings were all in good shape. Uncle Dan said that they needed to re-roof the barn this year. From the porch we could see Uncle Dan's farm. It is a nice farm of about eighty acres.

Thursday, 7 July. It was a hot day again. The day before the hay and barley had been brought into the barn at Uncle Dirk's. The barley had been

harvested last week using a combine and the yield was about 400 bushels from nine acres, which is quite good for this area. One bushel equals forty-eight American pounds, which is 22 kilograms for us. They brought the bales indoors, which means we all went to the field on the truck, grabbed first the barley straw and after that a few truckloads of hay which was considerably heavier than the straw. Not being used to working, I sweated quite a bit, but after a refreshing bath and different clothes I was okay again. Meendert and Gert had to get a load yet, and that was the end of it.

After this we had lunch and decided to call it a day. In the afternoon we went for a ride.

Friday, 8 July. Beautiful weather again. We stayed home in the morning because Uncle John had called to ask if we wanted to join him in the afternoon on a trip to Ionia where, as we mentioned earlier, some of his cows are pastured. This was on the large farm bought by a farmer who used to live on Uncle John's farm in Coopersville. His name is Strybek, originally from White Russia. He is married and has quite a few children. Uncle John's neighbor, a Mr. Kuiper, came along too. His parents had come from Zwolle. His father had been a peat skipper,³ and he himself had worked in a factory as a paper cutter. The weather stayed good, except it looked at times as if there might be a thunderstorm. We saw the cows and they appeared to be good milk producers. I took a picture of some of them and hope the pictures will turn out. We also saw a couple of good-looking gray horses that Uncle John had bought last year for \$100 total. One could make a nice profit on those in the Netherlands. On the way back we stopped for a beer, and drove back via a detour on roads lined with colorful flowers.

Aunt Maatje had dinner ready and it was decided to eat outside at the picnic table. It was too hot indoors. Only Gerrit Markensteijn objected, since he does not like to eat outside. He is always afraid he'll get a fly in his soup. After dinner it began getting dark. We hurried a bit because we were supposed to visit John,⁴ son of Uncle Dirk. They already had telephoned to ask what the holdup was. By the time we left it was totally dark and it looked like we would be in for a thunderstorm.

John lives on the outskirts of the city close to a small river. This property used to be part of the Delaware Farm. It was quite some distance away and therefore did not appear to be part of the city. The gardens in front and in back seemed to be well-kept. The house was not quite finished, but it looked like it was going to be a nice place. After a cup of tea we went to one of the ice cream stores on Fulton Street. Aunt Maatje and Bernice had stayed home with the children. In the meantime a thunderstorm had developed and it rained very hard. The weather was the reason it was not very busy at the store. Everything looked quite neat and seven nice ladies graced the place. The last few weeks, because of the hot weather, the store had been very busy and the proceeds must have been substantial, no doubt. Once back home Uncle John made a highball that tasted delicious. The conversation was pleasant and Bernice saw to the midnight snack. Wherever we went we had to eat and in spite of the heat we got fatter and fatter. John was quite entertaining and we discussed the entire Buth family. One of the questions he asked was why the Buth people were so family oriented. Everybody gave his take on this, and I told John that he should be proud to carry the Buth name. I am quite pleased personally that relations between members of the Buth family are so good. I too was

proud whenever I saw the name Buth on the various stores or automobiles that we passed even though I did not own any of them.

The Buth family happens to be very family oriented and its members have relied on each other in good and bad times. We agreed that the big family has always had a healthy view of things and that all of them have done well in life, both here as well as on [the island of] Flakkee.

Old Grandmother Buth, with her simple philosophy, was privileged to see that all her children did well in life both here and on Flakkee. It was midnight again when we got home; it poured so that Uncle Dirk had trouble staying on the road at times.

Saturday, 9 July. The plan for today was to go to a cattle sale with Martin Jr. and Uncle Dirk. The women did not look too pleased that once again we would leave for the day. Around 9 o'clock Martin came to Uncle Dirk's farm. We drove past Francis Campau's where we had to pick up an acquaintance of Martin's. This time we used that gentleman's Pontiac. We had to be in Williamston, which is fifteen miles beyond Lansing, and about one hundred miles⁵ from Grand Rapids. It turned out to be the same place where we attended the show on Wednesday. About one hundred head of cattle both large and small were sold. This is only done by bidding and it was interesting to listen to the auctioneer. He was the same Mr. Smith who did the auction for Uncle Marinus. There were not many people and the prices of registered cattle were correspondingly low. The farmers were not quite as eager to buy as they were a few years ago.

Prices for dairy cattle varied from \$250 to \$700. Young calves went for \$60 to \$80. A big, three-year-old bull sold for \$500. We were home at 6:30, in other words, well in time for supper. In the evening we were going to

take a look at the airport in Grand Rapids. The weather was good. The airport is much smaller than Schiphol, and there were quite a number of sport planes in which you can take flights over the city. Two airliners landed and shortly afterwards left again in the directions of Detroit or Chicago.

We were quite eager to take a ride. Miny could not wait to experience this. There was room for two passengers and the pilot. First Uncle Dirk and I were going to take a turn and if he liked it Uncle Dirk would go for a ride with Miny. Once in the air we had a beautiful view of the city. Miny enjoyed it very much as well, and was glad that she had the opportunity to do this.

At the same time those small things are a bit scary, especially when they bank sharply, for then it seems that it might turn upside down. I pinched Uncle Dirk's knee at one time, but everything turned out okay. We also wrote this to Mom Buth to prevent her from being worried.

Sunday, 10 July. We had agreed that we would sleep in today after all the things we had done this past week. It was 11:30 when we came downstairs. Uncle Dirk was still busy getting dressed. We had breakfast and decided not to have lunch, but to have an early supper. After supper we were going to visit Mr. Dutmer, who is married to the youngest sister of Aunt Maatje. They live close to the city, have a nice



Monroe Avenue (looking northwest from Fulton) was the main retail strip in the city. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

home, and a garden full of flowers. Mr. Dutmer works in Uncle Dirk's dairy; he does this to have something to do. He is appreciated there and is quite handy at making and repairing things. They have a good life together. We have met a lot of people during the past week and we have seen quite a bit.

Monday, 11 July. First I worked on my diary. An's hip still bothers her and she wanted to visit Abe to see if there was something that could be done about it. So Uncle Dirk took her to the doctor this morning. In the meantime I wrote a letter to Mother and the other relatives.

Miny helped Aunt Maatje around the house because it was laundry day.

We stayed home today. We spent time on the porch in the evening. The weather was nice. An's backache had much improved. Abe had given her an injection and some tablets. We all hope she will get better soon.

Tuesday, 12 July. The day began with beautiful weather. An's backache is a bit better than yesterday. We were downstairs around 10 o'clock. Uncle Dirk thought this was quite late, but



A photo from about ten years after the Buth visit, still attests to the busyness of downtown Grand Rapids for shopping. Courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

since we have done a lot of tiring things during the past few days we do need more sleep. Uncle John came for coffee this morning since Aunt Marie was at a neighborhood coffee. This is a custom they have in this area.

After lunch all of us were planning to go to the city. Geert Markensteijn was going to paint the three doors today that Kees Koert had made. We let the ladies off at Steketee's, a busy and pleasant store for ladies who like to shop. We went to look up Gerrit Koert who is married to Anna, the oldest sister of Aunt Maatje. We had a cup of tea and agreed that we would return at some future time with the ladies. Barring circumstances we said we would come back tomorrow afternoon. I did not know Gerrit Koert myself, but when I saw him I immediately recognized the Koert mannerisms and thought he resembled Jaap and Jan Koert. When we got back to the city the ladies were waiting impatiently for us, which is unusual for ladies when they are shopping.

We were home around six, had a whiskey, and discussed what we might want to do this evening. We decided to go to see a movie. Supper lasted quite a while so that we would have

downs. Uncle Dirk and I agreed most of the time, and so did the ladies. An and Miny went to bed a bit earlier this evening, we did so by 1 o'clock.

Wednesday, 13 July. An is improving gradually and is starting to get about a little bit easier. Miny was going to help Uncle Dirk with mowing the grass around the house with the new motorized mower. The grassy area around the house is too large to do with just a push mower. First I wrote a letter to Joost van Es who is going to have a birthday in a few days; An and Miny added a few words as well. We had another beautiful summer day without the oppressive heat of the last few days.

After supper we got ready to go visit Gerrit Koert. We made a small detour through the countryside along beautiful roads with a lot of green growth alongside of them.

I suggested that we return there tonight to see if we could kill a few rabbits with the car. However this remained an illusion since

had to hurry to be on time, so we decided to stay home instead.

After all our peregrinations this was quite welcome as well. This evening we talked about marriage in general, with all its ups and

no whitetail showed itself on the road that evening. The family was waiting for us but, because of a heavy rainfall, we had to wait in the car until it let up somewhat. The conversation went well; we talked about a lot of things. As I said, we stayed for a little lunch which caused us to be home very late. A daughter of Gerrit Koert lives with them. Her husband is a pilot in the military. During the war he was a bomber captain who flew many missions over enemy territory. Their son Kees owns a dairy and an ice cream store in the city of Lowell. The other daughter and her husband live in Grand Rapids, and a third one lives in another state; she is married to a meat inspector who is transferred from time to time.

Thursday, 14 July. Last night's rain brought with it totally different temperatures; in fact, it was quite cool and rainy during the night. It just kept raining, which was good for the corn but not for the grass that had been cut for hay. We went back to the city again today, where Uncle Dirk had an appointment with Mr. Muller, director of



The Pantlind Exhibitors Building was connected by a tunnel to the Pantlind Hotel, located approximately in the middle of the retail district at the intersection of Pearl and Monroe. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.



During the 1920s Grand Rapids leaders became convinced of the importance of an airport for the community's future. This is a photo of a newly acquired used fire truck for the airport in front of the terminal building constructed as a public works project during the Great Depression. Photo courtesy of: Archives, Calvin College.

one of the largest bakeries of the city. Those bakeries do business far beyond the city. It was an exceptionally large business that we toured.

It was striking how much was done with so few people. Hundreds, no thousands, of loaves were baked, cut, and packaged. The bread oven was five hundred feet long. Trays came rolling in on one end and appeared completely baked at the other end. It was a gigantic business. Mr. Muller hails from Bruinisse originally. He left for America when he was only twenty. Before that he had served in the navy at Den Helder. His career showed me that it remains uncertain how a man is going to achieve his destination in life.

We had lunch in the city. The ladies went shopping and we visited the big hotels of the city, like the Morton House, and also the big auditorium that is connected with an underground tunnel to the Morton House.⁶ In the meanwhile it was time to go home again. The ladies were waiting at the agreed upon place. When we arrived home, Gert was greasing the tractor and was a bit depressed because this morning he had received word from the milk inspector that no milk was to be picked up from the dairy because of

an excessively high bacterial count caused possibly by the milk cans or the milking machines. Since Gert cleans these things himself, he felt responsible, even though it is hard to prove. This is part of the risk of being

in business, and it can serve as an incentive to be extra careful and to pay attention to everything. Something like this can be beneficial and prompt a person to work better.

We went to see a movie in the evening.

Friday, 15 July. The movie we saw last night was nice, though the ladies thought it was creepy.

The weather was good, but it promised to be a hot day again. Aunt Maatje had to be at the beauty parlor at 10:30. For sociability's sake we rode along and took a look at how ice cream is made in the dairy. It is a complex process and requires many machines before the ice cream reaches the dinner table. Gerrit, Uncle Dirk's son, is in charge there and I believe that he knows his trade. Getting the milk ready requires a lot of work. Four big trucks transport the milk that comes from afar, while every day three horse-drawn dairy wagons pick up the milk from nearby. It is a big business that certainly needs good leadership.

John, Uncle Dirk's son, and George van den Berge—the latter is Anna's husband—manage the ice-cream stores. I noticed that Uncle Dirk does

not have to worry about the business: his sons are capable men. We enjoyed seeing everything and I wouldn't mind taking a picture of the outside. After this we went to get Aunt Maatje and drove to Anna's for a cup of coffee. We also stayed there for supper. We had a good time and it was nice and cool there. In the meantime I went to the barber to have my hair cut. He turned out to be a Dutchman as well, a Willem van Dijk. Some twenty years ago he had come here from Apeldoorn. He was a very cheerful fellow who quietly did his work and who was content with his business which provided him and his family a good life. He would not mind visiting Holland in a few years. ☞

Endnotes

1. Buth refers to his family in the USA as uncles and aunts, but he was their second cousin; in age they would have been that of his uncles and aunts. He and his wife Anna "An" Geertrudi van Es and their daughter Jacomina Anna "Miny," born in 1929, made this journey accompanying his second cousin Peter Buth, who had been visiting the Netherlands. Gerrit Johannes was a successful farmer on Sommelsdijk, and operated the Buth family farm "Dijk zicht," later "Sunny Home."

2. They lived at 312 Boynton Avenue NE, Grand Rapids; he was a salesman for the Buth Dairy.

3. An entrepreneur who often owned (or rented) a canal boat and bought peat for resale at stops along the Dutch canals. Peat was used for fuel. Generally the skipper and his entire family lived on the boat.

4. John Gerrit Buth was in charge of the Buth Ice Cream Stores. He was married to Berneta Margaret Spring; they had three children and eventually lived at 46 Maryland Avenue NE, Grand Rapids.

5. Previously Buth said the distance was about seventy-five miles, the actual distance is about ninety miles.

6. The Morton House was not connected to an auditorium; Buth must be referring to the Pantlind Hotel, which was connected by a tunnel to the Pantlind Exhibitors Building.

book notes



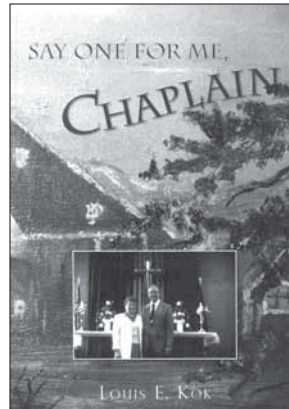
**Grace through Every
Generation: The Continuing
Story of the Christian
Reformed Church**

Scott Hoezee

Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian
Resources, 2006

ISBN 1-59255-294-3

\$6.95



Say One for Me, Chaplain

Louis E. Kok

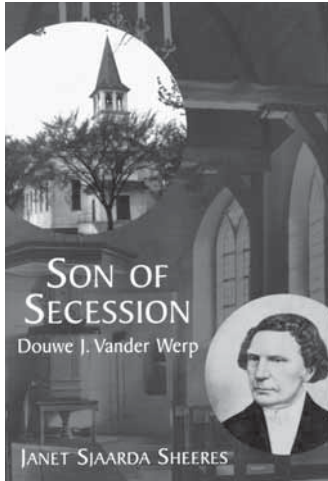
Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing,
2006

ISBNM 1-4120-5436-2

Available in US from
loufrankok@comcast.net

\$20 plus shipping

book reviews



Son of Secession Douwe J. Vander Werp

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

The Historical Series of the
Reformed Church in America,
in Cooperation with Origins Studies
in Dutch-American History, No. 52

William B. Eerdmans
Publishing Company
Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006

209 pages with appendices,
bibliography, and index
\$25.00

In the preface Sheeres mentions that she first “met” Douwe J. Vander Werp (1811–1876) in Burum, Friesland. Vander Werp served the church in Burum from 1858 until 1864 where decades later Sheeres was doing genealogical research on her Sjaarda ancestors. This relationship between author and subject is evident as Vander Werp emerges as a person with an enormous capacity for work, great intellectual gifts, and clarity of expression from the pulpit and with the pen. While

in the Netherlands he founded two churches and served seven congregations. One of these was Leeuwarden, Friesland, a worldly city with flourishing taverns and houses of prostitution and abundant with worldly theaters, music halls, and carnivals.

In 1859, while serving Burum, Vander Werp married Gerritdina Ten Brummelaar (1829-1911), a good helpmate for this overworked pastor and three times widowed. Her unstinting support of the seceder cause combined with efficient management of household matters made her the ideal *juffrouw* for the parsonage. *Juffrouw* was the title for wives of seceder pastors and was still used in America as late as the 1940s. This Dutch-language designation is a bit complicated and, as Sheeres explains, in the Netherlands it had both grammatical and sociological implications, implications that did not carry over to the New World.

Late in 1864 he accepted a call to Graafschap, Michigan, Christian Reformed Church where he remained until 1872. After this he served the Muskegon (Michigan) CRC until retirement in 1875. He had overseen the organization of the Muskegon congregation in 1867. During these eleven years as a Christian Reformed Church (CRC) minister, he organized ten churches, four in Michigan, two in Ohio, one each in New Jersey, Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Added to his parish duties were his near-perfect attendance at classical and synodical meetings; service as the first editor of *De Wachter*, the official CRC publication; and tutor of future minis-

ters. In all these endeavors it can reasonably be argued that Vander Werp may well have ensured the survival of the fledgling CRC in America.

Throughout this biography Vander Werp emerges as a steadfast and uncompromising champion of the seceder cause in the Netherlands and America. Sheeres suggests her book title “Son of Secession” results because he was a theological heir to De Cock, who broke away from the Reformed Church in the Netherlands in 1834. Secondly, in 1837 Vander Werp withdrew from the De Cock secessionists and joined the *Kruisgezinden* folk, who believed the church must exist under the authority of the cross of Christ (God’s Law) and not state authority. Thirdly, later in America he affiliated with the CRC which had left the Reformed Church in America in 1857.

Strict adherence to the church order promulgated by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) was a crucial matter for Vander Werp. Negotiations concerning church governance matters left little room for compromise, especially in the mind of the orthodox Vander Werp. Also, he cherished a longstanding hope that the secessionist denominations with which he was identified in both the Netherlands and America would exhibit the true will of God in preaching, governance, and the daily life of each church member.

After reading this book you will know Vander Werp up close and personal. Included in the narrative are descriptions of both historical events and the cultural atmosphere surrounding the secession movement in both the Netherlands and America.

By the 1860s many of the secessionists in the Netherlands had made concessions of a practical matter to avoid continual doctrinal infighting. For Sheeres this dogmatic quarreling “. . . did more damage than the persecution had done . . .” (p. 170)

Sheeres’s portrayal reveals Vander Werp as a staunch advocate for the secessionist cause, not easily persuaded to change his views, thoughtfully nourishing a new denomination in America embodying his cherished beliefs, leaving him little room for compromise.

Among the secessionist heroes appearing in various roles in the work are Albertus C. Van Raalte, the founder of Holland; Koene Vanden Bosch, the first pastor in the Christian Reformed Church; and Hendrik Scholte, pioneer pastor in Pella, Iowa. Reading how these pastors and others behaved under stress mirrors, in a sense, the religious trials and tribulations experienced by most seceders who came to

America. Included are such matters as opposition to fire insurance, lightning rods, and small pox vaccination.

But there were areas where Vander Werp was forced to modify his views. When preparing to preach for the first time in Graafschap, Vander Werp donned the pastoral garb worn in the Netherlands. When the housemaid saw him attired in a three-cornered hat, bib tie, knickers, and a long coat, she “. . . shrieked at the strange sight” (p. 124). Vander Werp put on other clothes and never appeared before his congregation in Old World clerical dress.

This sartorial adjustment by Vander Werp may have been a bit traumatic, but it pales when compared with the “shattered relationships” (p. 58) and loss of friends he suffered as unfortunate byproducts of internal strife among those who cherished the secessionist cause. The following well-chosen words by the author capture the essence of Vander Werp’s mind and heart: “. . . Vander Werp’s life revolved

around words—spoken and written” and “sometimes caring, sometimes caustic, but always cautionary, his words were meant to instruct his listeners of their need for salvation” (p. xiii).

Since listening to Vander Werp from the pulpit or conversing with him about his secessionist views are not possible, the next best thing is paging through this definitive and readable biography of a man who can rightly be called the theological father of the CRC in America. The bibliography and multitude of annotated footnotes complement the text as do the well-chosen illustrations. One titled “Walking to Graafschap Church in wintertime” and another, “A horse and buggy ride to a church meeting,” present a glimpse of life over a century ago. This book will have an enduring appeal to a wide variety of scholars as well as casual readers. ☞

Conrad Bult



Stories of Our Fathers: A Multi-Generational Narrative of the Gazan Family through Sorrow and Triumph

Harold S. Gazan

Springtree House Publishers, 2006

290 pages, photos, illustrations,
bibliography, appendices

(hardcover)

\$49.95

In 1994 Robert Swierenga published *The Forerunners*, which gives a comprehensive and fact-filled overview of Dutch-American Jews and their communities. Gazan's *Stories of Our Fathers* complements Swierenga's work with a very personal and moving account of his own Jewish family's experiences in both the Netherlands and America from 1740 to the present.

The event that motivated Gazan to research and write this series of family narratives came in 1987 at a family reunion in Amsterdam. Here he learned that over fifty family members from the Gazan's home city of Middelharnis in the province of South Holland had been taken by the Nazis and shipped to Auschwitz and other German extermination camps—never to be seen again.

The story begins in 1740 as the Jewish Gazans were forced to migrate

from a politically unsettled and anti-Semitic Poland, which had long been their home, to a much more tolerant and friendly life in the Netherlands. Under the leadership of the modern family's founder, Marcus Levie Gazan, the family began its Dutch rebirth in the northern port city of Enkhuizen. The family then journeyed south to Leiden and later moved farther south to Middelharnis, which then became home. The men of the family were kosher butchers by trade. Religiously they were active in the synagogue with Marcus Levie serving as the congregation cantor. The family surname, Gazan, was officially recorded in 1811, being derived from the Hebrew word *Chazan*, meaning cantor.

A traumatic break came in 1842 when a fourth-generation son, Markus Gazan, married a Dutch Christian young woman, Janna Notebaart, and began a Christian branch of the family. Because of the hostility that developed within the family, Markus and Janna chose to live farther south in the town of Breskens in the province of Zeeland.

In the sixth generation of Dutch Jewish Gazans another son, also named Marcus and the author's grandfather, emigrated from the Netherlands to the United States in 1905. In 1906 Marcus brought his wife and three children to America and settled in the large Dutch community located in western Michigan. Members of this branch of the family were not practicing Jews or Christians. They called themselves "free-thinkers" and lived more by the rule of empirical reason than the dictates of any organized religious system.

At this point in the book the author relates several fascinating stories of his own immediate family and his

own life. In one, Uncle Max Gazan leaves western Michigan to seek his fortune in Detroit as a cook. Here, in the "World's Automobile Capital," Max became a leading labor organizer and union official from the 1930s to the 1960s. Max is credited with being the person who saved the United Automobile Workers Union (UAW) when, in the winter of 1936-1937, he organized the cooking and delivery of food to over 2,000 "sit-down strikers" inside the General Motors Buick plant in Flint, Michigan. Without his efforts and expertise the strike might have failed and the UAW might not have succeeded in its efforts to unionize the auto industry.

To place this whole-family chronicle in historical perspective, Gazan develops several important sections of general historical background on the Jewish situation through the centuries, especially in Europe. Here, the story begins in the twelfth century when Jews were forced to wear distinctive clothing with an oval badge to identify them as Jews and also as the group that crucified Christ. Later, the author presents a chilling overview of the Holocaust in Holland. Here, of the estimated 149,000 Dutch Jews in Holland in 1940, only 36,000 remained after World War II. In the province of Drenthe, a deportation camp was set up near the town of Westerbork—with a train track that went straight from the Netherlands to Auschwitz.

The stories in this chronicle serve well as food for thought on the past, present and future of the Jewish community in both Holland and America. I heartily recommend this work as a must-read book. ♪

James Evenhuis

for the future

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



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

Maria Brown details the story of celery farmers and the Dutch in Imlay City, Michigan.

Janet Sheeres takes up the story of Friesland, South Dakota, another former Dutch-American community.

Paula Vander Hoven and Angie Ploegstra continue their research of Dutch-American settlements that no longer exist with a study of Martin, South Dakota.

“The Dutch Come to the Hackensack River Valley,” by Richard Harms.

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Volume XXIV • Number 2 • 2006

