

# ORIGINS



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# GRANDVILLE





# LE AVENUE



# The Era of Ymen P. De Jong

## 1920–1950

by H. J. Brinks

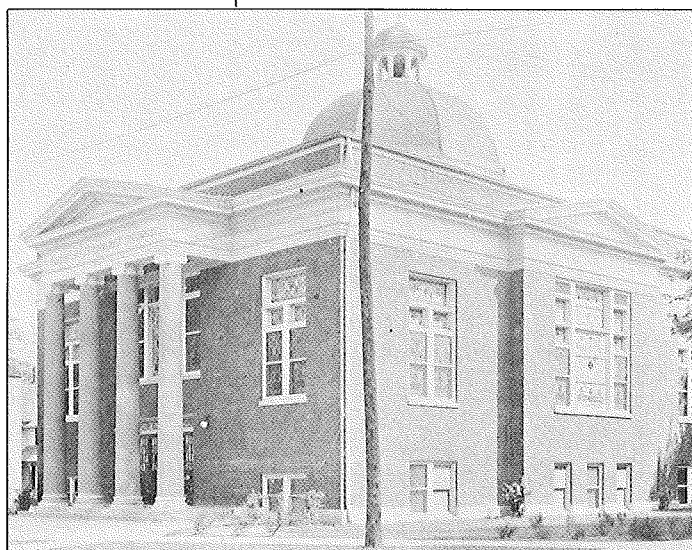
**D**ating from 1847, when it was only a muddy path, Grandville Avenue has linked the village of Grandville with the city of Grand Rapids. The Grand River, which created both of these urban centers, also connected them to the Lake Michigan port city of Grand Haven. From there, riverboats of all sorts loaded freight and passengers for inland destinations along the Grand River. Debarking at Grandville, many Dutch immigrants concluded lengthy voyages across oceans, lakes, and rivers to exchange boats for ox carts. On these they jostled along the rutted trail which later became Route 21. In the 1840s nearly all the immigrants turned west at Grandville and joined the woodland settlements clustered around A. C. Van Raalte's colony in Holland, Michigan. But by 1857 many had already turned northeast to seek names and places in the recently incorporated city of Grand Rapids. They settled first near the city's center, and it was there, on Spring Street, that the original Christian Reformed congregation in Grand Rapids constructed its sanctuary.<sup>1</sup>

Thirty years later, in 1887, while Dutch immigration to the United States was peaking, the Spring Street congregation sponsored a daughter church near the corner of Franklin Street and Grandville Avenue.\* Factory employment drew the newly arriving immigrants to that area, and they clustered along a one-mile stretch of Grandville Avenue between Plaster Creek and Franklin Street.

Soon two more regional congregations were organized: Grandville Avenue in 1891 and Bethel, an English-language group, in 1913. Two Reformed churches, Fifth Reformed, organized in 1886, and Grace, organized in 1897, also served the Grandville Avenue region. They all flourished there in a predominantly Dutch-American enclave.<sup>2</sup> By 1900 nearly 75 percent of the area's populace was of Netherlandic origins. Shops, trades, factories, and schools combined to provide the community with its daily needs. At its peak in the 1920s, at least fifty Dutch-American businesses served this sub-society.<sup>3</sup> Currently, two flourishing Dutch-import shops still persist in the old neighborhood, though it is now inhabited by a largely Hispanic-American populace.

Perhaps it seemed boringly homogeneous to outside observers, but this southwestern corner of Grand Rapids included considerable variety, and the area's Dutch churches provided a significant basis for differentiation. Under the influence of its first pastor, W. R. Smit, Franklin Street CRC was distinctive in its promotion of church music. Smit, who served the church for sixteen years, was a native of Bentheim, Germany, and he reflected

that region's attachment to hymns and instrumental music as well as psalms. Consequently, the Franklin Street church quickly organized a choral society, and already in 1898 it boasted a ladies quartet. By 1921 its orchestra



joined the singing groups. These developments contrast rather sharply with the Grandville Avenue church, where choirs were not incorporated into the liturgy until the 1950s. Located about midway between its ecclesiastical sisters, Bethel CRC began as an English-language congregation in 1913. For that reason it also attracted a

*\*The Spring Street CRC is now located on Bates Street as First CRC of Grand Rapids. Franklin Street disbanded in 1966 and became largely amalgamated with Rogers Heights CRC. If it had survived Franklin Street would have shared a one-hundredth anniversary with LaGrave Avenue CRC, which, like Franklin Street, grew out of the original Spring Street church. By contrast, LaGrave was English speaking—the first of its kind in the Christian Reformed Church.*



less traditional membership. The congregation's leading elder, B. J. Bennink, had long advocated the adoption of English as a necessary prerequisite for exerting a Dutch-Calvinist influence in American culture. Thus, it was not strange that *Banner* editor Henry Beets led the Bethel church in its inaugural services. Beets was so convinced of the need for using English that he once promoted the organization of an English-language classis.<sup>4</sup>

Although *liberal* would be a ridiculous label for any of the south-

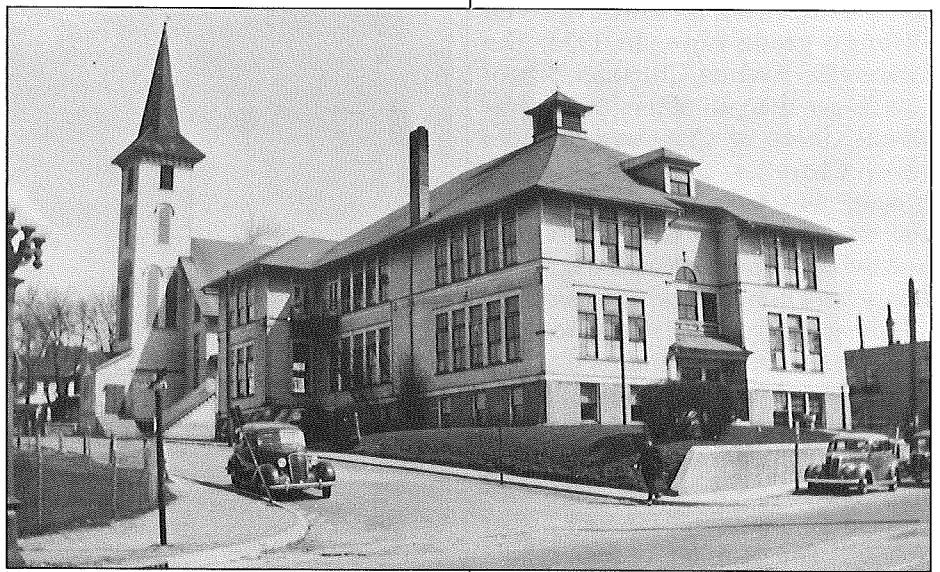
different pattern prevailed. Its original pastor, William Greve, was, like Franklin Street's W. R. Smit, a German from the province of Bentheim. But Greve studied after immigrating. Actually, he was a lay evangelist who gained ordination after abbreviated study under Rev. Douwe Vander Werp. All of the congregation's subsequent pastors until the 1917 arrival of Dr. Ymen P. De Jong remained for rather short terms. "Y. P." broke the pattern. He stayed for twenty-eight years (1917-1945), and during that era Grandville Avenue became the domi-

large and paternalistic over his many parishioners and in the larger Dutch-American enclave on Grandville Avenue. His era there was momentarily marked not only by the unexpected shifts of daily life but especially by a world-altering technology which changed population movements, warfare, education, and much more. The community could not and did not isolate itself from those events. In 1917, for example, the Grandville Avenue people spoke Dutch in common discourse, but by 1945 English prevailed. During that same time span auto-



west Grand Rapids churches, Bethel was more inclined to cultural novelty than its neighbors were. Bethel's first pastor, Gerrit Hoeksema, served the new congregation for thirteen years, and his preaching reflected a "common grace" perspective. Like B. J. Bennink, H. Beets, and Johannes Groen, Hoeksema emphasized the potential for cooperation with other denominations and even with non-Christians. Active engagement in American culture rather than isolation stood high in Hoeksema's priorities.<sup>5</sup> Some of Bethel's subsequent pastors, notably Rolf Veenstra and William Buursma, advocated similar views.

For the Grandville Avenue CRC, a



nant church of the region. Its membership stood at 425 families in 1945, when it was, with 1,673 persons, the largest congregation in the Christian Reformed Church.<sup>6</sup>

Pastor Ymen P. De Jong loomed

(facing page) Franklin Street Christian Reformed Church; (above left) Dr. Ymen P. De Jong, 1905, seminary graduation; (above right) Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church and Grandville Avenue Christian School, circa 1937; (bottom) Bethel Christian Reformed Church.

mobiles replaced horse and buggy conveyances, and the first airplanes flew overhead. Meanwhile, two generations of the neighborhood's youth served in two successive world wars. Through it all, Y. P. preached as many as four sermons each Sunday—two in Dutch and two in English. Both the congregation and the neighborhood grew vigorously during his pastorate. And that growth also encompassed a significant postwar immigration dur-

ing the late Forties. But by the time of Y. P.'s death in 1958, the ethnic enclave showed signs of disintegration. Its residents had begun to move to Grandville, toward Jenison, and into suburbs like Wyoming. Partly from that migration, eight new churches were organized in Classis Grandville during the Fifties. Clearly, an era was ending.<sup>7</sup>

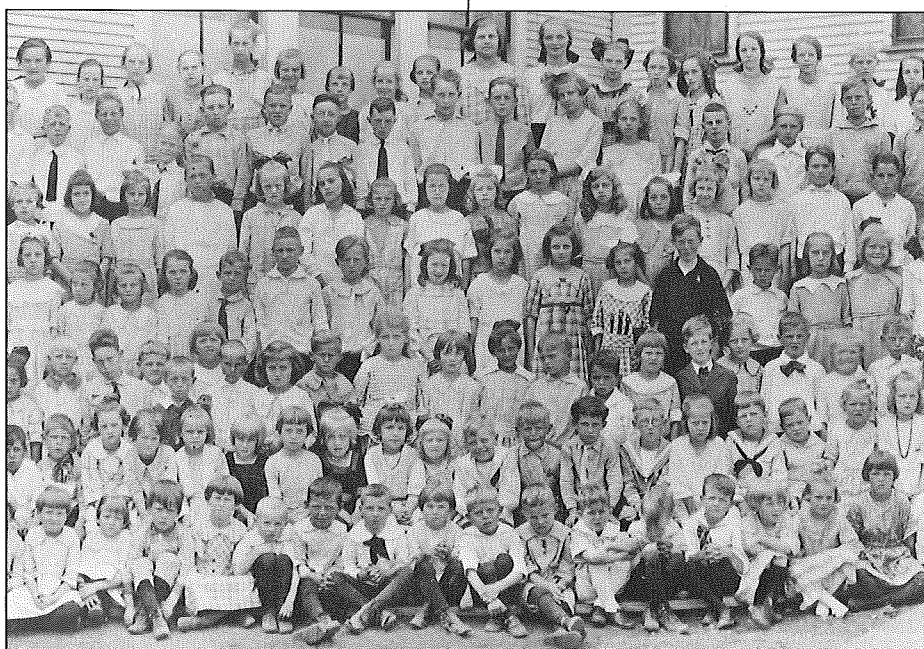
During the peak of its vitality, from 1915–1960, the Grandville Avenue community supported a large Christian school which, from 1930 on into the 1950s, enrolled about nine hundred students, in kindergarten through grade nine. In 1932, the Grandville Avenue Christian School was larger than all others in the National Union of Christian Schools (now Christian Schools International).<sup>8</sup> But forty years later (1972), the school enrolled only 321 pupils, and by 1980 it merged with the Christian school in neighboring Wyoming. While it prospered, the school attracted prominent educators like B. J. Bennink and Richard Postma, and in the early Twenties both Postma and B. K. Kuiper staffed a Christian Normal School which met in the southwest area's Franklin Street Christian School.\* The fledgling normal school offered evening courses to train grade-school teachers, but the school could not survive competition from Calvin College, which began to offer similar courses in 1920. Though the normal school's principal, B. K. Kuiper, protested this unexpected competition, Calvin College would not alter its curriculum, and the normal school near Grandville Avenue disbanded by 1922.<sup>9</sup>

Among the many prominent people associated with the southwest Grand Rapids community—Bennink, Postma, and business leaders like the

Hekman brothers, R. Jurgens, H. Holtvluwer, and others—Y. P. continues to evoke the widest spectrum of memories. His reputation, which extended well beyond his own parishioners, was something akin to that of a traditional Jewish rabbi, a singular source of advice and wisdom for the entire range of human experience. For birthing and dying, in prosperity and want, at sickbeds and amid every festivity, Y. P. provided the words and gestures which could enrich or elevate daily affairs. And even now almost everyone over fifty who was raised on

so by design. He controlled consistory meetings with similar precision. They concluded regularly at 10 p.m. Many decisions, though, were reached informally when Y. P. met with the consistory's officers in the Hekman Biscuit factory prior to the regular consistory meeting.<sup>11</sup>

During a twenty-eight-year pastorate, Y. P. gained an intimate understanding of his congregation. Under his tutelage, three generations passed through adolescence, and he must have baptized most of the children and even some grandchildren born to



*Students of Grandville Avenue Christian School, 1922.*

the southwest side can recite tales of encounters with Y. P. These, together with secondhand accounts of the pastor's astounding capacities, have contributed to his nearly mythic image.

Because "Dominie" De Jong was first and last a preacher, his parishioners remember him best in the pulpit and catechism classes or at sickbeds. Few ever considered the possibility that Y. P. was not in charge. He was tall and broad shouldered, with a rich voice. On Sundays he donned a Prince Albert coat with tails, and although his sermons were long—about forty-five minutes—they were

members of his first catechism classes. But, if Y. P. examined his parishioners, they also examined him, and very little escaped their eyes. Several of these former parishioners have provided recollections for use in this article.\* Their comments range widely, from school days to neighborhood games and vivid impressions of prominent people. Naturally, then, Dominie Y. P. is a frequent subject of comment.

Aside from his pulpiteering—pre-

\*The Franklin Street Christian School existed independently from 1891 to 1929 and then merged with the Grandville Avenue Christian School.

dictable mannerisms and phrasing and, occasionally, astonishing behavior—Y. P.'s inclination to practice medicine is the most enduring source of wonder and comment. As Physician Edward Postma recalls, Y. P. regularly visited P. J. Haan's apothecary, where he marched behind the counter to select the ingredients of medicines which he mixed at home. These he parceled out to parishioners for both minor and serious ailments. At bedsides he was known to take a parishioner's pulse rate and, after pen- sive silence, to predict the term of ill-

Herbal medicines, especially those which could be acquired in Morley, Michigan, from an Indian known as Big Elk, served Y. P.'s designs for treating ulcers, diabetes, and other internal maladies. Of one such case Dr. Enno Wolthuis reports, "My father, at about forty years of age, developed what later proved to be a mild case of diabetes. When Y. P. heard of it, he volunteered to take care of it. One Saturday he took father . . . to see Big Elk. That afternoon Dad came back with a large bag filled with herb roots with which he had to make tea daily.

What effect, if any, this tea had on his diabetes, I will never know. But I do know that not long after this he was taking orinase, an oral insulin." Whether Y. P.'s therapies were successful or not, they probably provided powerful incentives for well-being, for, as Jess

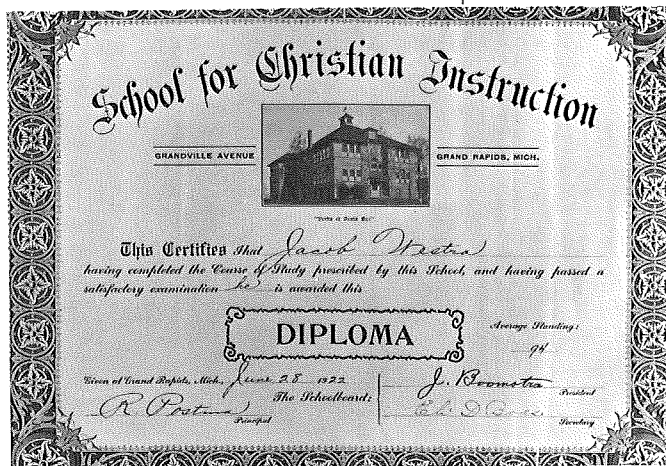
vice. In spite of the noise of people and sirens and the odor of smoke in the church, Y. P. kept preaching until an elder went up to the pulpit to ask that we be excused. Y. P. complied, but not before we all sang a concluding psalm."

Young men who, as a rite of passage, were allowed to sit together in the balcony, enjoyed a special vantage point for observing the church services.\*\* And their eyes were frequently drawn to a particularly demonstrative auditor who made a display of his negative reactions to Y. P.'s sermons. Dr. Richard Post remembers that this fellow would "often stand up suddenly, glare at Y. P. until he was noticed, and then silently stalk out. On one occasion he rose to his feet, shook his fist at the dominie, and shouted, 'Ik geloof er niks van!' Y. P. paused, looked at the man coolly and replied, 'Ga jij maar naar huis. De duivel heeft je weer te pakken.'\*\*\* Antics of that dimension were highly exceptional because the "Dominie" was not often challenged in a Christian Reformed church.

\*A tape-recorded conversation by Jessica Oppewal, Johan Westra, Herman Steenstra, and Herman Leestma provides delightful glimpses of the southwest Grand Rapids area. Dr. Ed Postma visited the archives last year to provide a lengthy account of his impressions, and these have functioned as a model for other commentators. Some months later, Rev. Jerry Postma penned additional recollections, and other authors (Enno Wolthuis, Johan Westra, Emma Ruiter, Bernie Velzen, Wilma (Ditmar) Lagerwey, Richard Post, and Walter Lagerwey) have each written fascinating views of their days in the Grandville Avenue area. Some of these will be quoted at length, and together they have provided the substance of this narrative. The Calvin College Archives has preserved this entire collection, and we invite others to contribute additional comment for the Southwest Grand Rapids Collection.

\*\*The antics of these young folks included general rowdiness and even cardplaying, which often drew a public reprimand.

\*\*\*"I don't believe a word of it," and Y. P.'s retort, "Just go on home. The devil has got hold of you again."



ness or, in some cases, the probable time of death. No doubt, long experiences at such bedsides informed his judgments.

Some of Y. P.'s medical advice and prescriptions were astoundingly beneficial. Mrs. Jessica (Leestma) Oppewal recalls one such treatment for her sister, who suffered from rickets. When a medical doctor recommended that her legs be broken and then reset to straighten them, Pastor De Jong intervened and prescribed leg splints with a special diet. And it worked! Less effective, though, was Y. P.'s advice that Richard Post should be swathed with turpentine-soaked towels to cure a severe cold. "I don't know what happened to my cold," Mr. Post writes, "but I do recall that my neck was inflamed and virtually devoid of skin the next morning."

Oppewal commented, "He had such a powerful personality that, from his hand, a peppermint could cure you."

As a preacher, counselor, and teacher, Y. P. enjoyed much veneration. Lord's Day sermons from the Heidelberg Catechism indoctrinated the congregation each Sunday morning, while the evening sermons were more popular. Often they were packaged in a series. One such series, on the prodigal son, stretched from week to week until the neighborhood comment each Monday was, "Did the prodigal make it home yet?" Other pulpit exploits, including a sermon which went on undeterred by a neighborhood fire, remain vivid for Dr. Bernard Velzen, who wrote, "I remember when Vogel's meat market caught fire during a Sunday-afternoon Dutch ser-



In general, pastors were highly regarded. Advanced education set them apart, but their status as God's spokesmen was even more significant. And Y. P. enjoyed an even loftier status than most of his clerical cohorts. As Richard Post recalls, "Y. P. was the undisputed ecclesiastical guru of the south end. I do not know whether his commanding presence as a local personality reflected inherent capabilities and unflappable self-confidence or whether he was virtually deified by his less-well-educated-blue-collar constituents. That he was a dynamo was, in my opinion, unquestioned. Regarded as 'flink op de preekstoel,'\* he regularly preached three times each Sunday," and "he was a faithful visitor to families in need, freely providing counsel, consolation, and advice."

No one could effectively compete for authority with Y. P., but at school and among its pupils the principal reigned supreme. During most of Y. P.'s tenure, Mr. Richard Postma supervised the Grandville Avenue Christian School,\*\* and like his counterpart in the pulpit, Postma dominated his terrain. Richard Post laconically described Postma as "an imperious little man who struck dry-mouthed terror into the hearts of those who were disciplined. He was a superb strategist, a capable public speaker, and an inspiring leader."

"I am sure," Richard Post continued, "that the principal and preacher carried the biggest clubs in the valley. During my Grandville Avenue days I once asked Joe Westra to explain the apparent animosity which flared up between 'Postie' and Y. P. at

congregational meetings. Joe's astute reply, 'There isn't room for two dictators in one church.' "

Occasionally, as Dr. Wolhuis's recollections indicate, "dictators" could be benevolent. "When I attended this school," Enno writes, "the principal was first Mr. George Bos and later Mr. Richard Postma. Mr. Bos was somewhat crippled and used a cane, not only for walking but also for disciplining. He taught some classes, and when he waved his cane, the pupils readily obeyed him. Mr. Postma also was a feared taskmaster, and he used a

ruler or a yardstick with gusto in administering discipline.

"The entrance of pupils into the school building was also a disciplined affair. When the first bell rang, all the pupils were lined up single file behind the school under the supervision of the teachers. When the second bell rang five minutes later, a teacher sat at the piano in the hallway and started banging out the 'Black Hawk Waltz.' Thereupon, they all kept step with the music as they entered the school.

"I think it was during the First World War when, during one recess



\*A very able preacher.

\*\*Postma, who also edited the Young Calvinist and wrote a weekly column in The Banner, organized the American Federation of Young Men's Societies and helped direct the National Union of Christian Schools—all this while principal at Grandville Avenue between 1921 and 1946.

period, we saw our first airplane flying over the grounds. We were very excited, so much so that some of us decided to follow it. As I recall that venture, we ran quite a distance along Godfrey Avenue toward downtown Grand Rapids before we gave up and returned to our classes—late, of course. The teacher took this seriously and sent us to the principal. However, to our surprise, he decided not to punish us because he knew this was a momentous event in our lives. It certainly was."

Jess Oppewal also remembers

was also a masterful storyteller, retelling particularly the deeds of heroic Netherlanders: William the Silent, Piet Hein, and other sea captains like Michiel De Ruyter. Other stories, like "The Boy and the Balloon Ride," Postma delivered to reward a class for good work.

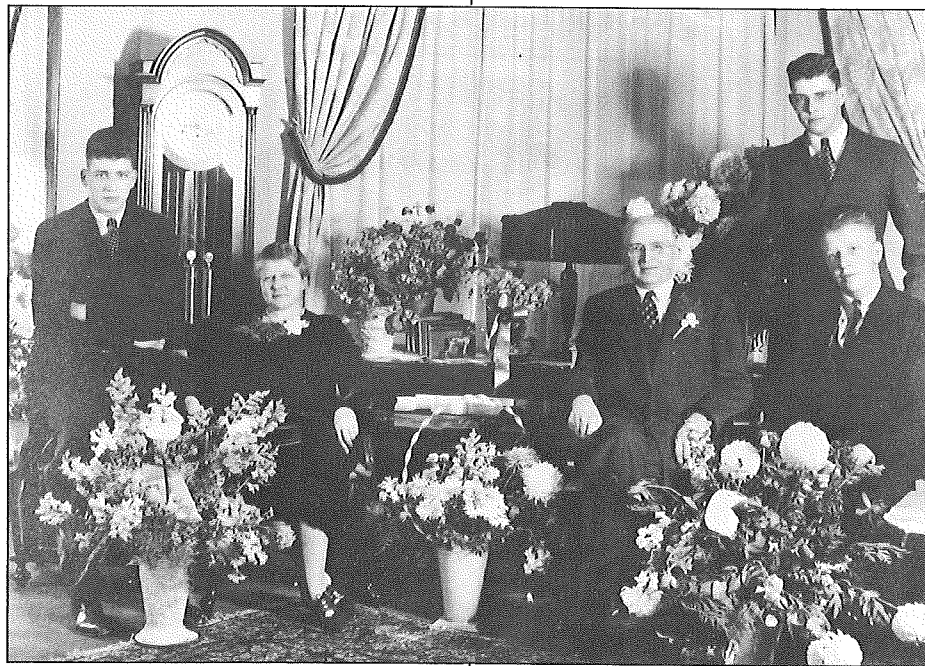
The era of Y. P. and Postie also encompassed the Great Depression, and nearly everyone along Grandville Avenue during that time knew economic hardship. One of the area's residents recalls that "the economic depression of the Thirties was a most traumatic

time. There were many young people and even school children who left home due to family tensions caused by their fathers' unemployment. In some cases 'running away' was only for a day or two, but it spoke volumes about the tension in the neighborhood. The Grandville Avenue area was hard-pressed because of the lack of work at the Leonard-Kelvinator plant as well as the shutdown of many furniture factories.

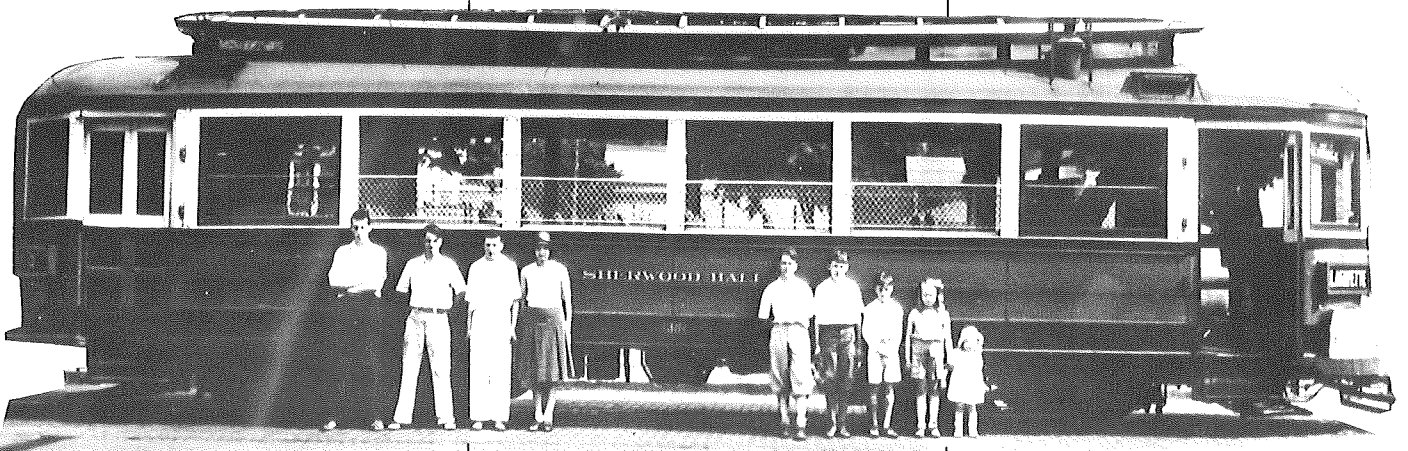
"But the Christian school retained its influence and the loyalty of its supporters. Some parents were so dedicated that they attempted to pay tuition with family heirlooms and other last reminders of their relatives in the Netherlands.

"Both food and medical attention were scarce. One child in our neighborhood actually died from malnutrition and the lack of medical attention. The neighborhood fire station was the place where families went for a daily allotment of one quart of milk and a loaf of bread.

"There was a change in political loyalty among many of the little people during the Depression. What had



(facing page) Dismantling Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church, 1950; (above) Y. P. De Jong family celebrating Rev. De Jong's twenty-fifth anniversary as pastor of Grandville Avenue CRC.



once been a Republican stronghold\* became at least partly loyal to President Roosevelt. One of the leaders influencing this change was the principal of the Grandville Avenue Christian School, Mr. Richard Postma. Due to idealism as well as realism, he changed his own political thinking and became a strong supporter of the programs of the New Deal. Postma's views influenced many of the area's residents who respected the school principal. His attitude was in some contrast with that of Y. P."

But the community also banded together during the Depression, and when cash gave out, they bartered services for goods. Jurgens and Holtvluwer, for example, traded clothing for potatoes and haircuts. Coal frequently came from the nearby train tracks, and ice from the railroad's refrigerator cars. It was during the Depression that the Lagerwey family migrated to Grand Rapids for a second time, and Dr. Walter Lagerwey

*The well-known "DORNBOS" Sigars*

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*But now also made in Grand Rapids.*

*Of the opinion that the "Dornbos Sigars" are worth a greater market, which was not possible until now, the manufacturers have moved their factory to Grand Rapids. The factory is located at 16-18 Fulton St. W., on the 2nd floor of the Maris Building. From now on these (very) well-known cigars will be locally made. Do not forget to stop in, when in downtown, to observe how your sigars are made.*

*Ask your store for "Dornbos" sigars.*

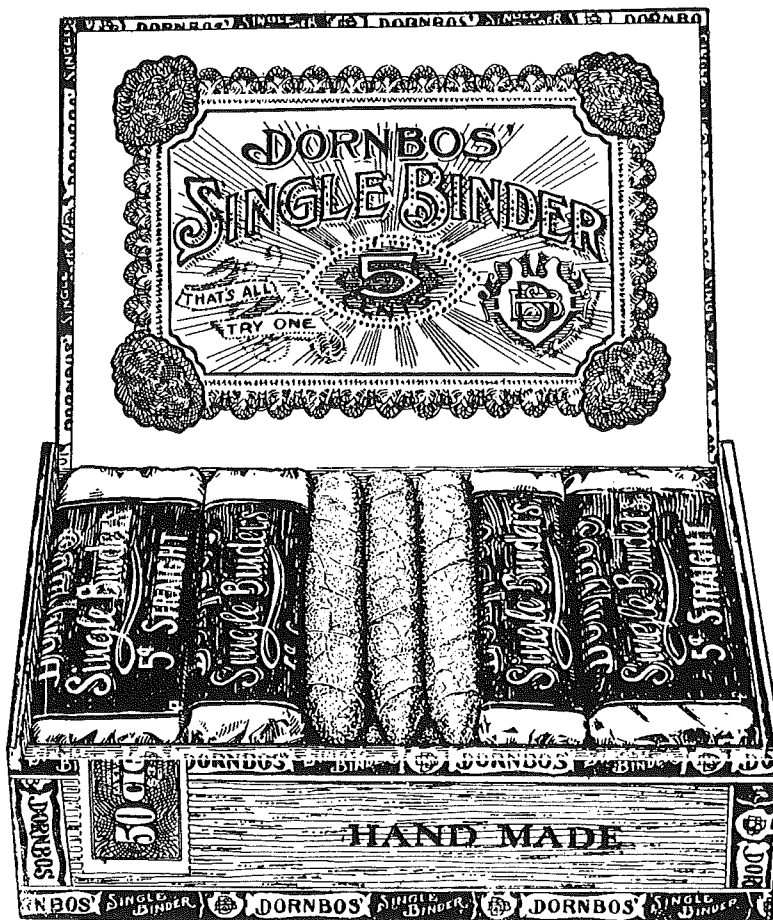
*It means quality.*

*\*Concerning the Hoover/Smith campaign of 1928, Bernie Velzen wrote, "Every Protestant had Hoover's picture in the house window, while Catholics all displayed Al Smith. But," Velzen adds, "the bias didn't take root in the kids. Although we had Christian schools, public schools and Catholic schools, before and after school we were a happy bunch of kids playing together."*

## De welbekende "DORNBOS" Sigaren

GEDURENDE 20 JAAR REEDS HIER VERKOCHT,  
DOCH NU OOK IN GRAND RAPIDS GEMAAKT.

In het vertrouwen, dat de „Dornbos Sigaren” een ruimere markt waard zijn dan tot heden mogelijk is geweest, hebben de manufacturiers hun fabriek naar Grand Rapids overgebracht. De fabriek is gevestigd te 16—18 Fulton Street, W., op de tweede vloer der Maris Bldg. Van nu af aan zullen deze zoo welbekende sigaren hun „home” maken in onze stad. Verzuim niet, als ge „down town” komt, eens kennis te maken met de nieuwe buurman en zie hoe uwe sigaren gemaakt worden.



VRAAG UW WINKELIER VOOR „DORNBOS” SIGAREN,  
DAT MEENT KWALITEIT.

## PIETER DORNBOS

16—18 Fulton St., W.  
Citz. Phone 31647.

Grand Rapids, Mich.  
Maris Building.



recalls, "In 1936 we moved back to America, settled in the Grandville Avenue area, and began to attend the Grandville Avenue CRC, where Dominie De Jong was the preacher. We were viewed as fresh immigrants, though in fact, we were emigres returned. Our speech and manners must have been those of new immigrants, and we were certainly poor like immigrants. We depended on the generosity of kindly people for the basic necessities of life. Our home was furnished with hand-me-down furniture (including, I remember, a coal

stove with a cracked pot) from good people of the CRC community. My brother and sister went to the Grandville Avenue Christian School, but we could pay little or no tuition on the ten dollars which I earned from my job, working half days for Ditmar and Son on the corner of Galewood and Burton Streets. I began there with such humble tasks as boning pig heads and trimming fat backs."

That the Depression brought hardship and anxiety to many cannot be disputed. Richard Post speculates that "During the lean years, Y. P.'s many

sermons from the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation were aimed at allaying the fears and anxieties of his flock. Y. P.'s tender side, a capacity to sympathize with ordinary people, was also enhanced by his hobbies. He was an enthusiastic breeder of chickens, rabbits, and canaries, with a literal aviary in one room of the house. Boston bull terriers was his favorite breed of dogs. He shared with most of his male parishioners a fondness for tobacco. Pipes and cigars were, as one commenator remarked, nearly a sacrament in the old ethnic communities. The Grandville Avenue consistory room was always furnished with a tin pail of Summertime tobacco for general use. Cigars, the most common smoke, trailed their odors up to the church door. But during the service they were lined up on windowsills to await the return of their owners.

More intimate glimpses, gained by the pastor's near neighbors and family friends, disclose warm and exceedingly human cameos of Y. P. and his family. On Monday mornings, some folk knew, Y. P. helped with the family wash. And during house visitation, when the elders questioned the De Jong boys in the parsonage, Y. P. came readily to their defense. They were "good boys at heart."

Mrs. De Jong, or "Mevrouw," was partly obscured by the masculine dominance of the times and also by her exclusively male household. But Wilma (Ditmar) Lagerwey remembers the dominie's wife as a strong and forceful person. She was "a soft-spoken sweet woman. She was a Van Laar. We used to say that if Y. P. should die first, she wouldn't last long. Well, we were wrong. She lived long after he died, and very independently. Y. P. used to say, 'I am the head, and my wife is the neck.' Even though she appeared on the surface to be meek and to think that 'Papa' was wonderful as the head, she often made him turn his head. If you can do



that to a Frisian like Y. P., you must be very forceful."

And from another source, the son of Mevrouw De Jong's housekeeper, the following testimony: "After our return from the Netherlands, my mother went out working and did housework for none other than the wife of Dominie De Jong. . . . Mother and Mevrouw hit it off right away. She was a gentle, kindly person, and working for her was almost a privilege. There was time for conversation over coffee cups, and a friendly relationship with Dominie and Mevrouw

linked us all together. I remember," Walter Lagerwey writes, "visiting the De Jongs when they were living on Madison Avenue. The dominie, whom we held in such high esteem, could be a very ordinary man,\* although there was always a certain dignity about him."

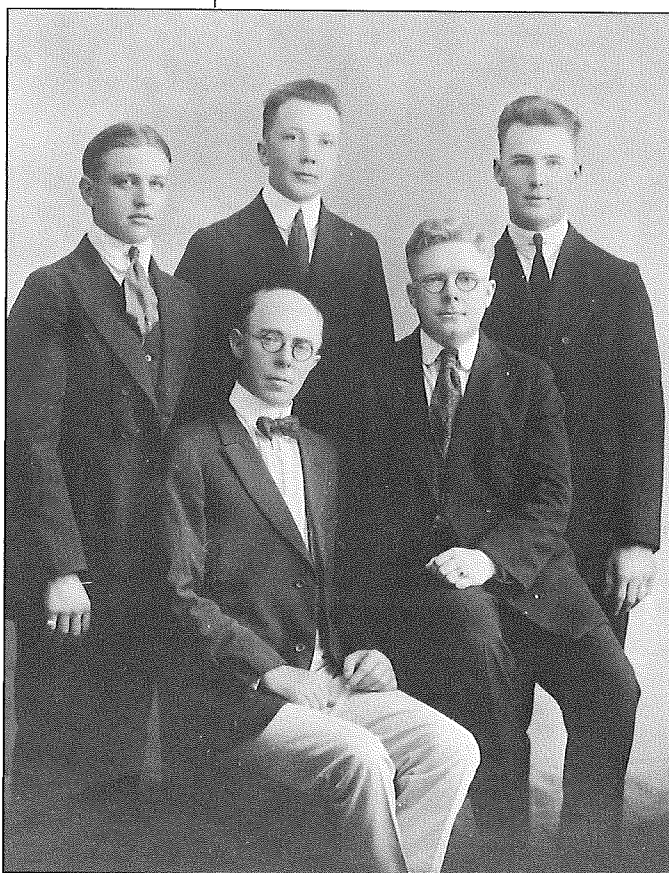
The streets where this extraordinary yet common man distributed comfort, advice, and medicine swarmed with activity. Houses full of children were crammed onto small lots, and many were fronted with shops and stores. Butcher shops,

old alike," and Postma also remembers the excellent mail service provided by "Jim Woudstra and a Mr. Doele, who delivered the mail twice each day and walked the entire route. Mr. Doele was always accompanied by a pack of dogs. One group followed him for a few blocks, and then others would fill in for those who returned to their own yards and neighborhoods."

On Saturdays the stores kept late hours. It was the shopping night, and the streets were jammed. Farmers from outlying areas—Jenison, Hud-



(above) Henry Velzen Sr. with customer, 1924; (across) students and faculty (B. K. Kuiper and Richard Postma) of the Christian Normal School, 1921; (facing page, left) gardening on London St. SW; (facing page, right) Mrs. Vander Ploeg with Hekman Biscuit Company truck.

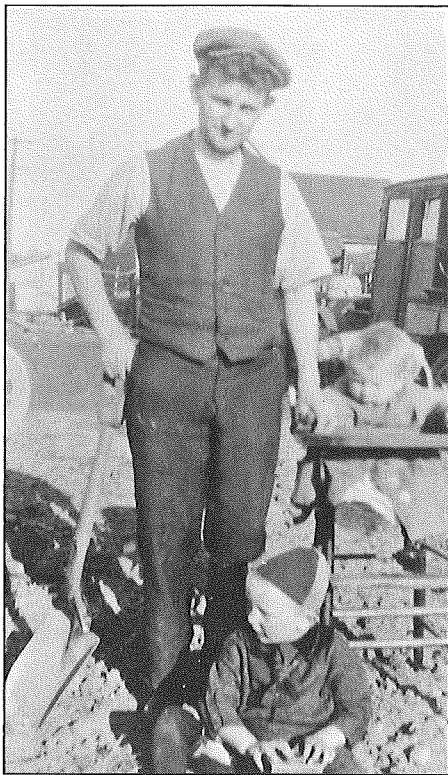


\*During a candid exchange, Y. P. explained to young Walter that the preparation of many sermons was not as difficult as Walter imagined. There were, of course, "de zwarte boekjes"—i.e., the standard Reformed commentaries issued by J. H. Kok for Gereformeerde (Reformed) ministers in the Netherlands. These publications, written by theologians at the Free University of Amsterdam and at the Kampen Theological School, provided the most authoritative words on biblical interpretation both for Y. P. and most of his colleagues in Christian Reformed pulpits.

cigar makers, grocers, and nearly every other sort of small business venture clustered along Grandville Avenue. Walking toward town from Plaster Creek, one could encounter a dozen well-known shopkeepers and local professionals. Among them, as Jerry Postma recalls, "John the Barber loved to get into arguments by making caustic comments to young and

sonville, and the spaces between—joined local residents to purchase clothing, shoes, furniture, and groceries. But when the stores closed at 9 p.m., the shades also came down. Preparation for Sunday and Sunday itself excluded the lure of display windows and the material concerns of the week. Sometime during the 1930s, Ed

Postma recalls, a group from a rescue mission began to appear each Saturday on the busy street corner near Holtvluwer's store. With drums and horns they drew a crowd and then preached a decidedly freewill gospel to the assembled Dutch Calvinists. But appeals to "accept the Lord" and urgings to "be saved" resulted in debates rather than conversions. Well-schooled in the doctrines of divine election and covenantal theology, the Dutch audience openly refuted the street preachers. The local tailor, Isaac De Mey, was especially adept at pre-



senting biblical evidence to correct the Arminian views proclaimed on the street corner.

Enno Wolthuis colorfully displays the scenes of his youth in a recollection which ranges from the Hall Street fire house to the blacksmith shop: "One of the recollections of my boyhood days concerned the fire department housed on the corner of Grandville Avenue and Hall Street. I vividly recall seeing the steamer wagon,

drawn by a team of four horses, racing down Grandville Avenue to a fire. On the way a fireman stood on the back of the steamer busily stoking up the fire under the boiler so that, on arrival at the fire, there would be enough steam pressure to run the water pumps.

"An important feature of southwest Grand Rapids was the P. J. Haan drug-store at the corner of Grandville Avenue and an alley which led to the Grandville Avenue CRC. This store was the source of most of our drugs, but among other things, it also supplied fireworks for our Fourth of July



celebrations. On the eve of the Fourth, P. J. and his brother, Jake, put on a fireworks display at the store which attracted much attention and, I am sure, many sales.

"One of the prominent citizens in our neighborhood was the dentist, Dr. Broodman. His office was above the Jurgens and Holtvluwer clothing store. Dr. Broodman did much walking for exercise, and we met him often on Grandville Avenue on his customary walks to downtown Grand Rapids and back. He greeted everyone with a broad grin and a smile which, so the

kids thought, showed us his fine set of teeth. He also owned an unusual automobile, a Franklin, featuring a sloping radiator.

"In the early days there were many peddlers who plied the streets to supply the homes with foods of various kinds. They made their rounds of the community with horse-drawn wagons. One of these was Mr. Vander Zwaag, the meat man. Kids often greeted him at his stops, and, if he was in a good mood at the time, he treated us to a piece of bologna (we called it "baloney"). Another peddler was Mr. Kingma, the produce man, but his potential treats did not interest us much. Then there was the egg man, whose name escapes me now. However, I remember him very well because of a prank we played on him. In those early days the Ford cars' engines had coils to activate the spark plugs, and these had to be replaced at times. We found old ones in the dump, and we discovered that by hooking them to old batteries, also from the dump, we could produce enough voltage to give someone a shock. So one day we connected the high-voltage terminal of the coil to our back screen-door handle. Unfortunately, the next peddler to come that day was the egg man, carrying his basket of eggs. He was rudely greeted with a shock as he tried to open the door, and he nearly dropped his basket. My mother was angry, but, to relieve the tension, she treated him to a cup of coffee, something the peddlers often received on their visits.

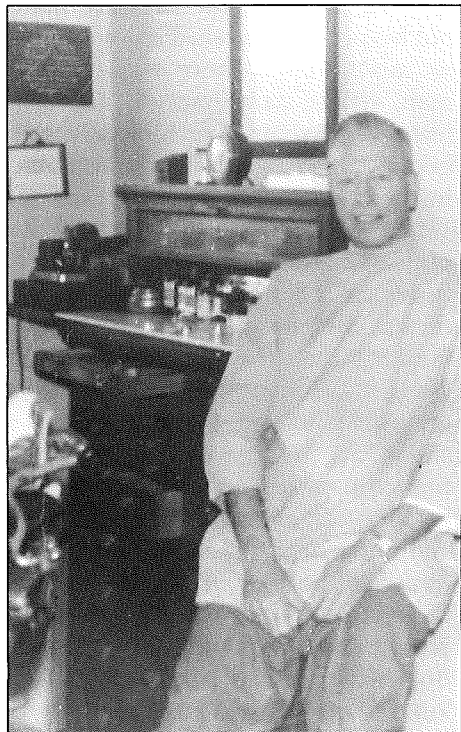
"One of the big attractions for kids was the blacksmith shop on the corner of Grandville Avenue and Workman Court,\* next to the Vredevoogd Furniture store. On our way home from school in the afternoon, we often stopped there to watch the smith hammering the red-hot metal into shape, making a new part for some-

\*Currently named Van Raalte Drive



one's wagon. Just as exciting was seeing him shoe horses, especially when the horses balked and he tamed them with his muscular arms."

The streets were crowded on Sundays too, but primarily with worshippers en route to the neighborhood churches. One such pedestrian, "a lady well into her seventies, walked into the Grandville Avenue church a few minutes late every Sunday morning, always carrying a large black bag containing a pair of shoes, a purse, and assorted gifts for her grandchildren. Few people knew," Richard Post



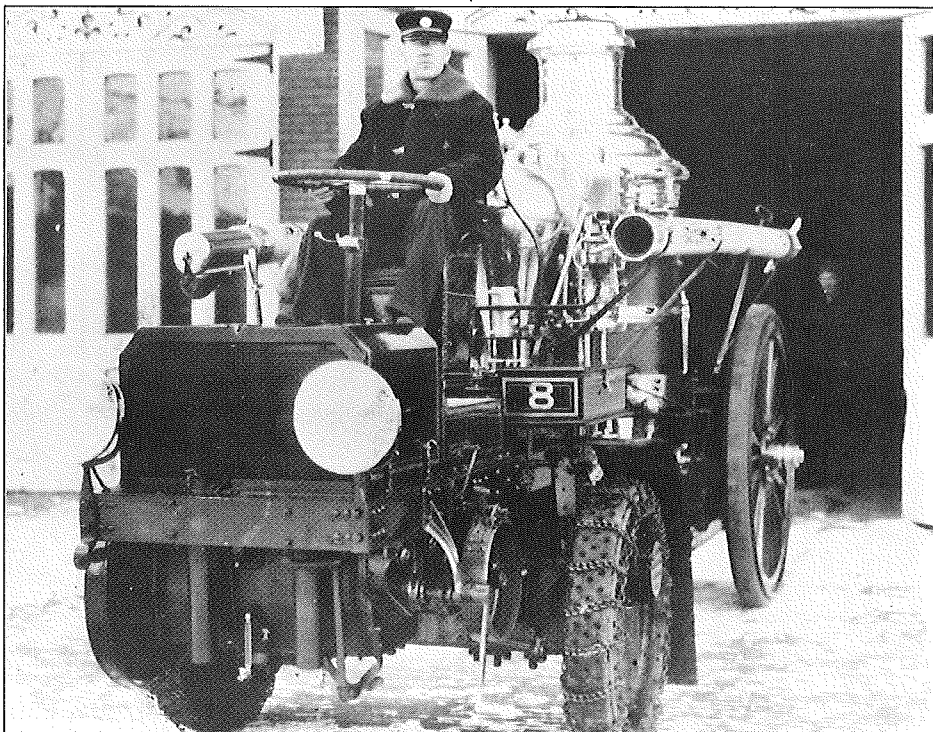
writes, "that over the objections of her family, this lady walked to church from the Holland Home on East Fulton Street, a distance of more than seven miles."

Such loyalty was, doubtless, uncommon, but the Grandville Avenue Church and Pastor Y. P. did nurture a host of loyal saints. One of these, recalling youthful soul struggles, remains profoundly grateful for "Dominie De Jong's . . . pastoral concern for doubters in the pew, the seekers who

lacked certainty."<sup>12</sup> Walter Lagerwey also remembers his pastor's familiar rhetorical query, "Now you will ask me, 'Dominie, how can I be certain that I am one of the elect?' "

"That question greatly troubled me, too," Lagerwey continued, "and in the catechism class dominie constantly reassured us that if we detected in our lives the signs of grace—a heartfelt concern about our sins and a sincere prayer for God's forgiveness—if we heard the Word of God gladly in the sermon, in catechism, and in our personal devotions, then

Y. P.'s apt phrases which, after frequent use, still linger among his surviving parishioners. From congregational prayers Richard Post can still recite, "Ga, dan, O Heilige Geest, van oor tot oor en van hart tot hart. Geef ons wat wij noodig hebben; ontnem ons wat wij moeten missen." Or, in English, "Go, then, O Holy Spirit, from ear to ear and from heart to heart. Give us what we need and deprive us of what might work us harm."



we had unmistakable evidence that the Spirit of God was working in our hearts, and the good work that God had begun he would bring to fruition so that in God's good time we too would know that we were in fact the children of God, saved by electing grace. And so we were drawn, most of us, into the acknowledgment of our desperate need and the richness of God's grace. . . . We bless Y. P. for his ministry."

Blessed, too, are the memories of

(left) Dentist George Broodman; (above) Hall Street fire department; (facing page) Ditmar Home on 749 Lynch Street

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Henry Lucas, *Netherlanders in America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1955) 272-73. For a personal narrative describing this route, see *Origins*, Vol. 1 2:16-25.

<sup>2</sup>*Golden Anniversary: Franklin Street Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: privately printed, 1937) 3-4; *Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church . . . 75th Anniversary* (Grand

Rapids: privately printed, 1966) 3-14; *Silver Anniversary Bethel Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: privately printed, 1938) 5-12; *One Hundredth Anniversary, 1857-1957: First Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: privately printed, 1957) 35-36.

<sup>3</sup>David G. Vanderstel, "The Dutch in Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1848-1900," Ph.D. Diss. Kent State University, 1983, 182-93.

<sup>4</sup>*Golden Anniversary 1887-1937: Franklin Street Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: privately printed, 1937) 2-3, 27-29; *Silver Anniversary Bethel Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: privately printed, 1938) 5-11; *Interview*, Nov. 1986 with Dr. Edward Postma, written notations in Calvin College and Seminary Archives.

<sup>5</sup>Gerrit Hoeksema, *Confessional Unity* (Grand

Rapids: Christian Reformed Church, 1956) 13, which asserts, "The world . . . needs the beautiful Calvinistic doctrine of common grace, which saves the Christian from pessimism and from idle separation in a world that is crying for Christian leadership."

<sup>6</sup>Newspaper clippings re: William Greve, 1836-1906, in the verticle file of Calvin College and Seminary Archives; *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Church, 1946) 7-26.

<sup>7</sup>*Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Church, 1969) 24.

<sup>8</sup>*Christian School Statistics 1931-1932* (Chicago: National Union of Christian Schools, 1930) 8-14.

<sup>9</sup>George Stob, "The Christian Reformed Church and Her Schools," Princeton Theological Semi-

nary, 1955, 408-10. *Banner*, 28 Aug. 1919: 538; B. J. Bennink, "To B. K. Kuiper," 24 July 1919, in the *Klaas Kuiper Family Papers, 1877-1945*, Calvin College and Seminary Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

<sup>10</sup>*Interview*, Nov. 1986 with Dr. Edward Postma, written notations in Calvin College and Seminary Archives.

<sup>11</sup>*Reminiscences* of Rev. Jerry Postma, 1987, in the Calvin College and Seminary Archives.

<sup>12</sup>*Reminiscences* of Dr. Walter Lagerwey, 1987, in the Calvin College and Seminary Archives.

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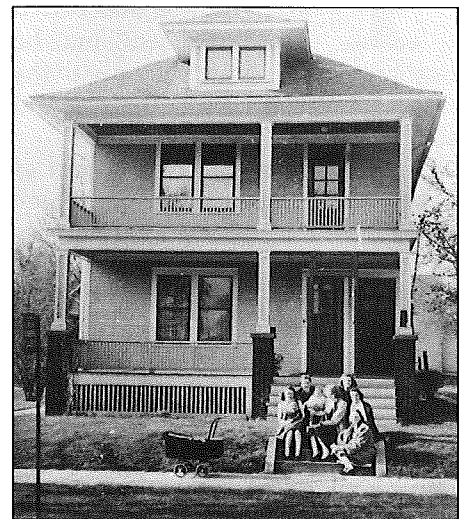
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# Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church

## Parish and Pastor

by Johan Westra

**Y**. P. De Jong was my pastor from earliest childhood till I left for military service in 1943. Even after he was succeeded by Martin Monsma, he continued as associate pastor with the responsibility of visiting the sick and shut-ins.

I had occasion to observe him as pastor and preacher for some fifteen years, but I also had some special vantage points the average parishioner did not have: I was, during my mid-teen years, a very close friend of Y. P.'s youngest son, Alex (Rev. Alexander C. De Jong). As such, I got inside the parsonage fairly often, and Alex was often at my house. The De Jongs never took the usual kinds of vacations (cottage or travel) or did things on summer holidays such as Memorial Day and July Fourth. My family usually went on a picnic at some lake or park on such days, and Alex often went with us. On one occasion I accompanied the De Jongs when they went to Detroit to visit the zoo. We also visited Father Coughlin's famous church, the Shrine of the Little Flower, in Royal Oak.\* He was at the height of his influence. The shrine was filled with visitors, mostly Catholic I presume. Many would genuflect and/or cross themselves when passing in

front of the altar or when passing one of the many images and statues. Y. P.'s comment on all this to-me-unfamiliar scene was that it was "all dead formalism."

Two incidents from that trip remain with me. While driving to Detroit we stopped somewhere for gas. Y. P. was then driving a big black Buick Century, practically new. When the attendant had finished filling the tank and had come to the driver's window to receive payment, he said, "O.K., doctor, is there anything else?" As Y. P. drove off, he was obviously pleased and flattered and said, "See? He knew I was a doctor just by looking at me."

On the way back from Detroit we stopped in Howell at a small house that had a sign in the front yard saying "Boston Bull Terriers." Y. P. at that time had a couple of Boston bull terriers, one of whom was named "Jiggs." Anyway, the lady at whose house we stopped raised and sold this breed. Among the dogs we saw was one that had been in-

ternational grand champion the previous year. Y. P. was ecstatic at having seen such a fine specimen of the breed.

There were three boys in the De



Jong family, Peter Y., Albert, and Alexander. Peter Y. and Alexander C. both became preachers. Albert, or "Hop," as he came to be nicknamed, was a colorful guy. He got the nickname because he had lost a leg as the result of a bobsled accident. Before he was fitted with a wooden leg, he got around with crutches. He would fre-

\*Coughlin was a popular radio preacher who opposed F. D. Roosevelt, international banks, communists, and labor unions. His National Union for Social Justice gained considerable support in the mid-Thirties.



quently lay the crutches aside and hop about on his one good leg.

I wasn't present when the bobsled accident occurred, but I know the locale and the circumstances of the accident. Homemade bobsleds were common in the Twenties and Thirties. They were about six to ten feet long. The long, heavy plank on which the riders sat was about one and a half feet above the ground. It was mounted on two sturdy sleds, the front one movable, the rear one fixed. The bobsled driver could turn the front sled by pulling on a rope attached to each side

young adults. With crowding, as many as eight to twelve people could ride on a bobsled. With smaller kids the number could be greatly increased. Smaller kids often clamored for the privilege of being the "headlight," i.e., being seated in front of the driver, who sat about two feet back from the front edge and could see over the head of a small passenger sitting in front of him. It was while riding as headlight that Hop De Jong got his leg severely injured. The sled was making a run down the long slope that led from the top of Roosevelt Park till it intersected with Grandville Avenue. The driver coming down that slope had to make a fairly sharp turn when he came to Grandville Avenue, for if he continued straight, he would cross that busy street and crash into Groen's Hardware Store on the south side of the street. While trying to make that turn, the driver of the sled on which Hop was headlight, crashed into a utility pole, and Hop's leg was badly broken. While he was hospitalized with that injury, the leg developed gangrene and had to be amputated. The surgery was performed by a Dr. Veenboer, a well-known physician whom I recall was our family doctor when I was a child. He was a big bear of a man with a shock of unruly gray hair. I recall Rev. Y. P. De Jong recounting years later that Dr. Veenboer told him it was one of the hardest things he had ever done and that there were tears in his eyes when he told Y. P. the leg would have to be amputated.

Spring came that year about the time that Hop was just starting to get around with his crutches and his hopping gait. Spring also inevitably meant marble season for boys. One of the marble games we played in those days required someone to put up a good glass marble, a "glassie" we called it. He would sit on the ground with his legs spread in a V. He put up his glassie between his legs. Other

players standing behind a line about six feet away would throw cheap clay marbles, "megs" we called them, to try to hit the glassie. The first to hit it would win it and also win the right to sit down and put up his own glassie. The boy who surrendered his glassie got to keep all the megs that had accumulated between his legs before someone "hit." This could be a very large or a very small number.

Hop, on one leg or on crutches, was at a distinct disadvantage playing marbles, so other boys would let Hop sit for them when they had won that right. He, in turn, got to keep half the "pot." He quickly became a marble magnate with more marbles than he could carry in his pockets, so he devised a way to hang a Summertime tobacco pail from his crutches to hold his hoard. The pail held mostly megs at first, but megs could be bartered for glassies at the rate of about ten to one. As Hop's share of the pots accumulated, he would trade megs for glassies and then trade glassies for special glassies that were more valuable.

As he grew older and after he acquired a wooden leg, he participated in games about as well as anyone. He couldn't run very well, but in softball he usually played catcher, a position in which he didn't have to run much. He was a superb catcher and a strong batter.

When the occasion required, however, Hop would use the wooden leg to elicit sympathy and to get out of disagreeable tasks or assignments. One year he received a toboggan. The best place for tobogganing was on some steep hills to the west of the so-called Black Hills neighborhood. This was the somewhat isolated residential area which was built on top of the steep ridge which lies west of the string of factories which lined Godfrey Avenue between Market Street and Hall Street. The steepest slope on the western side of the Black Hills we called Eagle Mountain. From Roo-



*William Kingma with delivery wagon and customers, circa 1925.*

of this sled. Sometimes he could also assist this steering with his feet by pushing on a crossbar mounted on the sled.

Such bobsleds were usually built and operated by older teenagers or

sevelt Park to the Black Hills was a distance of about a mile as the crow flies. It was a long, hard walk, especially if the snow was deep. Hop, who owned the toboggan, was usually able to find plenty of kids willing to pull him the whole distance while he rode in style like a king in a sedan chair.

Hop, or Albert, as his name really was, seemed in some ways to be his father's favorite. It may have been because of his handicap, but for whatever reason, Y. P. had a special fondness for Albert. Where Peter and Alex

from the Free University, he also fancied himself a medical doctor. His regular visits to sick parishioners over many years had given him a good bit of practical knowledge. Many of these folk were reluctant to go to doctors but trusted "Dominie's" judgment on all questions, medical as well as theological.

Whether Y. P. actually prescribed or dispensed medicines, I don't know, but I do know that the top shelves of one of the glass-fronted sectional bookcases which lined three sides of his study contained a large assort-



were headed for the ministry, Y. P. hoped that Hop would become a doctor. I don't know what kind of student Hop was in elementary or high school, but he did begin Calvin College in a premed program. That didn't go too well, however, and he dropped out of school after a year or two.

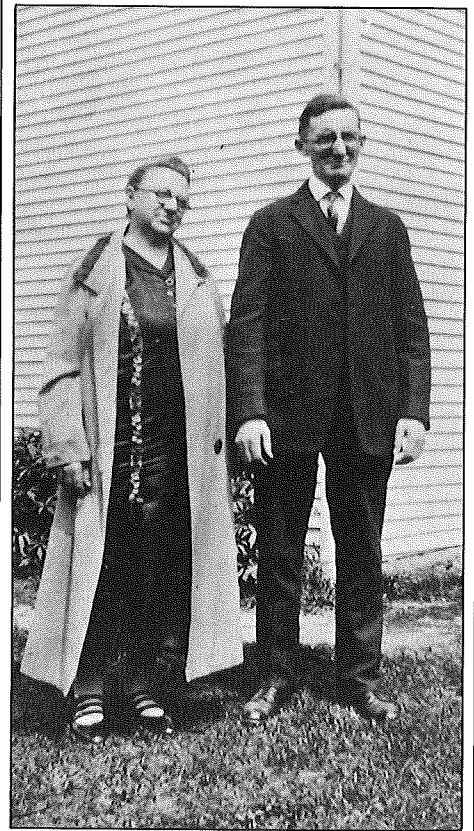
Y. P.'s hope that Albert would become a doctor may have been a projection of his own ambitions. Although he had a doctor's degree in theology

ment of bottles and jars of herbs and medicines.

The herbs and medicines came from P. J. Haan's drugstore, which was on the west side of Grandville Avenue. Across the street was Haan Brothers Grocery and Meat Market. These Haan Brothers (there were several of them) were not related to Peter and Jake Haan, who operated the drugstore. Peter Haan and his family lived upstairs above the drugstore.

This drugstore was one of two in the Grandville Avenue shopping district. The other one was located on the corner of Clyde Park and Grandville Avenue. It was called Clyde Park Pharmacy and later Treat's Drug Store. This drugstore had a much more extensive selection of magazines than P. J. Haan's, and therefore it became more of a hangout for young men of the neighborhood.

P. J. Haan's had a large display window with various kinds of merchandise. Two displays which appeared periodically and remained in the win-



dow for several weeks were especially interesting and mysterious to children. One was a display of medicinal herbs. Dozens of small white paper plates containing samples of medicinal herbs were arranged in the window, each with an identifying card. The card contained the common name of the herb as well as the proper Latin botanical name.

Equally interesting was the extensive display of trusses which sometimes filled the window. These were for persons who had hernias, or "ruptures," as they were commonly called. As a boy I wasn't quite sure what a rupture was and was thoroughly puzzled by all that strange paraphernalia of belts and braces with their padded leather protuberances.

Other things about this drugstore were also mysterious. It had its own characteristic smell, which is hard to describe. It was a combination of the antiseptic odor which used to pervade

and an A & P. It was sometimes a problem for a housewife to know at which store to shop. Often one knew the proprietors well, for most of them lived in the neighborhood and went to the neighborhood churches. Most of the time a family did most of its shopping at a favorite store.

The store at which my family did most of its shopping was Vander Ploeg's on the corner of Grandville Avenue and Stolpe Street. The Vander Ploeg family lived in a house behind the store, which made it convenient if someone needed something after

items gave Vander Ploeg's its own distinctive aroma.

The Vander Ploeg family was a large family with several boys and two girls, as I recall. One of the boys, John, became the Rev. John Vander Ploeg, who later became *The Banner* editor. The youngest son, Claude, who was about six years older than I, became an attorney and was a judge in Grand Rapids, first of Superior Court and then of Kent County Circuit Court after the Superior Court was abolished.

Considering that the Grandville Avenue neighborhood was essentially a working-class neighborhood, it is interesting to note how many sons of these immigrant families went on to college and became ministers and doctors. In some cases it was the eldest son only. In others it was a younger son who showed academic promise and was permitted to carry on his education rather than going to work after finishing ninth grade or high school.

Another prominent clergyman Reverend William Haverkamp, was also raised in the Grandville Avenue area. He was the second-youngest son of a family that emigrated to the United States fairly late, in the Twenties. Because all of the family were born in the Netherlands, they knew the Dutch language but were young enough so that most of them learned to speak English without an accent. William Haverkamp was a facile speaker who preached about equally easily in Dutch or English. The family had come from Groningen, and Haverkamp could also converse easily in the Gronings dialect, a fact which endeared him to the elderly parishioners of the several large churches he served in Paterson, Chicago, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, and Holland, Michigan. He ended his career as editor of the CRC's Dutch-language periodical, *De Wachter*.

Frequently, later-arriving immi-



(facing page, left) Muller's Shoe Store, circa 1913; (facing page, right) the grocers: Mr. and Mrs. Vander Ploeg; (above) William Kingma's Grandville Avenue produce store, circa 1936.

hospitals and of the mingled odors of many different medicinal herbs. It gave P. J. Haan's an aura all its own.

Many stores and shops lined Grandville Avenue. Between Hall Street and Clyde Park Avenue there were at one time as many as ten locally owned grocery stores and meat markets. They were joined by a Kroger

store closing hours. A knock on the Vander Ploeg's door was enough to get some member of the family to open the back door of the store and get the needed item. Entering the back door of the store required one to go down about five steps. Next to those steps was a vinegar barrel from which vinegar was sold in bulk. The customer brought his own container, usually a quart fruit jar. Many items were sold in bulk in those days: flour, sugar, oatmeal, and more. The vinegar barrel, spices, and other bulk



grant families were ridiculed by the children of families who had come only twenty to thirty years earlier. When the children enrolled in the Christian school, they were conspicuous by their clothing, their rosy cheeks, and, of course, the fact that they didn't know English. Boys of such immigrant families were often nicknamed "Dutch." There were several such in the neighborhood, of varying ages: Wallace "Dutch" Waalkes, Clarence "Dutch" Haverkamp, Herman "Dutch" Leestma, and Gerrit "Dutch" Scholten.

This was an era when bilingual education was unheard of, but it has always surprised me how quickly immigrant boys learned English. Usually they were indistinguishable from their native-born "real American" schoolmates after a year or so. World War I marked a watershed in the matter of language. Before the war Grandville Avenue Christian School offered some instruction in Dutch. I had older brothers and sisters born before 1909 who remembered such instruction, but siblings who began school after 1917 don't recall any. How much Dutch was spoken in the homes depended partly on how long a family had been in the States, how many school-age children there were, and on the father's occupation. Merchants and peddlers, of whom there were many, would have to use some English when dealing with customers, as would men employed in factories, where most of the employees were not Dutch. But men who farmed (and there were several of these in the Grandville Avenue congregation) had less need to learn the language. Generally, men learned English more thoroughly than their wives. Well into the Forties there was both a Dutch and an English Ladies Aid Society at Grandville Avenue church. At one time there were also two Men's Societies, but, as I recall, the Dutch society petered out long before World

## War II.

The Grandville Avenue congregation continued to hold four worship services every Sunday till after 1945. The newer Christian Reformed churches in the neighborhood (Bethel and Lee Street) were organized as "English" churches and never did hold Dutch-language services. Grandville Avenue, however, still (1987) has an afternoon Dutch service.

Y. P., when I was a boy, usually preached at three of the four Sunday services. He would usually alternate between having the morning service

days the most formal and "deftig" preaching attire. He wore a double-breasted frock coat of black silk, which came about to his knees, gray-striped trousers, a shirt with wing collar, and a black necktie with either a white stripe or a small white figure. He also had a cutaway, or tailcoat, that he sometimes wore.

He had a strong voice, which carried easily throughout the large church without electronic amplification. He would stride about the rather high platform on which stood a pulpit-lectern and behind it three black

*Proceed.*  
After mass the Society met with the Boy's Club and saw motion pictures.  
Otte De Jong closed the meeting with prayer. *The 12th was a gathering with prayer. During this members sang.*  
S. J. sec.

*March 3, 1939*  
The meeting was opened with prayer. With discussion followed, from Lesson 2 of the February issue of the Young Christian Herald. Membership gave us fine participation.  
Harry Velt was asked to introduce next week's Bible discussion and certain members were assigned questions.

*Spaced.*  
The minutes were read and approved. Otte Zylstra reported the society had purchased 1/2 bushel for the church's silver for \$4.00.  
Otte De Jong announced that committees had been sent to visit the Van Dam and Dik families. Incidentally, flowers were given to the Van Dam family.

A motion was carried to donate flowers only when a person from the immediate family (which is to say, brother, sister, father or mother) passed away.

A motion was made, supported and

carried to hold a spring banquet for all the young people of the church. Don Ottem and Carl Klabbe were appointed as a committee to work with the girls on the arrangements.

A motion was made and carried to complete the payment of our share of the \$1.00 fine levied together by digging into our treasury's gold mine.

Otte De Jong then divided the society into two groups and asked questions concerning church's future. This proved very interesting and instructive.

A motion was made and carried to adjourn.

Carrie Velt closed the meeting with prayer.

*S. J. (sec.)*

*March 14, 1939*  
The meeting was opened with prayer by the President. Harry Velt introduced the Bible discussion which was taken from Lesson 2 of the March issue of the Young Christian Herald. Otte De Jong was appointed to give the introduction next week and questions were assigned members.

in Dutch one Sunday, in English the next. In addition to preaching on Sundays and on special occasions such as Prayer Day, Thanksgiving Day, Old Year's, and New Year's, Y. P. visited the sick, led the ladies societies, and taught several upper-level catechism classes. It took a rugged constitution and enormous self-confidence to pull this off. Y. P. had both.

Y. P. had an impressive pulpit presence. He was tall and solidly built, with broad shoulders, a heavy torso, and only a moderate paunch. He usually preached in what was in those

(above) Minutes of Young Men's Society of Grandville Avenue CRC, 1939; (facing page) Rev. and Mrs. Ymen P. De Jong.

upholstered oak chairs, the center one slightly larger and higher backed than the two flanking it. Y. P.'s gestures were anything but restrained. He would wave his arms, shake a fist, and sometimes strike the lectern with an audible whack.

He preached the Heidelberg Catechism regularly, usually at the morning services. Evening sermons were slightly more "popular." He would

preach series of sermons which often took several weeks to complete. I remember one series on the parable of the prodigal son (which Y. P. always mispronounced "prodgicol") that went on for at least five weeks.

Even longer was a series on the prophecies in the book of Revelation, which seemed interminable. Three quite specific memories remain with me from that series. One is that it was the first time I ever heard the name Antiochus Epiphanes. Many years later I read this name, but I have never heard it spoken again that I can recall. Second, I remember walking to church on a Sunday evening with a neighbor, Isaac De Mey. De Mey was a tailor and an avid student of the Bible. He was frequently on the consistory and was frequently elected vice president or clerk. On this occasion we got to discussing the sermons in the Reve-

lation series. I ventured some mild criticism and was surprised when De Mey, about three or four decades my senior, concurred.

I also recall visiting in the De Jong home on a Sunday evening during that series. Peter was there, along with Alex, Y. P., and "Juffrouw" (Mrs. De Jong). There had been a sermon dealing with the last days and the end time. Without actually predicting an imminent end, Y. P.'s assessment of the trends of the times was very gloomy, suggesting that the world was certainly getting worse fast. I think I was a junior or senior in high school at that time. I was very interested in history. In addition to the American History course required of all students, I also took a course in Modern History. I had the temerity to question whether the world was actually worse than it had ever been. In

many ways I thought the world was much better than ever before and pointed to many areas where I thought there was improvement. My case was probably not too well put or adequately documented, but Peter Y. and Y. P. both put me down pretty hard. I was young yet, they implied, and had a lot to learn and could scarcely be expected to know about the wickedness of Hollywood and the evils of labor unions. They were condescending rather than angry, but I think this only solidified my own views.

—Johan Westra, a native of the Grandville Avenue neighborhood, is a professor emeritus of political science at Calvin College. Though not written to appear as an independent article, Westra's recollections are so obviously cohesive and appropriate that they deserve separate treatment in the Grandville Avenue segment of Origins.



# Lee Street Christian Reformed Church

## Daughter Church of Grandville Avenue CRC

*by Rev. Charles Greenfield*

**O**ver many years the Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church has "fed" the congregations of Wyoming, Grandville, and Jenison with young families who moved to the southwest Grand Rapids suburbs. Thus, in 1926, just one mile from the Grandville Avenue church, the Lee Street Christian Reformed Church was born, and it was especially indebted to its mother church.

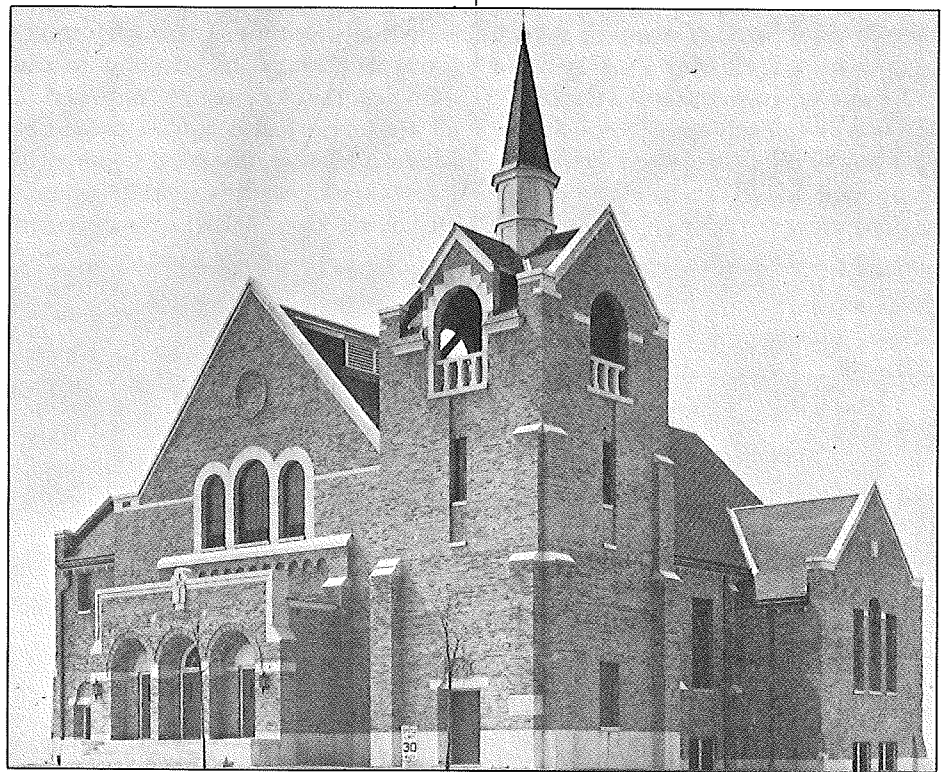
Several factors explain the organization of this new church. During the early 1920s a large influx of immigrants from the Netherlands, together with a significant number of families from the Lucas, Michigan, area, settled on the southwest side, where they found employment in factories. With others, these folk expressed a desire "to organize an English-speaking congregation in the rapidly growing southwest suburban area."

In general, the attitude of the Grandville Avenue church to the new church was helpful and encouraging. Dr. De Jong, who knew his congregation thoroughly, was well aware of the growing interest in a new church. He knew too that a number of men from the church were coming to a consistory meeting with expectations of having to exert much pressure on the consistory to gain permission for planning a new congregation. However, the clever pastor was prepared, and he completely deflated the sails of the

visitors. Heartily welcoming the brethren, he informed them that the purpose of their appearance was known and that the consistory had al-

tiful church building. On May 16, 1940, he participated in the dedication of that building.

Lee Street has been signally



ready taken care of their desires by appointing a committee to assist in planning for a new congregation. Later, a gift of \$10,000 (no small amount in those days) was presented to the Lee Street group. At the June 30, 1927, installation service of Lee Street's first pastor, Rev. J. J. Steigenga, Dr. De Jong officiated, and he also participated in the December 16, 1939, cornerstone ceremony for the superstructure of the present beau-

tiful church building. On May 16, 1940, he participated in the dedication of that building. Lee Street has been signally blessed of the Lord during its sixty-one years. Among those blessings is the spiritual influence of its Grandville Avenue heritage. Many consistory members and other church leaders had their training under the ministry of Dr. De Jong. One of those leaders, Mr. J. Steenstra, gave this assessment regarding Dr. De Jong: "One of the best catechism teachers."

*\*Much of the information for this notation has been provided by Mr. Steenstra.*





1900

# ABRAHAM KUYPER

## 150th Birthday Anniversary

by James D. Bratt

October 29, 1987, will mark the 150th anniversary of Abraham Kuyper's birth. In his lifetime (he died in 1920) Kuyper was a towering figure in the Netherlands' public life: a renowned theologian, editor, pundit, political activist, and statesman. But why should *we* remember him so many years later on a distant continent? Put a little differently: *how* should we remember him? How should our picture differ from the ones we have seen of him before?

Briefly, *Kuyper* has meant one of three things to Dutch-Americans. For some, he has been the first if not the last word on how Christians should act in the world. That is, they should act separately, distinctively, and militantly, with suspicion of non-Christians' motives, with confidence that God will uphold them in the battle and give them the final victory, and with fixed attention on building up the pure Christian worldview and the institutional apparatus required for the fray. Others have been so offended by the arrogance, the divisiveness, and the false urgency they see in this position that they try to forget

Kuyper altogether and follow supposedly more "American" or genial strategies. Somewhere in between, a third contingent has tried to claim Kuyper's general spirit while disclaiming various of his specific practices and to adapt his principles and insights to perceivedly different conditions than he himself faced.

None of these attitudes is without ironies, as we shall see, and none escapes Kuyper's power, even if it rejects him. For Kuyper hit upon the key problem of his age and ours—the relationship between religion and the modern sociocultural order. How he meant to solve this problem and what complicated his intentions are the subject of this paper. To find out the first, we need to sketch what he did in the Netherlands. To see the second, we need only watch his performance in America.

Kuyper came to maturity in the late 1850s and early 1860s, on the verge of the Netherlands' decisive turn toward modernization. The fallout from the 1848 revolutions in its neighboring countries raised the *political* question of liberalism, constitutionalism, and popular democracy. The country's long-postponed industrialization was finally underway by 1870, auguring fundamental changes in all *socio-economic* arrangements. These two developments resulted in broader com-

*James D. Bratt, the author of this article, is a professor of history at Calvin College and author of Dutch Calvinism in Modern America.*

munications networks and in increased formal educational requirements, which in turn ensured that the *cultural* challenge of modernity—the potential disruption of loyalties and values and of thought and belief systems—would be felt even on the popular level. It was Kuyper's historic opportunity to witness the rise and (by virtue of his longevity) the maturation of this process firsthand. It was his great achievement that he understood what was going on, often with great acuity, and that he tried to articulate a complete and consistent Reformed response to it. It is for this, essentially, that he is remembered.

Modernization, of course, has many parts, and so did Kuyper. His biographers all list early on the great number and variety of offices he held, roles he played, and ventures he attempted. But not all his parts were equal. The first role he played in public life, that of ordained minister, was less than crucial, lasting little more than ten years. Rather, it was as newspaper editor, a post he picked up in his later pastorates, that Kuyper found his true calling. Journalism proved to be his fundamental and longest-lasting role, the means by which he created a constituency and directed it. With instrument and audience in hand, he pressed for church reform, Christian education, and political action. Note two key strains in Kuyper here: he was a *populist*, realizing that the issues of modern times would involve rank-and-file opinion more than ever before. Thus he helped create the Netherlands' first mass-circulation newspaper and mass-based political party. He was also an *idealist*, believing that the intellectual-spiritual dimension of life held sway over the future. Thus he saw himself fighting "for the *soul* of the nation," and he pressed his campaigns in the enculturating institutions of society: church, school, and press.

The enemy in all this was therefore not modernization, the social process,

but Modernism, the ideology: the complex of thought that was naturalistic in assumptions, secularistic in horizon, humanistic in confidence, and scientific in approach. In short, it saw man as maker, arbiter, and savior of his own world. Against that outlook Kuyper erected his Calvinism: the belief in the sovereignty of God and loyal obedience to his will and Word. The Europe that had once been rejuvenated in the Protestant (i.e., Calvinistic!) Reformation, Kuyper argued, had lately fallen into the Modernist Revolution. The two were destined to battle for world control. The outcome was ultimately the Lord's, Kuyper the theologian knew; but the future near and not-so-near, Kuyper the daily columnist feared, would be grim.

Against that world-historical backdrop Kuyper worked his tiny Dutch corner. Grandiose visions and catch-penny dealings were no contraries to this man. His efforts first went into a twenty-year (1866–86) campaign to bring the National Reformed Church back to confessional orthodoxy and proper (free, decentralized) polity. A revitalized church, he thought, would rejuvenate the nation. But this struggle involved Kuyper in ever-mounting bitterness and recrimination. Out of it he honed one of his cardinal theological points—the antithesis: the redeemed and the unregenerate operate out of contrary convictions and commitments. Hence, they have always and only to combat each other; hence, compromise, mixed solutions, and mediating proposals are illusory, whether in church or culture. But such solutions were attractive to most members of the National Church, so Kuyper, as a last measure of reform, led some of the orthodox out of the National Church into a new fellowship in the Doleantie movement of 1886.

His education campaign went better. Beginning in the mid-1870s, the Christian-school movement built

steadily and firmly, achieving legal parity with the state system by World War I. In higher education, the Free University, established by 1880, grew in size and respect. The antithesis applied here again, but another of Kuyper's seminal doctrines entered in as well, namely "sphere sovereignty." This meant first of all that each ideological group—Calvinist, Catholic, humanist, etc.—should be free to nurture their children by their own lights without encroachment by others. And it meant secondly that the school, the church, the state (and by



Political cartoon: "Abraham the Mighty"

extension the firm, the union, the arts, the press) should take care of its own business and not unduly impinge on each other. Kuyper yearned for the full, flush development of society and culture, a return of the seventeenth-century Dutch "golden age," and he saw his arrangement of independent spheres as most conducive to such development.

Both the church and the school battles got Kuyper involved in politics, and from 1890 on he focused most of his attention there. If the institutional

church could not be purified to reform the nation, perhaps the "organic church," the body of believers in daily life, could. To this end Kuyper struck a historic agreement between Calvinists and Catholics that would eventually bring this religious coalition to the head of the Dutch government as often as not in the twentieth century. Kuyper got his own chance as prime minister early in the century (1901-05), but his term did not go well. His party turned to younger candidates thereafter, so Kuyper spent his last fifteen years gravitating a bit re-

politics that is successful and wins public responsibility, cannot go forward simply under the antithesis. So Kuyper refurbished the Reformed idea of common grace, recognizing residual talent and virtue among the unsaved and thereby allowing believers some basis for working with them on a broad scale. That doctrine encouraged, secondly, a rich Christian engagement with culture. Kuyper had long lamented the pious fear not of Modernism but of modernization as such, the pattern of resigning the world to the devil, of preserving the

that tripped Kuyper up on his American trip of 1898. His remarks about the United States in particular reveal some of the faults of his thought. I am referring here not primarily to the attempt by some of his followers to duplicate on this side of the ocean the full Netherlandic system of separate Christian institutions, especially a political party and a labor union. The guardians of piety and orthodoxy in the Christian Reformed Church ridiculed the plan as vain and dangerously worldly. The more optimistic leaders in the Reformed Church in America found the opposite fault: America was already so Christian that such separate organizations were unnecessary, even insulting.

Kuyper's problem lay in his accepting too readily the latter attitude and the assumptions behind it. How could so tough-minded a critic, one with such austere standards for what constituted true Christianity, one so deft at ferreting out worldly principles beneath an innocuous surface, make this mistake? Easily, given his two cardinal notions about the land: (a) America was founded on a Christian, even a Calvinistic, basis; (b) America was the preeminent land of modernization—of technical and industrial progress, of full, free development in society and culture. These added up to an irresistible third: (c) Christianity *was* compatible with advancing, modern culture, just as Kuyper had been arguing for years to pietists and secularists alike. And proof positive was the United States, which in the very summer of his visit (1898) had jumped dramatically into the circle of the world's colonial powers, as it had a few years before taken over global economic leadership from Great Britain. Thus, Kuyper's American trip brought him—besides an honorary doctorate from Princeton, for which he was abjectly grateful—bold confirmation of his dearest hope. It even bore out some subthemes of his work.



*The library of Dr. Abraham Kuyper.*

sentfully toward the sidelines. He turned toward cultural commentary of a rather doleful stripe on the character and prospects of the West. As World War I bore out some of his predictions, his powers declined, his roles and offices dropped off one by one, until he died, "a helpless babe in Christ," as he said, in 1920 at age eighty-three.

His last three decades crystalized a few other themes which any review of his thought must include. First, he came to see that politics, especially a

faith in a small corner of safe doctrine or ardent feeling (although usually allowing, to be sure, some action—preferably profitable economic action—in the world and on the world's terms). His cry to the contrary—that Christians enter every area of life to bear witness to God's will there, that they fear nothing as too inimical, scorn nothing as too earthly for Christian redemption—this cry echoes loud down the corridors of Dutch-American history and probably constitutes Kuyper's clearest legacy in America.

But it was also politics and culture





1917

For what explained America's rapid development, Kuyper asked, but the working of something very much like sphere sovereignty: a free people with a free church in a free (and fairly minimal) state? And what did all this development, particularly the technological and economic development, mean but that America was of all the world *the* land of common grace?

No wonder Kuyper was in a good mood as he toured the Dutch-American settlements in the fall of 1898. The hearty reception he met in them did not hurt either. To this audience Kuyper prescribed a course of full, confident Americanization. The land was fair, in both senses of the word. It was agreeable to Dutch taste, rewarding to Dutch diligence; it threatened neither sound principle nor virtuous practice. Moreover, its vices were such—churches full but preaching a bit shallow; the public tone too raucous; political discourse free but strident—that good folk could make a salutary difference. For now, Dutch men in America should get ready to enter public life more forcefully, Kuyper told them. They needed to outgrow their understandable but still narrow materialism. The Christian Reformed and the Reformed Church in America members should try to heal their denominational rift. (Kuyper refused to get specific on the lodge membership or Christian school issues that defined that rift, however.) Above all, they should keep voting Republican, the party founded by the good Christian Hamilton in opposition to the impious revolutionary Jefferson.

Off the Dutch-American trail, however, Kuyper sounded different. Here he had another audience, consisting of the native WASP elite in university and seminary circles from Princeton to Chicago (McCormick Seminary) to Rochester (a women's literary guild), to Baltimore (Johns Hopkins). To them he spoke of the rising challenge of Modernism, the antithesis dawn-

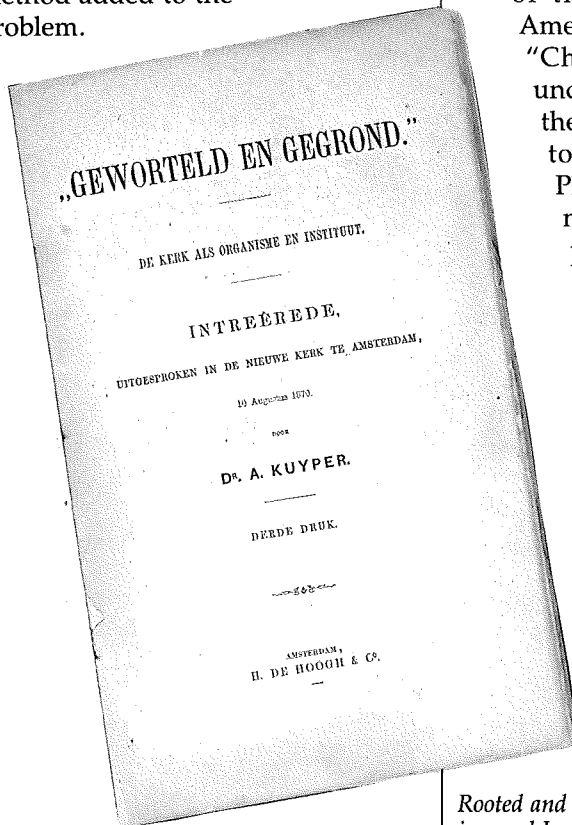
ing even in the land of common grace, and the urgency of restoring the nation's ancestral Calvinism as a political as well as a theological force. His audience listened politely and went home bemused. Except for a few people at Princeton, they did not understand.

Kuyper had been warned of that reaction years before. During the church battle of the 1880s, he had inquired about emigrating to the United States. His correspondent, Nicholas M. Steffens, professor at the Reformed Church's Western Theological Seminary, told him to forget it. The vaunted religious nature of the American people, he warned, amounted to personal piety among the laity and administrative busywork among the clergy. There was no place for the theological depth, the philosophical consistency, the sociopolitical implications that were Kuyper's meat and drink. If America was materially a generation ahead of the Netherlands, as Kuyper had written, it was intellectually a generation behind: the tendencies Kuyper was fighting in the Netherlands were beginning to sprout in America, but here there were few tools sharp enough to cut them out.

Proof of Steffens's complaint can be seen in another source of the Americans' bemusement. They already *were* involved in Christian politics, they might have answered Kuyper. The Progressive movement of the time had precisely a (native) Protestant clientele and a platform which embodied the Protestant virtues of decency, order, efficiency, and public accountability. That the movement also had a secular philosophy of state and society bothered Kuyper's Dutch-American followers much, but his American audience seemed unaffected by such fundamental issues. But then Kuyper had made a similar mistake in coming to his notion of an originally Christian America. His con-

fusing the religious convictions of the Pilgrim fathers and those of the Massachusetts Bay Puritans with the views of the Revolutionary founders of the 1770–80s is familiar enough to anyone who has watched Christian right TV in the last ten years. It was a bit more understandable then than now, however, for Kuyper was following the lead of George Bancroft, the most influential American historian of the nineteenth century.

One of Kuyper's problems, then, was the looseness of his intellectual method. Calvinism in one case would demand hewing to a fine doctrinal line and in another case would encompass a broad historical sweep and most general ethic. That arbitrariness, the use of a noble name to clinch a dubious or partisan argument, would haunt Kuyperians of all stripes in years to come and would be one incentive for dropping the tradition altogether. The idealist part of his method added to the problem.

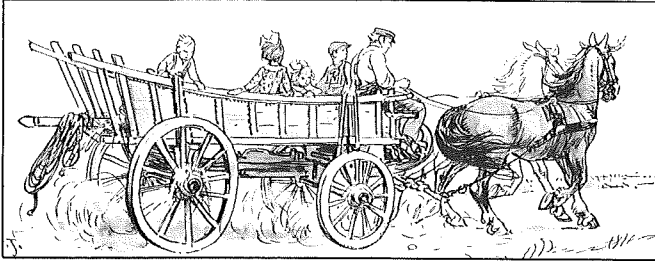


Kuyper thought that the right ideas could be held independent of, and in control over, a social process—that we could have modernization without Modernism. But there was a deep (though not inevitable) connection between the two that belies this assumption. A social process carries its own logic and imperatives, which prescribe limits for the generation and acceptance of ideas. American modernization created the pragmatic and personalistic atmosphere that allowed intense religion in the private sphere but left public domains to an operative secularism. Impressed by the former, Kuyper overlooked too much of the latter and hence underestimated the severity of the American disease and miscalculated its cure.

His Dutch-American audience, longer immersed in this atmosphere, saw better than he did and so entered public life along a track different from the one Kuyper envisioned. Members of the Reformed Church in America began to abandon the "Christian America" position under the secularist shock of the 1920s, but they still wanted to follow an American line. Plenty of people in both denominations pursued the pietist-materialist combination we sketched above. The critical-pluralist heritage of Kuyper lived on chiefly in Christian Reformed academic circles. They have maintained over the twentieth century a critique of American secular culture more penetrating than Kuyper's and have tried to build an alternative Chris-

tian vision that has something of his range, depth, and enthusiasm. These constitute both Kuyper's best fruit and a valuable service to contemporary American Christianity. But note their theoretical, intellectual nature. Institutionally, as Herbert Brinks has said, Dutch America has built nothing that would not have been built anyway, Kuyper or not. His influence, in sum, amounts to having instilled a new spirit or purpose into existing or foreordained structures.

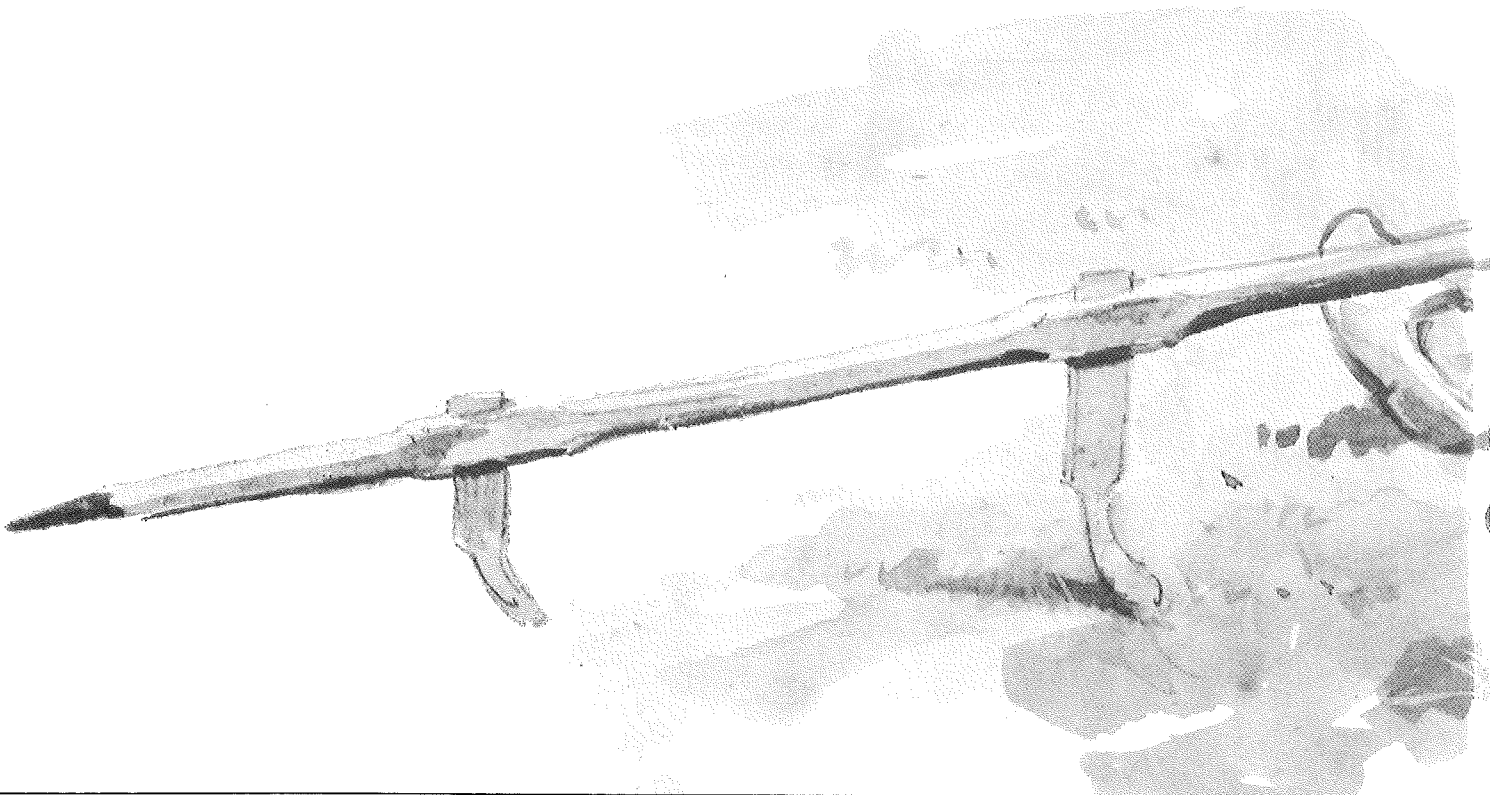
How should we view Kuyper, then? Certainly not as an infallible authority. He who adapted his ancestral Calvinism to the needs of his age would expect the same of us. But the issues of our day are different from those of Kuyper's day. Coarse secularization and blatant class struggle have been transmuted into matters of racism and the Third World, consumerism and cool technical-therapeutic management. The latter especially is tailor-made for a pragmatic-personalistic approach that is more supple than Kuyper's systematics, yet—as his own case showed—may be more seductive and corrosive to Christianity than an outright threat. Christianity's encounter with a *post* modern culture must go beyond a moment-by-moment, seat-of-the-pants doing of what seems nice or moral or full of evangelical good will. It must, to adopt Kuyper's favorite tree metaphor, draw off deep roots; send out broad and high yet finely articulated branches; display long endurance, coherence, comprehensiveness, and integrity. It must stand against the wind, yet provide beauty and shelter for inhabitants and observers. For nurturing such a plant we have in Kuyper a daunting example.



# Rural Life

## When the Farmer P

*Rural Life, or Leven op het Platteland, was written by Jan A. Niemeijer and published by the Friese Pers Boekerij in 1986. The book discusses social conditions in the Netherlands at about the turn of the century, and it relies heavily on personal interviews to achieve an intimate view of its subject. Rural Life also features the art work of Cornelis Jetses, a famous Dutch illustrator whose work was widely circulated in school textbooks, Bible storybooks, and other popular publications. Two of Niemeijer's earlier books have focused directly on Jetses and his art. The current work, Rural Life, is being considered for publication in English. A North American audience will find Rural Life especially attractive because it offers a very readable account of life in the Netherlands at about the time when great numbers of immigrants left Holland to settle in North America (1890-1910). Thus, the book provides a sound foundation for understanding the lives of the immigrants prior to their migration.*





rospers . . .



*Translation by Tina Minnema and H. J. Brinks*

**T**he famous Dutch socialist P. J. Troelstra must have been deeply impressed by his neighboring Frisian farmers. From his youthful days he remembered them as "great dignified characters with huge estates consisting of vast fields and meadows. Like kings, they ruled over hired hands and maids, over day laborers who lived in nearby cottages, over horses and cows and all that pertained to agriculture. As the son of a clerk, who could scarcely provide for his own family, I was always dazzled by the farm's great abundance—orchards with apples and pears; cellars with full vats of butter, cream, cheese, and buttermilk. Even farmhands enjoyed huge slabs of bacon and an endless supply of thick yellow porridge. This was the world of the great farmers who, in times of abundance,



enjoyed honor and social prominence. They ruled their small kingdoms wisely while their wives tended their homes and the production of butter and cheese."

It is hard to imagine that a socialist like Troelstra, who hated social abuses, could write so romantically of rural village life. But he was also a poet, and perhaps nostalgia for his youth combined with his lyrical gifts to portray his native village as a pastoral paradise. He grew up in Stiens, just north of Leeuwarden, an area famous for cattle breeding.

Stiens is located in the sea clay soil belt which stretches along the coast of Groningen and Friesland. Such soils, which are also found in polders and reclaimed marsh lands, support the most prosperous and progressive farms, while sandy-soil farmers could expect little more than self-sufficient farming. Though sand soils produced but little surplus, they did nourish cattle, which, in turn, provided manure to fertilize the soil. Small surpluses could be sold or bartered for groceries, tools, and other necessities.

### Social Distinctions: The Farmer and His Helpers

An old saying asserts, "When the farmer prospers, the village follows." But prosperity for the farmer was not always transformed into prosperity for his employees. At the outset of the twentieth century, resident farmhands earned between 150 and 250 guilders annually, while housemaids took in from 40 to 200 guilders. Day laborers, who were not assured of steady employment, earned yearly incomes of 150 to 400 guilders,\* and they were usually allotted a small cottage with a garden plot. The highest wages, as high as 600 guilders, were paid in North Holland, South Holland, and around the city of Utrecht.

Farm workers did not unionize quickly, and therefore their economic status improved very gradually. Ultimately their economic advances stemmed largely from the enactment of social reforms. But at the beginning of the nineteenth century little social progress was evident. The seriously ill, the persons with handicaps, and old people were usually dependents. They relied upon their children, the church, public assistance, or some form of private charity.

Few farmers were able to save enough for a financially secure old age. Older folk who owned small farms were fortunate because they could attract their children to the family homestead and receive assistance in that manner.

Although they worked long hours for paltry wages, farm workers among the sand-soil farmers enjoyed pleasant social relationships with their employers. Such resident laborers, young men and women alike, joined the farmer's family at mealtimes and participated in family activities. But in the clay-soil regions, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century, a great social cleavage developed between the laborers and farm owners. This situation has been attributed to the rapid growth of prosperity among clay-soil farmers during that era.

The symbols of this growing social division included the transfer of hired hands to the back rooms of the farm building.\*\* Thus, when the farmer's family moved into elaborate front rooms, the hired hands were relegated to unheated quarters between the front rooms and the livestock. These arrangements were doubly economic because they reduced fuel cost and avoided the special tax on each fireplace. Farmhands warmed themselves with foot warmers—small boxes containing hot coals. During the coldest weather they huddled near the cattle for greater warmth. The front parlor with its open hearth and warm stove was off-limits to the employees.

\*In dollars, at current exchange rates, the last figure is \$75 to \$200. During this same era farmhands in the United States earned between \$300 and \$400.

\*\*The East Groningen farms featured enormous barns with luxurious living quarters attached.

Their sleeping quarters were especially spartan. In the best arrangements, double beds behind cupboard doors opened into the kitchen for the maids and toward the barn for the hired men, but it was also exceedingly common for employees to sleep in spaces separated from the cattle only by wooden partitions.

It is not surprising, then, that the servants who slept in such primitive and cramped quarters sought mutual warmth and companionship which sometimes resulted in unwanted pregnancies. In such cases, when marriage was impossible or unattractive, the newborn child was passed on to its grandparents or placed in a foundling home. Such "houses of mercy" were often supervised by widows who received one guilder each week for child care.

Servants ate their three daily meals from a common bowl, and the fare usually consisted of potatoes—boiled or mashed with greens. Fat or gravy was served in a side dish, and for bacon and other meats each diner used a flat piece of wood as a plate. They cleaned these plates with boiling water and scoured them with sand once each week. Almost every meal included buttermilk porridge. After supper the married farmhands returned to their families, and by 8:30 all laborers were under the bed covers. Work began at daybreak.

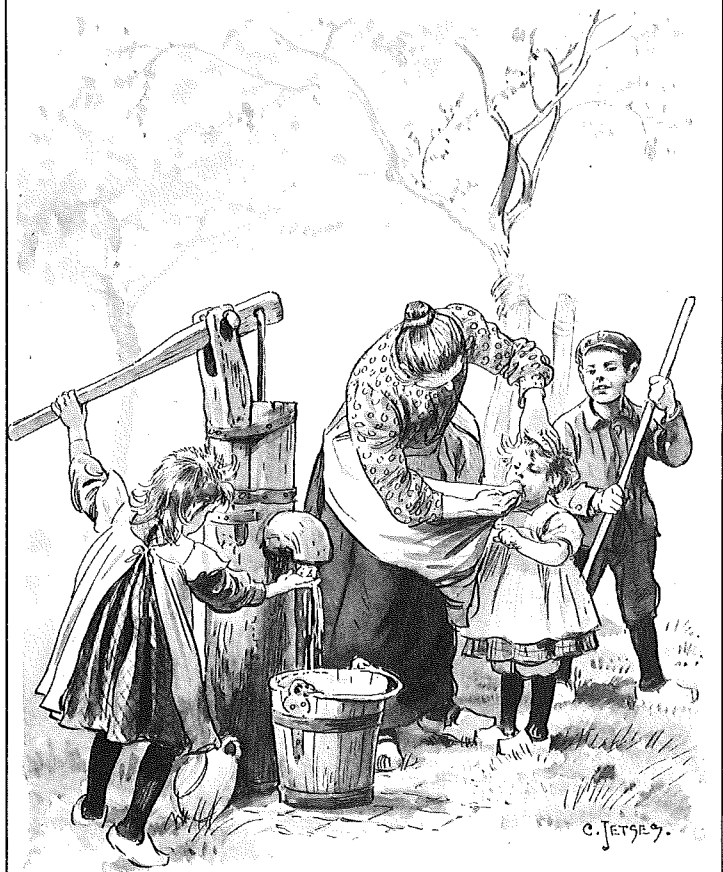
### The Children

The laborers' children grew up quickly because they joined the struggle for survival at an early age. One farmhand's daughter recalls that she was "loaned" to a farmer at the age of twelve. Such children were expected to milk cows at 5 a.m., light the hearth fires, heat the water, and bring it to the bedroom of the farmer and his wife. Thereafter the maid was permitted to join the other farmhands and maids for breakfast.

Ordinarily meals were prepared in separate pots, the employees receiving the least desirable portions. If a maid snatched an apple from the abundance of the orchard, an angry rapping on the window would be followed by a sharp reprimand. The fruit supply in the cellar was protected from employees by lock and key. But when the girls were sent to fetch things from the cellar, they would sometimes sneak off with apples in their bloomers. On one occasion a maid's pant leg broke, and the apples rolled out on the floor. To save herself from that ticklish situation, the maid quickly dumped the apples into a pail of water and covered them with a mop rag. Little love was lost between the tight-fisted employers and their servants.

A daughter of one farmhand recalls, "I was eleven years old when I had to leave home. We lived far from town, in an area near the coast, with about thirteen houses. My father was a day laborer, but he owned about five acres of land and some stock. He grew all kinds of crops, most of

which we used ourselves or fed to our cows, the pig, and the chickens. Every spring my dad brought a piglet home from the market. He carried it on his back in a burlap bag. It was to be fattened for butchering in the fall. When I was young, we kept nothing of the pig for ourselves because the bacon and meat were sold. Later on, when things improved a bit, we kept some of it for our own use. During the winter, father often called us early from bed and shouted, 'Get up! The tide is low; we must fetch mussels.' It was terribly cold on our bare hands as we picked mussels from behind the dike, and I think that caused the chilblains on my hands. Sometimes I cried of the cold, but my father took no pity. At least he never showed any. 'Don't cry,' he said. 'Hurry.' Mussels were an important addition to our meager menu. They were cooked in a large pot, then fried and served with potatoes. Though we were very poor, we got two slices of rye bread for school lunches, but never white bread. There were other children who had to make do with a slice of turnip or a carrot. From our cow's milk we made butter, which could be bartered or sold, but we were allowed to drink as much buttermilk as we liked, and the leftovers went to the pig. The grocer and his dogcart came by regularly to trade provisions for our butter and eggs. We had eleven children, of whom three died young. Our



living quarters had two large cupboard beds—one for my parents, and in the other I slept with two sisters. We stored potatoes, turnips, and carrots underneath the beds. In the same room was a smaller cupboard bed for the little children, and in the back of the house father constructed more sleeping quarters. But we were never all home together; the younger ones were born after the older ones had already left.

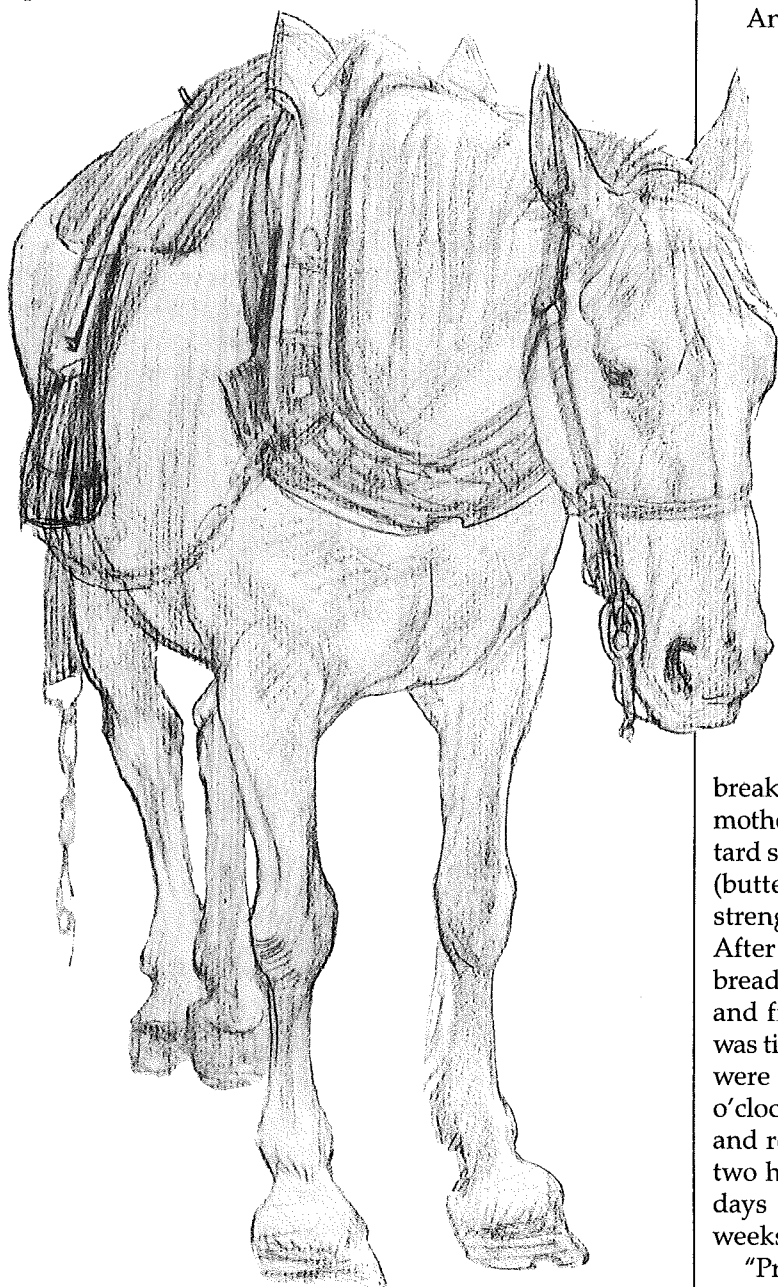
"When I was eleven and busily churning butter one day, an elderly woman from the village stopped in. She said, 'I would like to have your Griet.' My mother answered, 'That is possible.' I did not understand it at all. I knew, of course,

that children left home at a young age but could not imagine that I had to leave so suddenly. I was sent out to work for a family in the village, and I earned £12.50 a year. My dad said, 'If you run away, then the door here is locked, and you can't come back. Only if they send you away, you may come back home.' I was frightened, of course, but nothing could be done. That's the way things were. At home they were glad that the child who left made more room for the others. Once a week I was allowed to go home for an afternoon."

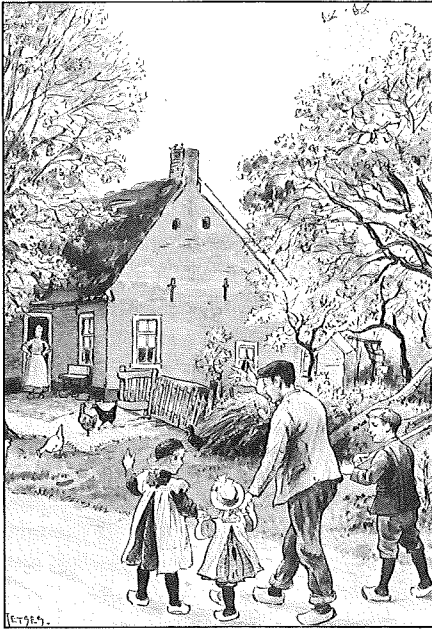
### The Farmhand's Family

An aged farmhand from the coastal clay-soil region recalls, "As a thirteen-year-old boy I joined my father, sister, and oldest brother to work on the farm. Thereafter more brothers followed us, and at one time six of us worked for the same farmer. I would have liked to continue school, but for a family with eight children that was out of the question. We all had to work just to stay alive. So, before three o'clock in the morning, Dad woke us. Within a few minutes we were outside. We had no pajamas, and at night we kept our blue work shirts on. I jumped into my pants, socks, and wooden shoes, piddled in the ditch behind the house, and when the steeple clock struck three, we walked through the fields to herd the cows for milking. We lived in a laborer's cottage about two hundred fifty yards from the farmhouse. The man for whom we worked was a general farmer with acreage for crops and thirty milk cows. Milking took until four thirty. Then we went home to eat rye bread with bacon, and a mug of tea. At five o'clock we were back in the fields to plant, weed, make hay, or harvest whatever the season required. At eight we returned home for a two-hour break. By then, we had already worked five hours. My mother put a warm meal on the table—potatoes with mustard sauce and, if available, vegetables. A plate of *soepenbrij* (buttermilk porridge) finished the meal. That restored our strength. From ten to one he worked in the fields again. After that we ate rye bread with bacon and two slices of bread at home. From two until three was time for milking, and from three to six we were back in the fields. Then it was time for an evening slice of bread. Only at harvest time were we required to keep on going until eight or nine o'clock. Then the farmer's wife would bring lukewarm tea and rolls out to the fields. Normally we worked seventy-two hours a week without vacations or days off. On Sundays milking was the only chore, and once every three weeks we had one afternoon off.

"Practically the whole day was spent working because







during break time we worked our own plots. We fetched grass from the dikes and the ditches for the goats. We milked the sheep and worked in the garden, where we grew potatoes and vegetables for our own use. A laborer earned a set wage; in addition he received certain "extras." For us that meant free rent, the right to keep a sheep in the meadow, and a piece of ground for our garden. Luckily, my father was once able to bargain gleaning rights on the potato crop, which was very beneficial for us. A large family consumes lots of potatoes. We needed a pailful each day. At our house food was prepared on a cookstove which was fueled by coal and peat. Our livestock consisted of three goats, a sheep, a pig, about fifteen hens, and, at times, some rabbits. We used sheep's milk for coffee, and since goat's milk was easier to digest than cow's milk, it was often fed to babies whose mothers could not nurse. Farmers wives with such problems traded cow's milk for goat's milk. At our house meat was hardly ever served, but we often had bacon. It was quite common that under the cover of darkness poor people went poaching. They set traps made of horsehair or copper wire to catch partridges, pheasants, or hares. At times hares were caught with a bright light or a weasel trap. We often set bow nets for a meal of fish. Our house was extremely modest. When you opened the door, you were in a small hallway about four by six feet. That was one step from the small living area, which also served as the kitchen. There we had a pull-out table and several wooden chairs with seats woven from reeds. Along the wall a wooden bench provided space for a few children. On one wall of the living room were the cupboard beds for my parents and two younger sisters. In the front hall a stairway led to the cellar and to the attic. In the upper level my father had built three double beds from some old pieces of wood. We slept on straw mattresses and pillows filled with oat chaff. We did not have running water, but water came out of a cement rain cistern in the corner of the hall. To wash our hands, we pulled up a small pail from the cistern, poured the water into a basin, and,

when done, threw the water outside. For a more elaborate washing, the bowl was placed on the kitchen table. A tench, which is a sweet-water carp, always swam in the cistern to keep the water free from vermin. Once in a while my mother screamed when she pulled up the carp with the water. The creature was quickly thrown back. Such a carp could live in a rain cistern for years and could grow to over two feet in size. If the cistern was going dry during the summer, we had to fetch water from the farmhouse, with two pails on a yoke. Our toilet was in a separate shed behind the house where the goats, the pig, and the chickens slept at night. We did not have toilet paper but used newspapers torn into pieces and kept in an old cigar box.

"Because so many of our family worked for the same farmer, we earned a comparatively reasonable amount of money. Nonetheless, we existed at little more than a poverty level. A doctor seldom crossed our threshold. That was too expensive. Even if you had a good-size gash in your hand, you did not go to the doctor for stitches. A rag tied around it would usually help it heal. I remember that

*The adverse conditions described above help explain the enthusiasm which some immigrant farmhands expressed about working conditions in the United States. Writing from Orange City, Iowa, in 1882, Herman Berghuis asserted, "It is such here that people can progress better than in the Netherlands if they will work and if they enjoy the Lord's blessing. Also, many people are going to Dakota, where you can get 160 acres for \$23. The land there is as fertile as here. The farmers and the hired hands have it much better here than by you; thus one can become a farmer quickly here. If you have two horses, a plow, a wagon, a cultivator, and a mowing machine, you are ready to farm. If I work here for two years, I will have more than if I worked for five years in Holland. Every day we eat white bread with the boss, and that tastes good."*

Another young farmhand, G. van Nijhuis, found work in Sheldon, Iowa, and urged a friend to join him in America. In 1889 he reported confidentially that he had saved \$8.25 in just one week, and although that was extraordinary, he could expect an average income of \$20 per month. Most importantly, Nijhuis claimed that he could save most of his wages because he needed to pay cash only for clothing and tobacco. Urging his friend to join him in Iowa, Nijhuis promised, "If you have the desire to come and can't earn as much in one summer as it costs for a round-trip, I will give you the return passage. But I have no worry about that. Once you come here, you will be glad to stay."

Four years later, Nijhuis continued to encourage immigration: "Why don't you come to this country? If you don't like it, you can go back. There is demand for hired hands this fall, if you have enough money to come. Don't be afraid that you won't get enough to return. I now earn \$25 per month and \$20 in the winter. I could go back to Holland every winter and still have twice as much left over as you. The reason I don't come back is not for fear of the ocean. I don't worry about that. But I worry about spending all my savings."\*

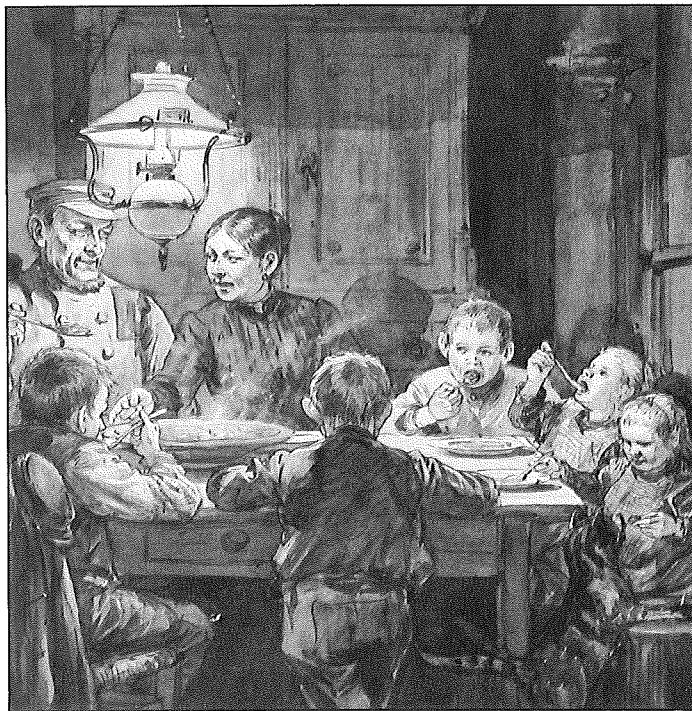
\*From H. J. Brinks, *Write Back Soon* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1987), pp. 88-89.

my mother once spilled a kettle of boiling water over her leg and burned her feet badly. Even though she suffered unbearable pain, my dad decided to treat the wound himself by sprinkling the burn with ground-up school chalk and covering it with strips of bed sheets. Healing did not follow, and instead the burned foot started to fester and smell. Only then did we call the doctor. He gave my dad a tongue-lashing. But with the use of a good ointment and sterile bandages, the foot healed quickly.

When we were ill, we kept on working if at all possible because a farmer had no use for a sick worker. We were afraid of getting fired. Although a farmer might continue to pay a resident laborer through an illness, a day laborer got absolutely nothing. So when laborers grew old or were handicapped, they were pushed aside and abandoned. Families in that condition had to leave their cottages and find shelter elsewhere. They might find modest accommodations in the village or perhaps move in with their married children. They had to exist on the small sums they had saved or on whatever they could get from others. Sometimes they received help through the social services of the community, but that was only meager relief. The church, through the diaconate, often provided food and fuel. My father was so fearful of dying in poverty that during his whole lifetime he saved every spare dime for his old age.

#### Our Workers Had It Good

Wealthy landowners had their own impressions of the laboring class. From the prosperous regions of East Gro-



ningen, where the landscape is peppered with massive agricultural estates, the daughter of a wealthy farmer provided her recollection of the social situation during her youth.

"I never stopped to think about great social contrasts at that time," she said. "My father's farm of about fifty hectares [124 acres] raised grain for the most part. We employed two resident farmhands, five day laborers and four maids. One of these was our nursemaid. While young, we were frequent companions of the laboring children—both at play and at school. They wore wooden shoes and ours were leather.

"As to social distinctions? Well, I suppose I was spoiled. I hardly ever had to tie up the long laces of my own shoes. The nursemaid did that. And in winter she warmed my shoes at the cookstove. But she did that gladly. I never had to wash dishes. Later I went to the girls' school in the city. We boarded there and often attended the theater and concert hall. We were home only during vacations. Upon our arrival, the farmhands picked us up at the train station with a carriage and two horses. Later I studied in Hanover for seven months to improve my German.

"At our house, farmhands slept in a boarded-off area in the back of the barn, near the cattle. The maids slept in the back as well. At night they sat together in the kitchen. They had their own toilets, two seats next to each other without a partition. It was very primitive, but perhaps" she snickered, "it was designed for coziness.

"My father was good to his employees. He was always able to get laborers. In East Groningen there was much communism, but that was caused by Domela Nieuwenhuis, who stirred the laborers up against the farmers.\* At that time farmhands received low wages, but the farmers did not always have it so easy either. They had to take out mortgages when they took over the business from their parents. Many farmers went bankrupt, so life was not always rosy. Yet, among the farmers in our area, there was much pride and devotion to their own class. Most marriages took place within a certain circle of families in order that farms would not end up in the hands of strangers.

"We were very kind to our people. On New Year's Eve the farmhands, the maids, and the laborers would come to the front parlor to wish us 'Veul zegen in 't nij joar' [Many blessings in the new year]. Then they would get a small glass of wine."

*\*This specific region experienced severe labor strife, including massive strikes which followed the unionization of farm labor. That explains also the Communist Party's success at gaining majorities in several counties in East Groningen.*



# WWII

- California
  - Recollections of a Serviceman
  - Service in Alaska
-

# California

by H. J. Brinks

When Pearl Harbor's destruction threw the West Coast into a panic, California contained just ten Christian Reformed congregations. Today, with forty-eight churches and over 16,000 members, the denomination's California contingent has more than tripled.<sup>1</sup> Combined attractions—a favorable climate with economic opportunities—spurred a nationwide population shift to the West Coast. It began during the Great Depression and has continued to the present, but that process was sharply intensified during World War II, when California's large military emplacements hosted thousands of the nation's young people. An array of military camps sprang to life there, and hastily constructed wartime housing accompanied the erection of defense plants and shipyards. The rapid growth of the Christian Reformed Church in California also dates from that era.

As Richard Lingeman observed,

People went to the Far West because the opportunity was there, and the opportunity was there because the war money went West: California alone, with a 6.2 percent of the population had by 1944 received war contracts totaling \$15.8 billion, or 9.7 percent of the total for the nation. More than half of the

wartime shipbuilding took place in the three Pacific Coast states, and nearly half the airplane manufacture. Because of its location on the sea and the existence of a prewar aircraft industry, California logically helped itself to a large chunk of this production. When the war ended, an estimated 1,000,000 war workers would be out of work, but till then California was truly the Golden State. All told its population increased by almost 2,000,000 between 1940 and 1945. Per capita income rose apace, reaching \$1,470 annually, the highest in the nation.<sup>2</sup>

The military draft which spearheaded the California migration also drew thousands of the Christian Reformed young people to training camps on the West Coast and elsewhere. Everywhere the church expressed concern for its young people. Members of congregations located near training camps quickly opened their homes to the trainees. Publications like *The Banner*, *De Wachter*, and *Calvin Forum* offered advice. The Home Missions Board appointed camp pastors, who set up house-keeping near the training camps where they provided weekend quarters to entertain young folk with food, fellowship, and worship. Some of the camp pastors hitched up trailers and traveled like nomads from one mili-



(previous page) Lt. Martin Smith; (above) Len Jensen and Jim Karsen from Chicago.

tary installation to another. In addition, the *Young Calvinist* reordered its priorities for the duration of the war. Even before Pearl Harbor, when the first draftees left their homes, the *Young Calvinist* devoted a four-page segment to "The Boys in Service," but by 1943 that feature stretched to ten pages—a full quarter of the magazine.

Rev. Edward Boeve was the CRC's first camp pastor, and from his station in Louisiana he warned the *Young Calvinist's* readers of the loneliness and the wrenching social adjustments which military life required. Young



folk from small towns, tightly knit city neighborhoods, and country roads were thrust into completely new circumstances. These eighteen-year-olds, though often boisterous and externally self-confident, were unprepared for the dilemmas and decisions they faced. No wonder, then, that Rev. Boeve and the *Young Calvinist's* editor, Richard Postma, bluntly warned prospective military recruits about the moral pitfalls common to military life.<sup>3</sup>

After Pearl Harbor, when the draft rate shot up, the number of camp pas-

Service Centers. From San Diego, Frank De Jong and later Gerrit Boerfyn served the southern region, while Harry Dykstra covered the north. From his home base in Redlands, "Uncle" Harry Dykstra carted a trailer from Fort Ord to Camps Beal, Roberts, and elsewhere, but he also visited the San Francisco Bay area and became well-acquainted with the Alameda CRC.

That church, then the only organized CRC near the Bay, became a week-end home for literally hundreds of the denomination's young people

sidio, Fort Mason, Hunters Point, the San Francisco Bay Airdrome, the Oakland Air Port, Angel Island, and a host of other places where the boys come and go. Some of them stay for several months while others are here for only a few days. Many are taking advantage of the church and the opportunities for Christian fellowship it offers. And I may say that the boys are very appreciative of what little we can do for them.

Yes, our people are glad to take them in and do all within their power to make the boys feel at home. But that goodwill is quickened when the boys are so friendly, so appreciative, and so willing to join in with our congregational activities.<sup>5</sup>

The Alameda congregation's hospitality attracted so many weekend visitors that several church members purchased a two-story guest home at 2141 Antonia Avenue to house the troops.\* Between 1944 and 1946 the facility housed over 3,000 guests, who consumed some twenty thousand meals.<sup>6</sup>

Among many others, Chaplain Harry Boer remembered his days at Alameda with great affection, and Boer's letter to the *Young Calvinist* in 1943 declared, "Don't Overlook Alameda." He continued:

While spending some time in San Francisco I was very happy to find our Alameda congregation close by, just across the bay. I found there a most hospitable reception, an island of warmth and Christian fellowship in a world of strangeness.

San Francisco is a large military and embarkation center. Doubtless many Christian Reformed and Reformed boys are stationed here or pass through this port. In view of



(left to right) Rev. F. De Jong, Tom Noteboom, Mrs. De Jong, Hubert Van Tol, Jay Schaap.

tors increased similarly. They were located from coast to coast. In the East, the Revs. John Kenbeek and Herman Moes trekked to camps in Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. Throughout the Midwest and South, Pastors Albert H. Bratt, Harold Dekker, and J. Vande Kieft wore out their cars racing from one dusty camp to another. Of all the camp pastors, only A. H. Bratt brought prior experience to the task, for he had also served during the First World War.<sup>4</sup>

California, which stretches along 840 miles of the Pacific Coast, had two

stationed in the region. Sailors on shore leave frequently lodged with Alameda's parishioners. The pastor at that time, Evert Tanis, described the opportunities which the war brought:

Alameda, Oakland, San Francisco, Berkeley, and San Leandro—these are the cities on the coast of the San Francisco Bay. And the only CRC in the whole area is the Alameda CRC. Many of our service men are aware of this because there are many camps and forts and strategic places to be guarded there. It is one of the finest harbors in the world. And wouldn't the enemy like to lay it low. But the authorities are alert. Hence there is the Pre-

\*The members were S. De Vries; Dick Hook, Jr.; John Hook; and H. Meyering.

this, Alameda is strategically located indeed. I do not believe, however, that its nearness to San Francisco is generally known to our service men. Some have spent uninspiring weekends before learning that Alameda is not only in California, but on San Francisco's doorstep; others have left our shores without having enjoyed the last opportunity for Reformed fellowship that is so comforting and encouraging before leaving for combat areas.

I write this letter in the hope that some of our boys will read, and take my word for it, that a most hearty and cordial welcome awaits all soldiers, sailors, and marines, as well as civilians, who will visit our Alameda church. A friendly congregation sees to it that every visitor has a place to go, a place that is a home.

In addition to this cordiality, there is the inestimable benefit of worshiping God in the doctrine and spirit of our fathers. It warmed my heart not a little that I could spend the last few Sundays prior to my departure from continental limits in worship and fellowship with blood and spiritual kinfolk.<sup>7</sup>

Alameda's hospitality became legendary during the war. And later, during the Korean War of the Fifties, the congregation opened another Service Men's Home.<sup>8</sup> Even now the alumni of the two Alameda homes gather for reunions. In many of their conversations Rev. Harry Dykstra's visits probably contribute to their recollections. His regular reports in the *Young Calvinist* are peppered with the names and places which made the magazine intimate and attractive during the war years.

In July, 1942 Rev. Dykstra reported:

On Saturday I arrived at Paso Robles. Camp Roberts had already graduated its trained regiments of infantry and cavalry. How my thoughts and prayers follow those

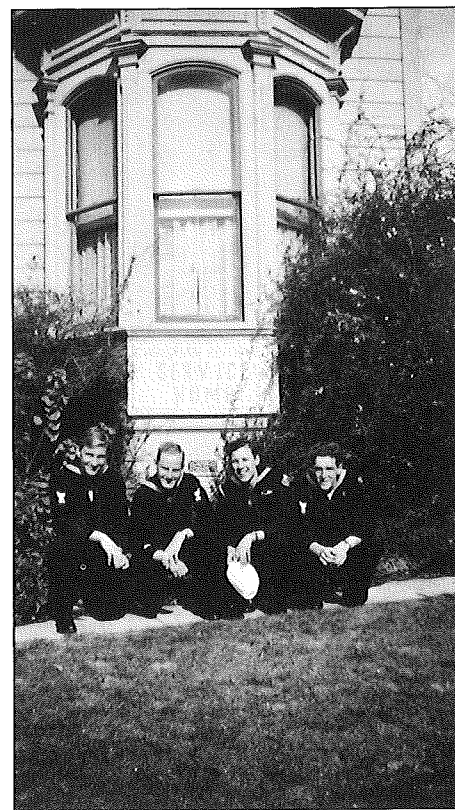
men who left that camp with their basic training completed. The letters you men sent are highly appreciated, and you do not fail of an answer. I should not try to call the roll but I want to express my appreciation for the help Otto De Bruyn always rendered so willingly. I know Rich Vos' prayer will be true that the light of God's face shine upon him as he moves so far from all he loves here. And that holds for Joe Dyk and so many others who have left these shores. God bless and keep you all till we meet again here in America the Beautiful. That Monday evening meeting at the Chapel was worth a lot. Each of you fellows anew pledged your faith and some did it for the first time. With God you are fully equipped for what lies ahead.

A tense situation was evident at Fort Ord. The Japs have received a severe licking from our airforce and we hardly expect them to take that lying down. These "ALERTS" are more than a practice game. When I preached for Dr. Potter at the morning service in the First Presbyterian Church of Monterey, soldiers were conspicuous only by their absence. So many of the units were called for field practice that I wondered whether my objective could be reached. Last night made up for that. Out of a possible twenty there were eleven of us at the meeting and the hour was late before bed-check forced us to part. And nearly all the men—even those who were not at the meeting—had been contacted. Even Herman Van Zanten at Sunnyvale and Dean Watson in the same neighborhood. Now for another look at Camp Roberts and then back home.<sup>9</sup>

Equally diligent, the other camp pastors also searched camp rosters and cut through red tape to visit young recruits from the CRC. The pastors' reports in the *Young Calvinist*

along with correspondence and occasional articles by chaplains, recruits, and the *Young Calvinist's* staff provide a large pool of information for students of World War II.

One of the more curious reports discussed Stratford (Ontario's) Juliana Barracks, where some of the first CRC volunteers received basic training. Canada, a member of the British Commonwealth, was already at war in 1941. The United States, by contrast, remained neutral until the bombardment of Pearl Harbor. At the Juliana Barracks the *Young Calvinist* reports,



"We located a camp for the training of young Dutchmen from the Dutch army. Among these . . . were some young men belonging to Christian Reformed churches."

The *Young Calvinist* continues:

The Rev. Wierenga provided us with a letter of introduction to one of the officers of the camp and that letter proved to be of great help. Upon arrival at Stratford we soon

located the Juliana Barracks and there had our first view of a fine looking Dutch soldier. He, the sentry, looked strangely familiar and revealed a large measure of courtesy in leading us to another soldier. This soldier, Mr. Veenstra, formerly a member of Bates St. Christian Reformed Church, conducted us to the officers' quarters where the letter of introduction was handed to Captain Carp. From him we received a most cordial reception and we were provided with the services of Lieutenant Van

tin Loos, a former student of Calvin College, was finally located and with him we had a very interesting conversation.<sup>10</sup>

The *Young Calvinist's* most popular pages featured letters sent from training camps and battle zones. This correspondence usually expressed appreciation for the magazine and particularly for its published letters from service personnel. Such correspondence often contained impressions of military life and encounters with unfamiliar people and places. Bert Triemstra's letter to "Dear Mr. Postma"

certainly a great privilege. I wish to thank the Home Missions Board, whose orders Rev. De Jong was fulfilling.

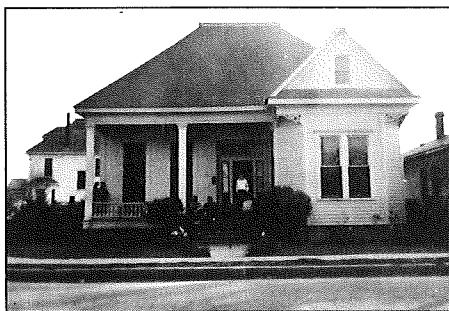
I am stationed in the field artillery here. I was made ammunition corporal on our big 155 mm. gun, which someone has already described in the last *Young Calvinist*. This gun really has power and makes a terrific noise when fired. We are going to the mountains tomorrow for an all day firing. Each time a projectile is fired, it costs \$56.00 to the taxpayer.<sup>11</sup>

With their training completed, most of the troops shipped overseas, bound for Europe, Africa, and the Far East, and their letters flowed back from every corner of the globe. "From somewhere in New Guinea" Private Gerald Streelman penned the following New Year's letter:

It's now (according to my watch) 10:22 a.m. New Year's Day. As nearly as I can figure out it must be 7:22 p.m. December 31, 1942, in Grand Rapids. So you see I am way ahead of you, having already seen over 10 hours of 1943, while you back home are still in the old year. I am wondering what you are doing right now and how you plan to spend the day. I suppose you are wondering too—thinking about how I've spent my time over the holidays. I'm just aching to tell you all about what has happened out here, but I'm afraid I will have to be a bit careful in my letter or this will not pass the censor. . . . I wrote a few letters a while back that probably made you afraid and a bit worried. Well, that's over for the time being. I passed through my combat with the Japs and came out without an injury of any kind, with the possible exception of being scared stiff a couple of times. I (as is to be expected after an ordeal of that nature) am a bit run down and have literally hundreds of insect bites of



(facing page) Alameda Service Home; (above) Camp Claiborne, LA; (left) Service Home in Alexandria, LA, established by Rev. E. Boeve, 1941.



Breeror, a gentleman who proved himself to be a most interesting and obliging guide. We were conducted throughout the barracks, were allowed to see everything that might be seen and received answers to questions that could and might be answered. One of the young men we particularly desired to see, Mar-

follows the pattern:

I have finally managed to . . . write you a few words. I hope you remember me because it has been quite some time ago that we met at the Sheboygan convention. I have not forgotten the last words you spoke to me as I left the convention to be inducted into the U.S. Army one week later. . . . A few weeks ago Rev. Peter De Jong, from Hamshire, Texas, came to Fort Sill and gathered a few fellows together. We held a social and devotional meeting in the new Post Chapel. It was

all descriptions.

We have begun to receive our Christmas packages just lately. . . . some boys received gifts that seemed rather silly. . . . One of the boys received a very nice toilet set, complete with shoe brush and polish. . . . It was beautiful, but here we were, hadn't shaved in weeks, shoes hadn't been polished since we left Australia. Our main thought was how we would lighten our packs and rid ourselves of all excess weight. . . . We received a very useful Christmas box from the American Red Cross. . . . The Australian Comforts Fund also was very good to us. . . .

The best of all the help at the front came from the Australian Salvation Army. . . . They served hot coffee and cookies to all who came to their stand. . . . It was the first real coffee we had in several weeks. I would have gladly paid a dollar a cup right then. I realized too that things like that are taken as a necessity at home and never thought of as a luxury. . . . I shall never forget that cup of coffee and cookie I got at the Salvation Army as long as I live. . . . If you could see the glad faces they inspire out here, you could never refuse to help them or question the results of your contributions. . . . The Salvation Army Post was set up so close to the front that one man was hit by a stray bullet!<sup>12</sup> From Italy Luke Timmerman wrote in 1944:

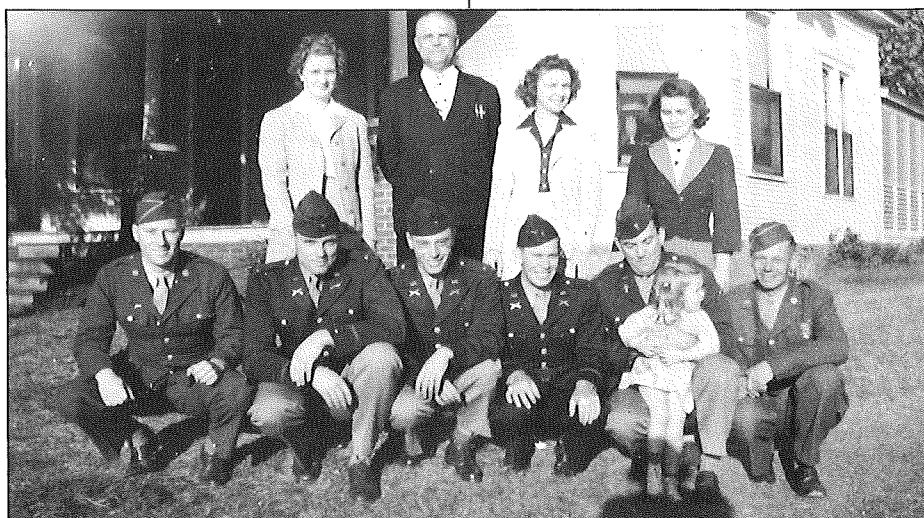
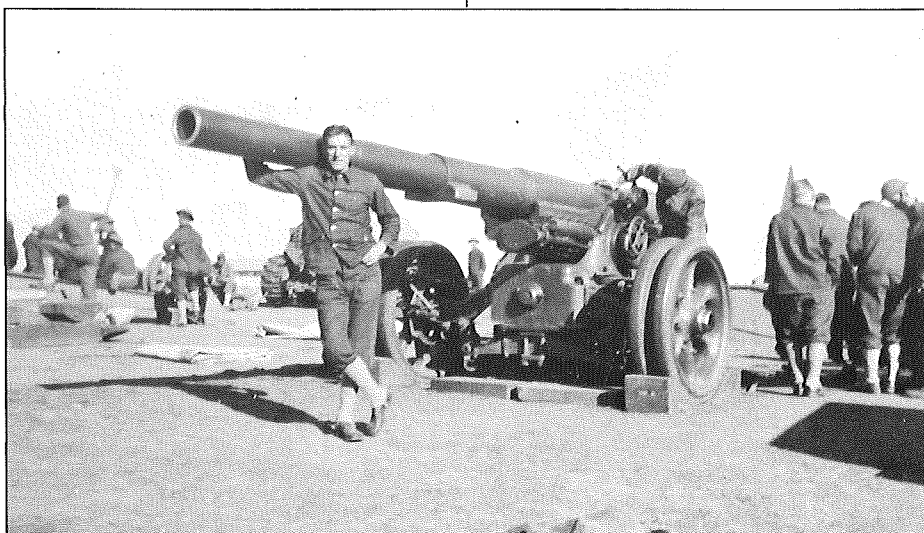
I am overseas and I have been in action several times. My outfit was among the first to march down the streets of Rome. You should have heard the people cheering us. . . . We also got passes to go to Rome during a rest period. But within a week the people had changed. When we bought something they made us pay an awful price. Back home the people are always talking about Rome and the historical stat-

ues and monuments in it. Well, I didn't care for it at all. The only place I want to be is back in good old G.R. I hope and pray that God will let me return there some day.<sup>13</sup>

Following D-Day, Pvt. Jacob Hoeksema reported:

I've been in the Army 10 months now and finished my basic training in January. Have moved so often that it almost made my head whirl. Am in the M.P.'s and was first sent to California, and then to New York City. To top it all off our outfit was chosen to go to France and be part

except for snipers, and they were thick, but the beach was being shelled by artillery and mortar fire. I know now what it is to walk through "the valley of the shadow of death" and saw death and destruction on every side, but thanks be to God, I got through safely and without a scratch on me. Little did I think a few months ago that I would witness one of the great events of the war first-handed. Someday, probably, I can see you again and give you more details. I'm well and looking forward to



of the assault forces on D-Day. We landed after the infantry had cleared the beach of small arms fire,

your next issue.<sup>14</sup>

Women (Wacs, Waves, Nurses, and others) also left homes and churches



to join the war. One of these, Bernice Rattering, published a lengthy account of her North African experience:

We want you to know how much we appreciate the *Young Calvinist*. There are four of us [Young Calvinist members] in our unit. Esther Gabrielse from Sherman St., Corenlia Cook from Bethel, Bernice Couzynse from Broadway, and myself from Burton Heights.

Africa is a beautiful country. We have seen many interesting things here, and are really enjoying the

phitheater where the Christian martyrs fought the lions, is extremely interesting. The main Catholic cathedral of all of Africa is at Carthage, and it is a beautiful church. Tunis and Bizerte must have been very picturesque cities before the war.

We have a Presbyterian chaplain who conducts the services for the patients and personnel of our hospital, and we appreciate him a great deal. He is a kind and understanding and sincere and fatherly chaplain, and certainly is doing a great

dozens. Even though the war ended on August 15, 1945, the dreary reports continued to arrive through all of 1946. Many who were first declared "missing" were ultimately reckoned as casualties. By 1946 over three hundred of the CRC's young people had been sacrificed.<sup>17</sup>

Though ordinary military combat was unspeakably terrifying, the wartime atrocities disclosed after the war seemed even more hellish than combat. One account, penned in Europe by Chaplain Cornelius Van Schouwen, brought the horrors of the Nazi death camps to the pages of the *Young Calvinist*:

It is estimated that about twelve million foreign laborers were evicted from their home and sent to Germany to work. The vast majority of these have been liberated, and now they are jamming the roads that lead out of Germany. They have no homes, no friends, wander aimlessly about, live off the land. In many cases they simply enter the homes of German civilians and take over lock, stock, and barrel. Hitler's chickens are coming back to roost. We hire Germans to work on our railroads here in Germany. But so great is the fear for these liberated slaves that they refuse to work unless they have the protection of American guards. Notwithstanding this protection, a German was beaten with a rubber hose. When the American guard intervened, the liberated slave took off his shirt, showed the scars on his back, and said, "That is what he did to me, when I was in that concentration camp over there." When I see these countless liberated slaves—men, women, and children—and think of the many atrocity stories I have heard, I find myself saying, "Such crimes must be justly punished." During basic training, I preached against the spirit of revenge. Said it was un-



(facing page, above) 155 mm gun; (facing page, below) standing (l-r) Mrs. G. Feyen, Rev. A. Bratt, Mrs. H. Telman, Mrs. M. Goote. Front row (l-r) A. Schaap (Paterson), G. Feyen (Byron Center), J. Van Eerden (Grand Rapids), H. Telman (Grand Rapids), Chaplain M. Goote, J. Reitsma (Paterson); (above) Service Home group in Alameda.

experience. Sisi Bel Abbes, where the French Foreign Legion is located, is a beautiful city. We rode through its lovely park, and through the Arab and Spanish sections in an open carriage. Carthage, with its ancient ruins of three cities of different eras built one on top of the other, and its am-

work here.

We certainly enjoy taking care of these boys who are fighting our war, and we think they really are a grand group of boys. We are proud of our American boys over here.<sup>15</sup>

But, as Bernice knew from experience, war's dreary inevitabilities—permanent disability and death—also reached deep into the CRC. Already in 1943 Gold Star notices began to pile up. The names of the slain arrived singly at first—Harold Kuipers of Rochester, John Haveman from Jenison, and Jim Greydanus from Paterson.<sup>16</sup> But throughout 1944 and 1945 the monthly casualty lists mounted in

christian and that we can fight the enemy and shoot them, without the spirit of revenge in our hearts. But where does justice end and where does revenge begin? Ever increasingly I find myself pushing justice into the region I formerly considered to be revenge.

The Germans opened a factory for the production of death at Maidanek, now in the hands of the Russians. Soviet and Polish authorities estimate that as many as one million five hundred thousand persons were killed here during the past three years. At Maidanek are the sealed gas chambers in which many of the victims were asphyxiated and the furnaces in which the bodies were cremated. According to witnesses, as many as 20,000 prisoners were executed in a single day. From the shoes piled up in one of the warehouses, it is evident that little children, infants, as well as old men and women were executed. How can the Germans ever atone for the crimes they have committed against the human race?<sup>18</sup>

Bernard Van Spyker, whose ship was gathering allied POW's in the Far East reported similarly:

So far we have [picked up] Dutch, British, Australian, Japanese, Indians and a few Americans. The latter were captured on Guam, Wake, Philippines, and Java very early in the war. They have a story all their own—the cruelties that were inflicted on them in over three years of captivity. They were forced to work in the shipyards seven days a week, ten to twelve hours a day. I talked to many of them and their stories were all similar—suffering month after month. Then they told me what happened when that atom bomb fell. This one Dutch fellow was in a small boat in the harbor about five miles away from the place where it exploded. He said, "A few seconds after we

heard the bomber go over there was a blinding, deafening blast. We were all blown into the water and we all were plenty scared including our Japanese guards. The city itself was blotted out by smoke and dust.<sup>19</sup>

That atomic explosion brought the war to an abrupt conclusion, but the bomb itself signaled new and more terrifying prospects. August 15, 1945, though, was a day of joy—joy and release from anxiety. Finally the troops would be coming home and the same Service Centers which had

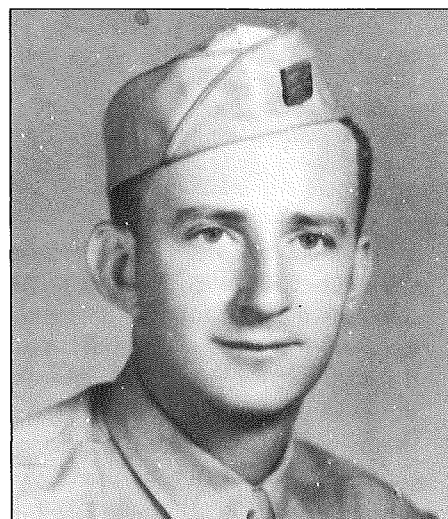
health and strength for each day. During this period we personally met 1,165 men and women in uniform who came to visit our center. In addition we had 773 other guests—many of them relatives of the service people. Nearly all of these we learned to know intimately. We experienced rich blessings through the fellowship of the saints. We provided 3,148 lodgings and served 28,168 meals and lunches. We had 148 Saturday evening devotional periods, 164 young people's fellowship meetings and



seen the young people off would also welcome their return. For several months after the war, both the San Diego and Alameda centers were busier than ever. Prospective brides arrived to meet their husbands-to-be and some wives carried children who greeted their fathers for the first time.

A year later, in the fall of 1946, both of the California centers closed. From the San Diego center Rev. Gerrit Boerfyn penned a farewell:

As we look back we are filled with gratitude to God. For over three years we were privileged to serve in this special way. God gave



other meetings of a social nature. The young people that went in and out with us endeared themselves to our hearts. We loved them because they loved the Lord.

In our San Diego church our boys always found a warm welcome. Three families in particular—the Tiemersmas, the Jorritsmas, and the De Graafs—did much by giving the service people a touch of home. Nearly every weekend they entertained them in their homes. We are certain that our service people will never forget

most beneficial programs undertaken. It has left a warm spot in our hearts for the young men and women who have experienced something of the love and spiritual care of their spiritual mother, the church.

The experiences at the home have been both happy and sad, happy to see youth in the springtime of life with varied talents and interests, with their correspondence lists to parents and girl friends. Some needed encouragement and some needed a word of

other round of Gold Star notices began to appear in the *Young Calvinist*.—



(facing page, above) loaded troop ship; (facing page, below) James Greydanus; (above) Service Home group in San Diego, CA.

them and will thank God for their kindness. Precious lessons were learned during days of war. Let us not forget them during the days of peace. May they make us more useful in His service.<sup>20</sup>

Similar sentiments came from Alameda in the Bay area's final report:

All good things come to an end and so we want to close the life of the Service Home here in Alameda with this article. We consider the work of our chaplains, service pastors and the service homes established by our Christian Reformed Denomination to be one of the

caution. All this and more made life at the Service Home interesting and busy with hardly ever a dull moment.

The sad memories are of those whom we know will never come back, having given their lives in the service of their country. There were at least six that we know of and we remember their loved ones when the Lord alone can give comfort. The sad partings after pleasant weekends during the war—may they never return, we pray.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, those sad partings did return. And even while the Alameda and San Diego centers were dismantling their mess halls, U.S. troops were beginning to cluster in Korea, and just four years later an-

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Yearbook of the CRC (Grand Rapids: CRC Publishing House, 1941) 5; Yearbook of the CRC (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1987) 22–24.

<sup>2</sup>Richard R. Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War Going On?* (New York: Paperback Book Library, 1971) 78–79.

<sup>3</sup>Young Calvinist (hereafter cited YC) Nov. 1941:4, 9; Dec. 1941:6.

<sup>4</sup>The YC "Invitations" column regularly listed churches, service "homes" and Service Men's Clubs. See, for example, YC, June 1942, p. 19, and July 1943, p. 26. A note from Rev. A. H. Bratt appeared in YC, October 1943, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup>YC, July 1942:9.

<sup>6</sup>Silver Anniversary (Alameda CRC, 1949), n.p.

<sup>7</sup>YC July 1943:14.

<sup>8</sup>YC Dec. 1951:551.

<sup>9</sup>YC July 1942:11.

<sup>10</sup>YC June 1941:14–15.

<sup>11</sup>YC Jan. 1942:17.

<sup>12</sup>YC Jan. 1944:34.

<sup>13</sup>YC Oct. 1944:20.

<sup>14</sup>YC Oct. 1944:20.

<sup>15</sup>YC Nov. 1943:22.

<sup>16</sup>YC Feb. 1943:21; Nov. 1943:27.

<sup>17</sup>YC Apr. 1946:13.

<sup>18</sup>YC June 1945:11–12.

<sup>19</sup>YC Jan. 1946:23.

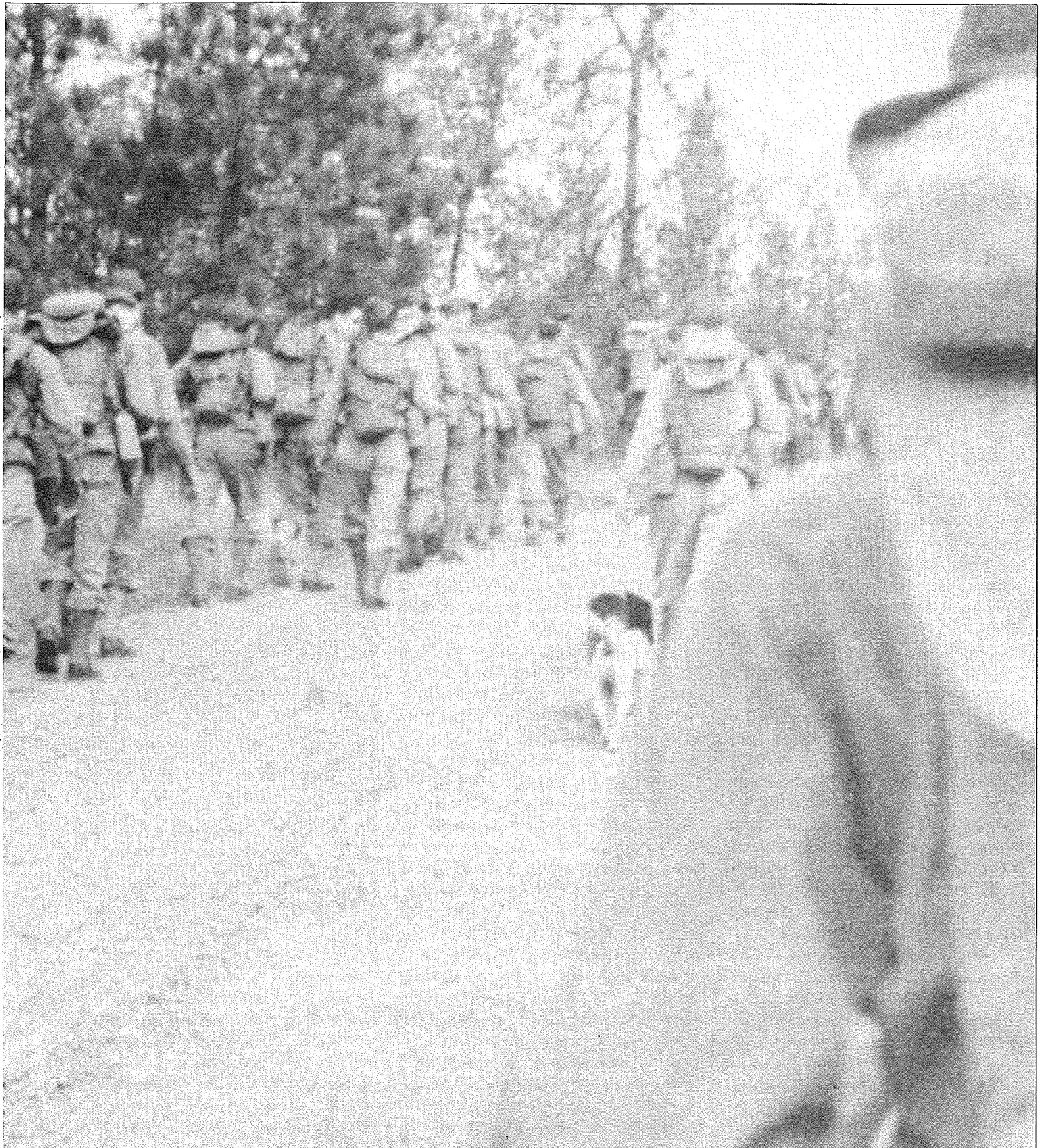
<sup>20</sup>YC Sept. 1946:21.

<sup>21</sup>YC Oct. 1946:21–22.









# Recollections of a Serviceman

by Steve Van Der Weele

**D**uring my forty months of World War II service, I wrote frequently—sometimes daily—to my family. My parents, thinking that these letters might have some future value, saved them for me—over five hundred of them. Some twenty years later, when they were cleaning the attic, they returned them to me because they needed the room. Only recently have I begun to reread the letters. Large portions of them deal only with routine and personal matters. No measure of anyone's vanity is great enough to consider such letters for publication. But because of the highly structured religious practices to which I was introduced as a youth, I did pen numerous and detailed observations about Sundays, sermons, preachers, and religious life in camp. Thus, when I was asked to prepare this set of "Rememberings," I agreed to do so, knowing that the letters would provide vigorous support to my memories of over forty years ago.

I hardly needed the letters to reinforce my recollections that Sundays were always vulnerable to the press of military functions and processes. The army needs time—lots of it—for main-

taining its personnel, moving troops, and preparing for and fighting battles. Sundays were convenient as catch-up days for the week's array of accumulated chores or—as it often appeared to us enlisted men—for the week's inefficiencies. Thus, though for most of the men, at least while they were stationed in the U.S., Sundays were relatively free, one could never be certain that he would have a Sunday not interrupted by army duties. There were, in fact, often practical reasons for attending chapel. It was not unusual for a sergeant to come through the barracks on a Sunday morning and order the first men in sight to fill quotas for duty in the mess hall. Sundays seemed especially suitable for dental and medical inspections, paying the troops, giving immunization shots, gas mask inspections, and clothing and equipment showdowns.

Sometimes more bizarre events would mar our Sundays. One Sunday the whole company was confined to the barracks for measles inspections; no one ever showed up to do the inspecting. On another, a complement of us enlisted men was assigned duty guarding a barracks that had been deloused. It cost us a Sunday. One Easter Sunday I got up in time for a nearby "sunrise service"—early shift in the mess hall. I observe in one letter, written from overseas, that I had not received a free Sunday or had had



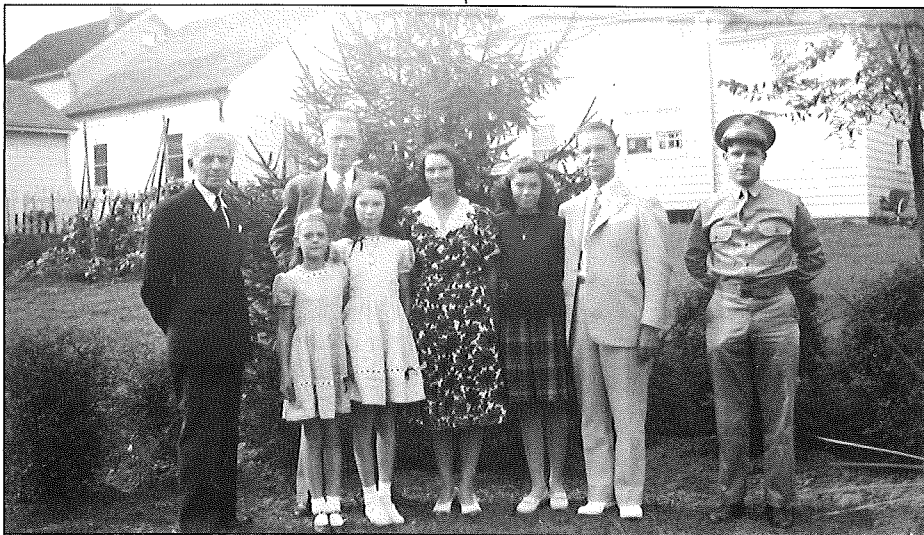
a chance to attend a church service in five weeks, and in another letter that such had been true for a period of four weeks. A welcome change occurred after Germany's surrender, however, for General Omar Bradley issued a directive that, "effective immediately, all but the most essential work will be suspended on Sunday, and only a

*Steve Van Der Weele is a native of Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and a professor emeritus of the Calvin College English Department.*

minimal crew will be on duty in army offices."

Because, once again, of a conservative religious training (I have, of course, no regrets about that), I tended to be demanding in my expectations of church services and sermons. I was frequently disappointed. The religious situation of that time is far more clear to me now than it was then, but I encountered at first-hand the fundamentalist and the liberal ecclesiastical minds. The liberals preached the social gospel, spoke about man's great potential, and dis-

no reference to God's attributes, nor did he indicate what difference God's existence might make in any practical way. One liberal chaplain preached about Easter as a time of new hope, new life, new beginnings, new stirrings of the soul, new opportunities to do good in the world. Only once, incidentally, did I encounter a Christian Reformed chaplain—Rev. Van Schouwen—and that was for only a few brief Sundays during the final months of my stay in Europe. I wrote with enthusiasm about his solid, biblical preaching.



(facing page) Steve Van Der Weele; (above) Steve Van Der Weele with the Bolts and De Jagers in Rochester, N.Y.

coursed on the splendor of the human species. I cannot have been the only one to sense the incongruity between our being at war and all this optimism about human nature. The "fundies" were more simplistic, often preaching as if everyone in the audience were unsaved; the sermons were moralistic, with strong admonitions to take Jesus into one's heart and acknowledge him as Savior of one's soul. Sometimes the sermons were more like lectures. One chaplain, for example, proceeded with what seemed impeccable logic to prove the existence of God. My criticism was that he made

All in all, one fared better going to church in the city than remaining on the base—with some exceptions. Disappointments could occur in the city as well. I remember attending the meeting of a Christian Endeavor young people's group after an evening service in Mattydale, a suburb of Syracuse, and being appalled at the lack of biblical knowledge and the doctrinal illiteracy among the young people. And a service I attended one Sunday evening in Syracuse proved an eye-opener in other ways. It turned out to be a joint service of a Presbyterian and a Methodist church—and of a local chapter of the Masonic Lodge. I could not believe what I was seeing: a stately procession of Mas-

ons, of high rank in their order, complete with Masonic regalia and embellishments, escorted with great ceremony and deference to a reserved section of the auditorium. What sermon could be right for such an occasion? This was my introduction to the phenomenon of civil religion; in his discourse the pastor praised the achievements of our founding fathers—their wisdom and insight and integrity—and commended these virtues to all present, especially during these days of national crisis.

While stationed in Syracuse, I attended most often the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. The members of this church, with names like Crocker, McDougal, Carson, and Murphy, were most cordial in opening their homes. Dr. Knight, the pastor, was a fastidious Bible scholar, paying strict attention to such details as the difference between judgments, commandments, and precepts (Micah 6:6) and the differences, in another sermon, between being steadfast and being immovable. He also took us on descriptive geographical tours of such sites as Kadesh, Mishnah, and the field of Jaar. He might be out of fashion for such times as ours, but it was refreshing at the time to experience a tradition of preaching which shared the same influences and hermeneutics with which I had grown up. I must admit that I found it a bit puzzling—and disconcerting—that this church used no musical instruments and confined its singing to the psalms. Only later did I learn the reasons for these practices.

But while at Syracuse, I was within range of Rochester, and I was able to get a weekend leave there about every two months. I remember well the pleasure of listening to Dr. Oren Holtrop preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism, with a particularly illuminating digression on the phrase "Thy commandments are exceeding broad." While there I got to know Rev.



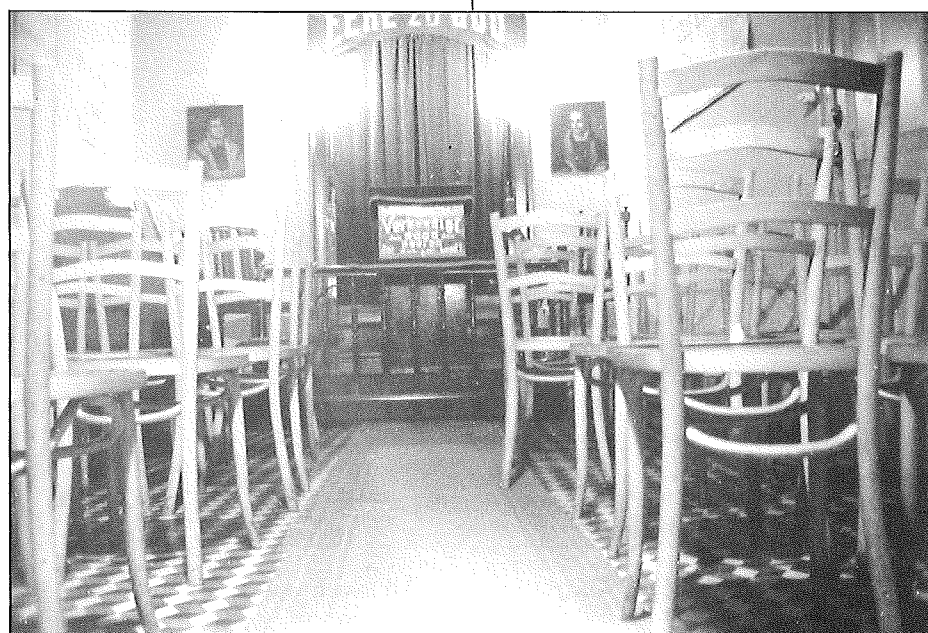
Bolt and his family and spent a number of most pleasant Sundays at the home of Clarence De Jager and his wife, Pearl (Bolt) De Jager, as well as at the home of Louis Bolt. I regretted each time having to return to the base.

Other pleasant memories come to mind. While I was stationed at Camp Reynolds, Pennsylvania—a staging area—Captain Clarence Bushouse and his wife, Grace, and her sister, whose husband was stationed on the West Coast, published a notice in *The Young Calvinist* inviting CRC soldiers in the area to come to their home. I accepted the invitation. Captain Bushouse, stationed in Pittsburgh at the time, and his family, were most hospitable people. They introduced me to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, where they were worshiping at the time. They took me with them to Carnegie Hall one Sunday afternoon to hear the *Elijah* performed. They took me to hear a certain Dr. Carl McIntyre (“He’s very controversial,” they warned me), who preached vigorously against the sins of the day as he perceived them. They introduced me—at the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—to the Davises and the Cummingses, and the Breischs—names and people whom I was to encounter again during my teaching career at Calvin College. All these experiences were real eye-openers to a young man from the Midwest who had hardly been out of the state of Wisconsin before military service and who had had hardly any exposure to any church other than his own.

But one of the most memorable relationships I established occurred in Belgium, where I got to know the Rev. Jacob De Vries, minister of the Belgische Evangelische Kerk (later, after more theological training, he was appointed to the seminary at the University of Louvain). He and his family had escaped from the Netherlands after harrowing experiences, and he was serving a small congrega-

tion in Tienen, Belgium (Tirlemont in French). I attended—in his home, for that was the meeting place—one of his very early services after the liberation. It was in Dutch, but I understood, to my surprise and pleasure, almost all of his sermon. (Dutch services were part of my childhood experience and memory.) He reminded his hearers of the magnitude of the gift of liberation that God had brought about in answer to their many prayers and through the courage and resources of the allies. After several long years of deprivations of all kinds, we were, he ob-

attendance of military personnel at his services. Eventually we outgrew his home, and we were able to procure an auditorium for these services. He would preach in French on Tuesday nights, in Flemish Sunday mornings at 9:00, and in English at 11:00 in the auditorium. Although my mother chided me for making him preach in English, he already had a good start in that language, and he improved by the week. He began drawing good crowds. Eventually a U.S. chaplain joined Rev. De Vries in conducting the services, but he contributed little to



(above) “Chapel” in home of Rev. De Vries (Belgium).

served, now free once more to pick up the scattered parts of our lives—in education, in business, in our professions, our careers, our families. But, he warned, our newly achieved freedom will turn against us if our liberation fails to capitalize on the enormous opportunities we now have to deepen our religious awareness and to advance the cause of the church and God’s kingdom.

This was early in November 1944. We met for several weeks at the pastor’s home. Fuel was a problem as the days became colder, and I successfully requested from the military a weekly ration of coal because of the growing

the proceedings. Many of the soldiers found De Vries’s biblically based sermons attractive and helpful.

A particularly memorable event occurred at the time of the Battle of the Bulge, on December 16, 1944, when the Germans in an attempt to seize Antwerp launched a vicious, surprise counterattack against a weak part of the Allied lines. We spent anxious days as we learned of the stunning initial German successes and as we tried to get a clear picture of the confusing events of the following weeks.



German atrocities filled us with indignation. Moreover, Tirlemont was in the heart of "buzz-bomb alley," and the Germans doubled the number of rockets they launched at Brussels and Antwerp. Our barracks, inhabited by Germans only a few months before, shook night and day from the artillery, and tanks and trucks roared through the streets on their way to the front.

But we took time out for Christmas church service. Rev. De Vries did his best to bring a message in English to a larger-than-usual audience of soldiers



and officers. He spoke out of the context of the occupation and expressed a God-based hope for complete victory and peace, despite the ominous situation then existing. We sang carols after the service and prayed for peace.

During the next months Rev. De Vries and his wife and his parishioners arranged pleasant social evenings—within their limited means. I learned to appreciate especially the

Jean de Roubaix family. The father, a Ph.D. in biology and a member of the underground, spent his time in agricultural experimentation. Of all the families I got to know, he most nearly approximated my stereotype of the elite, cosmopolitan, enlightened—but secular—European I had formulated up to that time. But his family were converts from Catholicism, and that development made a profound difference. He seemed almost out of place with the other humble folk of the church—more French, for one thing—and he was most supportive of the struggling church and exceedingly grateful to the Americans for their efforts in achieving Belgium's liberation. He plied us with questions of all sorts—especially about America and its history and about its social and religious life. And when, to my embarrassment, I could not always answer these questions, he gently admonished me always to be reading, never to go anywhere without a book or magazine with me. It was, of course, splendid advice, which I have tried to practice ever since.

In March 1945, we were placed on alert to move into Germany and prepare to take over our assigned city, Marburg. (I was in the Military Government branch of the army at this time.) Rev. De Vries's regret at our leaving was mingled with joy at the progress of the war; and he spoke wisely on our last evening together. He read Psalm 91, and, assuring us that we were doing God's work in the world, he commended us, in a moving prayer, to God's protection and grace. We arrived in Marburg within twenty-four hours of its capture, on March 29, 1945. I continued to correspond with Rev. De Vries. He was elated at receiving copies of *De Wachter*, which I arranged to have sent to him. In due time he informed us that the buzz bombs had ceased, and in an overnight stop at his home during a short leave, we learned, with joy,

that a baby daughter had joined the family.

But before we arrived in Marburg, we spent several weeks in Viersen, Germany, where an event occurred which I recall with particular pleasure. As the American troops came through this area, they encountered the Anrath prison. And as the American troops liked to do, they shot open the locks and liberated all the prisoners. The army commanders designated this camp as a collecting point for displaced persons—mostly forced laborers who had been working in German factories and on farms. Five of our detachment—two officers and three of us enlisted men—were designated to operate the camp. When we took over, it was already a temporary home to two thousand DPs—though we never were able to get an accurate count. Each day more arrived, bringing their few possessions in whatever contraption with wheels they were able to commandeer. We exercised only indirect jurisdiction over them, appointing committees from each national group—the Polish, Dutch, French, Belgians, Italians, and Russians—as liaisons. They were pretty well able to manage their own affairs while waiting for their return to their homeland—a series of great stories by themselves. Some groups conducted religious services in their part of the compound, and it was gratifying to hear some of them sing and pray among themselves.

One day one of the leaders of the French group came to our office to request a worship service for the Catholics in the camp. He informed us that many, if not most, of the people had not attended church or been to mass for several years. We obliged. We improvised furniture and seating arrangements and publicized the services—three of them on the Sunday designated. Many of the people wept uncontrollably at this great privilege, one denied them through the years of

their alienation, forbidden as they were to sing the Lord's songs in a strange land. They were hearing, from a German priest, in Latin, the words of the Catholic service; they took the wafer and the wine with deep emotion. Though a Protestant, I sensed a profound rightness about the proceedings. The Latin transcended the variety of languages represented, and the priest of the enemy nation represented the Church Universal as he ministered to people of different nations and ideologies. I was obliged for this time to suppress my reservations about the theological ambiguities of Romanism. The people thanked us profusely as they left the hall.

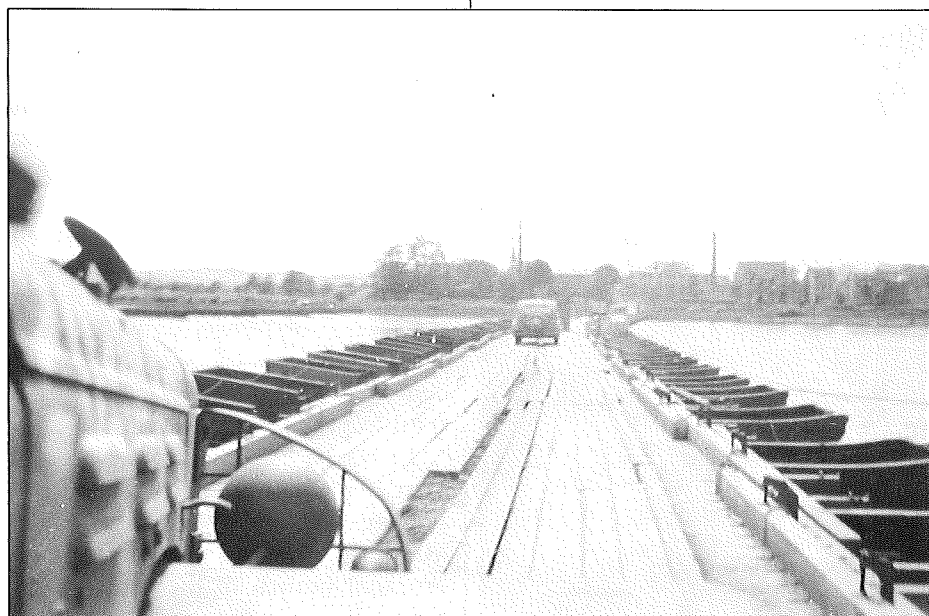
My letters recall other episodes. I noted, for example, that services were held every night on our troop ship while we were crossing the Atlantic and that they were well attended. Once we docked in Liverpool, however, the special service of thanksgiving for a safe voyage in submarine-infested waters was attended by only a fraction of those who had been present when we were on the high seas. I remember, too, an appropriate talk by a chaplain who spoke to us in full assembly during our several days at the Port of Embarkation near Boston. He urged us, in all our various and sundry preparations, to consider our spiritual needs as among the highest of our needs, and urged us not to neglect them in the experiences we were about to undergo.

I remember, too, the range of services I attended during my one hundred days in England—from "low and lazy" (a Methodist church with a lay preacher—very good, incidentally); "broad and hazy" (a somewhat liberal Anglican church); and "high and crazy" (a High Anglican church complete with incense, processions, formal litanies, together with only a brief sermon on what it means to be a member of the Church of England). But I

was duly impressed, as were my hosts, who did not attend church—when the Right Rev. someone or other, having got my name from the guest register, came one afternoon to call on me with best wishes for my stay in England and the remainder of my army days. And I remember a delightful Sunday in Rotterdam with some friends of my relatives in Milwaukee, where I heard, in a nearby church, the distinguished Dr. Brillenburg Wurth preach the sermon—once again on the subject of liberation, which had been only recently

mal patterns of spiritual refreshment; how limited, frequently, are the spiritual and religious opportunities and resources available to the military, to say nothing of the ambiguities and complex moral issues attending any war. To be sure, he observed, many of them would have wonderful stories to tell about deliverance and protection, but it takes, he pointed out, more than these episodes to build a good base for spiritual maturation.

Dr. Stob was right in many ways, of course. Still, consider how many of these men returned to their civilian



(above) Temporary bridge over the Rhine; (below) Rev. De Vries and wife.

achieved in the Netherlands. It was a particularly gratifying experience to meet him again—twice, as a matter of fact—in the States and to follow his career as a distinguished professor of ethics at the seminary in Kampen.

In one letter I refer to an article by Dr. George Stob, one of our denomination's chaplains, warning *Banner* readers not to expect that their sons, brothers, and husbands would become spiritual giants during their period of military service. He explained how disruptive war is to nor-



lives to resume—or begin—their education and careers and then became leaders in their churches. I believe firmly that this continued commitment to the Christian Reformed Church and its total outreach owes much to the patterns I spoke of earlier—initiation from youth up into the church and sound and thorough instruction in home and school about the ways and works of the gospel. And in our tradition, the Kuyperian vision proved to be particularly attractive to people who were looking for an ecclesiastical affiliation that was intel-

lectually respectable and that possessed breadth, depth, and a meaningful message for the time.

I report here, without embarrassment, that my letters reveal an unswerving loyalty to the Christian Reformed Church, my spiritual mother. One becomes religiously as well as nationalistically patriotic when away from home and in distant countries—at least it was so with me. I have never seriously questioned this affiliation since, either, though I have been saddened and hurt when, to my way of thinking, it did not live up to its

unusual years of our lives.

It is, of course, the disruptive nature of military life during those years that made for these unusual opportunities. I experienced an enlargement and established relationships impossible in any other way. I often coveted such experiences for my army buddies (I risk in saying this to appear guilty of self-preening, which I do not intend) who were too often content with passing liaisons and ephemeral contacts. And though remaining loyal to the church, the experiences I here related have made it easier for me, over the period of these last decades, to pray more meaningfully for the church of Christ dispersed throughout the world. I must surely speak for many of us who derived such enlightenment and acquired this new vision from their days in service—and who still do so as members of the military—and who were able and are able still to enrich the church through this heightened awareness of the glory and splendor of the church of Jesus Christ.



(below) Examination of Rev. Jacob De Vries for appointment to Louvain Seminary.

privilege and level of maturity. My CRC membership gave me an identity that stood me well during my army years. But it also gave me the ability to appreciate fellow believers, to identify what W. H. Auden calls "ironic points of light"—people of the church—and to enjoy the kindnesses of all those people who in various phases of the war provided support and encouragement to the soldiers who came their way. They were the clouds of witnesses, acting in behalf of the people at home, who blessed us during these

# Service in Alaska *by Jacob De Lange*

**S**ince the censor won't let me write you all of my experiences, I am going to keep sort of a diary so that you can read it later. We left Fort Lewis, Washington, on Friday, April 17. The day before, we had a "dry run," loading in trucks for practice, and on the following morning we started on our way to Seattle.

As soon as we came to the port, we loaded directly from the trucks to our bunks on the boat. Our first impression was not the best. I had to sleep in the hold, right next to where some big coast guns had been loaded. It was hot, with little ventilation. The bunks were four high. But soon we had our dinner, which made us feel better. The food was good, and there was plenty of it.

We had expected the ship to stay in port a few days before leaving, but soon after dinner the anchor was lifted. Some of us even had faint hopes of getting a pass into the city or of being able to mail a letter before we left. We hardly realized we were off for Alaska. It gives you a strange sensation to think you are leaving your homeland in a ship camouflaged in a dull blue-gray paint and without anyone except a few longshoremen to bid

*Jacob De Lange has retired from a career in mental health which included service at Elim Christian School.*



you good-bye.

Our ship was the *S. S. Chirikof*. It was about thirty-five years old and had few modern accommodations. It was a pretty good-sized ship. The ship extended about twenty-five feet in the water. The ship's crew were mainly Filipinos, who often talked very fast in a language we could not understand. They were small, but good sailors, nevertheless. Besides our company, there were a headquarters company and a coast artillery battery which left for a destination to the western part of the Aleutian Islands after we had disembarked. There were a few civilians on board who had contracts to cook or wait tables for \$300 to \$400 a month. Besides this,

they were exempt from the draft. If we had only known of such things before the army got us! I remember one stout gentleman who was going to Alaska as an engineer. He had been nearly everywhere and could tell a story about anything. Whenever you saw him talking, he had a crowd of listeners around him.

Most of the way to Alaska we traveled the Inland Passage route. I never realized you could sail all the way to Alaska with nearly always having land on both sides of you. The land was mountainous and covered with trees. Rarely did you see any sign of civilization. The scenery, we all agreed, was the best you could see anywhere. I'll mention some of the



things we saw. The sea, for the most part, was calm, so you could hardly tell you were moving. Beautiful streams came rolling down the mountains like silver streaks. Logging camps had long log slides to move the logs into the water. Before we left the Inland Passage, we all had a chance to see what a glacier was like. It was fun watching the porpoises that followed the ship as they would leap from the water to get air. Every now and then we would run into a Canadian Coast Guard ship or plane. Ships would exchange greetings by putting up vari-



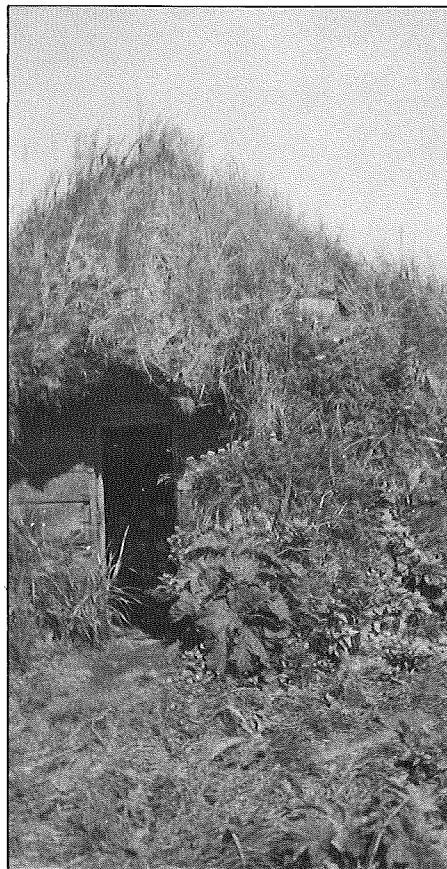
(above) Ready for outpost duty; (right) trapper's hut.

ous flags.

At various times we had lifeboat drill. This consisted of nothing more than blowing the ship's whistle, and each would go to his assigned lifeboat. At one time, while passing through some straits, we got our first experience with rolling waters, although it didn't last long. On our first Sunday afternoon, we wrote letters, as we were told they would be mailed the next day. When we woke up the next

morning, we were at Ketchikan, Alaska. This is mainly a fishing city. It seemed good, though, to see real civilization again. It was a pretty town with boats of all kinds. There was another large boat near us with soldiers on board. It was not long until there was a great deal of hollering back and forth in typical American style. It did feel good, however, to be near United States territory again.

Not long after leaving Ketchikan, we sailed into the open sea. Just before leaving the Inland Passage, we were accompanied by two other ships



and a low, sleek destroyer. This was my closest contact with the U.S. Navy. It was interesting to watch the ships signal each other by means of flashing lights. Not long after we reached the open sea, the rolling started again. Few ate supper that evening, and some of those that did soon disposed of it over the railing on the deck. At

first it seemed unbearable, but later one became accustomed to it. At times waves splashed completely over the front of the ship.

After a couple of days of traveling in this fashion, we reached the island of Kodiak. We had to wait till the tide came in before we could enter the bay in which the army fort there was located. Here again we could mail letters. That evening I watched as they took a friend who had pneumonia to the hospital there.

During the remainder of the trip the water was quite rough. A little excitement came when a .50 caliber machine gun suddenly began firing. It did not take long for a crowd to form on deck. Thoughts of submarines and planes were in our minds, but we saw nothing. We were soon convinced it was just practice firing. There were five machine guns and two antitank guns on board. Otherwise, life on board became sort of routine. The fellows were getting all their hair cut off by the company barber. News flashes were placed on the bulletin boards. Morale was higher as the news came of the bombing of Japanese cities. All our radios and flashlights had to be turned in during the trip.

It was not long till we again sighted land. Three destroyers hidden in a cove in the bay signaled a welcome. We arrived in Cold Bay at noon of the twenty-sixth. So this is where we're going to be stationed! We could see a tent city near. No trees could be seen. All kinds of stories were being told—huge Kodiak bears with legs like elephants, all kinds of fish, caribou, beautiful flowers and mountain streams. King Cove, the only village near, was about 15 miles away. The end of the peninsula was about 75 miles away, and Dutch Harbor some 150 miles. Stories were told of how Fort Randall was to have 15,000 troops in time. Girls were even to be sent to keep the men from being lonesome.

Some began dropping lines into

the water, and flounders were easy to catch. Often there were two on one line. The unloading details [groups] began to work. Since a dock had not yet been completed, we had to unload in barges. It was noon the next day before we could go to land ourselves. Our journey had been safely completed.

The work had just begun. We all had heavy packs, and it was about a four-mile hike to our camp. The ground looked like it had been plowed, but we later found out that it was natural. Our tents had been put up by C Company, who had preceded us here with the engineers. We helped unload trucks and fix up our tents. At first the food was quite poor, but it became better as rations were distributed. C Company and the engineers were living in nine-man KD huts. They were the pioneers and had had quite a rough time of it. When they unloaded, much of their equipment was lost in the sea.

May 9: Inspection day. Our tent went over quite well after we had rearranged it and put in a clothesrack and table.

May 13: In the morning we had bayonet practice. We went out in the field in the afternoon to dig foxholes. On the way we watched some trout fishermen. Then we sighted a red fox, and the lieutenant took a potshot at him. On the way back we found the fox's den and tried to smoke him out. We had a little excitement when the tundra started burning, and we had quite a time putting it out. A boat came in with the anti-tank company.

May 18: Got in a bunch of mail. A warning was given that attack of the Aleutian Islands and the Alaskan Peninsula was imminent.

May 19: Squad tactics in the morn-

ing. Guard duty from 10 till 2 in the night. Latest rumor is that a Japanese aircraft carrier has been sighted 150 miles off the coast from Dutch Harbor.

May 28: Saw six caribou near the outpost while on guard duty. Two bear were also sighted earlier in the morning. Went fishing in the afternoon.

June 3: What a day! At 6:30, while on outpost, I received a call that Dutch Harbor had been

bombed. Soon news was received of a second and third attack. Then that an aircraft carrier had been sighted 250 miles from Dutch Harbor. Planes buzzed all day, and one plane crashed into a mountain. We dug foxholes near our tents. Attack here was reported certain.

June 5: Dutch Harbor was again attacked. A Jap cruiser was seen. Seven unidentified planes were reported head-



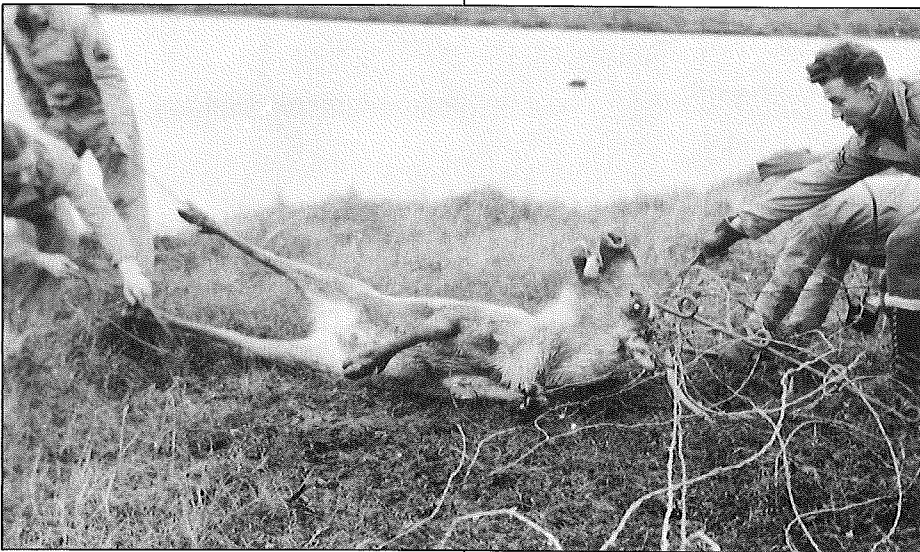
ing this way. Three hundred planes were reported to be coming this way from the States. Patrols were sent out at night from the outposts.

June 10: Saw my first bear. It came running through the water to our camp. In just a moment everyone had his rifle and was ready to shoot, but the sergeant wouldn't let us. It stood, looked at us, and then moved on.

July 22: Fishing is really good. Salmon are jumping in the

batteries fired at a target pulled by a plane.

Aug. 7: The three men who went out from our company in a small boat didn't get very far because of too rough water. The detail that went out to get logs from a bay west of here returned. These logs were formerly a Japanese cannery and will be used to build a service club. A company laundry was started with just one machine and two men running it.



(facing page) Caribou caught in barbwire; (right) releasing the caribou.

bay, and trout are following them for their eggs. Reports are: three more Jap ships sunk at Kiska. General Buckner is now in camp. There is a brigadier general in command of this fort.

July 23: At reveille this morning one of the second platoon had his gun loaded, which went off at inspection arms. He was so frightened that he fired another shot before they took his gun away.

July 24: Went on a detail hauling Quonset huts. Antiaircraft

Aug. 24: We tried out some new combat firing tactics. As the enemy would advance on the defense, a shot would be fired in the air to indicate the defense had opened fire. The attackers would then fall down in place. Targets were placed where each soldier was. The size of the targets depended on the position the soldier had. Then the field was cleared, and for a full minute the defense fired at the targets, which were about three hundred yards away. Then a count was taken of the hits and considered in relation to

shots fired. Our platoon got hits for 19 percent of their shots.

Sept. 24: Really had a storm today. Many tents blew down, and many men moved into the new mess hall for the night.

Sept. 25: The noncommissioned officers are digging foxholes and emplacements along a new line of resistance that has been picked out. The Bob Hope Show came over to entertain the soldiers. Mail has been held up, but it is starting to go through again now.

Oct. 15: Moved into a new Quonset. The officers came back from furlough, but the privates did not as yet because ship space was not available. The new colonel inspected the outposts. We fed him a steak. A caribou got tangled in the barbwire entanglements that were put up. We managed to free him.

Dec. 19: Our company was privileged to entertain the show girls at supper because of the fine record of our mess hall. The men all came out in their best fifteen minutes ahead of schedule. A sergeant, corporal, and private were selected as escorts. The thrilling moment finally came as I and others saw their first girls since coming to Cold Bay. I happened to be table waiter that day. The girls sat among the enlisted men, made themselves at home, and kept up the conversation among an uneasy bunch of boys. We had caribou steak which a hunting detail had gotten the day before. We also had three layer cakes.

Jan. 18: Got the welcome news that I

was to go to radio school. One more is going from our company. The classes are held at the regimental headquarters mess hall. About a dozen are attending. We had lectures on radio equipment and organization of the regiment. We began learning seven letters of the Morse code. The first platoon was served some homemade ice cream in the mess hall.

I am concluding this diary some time afterward but hope to recall some of the details. During the month of September I was sent out as one of the radio operators for the outpost at King Cove. This is a small cannery village where we had to keep track of all the boat traffic. It was a delightful month, and we actually seemed to be back in civilization.

We went back to camp at the end of the month. The next day the captain called me in and asked if I wanted to go back to the States. As I stood there aghast, he explained that seven men from the company were going to join an outfit that was going back, and I could go if I wished. I said, "Yes, Sir!" and did the snappiest salute of my career. So we spent the next few days packing and waiting for "our boat." October 8 was the day. We loaded in a truck, and then we were off to the dock. There we got on a barge and embarked on the boat with the band playing farewell to us. And so we left our home of a year and a half. Our next stop was Unga—another small cannery village. Here we stayed two days and loaded 46,000 cases of salmon. This was a civilian boat and did not have many passengers. There it was that a storm came up, and we spent a really rough night on the Gulf of Alaska. The next day we got to Seward and disembarked. This was the first town many of us had seen for some time, so we bought things in the

stores just for the practice. We then got on the only train in existence in Alaska. Many bottles of liquor went aboard, too. As we proceeded to Anchorage, many of these had to be removed from some of the men. When we got to Anchorage, we boarded trucks which took us to Fort Richardson, where we joined the Fourth Infantry.

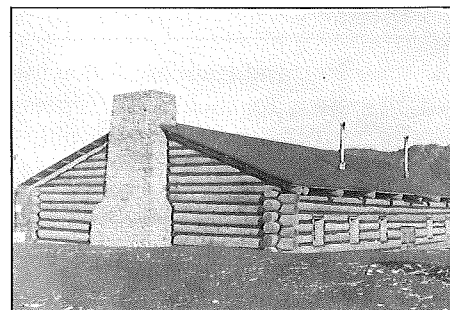
There we formed a casual company of replacements. There, too, our equipment was censored, and we were inspected. We spent about a week in all there, and then we

to express how thankful we were to be in the good old States again! After a trip of about forty miles we were taken again to very nearly the same spot I had left a year and a half before.

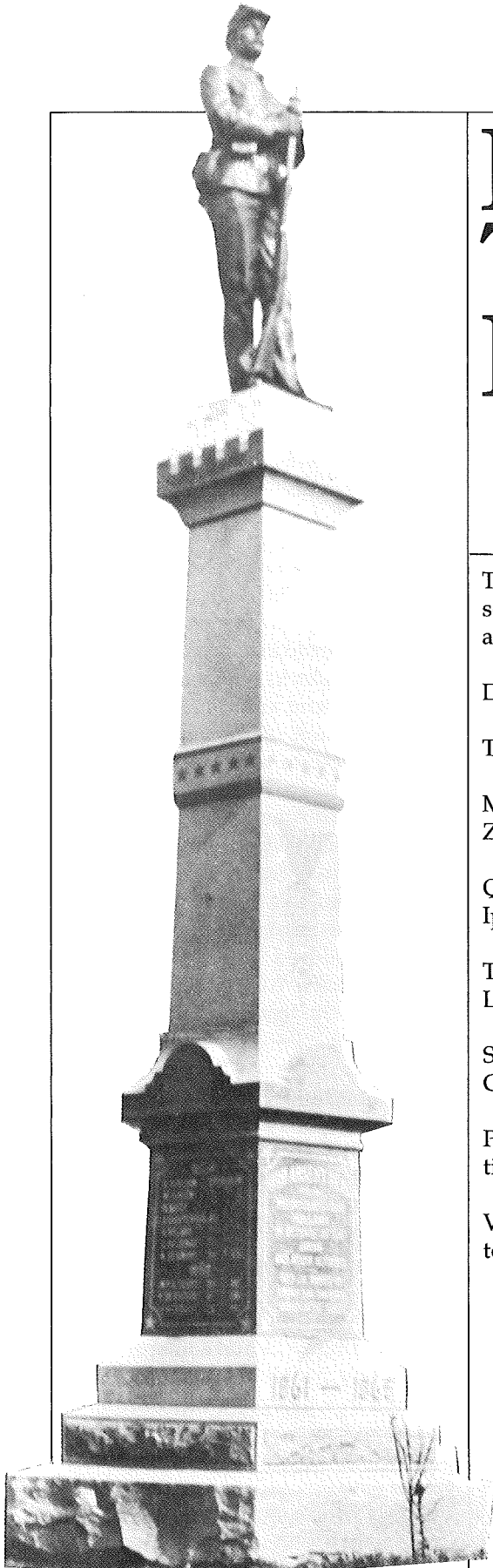


*Quonset hut for winter quarters.  
Recreation building.*

boarded a boat in Cook's Inlet. Our boat was the old coal burner *Gorgas*. But even if it was old, we were glad to get on it. We made just one more stop in Alaska—at Cordova. There we took on a load of civilians, many of whom had been working on the Alcan Highway. The rest of the trip went very smoothly, and in five days we were in Seattle. That was November 2, 1943. It was foggy, and we could not see the shore but could hear the good old train whistles again. We did not have to wait long to get ashore and into trucks. And we really used our voices







# FOR THE FUTURE

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

Dutch-Americans and the Civil War

The China Mission 1920–1944

Montana—Boom and Bust *by* David Zandstra

Quincy, Illinois: Bitter Years *by* Henry Ippel

The Life of Hendrik H. Dieperink-Langereis *by* Gerrit Bieze

Student Life a Century Ago: The Grand Rapids Theological Seminary

Pelgrim Vaders (continued), translation by the late Rev. W. K. Reinsma

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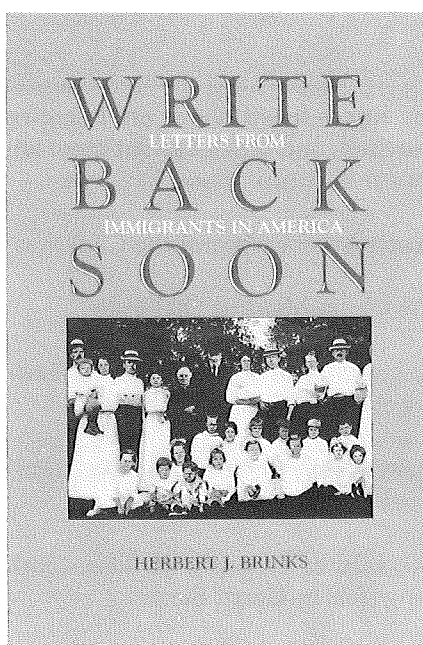
F. W. N. Huggenholtz, a Liberal Dutch Minister in America *by* Walter Lagerwey

# BOOKS *by Conrad Bult*

Brinks, Herbert J. **Write Back Soon: Letters from Immigrants in America.** Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1986. \$7.95 (paperback).

For those unable to read Dutch, Herbert Brinks's English version of his **Schrijf Spoedig Terug** is a welcome addition to the rapidly growing body of literature about the approximately one million Netherlands who came to America during the years 1820-1920. While in the Netherlands for six months during 1976, Brinks made an extensive search for letters written by Dutch-Americans to relatives and friends in the old country and found more than 1,400 of them; a few were publicly available, but most had remained in private hands. Since Brinks believes that those who experience the past are its best spokesmen, he allows these letter writers to speak for themselves in *Write Back Soon*. The new immigrants write about the hazards of the transatlantic voyage, their new American environment, sickness and health, church affairs, and numerous children. From this correspondence we learn about the risks of travel from the Atlantic coast to the Midwest and note that for the new arrivals America was a land where personal economic success depended for the most part on good health and hard work.

From the letters available to him,



Brinks has included some which reflect an immigrant attitude of critical pessimism and others which are full of hope and optimism. While on the Atlantic, one voyager wrote that his fellows "vomited like herons," but another, traveling first class, stated, "I have enjoyed the fresh air enormously this morning and found a pleasant place to sit and rest awhile." Advice to immigrants embarking on the Atlantic trip was frequently given by those who had survived the fearful sea ordeal and often included specific instructions about food and clothing. Required to provide their own provisions while at sea, prospective passengers were advised by those who had made the crossing to include a

bottle of brandy and books by Brakel, a noted Dutch theologian often read and quoted by our forefathers.

Wherever the immigrants chose to live, their remarks reveal a strong desire to own land and a pride in eventual possession of their own farms. Often the sought-after goal was a better life for their children and grandchildren in an America where "people are not treated like dogs" or where "every day we eat white bread with the boss and that tastes good." Frequent moves in search of cheap land were considered "in the American spirit." Dutch-American rural enclaves and clusters in urban environments were most attractive to those arriving in America. Surrounded by others sharing the same ethnic background, new arrivals found economic opportunity, social acceptance, marital possibilities for themselves and their children, and, most essentially, a church where they could worship and with which they could identify and a minister willing to give both spiritual counsel and down-to-earth advice about finding work and a host of other day-to-day problems. Dutch ethnic clusters in Chicago, Grand Rapids, and Sheboygan, Wisconsin, provided economic alternatives for those immigrants who first settled in the adjacent smaller towns such as Holland, Michigan; South Holland, Illinois; and Oostburg, Wisconsin. Children of im-

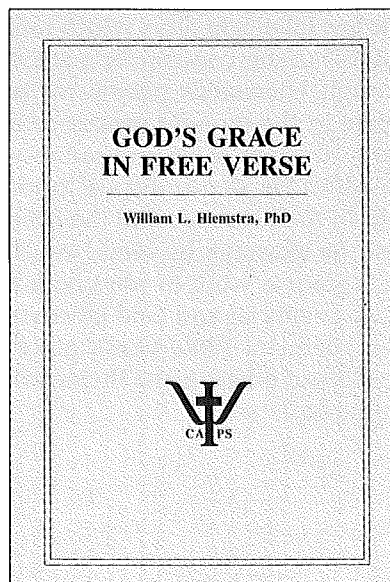
migrant parents often found making a living less strenuous in Chicago or Grand Rapids than it was on ancestral farms or in hometowns situated near these larger urban centers.

After four chapters of correspondence from Netherlanders in Michigan, the Chicago area, Wisconsin, Iowa, the West, Far West, Pacific Coast, and Canada, Brinks closes the book with a section titled "Dutch Churches in America." Here he quotes correspondence emphasizing the everyday practical piety of the immigrants, who in prayer and thought searched for God's will concerning themselves and their families. Few immigrant letters, Brinks asserts, contain material about doctrinal matters, but many do include observations about how church life and worship in America resembled or differed from that in the Netherlands. As Brinks explains, most immigrants were influenced by either the *Afscheiding* or the *Doleantie*. Those of the *Afscheiding*, who arrived first, believed the Christian life to be a matter of personal piety and pure doctrine. Consequently, in the author's views, they found much good in American institutions such as revivals, whereas those of the *Doleantie*, who arrived later, viewed American life more critically and had as their ideal an America where all aspects of life reflected God's will for mankind.

Over the years, the ideas of the *Afscheiding* (personal piety) and the *Doleantie* (Christian social awareness) have persisted as choices for the hearts and minds of the Dutch-Americans living in a pluralistic American society, where ethnic, social, and religious cohesion, with its strengths and weaknesses, is not as highly prized as is the American notion of a homogenized society—the ideal result of the Americanization process. The Americanization dilemma, which initially confronted our forefathers, comes alive in letters written by the

Christian Reformed minister John Vander Mey (1869–1933) and in those written by Western Theological Seminary professor Nicholas M. Steffens (1839–1912). For these men and others, Americanization was a mixed blessing, and after we have pondered their contemporary observations and Brinks's analysis of what they thought, we may better understand the skeptical views held on the subject by these two denominational leaders.

The letters collected by Brinks illuminate all aspects of immigrant life in the New World. Those who wrote recorded what they themselves saw and experienced. In a vicarious way their history becomes our own, and we can better comprehend our heritage once we have read this correspondence and have shared Brinks's perceptions about our ancestors' words on paper.



Hiemstra, William L. **God's Grace in Free Verse.** Farmington Hills, MI: Christian Association for Psychological Studies International, 1987. \$5.00. Available at Calvin College Bookstore.

William L. Hiemstra cares about people and has a tender spot in his heart for both common folk and those he considers underdogs of the past and present day. No doubt, his sympathy for the pained and perplexed members of the human race was nourished by tragedies in his own life such as the early death of his mother and being ignored by his father. These were exacerbated further by his singular lack of economic success in Clifton, New Jersey, a Dutch enclave where he lived until the age of twenty. He received an A.B. degree from Calvin College in 1938, graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1941, and was ordained a minister in the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1943. After a two-year pastorate (1948–1950) in First Reformed Church of Paterson, New Jersey, he served six years as chaplain at the Christian Sanatorium in Wyckoff, New Jersey. In 1957 he left the Christian Sanatorium and began his twenty-three-year tenure as chaplain of Pine Rest Christian Hospital. While there, he earned his Ph.D. from Michigan State University and held the post of executive secretary (1965–1974) of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, an organization he joined in 1954 as a charter member. Now retired, Hiemstra muses in narrative free verse about himself, his parents, his patients, and about those who exist only as creations of his poetic imagination.

In the first group of poems, titled "Precious People," we meet "the Dirty Dutch Housekeeper," "the Saintly Senile Minister," and "a dirty coal man with a clean heart" who "had only one Sunday suit, also used for funerals." Also making an appearance are "The Local Fool" and "The Pigeon-Toed Jewish Boy," whom Hiemstra and his four-year-old brother noticed walking in front of their parents' home. About this childhood incident Hiemstra writes,

I regret my wrong hostile feelings at age  
six—

Time never obliterates the past for me.

I also remember another Jew of an earlier  
century,

Who had a pure heart of love for Jews as well  
as Gentiles.

He would have shown compassion to any  
boy with handicaps.

Today's beautiful people do not  
qualify as Hiemstra's "Precious People," a group with whom he identifies  
and whom he characterizes in a manner free of condescension and pious  
nonsense. His verses pulsate with a vibrant Christian sympathy for those  
around us who exist unnoticed even though they exhibit mental anguish,  
loneliness, or trouble-filled lives.

Next we encounter the poet's "Perplexing Problems," which contains  
his contemplative reflections on the multitude of seemingly unexplainable  
aspects of the human condition. Trying to understand his father's neglect,  
Hiemstra pens the following words characterizing Frisians in general and  
his father in particular:

Frisians pride themselves on being direct  
and explicit;

This is only generally true, but applies  
mostly to criticism

And not to the expression of warmth and  
genuine affection

Expressed in a clear and spontaneous "I love  
you."

With the psychologist-poet as our  
guide, we meet a battered wife, a  
young thief, hungry children, and  
many others among modern society's  
castoffs. Hiemstra ends his poem  
about one of these, a Washington,  
D.C., bag lady, with these sobering  
observations:

You are a twentieth-century seated  
gargoyle, psychiatry's failure,

You are not alive, neither are you dead,

As you exist alone in a special twilight  
zone—

Which is more scary for us than for you.

Civilization is schizophrenic in not seeing  
you are disabled.

Alcoholism, hostility, hypercriticism,  
Christian naivete, and old age are personified in the author's verses. No

longer are these words merely arid  
textbook terms. For us they are vividly displayed in Hiemstra's characters,  
who are embodied in our next-door neighbors and frequently even  
in ourselves.

The author concludes his book of  
poems with verses on the theme  
"Profitable Pain." Under this caption  
we confront those who are victims of  
self-defeat, neuroses, inadequate personalities, or narcissism. While reading  
Hiemstra's poetic probings about their tortured pasts, we participate in  
his psychiatric analyses of those who either have risen above their limitations  
or have been conquered and warped by them, and we listen to his advice  
(frequently found in the last line of a poem), such as his counsel to a nervous  
old lady: "Nervous people can do much good, the healthy often do less."

With Hiemstra we travel on a road  
where we meet God's image bearers  
who frequently are not godly, kind, or  
lovable, and we become intimately acquainted with those who have used  
their few talents in ways which reflect Christ's humble concern for mankind.  
Through Hiemstra's poems we participate in the thought processes of a  
man well aware of sin and sadness in himself and in all members of human-  
kind. In the poet's life and the lives of those he portrays in verse, we find  
God's grace at work in ways both humanly beneficial and God glorifying.  
How Hiemstra finds God's grace in himself and others is the theme of his  
volume of verses.



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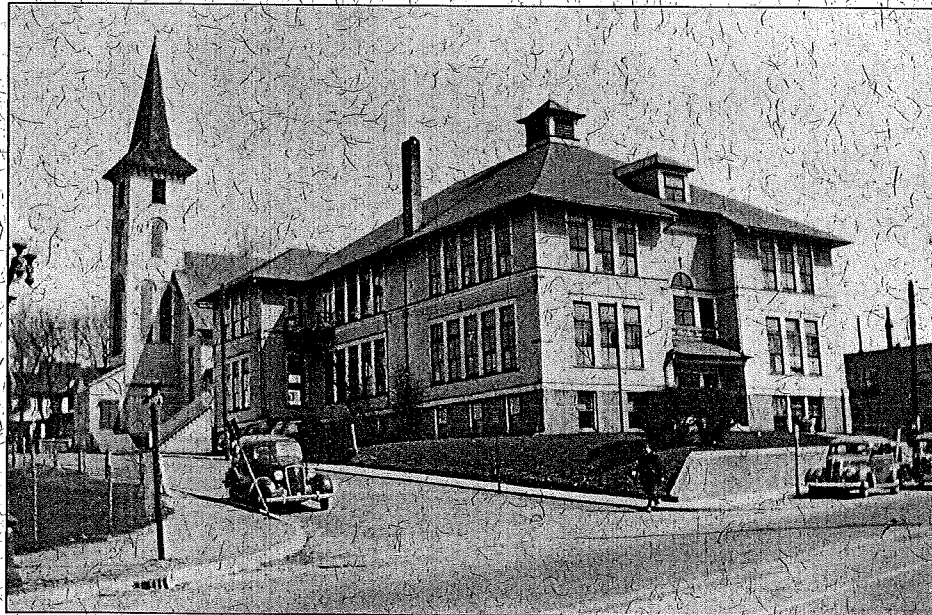


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