

# Origins

## Origins

Volume XIV · Number 2 · 1996

Historical Magazine  
of The Archives —  
The Hekman Library  
Calvin College and  
Theological Seminary  
3207 Burton SE

Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546  
(616) 957-6313

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

**H.J. Brinks**  
Editor

**Hendrina Van Spronsen**  
Circulation Manager

**Conrad J. Bult**  
Book Reviewer

**Tracey L. Gebbia**  
Designer

**Erdmans Printing Company**  
Printer

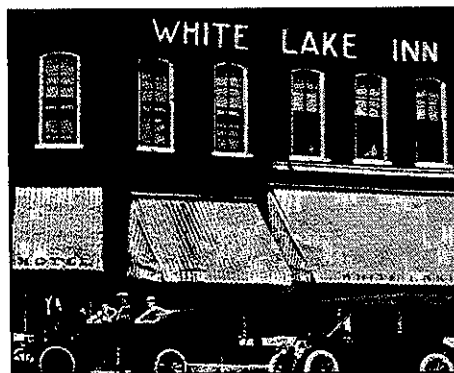


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# Eastern Avenue and Baxter, 1920–1950

With the mere mention of certain street names images, like footage from old news reels, spring quickly to mind. In Roseland, Illinois the streets are Wentworth or Michigan Avenue. In Prospect Park, New Jersey, they are North Eighth Street or Haledon Avenue while Roosevelt Road functions similarly in the memory of Chicago's West Side Dutch. In these and other Dutch



Eastern Avenue CRC, circa 1910 — viewed from skating pond located on Vanderveen Court.

neighborhoods specific streets with concentrations of ethnic shops, stores and churches revealed a panorama of daily life—frequent treks for bread, meat and tobacco; periodic purchases of clothing, medicine, shoes and home furnishings, and, of course, the dignified saunter of well-dressed churchgoers twice each Sunday. These activities and many others regularly attracted more than a thousand nearby residents to Eastern Avenue. It was the place to meet merchants and neighbors, the public space where the whole community mingled.

*Authors and contributors: Rev. Jim Kok, Eleanor (Koster) Kok, Cornelius C. Pastoor, George G. Harper, H.J. Brinks, ed.*

Eastern Avenue marked only one of Grand Rapids' several Dutch enclaves\* but it contained an especially concentrated and multi-layered slice of ethnic experience. Here, early on (1898), the parochial school supervised by the Eastern Avenue CRC became the Baxter Christian School, an independent institution governed by its own officers. Therewith it gained a constituency of Christian Reformed, Reformed and, after 1924, Protestant Reformed church members. It is even more noteworthy that the most disturbing and powerful ecclesiastical drama in the history of the CRC took shape in the Eastern Avenue CRC in 1924.

The organization of the Protestant Reformed Church that year sent tremors up and down Eastern Avenue. Residents there took on additional layers of identity based on their adherence to or disagreement with the teachings of Rev. Herman Hoeksema. Yet for all the hours of discussion, debate and some angry denunciations, the merchants and storekeepers on Eastern opened their doors to all. In commercial and educational sectors common grace reigned even though that issue segmented nearly every congregation and many families.

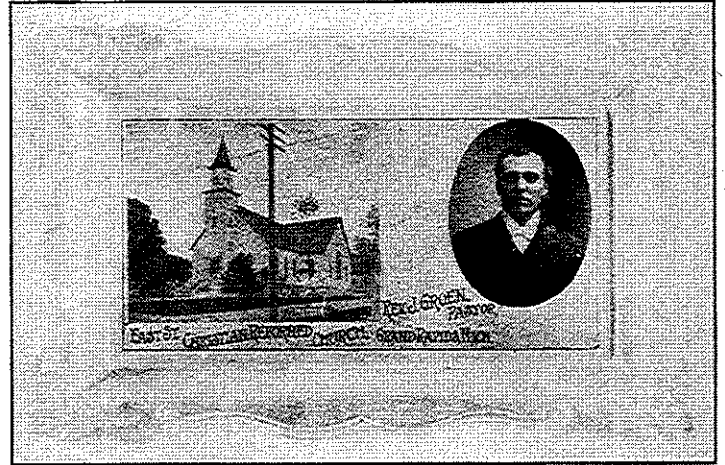
Perhaps the intensity and duration of this theological debate created a fertile market for religious bookstores because they were densely clustered on Eastern Avenue. Three of the book publishers, Zondervan, Kregel and Eerdmans, still flourish\*\* while the Baker Book Company was only a few blocks away. No doubt the 636 Eastern Avenue address of Calvin's first

\* For extensive treatments of other Grand Rapids enclaves see *Origins*, Vol. V, #2 for Grandville Avenue; Vol. VIII, #1 for Oakdale; Vol. XII, #1 for East Fulton and Vol. XIII #2 for West Leonard Street.

\*\* The bookstores were Sevensma Book Co., 347 Eastern; Smitter Book Co., 513 Eastern; Eerdmans-Sevensma at 513-15 and Louis Kregel at 525.



Laying the cornerstone for a new Eastern Avenue sanctuary, 1913.



Commemorative ashtray—Eastern Avenue CRC, circa 1918.

dormitory also provided a market for books. Book selling, in turn, provided summer employment for many college and seminary students. They usually took to the streets with a list of titles and samples which yielded a high commission.\*

These door-to-door book peddlers joined many others who sold and delivered vegetables, coal, ice and even meat on front doorsteps, but like the books the home base for most of these commodities was located on Eastern Avenue, and a trip to the bakery, druggist or shoe store involved a more public and social occasion than responding to the doorstep salesperson. A shopping foray required a degree of preparation—a clean dress, shoes and boots, and perhaps a hat.

When customers jangled the bell to enter Kok's Bakery they wore their public faces. Rev. Jim Kok recalls, it was always "good morning" or "goede morgen," and the theme of the visit was of the wonderful smell of the breads and a diligent inquiry if everything in the cases in front of them was fresh. From the back room came the sounds of bread slicing and the machine to fill

the cream puffs; and often you were greeted by Jim Kok, wrapped in an apron spotted with pieces of dough which his large hands had wiped onto it so that he might shake hands or reach for a succulent roll to display to a customer.

The atmosphere whether one was pro or anti Hoeksema was always one of friendly banter. The customers and the clerks, the baker and the visitor knew each other and their families.

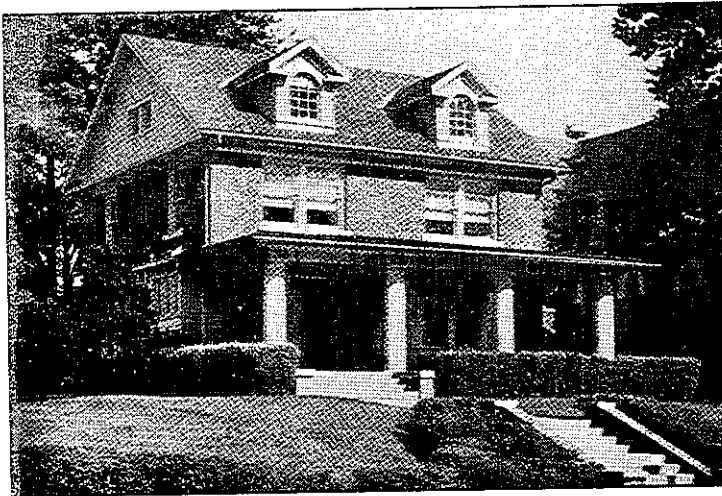
The bill of fare was diverse and taste-filled. The special raisin bread, so full of raisins that one could hardly see the white dough; the sweet *banket* and the letters made from it for the holiday season; the flaky *krakelingen* and the butter cookies; and the delicious cream puffs and eclairs which could be eaten as you walked home or rode your bike

to the park. All of it came from the rough tables and the overheated ovens in the back room, where sweating men (and a few women) laughed and labored; some with an ever-present cigar in their mouth, which only

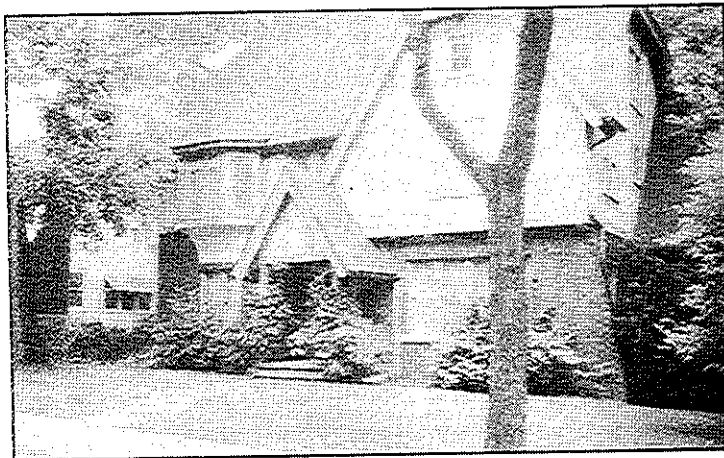


Immanuel Reformed Church, 1950s.

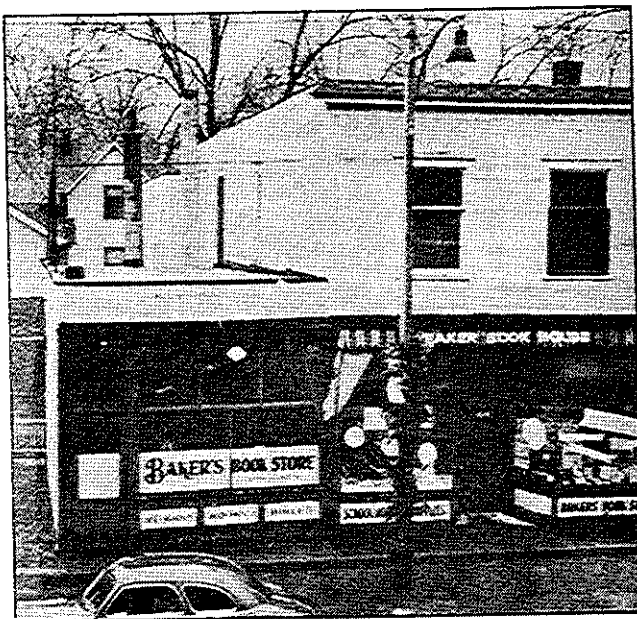
\* In 1916 E.H. Woldring was working for J. Hulst, a book dealer, and Woldring reported that he could make a forty-five-cent profit per book, i.e., over 50 percent.



Eastern Avenue CRC parsonage, completed 1921.



The Visser home joined the Eastern Avenue parsonage as one of the two most attractive homes on Eastern Avenue. The Harry Vissers were fish mongers, owners of the Sanitary Fishery.



Baker's Book Store, circa 1935.

looking for good things cheap, usually finding them; and merchants proud to supply them. Both were satisfied.

Close by were the candy store of Fred Rosema; a child's delight with those pennies saved for this shopping trip. And there was C. Thomas Grocery and Sondag's Bakery and the shoe store of the Helmus', where you got personal attention, if not much choice. A street of neighborly delight, where "Blind Ed," the most visible Black in the area, walked daily and greeted the shopkeepers all by name and often with a Dutch "wie ist er mij."

**Emeritus Professor George Harper has many memories of Eastern Avenue's shops and proprietors. The following recollections etch several of these vividly.**

Sinz' Apothecary Shop stood on the northeast corner of Eastern Avenue and Sherman Street, a two-story frame building,

with shop windows on the main floor facing Eastern Avenue. On the Sherman Street side the entire wall constituted a huge sign displaying at the top a high banner proclaiming that "This is the Birthplace of Sinz." In that religion-soaked neighborhood that was a startling idea—many of the residents and passersby possibly could not tell if Sinz were a misspelling or not. But the whole sign was more explicit and less confusing:

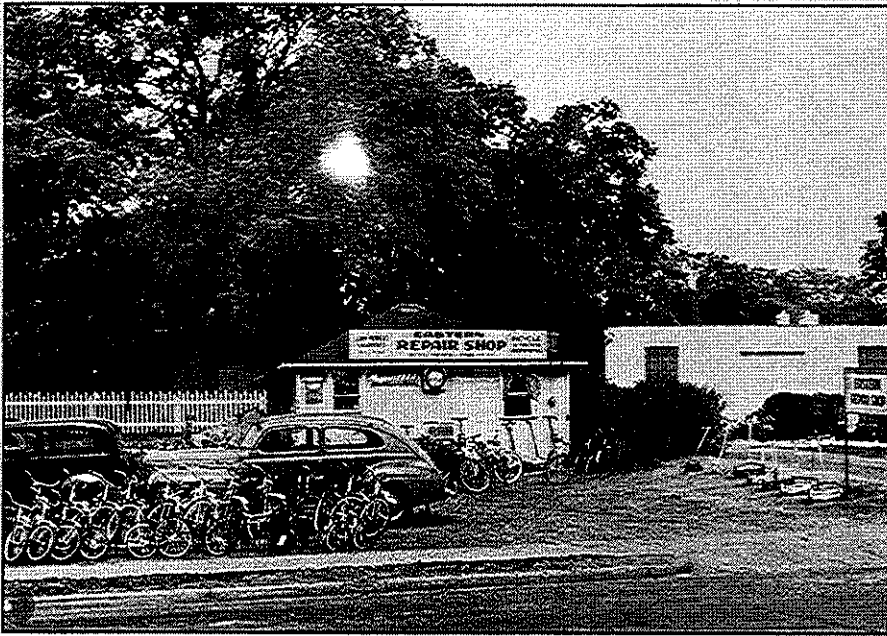
**This is the Birthplace of Sinz'**

- Bronchitis Remedy
- Pile Ointment
- Catarrh Reliever
- Corn and Bunion Salve
- Flu Medicine
- Arthritis Specific

In the front window a large sign proclaimed "Clean Out Your Flus With Sinz' Medicine." Another sign offered relief of a common complaint: "Piles Upon Piles Have Been Spent On Piles. Use Sinz' Pile Ointment for cheap and instant relief." The usual large apothecary jars, some hanging in chain harnesses, each filled with a different colored liquid, decorated the rest of the front windows, and pyramids of salve-boxes, ointment containers and bundles of licorice-root filled the remaining spaces. Inside the shop old glass cases carried trusses, pessaries, barber's tools, urinals, eye-cups, ear-trumpets, arm-slings, various kinds of dried herbs, assorted bottles and phials and jars with lurid labels, and even a tray of glass eyes. Along the wall, way up near the ceiling, at five- or ten-foot intervals, were stuffed monkeys, birds of prey, cats, and various reptiles—turtles, coiled snakes, menacing lizards.

The center of the shop featured a stand-up desk, just south of the huge heat-grill in the floor. Here stood the





*Koster's Eastern Avenue Repair and Bicycle Shop, 1939.*

Gerard Koster, founder and proprietor of the Eastern Avenue Cycle Shop (716 Eastern Avenue) learned his trade in the Netherlands where he served in a bicycle unit along the Dutch-Belgian border during World War I. Although the Dutch were officially neutral in that conflict, many Belgians crossed the border to escape German occupation and hardship. After immigrating in 1923 Koster was a plumber's assistant until 1939 when he opened a shop to repair bicycles, lawn mowers, and small engines.

The business flourished, especially after World War II when Gerard's sons (four were drafted) returned to join the business. In 1951 they constructed a new building and in 1982 they formed a corporation. But by 1987 the business had diminished because its clientele had moved out of the old neighborhood. The population shift along Eastern Avenue and in the whole region between Union and Fuller streets altered the business potential so that Gerard's sons Henry and Andrew sold out and retired. Those who have lived in the area — including thousands of Calvin College students — between 1923 and 1970 will probably remember the convenient and valuable services provided by the Eastern Avenue Bicycle Shop.

proprietor, Sinz himself. (I seem to recall that his forename was Albert, but that might not be true.) His various florid diplomas hung on the wall to the rear of the shop. Sinz was tall and thin, entirely bald, and had no lower jaw, or so it seemed. He was variously called, but not within his hearing, Baldy or Andy Gump (this last after the comic-strip character). To make up for the lack of chin Sinz cultivated a

long Western-sheriff mustache. Theories differed as to the cause of his chinlessness. Some said he had lost it in the Great War, in the German Army (these theorists never tried to explain why he had no accent); others said he had been born that way. He had an irascible disposition, and was said to have chased Black kids from the shop with a whip. But his licorice root, which we and he called sweetwood,

was held to be the freshest and tastiest in the county, and we loved it for its yellow heartwood and friable texture and of course its faint tang of licorice. It was such a treat that we dared to enter Sinz' shop just to buy it, peering at the stuffed beasts all the while, and taking care to remain out of Sinz' arm-reach.

Sinz' shop died with his death, sometime during World War II. The building was torn down, and the great sign, already badly faded, disappeared.

Another store, operated by Mr. Orie Hamstra, sold imported goods, mainly from the Netherlands. My grandfather used to go there once a month or so, and he usually bought tobacco and cigars, but once a year, in the late fall, he bought a wooden keg, about ten inches tall and perhaps seven inches in diameter, full of salt herrings from the Netherlands. These he would marinate further, in some mixture that I never knew the makings of. I do know that the herring tasted slightly sweet after Grandpa worked on them, and he would give me pieces with the bones still in, and let me know that the bones were to be eaten too, so I got used to it. The store was rather dark inside, with a few lights and dark shelves. The stock was mainly on shelves, but some was on the floor in boxes or barrels. Hamstra was I believe a Groninger, and the talk in the shop was likely to be in that dialect, so I did not catch the niceties. There were always a few non-purchasers present, and there seemed to be a lot of talk about ecclesiastical matters. Hamstra I remember as a short florid man, very energetic, with a husky voice; he had a cigar going most of the time, and so did the customers and unofficial advisers and hangers-on. Some had pipes, often clay, which Hamstra sold—these came packed in sawdust in fragrant wooden boxes. My grandpa

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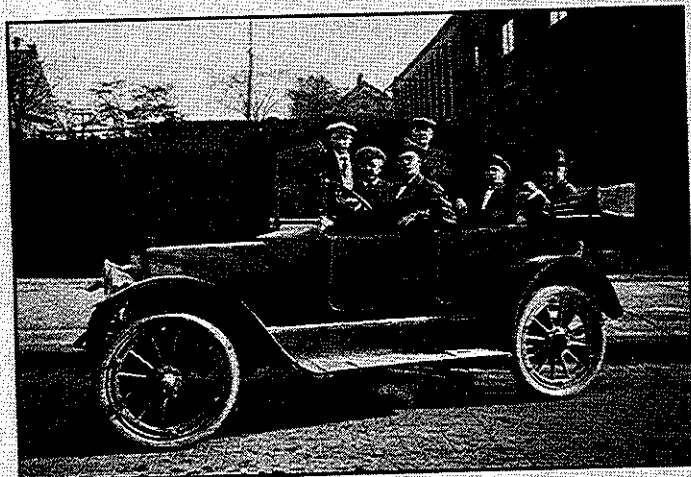
# The Pastoor Brothers

by Cornelius C. Pastoor

In 1893 Hilje Pastoor (widowed in 1888) immigrated with six of her children from Westermenden, Groningen to Grand Rapids. They were Bene (1870), Klassina (1872), Jan (1874), Cornelius (1875), Gerard (1877), and Harm (1882). Her oldest child, Peter (1868), continued the family business (livestock trading and a small meat market) and soon moved his business to Rodeschool where he prospered.

They were assisted financially by the Ryskamp family. Ryskamps also employed some of the brothers. From 1893 the children brought their wages to their mother which she divided in 1900. The children were all married within a five-month period. Three of the brothers (Bene, John and Cornelius) bought a meat market at Division and Home streets. During this time they also entered into livestock trading, buying fresh cows from farmers and trading them to urban dairymen for dry cows. These they then slaughtered. As the business prospered their mother urged the three to take the other two brothers (Gerard and Harm) into the partnership. Shortly thereafter they purchased the Eastern Avenue Market which became the base of operations. During this time (1908) they also built a small slaughterhouse in East Paris which they advertised as "Pastoor Brothers Sanitary Slaughterhouse." This was not successful and was soon closed. They invested in real estate not only for profit but also to deter local competition.

Upon his emigration (approximately 1921) Peter also became a member of the partnership. In 1926 Harm separated (not amicably) from the partnership and withdrew



Pastoor Brothers in open auto, circa 1920. L. to R. Gerard, Peter, Cornelius, Harm, Ben and John.



Pastoor family homestead, circa 1910. 812 Sherman SE, Grand Rapids. Built by John Kamp for Cornelius and Anna Pastoor in 1901. Occupied by Cornelius until his death in 1956 and Anna until her death in 1971. Brother Bene and wife Alice constructed an identical house on the lot to the west. The large barn in the rear extended across both lots and was used to house the horses (7 or 8) which were used in the meat business. Also living in the immediate area were brother Peter and wife Grietje, sister Klassina Douma and Mother Hilje Pastoor. L. to R. Anna, daughter Hilda, sons William and Charles, Cornelius.

his part of the assets. At this time they also invested in the Grand Rapids Packing Company.

The Great Depression of 1929 found them financially extended, but they survived by the hard work of sons and sons-in-law who took over the business in the mid 1930s. The Eastern Avenue site continued as either a retail or wholesale butchery until 1990. That familiar landmark appears here in two illustrations. \$

**FINE FOODS FOR CHRISTMAS**

For the big feast of the year you'll want the finest foods possible. We will have a large selection of the finest fresh dressed poultry that Michigan produces. Loads of nuts, dates, fancy fruits, in fact, everything in Fine Foods for Christmas. Make Pastoor's your headquarters for Christmas Foods.

<b>TURKEYS</b> . . . . .	lb. 25c - 28c
<b>FANCY ROASTING CHICKENS</b> . . . . .	lb. 20c - 22c
<b>FANCY HEAVY FOWLS</b> . . . . .	lb. 20c - 22c
<b>GEESE</b> . . . . .	lb. 18c
<b>FANCY DUCKS</b> . . . . .	lb. 20c
<b>OYSTERS</b> . . . . .	1/2 bushel 25c
<b>BULK MINCE MEAT</b> . . . . .	2 lbs. 25c
<b>BUTTER</b> . . . . .	2 lbs. 31c

YELLOW CORN MEAL . . . . .	5 lbs. 25c	W. OYSTERS, No. 1 Salt Shell . . . . .	lb. 25c
MARSHMALLOWS . . . . .	1/2 pkgs. 10c	ALMOND, Soft Shell . . . . .	lb. 25c
WALNUT or PECAN MEATS . . . . .	lb. 15c	MIXED NUTS . . . . .	lb. 21c

<b>ALL-STAR COFFEE</b> . . . . .	lb. 19c
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RAISINS . . . . .	2 pkgs. 25c	PIE APPLE JUICE . . . . .	2 cans 25c
ORANGE or LEMON PIEELS . . . . .	lb. 35c	Dean Orange or Grapefruit Juice . . . . .	2 cans 25c
Campbell Beans with Pork . . . . .	1 lb. can 10c	<b>BULK DATES</b> . . . . .	2 lbs. 19c
Libby's Canned Pumpkin . . . . .	2 lbs. can 10c	See-Lay Sliced Drieding . . . . .	4 lbs. 25c
Lakeside Cat Wax Beans . . . . .	can 12 1/2c	BEER . . . . .	3 bottles 25c - 30c
		FLAX FLOUR . . . . .	pkgs. 25c

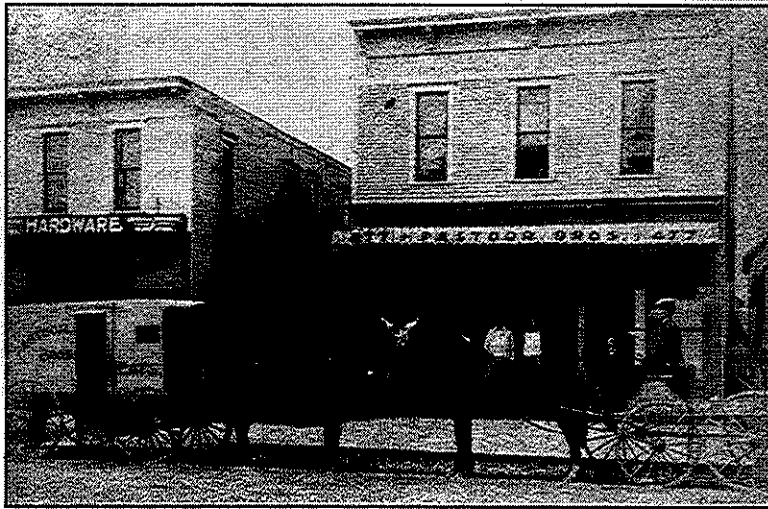
**NONE-SUCH MINCE MEAT** . . . . . 2 pkgs. 25c

**FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES**

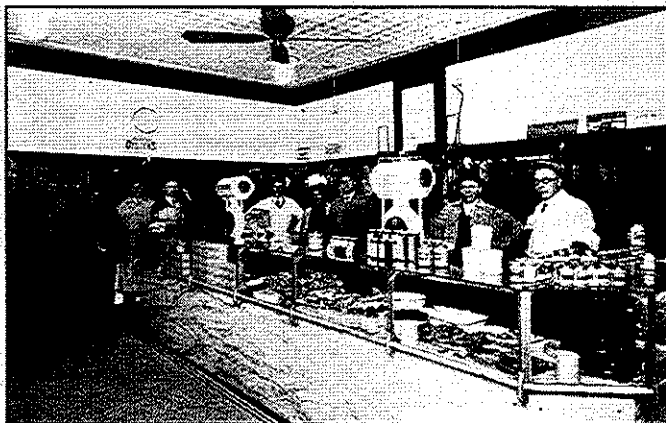
Bushell Market Oranges, 2nd Size . . . . .	4 lbs. 25c	Food Lotatoes . . . . .	2 large heads 50c
Extra Fancy Egg Apples . . . . .	5 lbs. 50c	Sweet Potatoes . . . . .	lb. 5c
Planet Michigan Cider Hearts . . . . .	5 quart 10c	White Potatoes . . . . .	15 lbs. bag 25c
Michigan Squash . . . . .	lb. 10c	Spinach . . . . .	5 lbs. 10c 1/2 lb

**PASTOOR'S**  
A Better Food Market

Pastoor Brothers advertisement, Independent Merchant, 1933.



*Pastoor Brothers Meat Market, circa 1910.*



*Interior of Eastern Avenue market. L. to R., Bill C. Pastoor, Pete Veenstra, Peter Pastoor, Albert, Don, Andy B., Cornelius, Bene, Gerrit.*

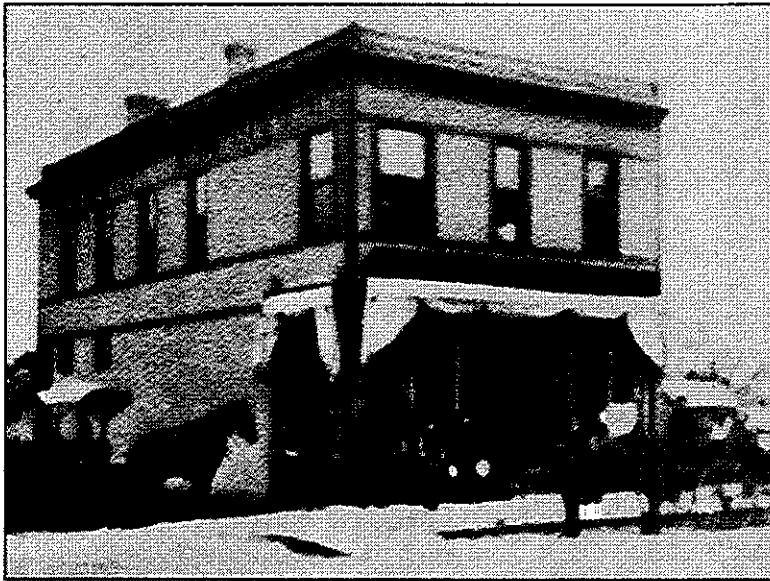


*"New" Pastoor Brothers Market and the John G. Oom Hardware Store, circa 1925. The street numbering was changed and space between the buildings was enclosed. The front of the building was veneered with bricks, while additions were also made to the rear of the building.*

had a box of these pipes in the basement of his house, and I took one or two but used them to blow soap-bubbles. My Uncle Jack told me not to keep it in my mouth for very long, for the clay was rough and, said Jack, the skin stuck to it and eventually the user developed cancer of the lips. He cited an old man on Logan Street who went about with a red-looking mouth and swollen lips; the result of keeping a clay pipe in the mouth too long, said Jack.

My grandpa visited Dood and Company, which stocked clothing, at Eastern and Sherman. I recall that the shop was also dark, and that there were gas-jet fixtures in the ceiling, but of course electric lights had replaced them, sometime in the '20s I suppose. Dood had a range: work-clothes to dominees' Prince Alberts (one was on display, but it seemed never to be removed; it was probably there to bestow class on the store). I recall that trade was waited on by two aging ladies, very thin and pinched looking. They were rumored to be spinsters, kin of Mr. Dood. My grandpa bought his gray flannel work-shirts, and now and then a hat or trousers. And his long underwear, itchy wool one-piece garments with drop seats. There were sad looking clothes dummies in the windows and stationed about the shop, draped in the latest high collars and shiny suits. There was a department for young people too, and for women. Unlike Hamstra's shop, there were no advisors and hangers-on in Dood's; the air of the shop was formidably dignified, and the people spoke in near-whispers. I doubt if much ecclesiastical gossip went on there.

**Although Eastern Avenue was clearly the concentrated core of its surrounding Dutch community, several Wealthy Street businesses functioned similarly. Even into the 1980s Peter Huizingh's Hardware**



*Ryskamp Brothers Paint Store, circa 1900.*

flourished because “Pete” was the virtual embodiment of “the helpful hardware man.” His inventory was astonishing but more than that he helped his clients assemble bicycles, and mysterious plumbing or toilet mechanisms in his store. He knew the parts they needed in advance of their asking. He was a superb “counterman,” a tradesman with knowledge, skill and personal magnetism.

**Pieter Kooistra’s business, also on Wealthy Street, was one of several house-front stores scattered across the area.**

*George Harper explains.* In the 1930s there were still many small shops in the Eastern-Wealthy area. The A & P had begun to destroy the market for these shops, but many hung on, serving a dwindling clientele. Most of the shops were family enterprises, and in some cases the family lived behind or above the shop. The shops had large front windows, which were used to display some of the goods on offer in the shop. And often the family cat would lie in the window absorbing sunlight, under the “glass curtains” that hung from brass rods at the top of the window. Gold-leaf lettering stated

the name of the proprietor and the nature of the trade; a few had elegant raised three-dimensional letters, also covered in gold leaf. Some shopkeepers placed pots of plants in the windows, often portulaca or cacti or a diminutive

orange tree. The shop often had a warning-bell attached to the door frame which jangled whenever a customer opened the door, thus informing the proprietor or his helpers that trade was at hand. The shopkeeper would then emerge from the back room and do business.

But not only business: often the customer entered in expectation of news (gossip, in fact, more often than not) as well as merchandise. The most sought-after news was church-news; then came gossip about families in the area, or of political matters in the city or neighborhood, or excited descriptions of recent catastrophes such as streetcar-automobile collisions. The shops functioned as message center also—when few had telephones, one way to communicate with others in the community was to leave a message with the shopkeeper or his assistants. The shops were more than mere commercial enterprises, then; they had important social and political functions (political in the more intimate sense).

The white-painted shop of Pieter Kooistra, in the middle of the tenthundred block of Wealthy Street, was a good example of such a shop. Set

back only a few feet from the street, it had the usual large front window with a gold-lettered sign, and the living quarters were in the back, through a blue-printed curtain and up two flights of stairs. Kooistra’s supplied canned goods, a few vegetables in season, some imported Dutch specialties, such as Groninger mustard and honey-cake, and writing materials and theological pamphlets, as well as a small collection of patent medicines. Indeed, Kooistra’s was the local outlet for the famous jalap called *Dr. Pieters’ Zokoro*, an alcohol-and-tar tonic for the faint and weak. Some of the people in the area assumed that Mr. Kooistra was somehow connected to Dr. Pieters—both were Pieters after all, I

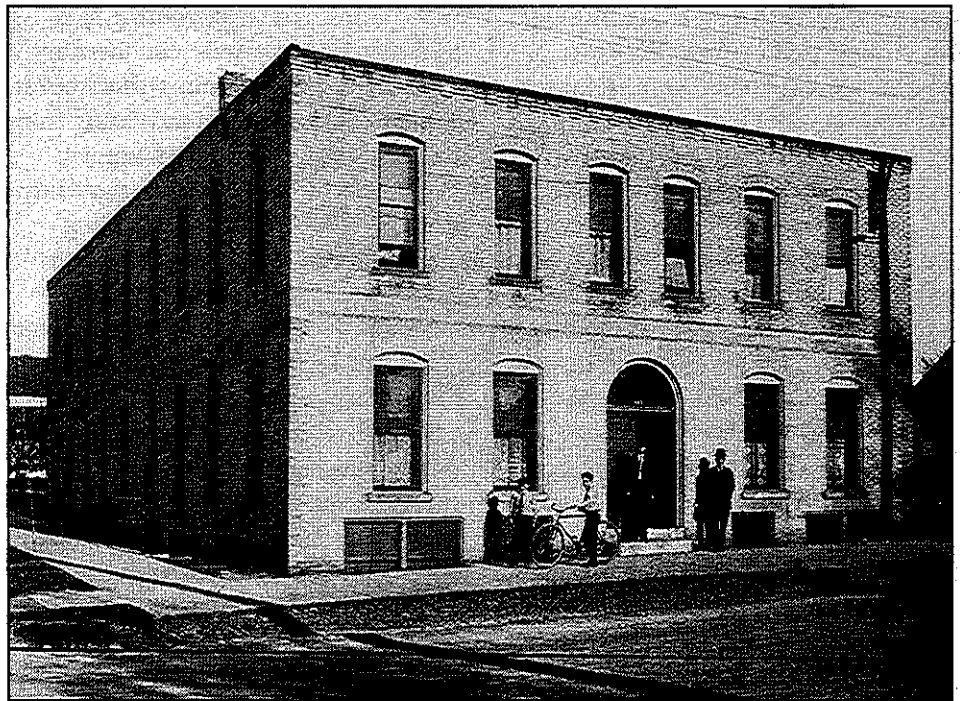
heard it said more than once. Kooistra’s carried only canned meat products, but Mr. Kooistra would supply meat from the many butchers nearby for a small fee. He took orders on Tuesday for delivery on Thursday. He walked to his customers’ houses, and on delivery day he towed a modified Janesville cart, or in the winter a sled. Most of his trade was carried on in this way; few people came to the shop itself, and some of these were there only to visit with Mrs. Kooistra or one of the spinster daughters who helped in the shop. Mr. Kooistra’s Tuesday-Thursday routine was not purely commercial; he carried information from house to house about sickness, deaths, or scandalous happenings in one of the many churches in the area. In this last line he was very ecumenical for his day—a member of the Protestant Reformed denomination himself, he relayed news about Christian Reformed, Reformed, and even Baptist matters. News about ecclesiastical affairs, the movement of preachers around the denominations, reports of break-ins, fires, collisions, street-brawls—he was a rich source of information. This was useful to a community that had little



time to gather or convey information. What with long workdays for the men and even longer days of cooking, washing, and child-tending for the women.

Over the years Kooistra had developed a kind of dramatic routine. He would enter the kitchen of his customer, ask after the family, comment on church affairs and with a grave face enumerate the tragedies in the community. Then he would supply an observation drawn from biblical stories, and moral recipes that might be useful for the family of the housewife he was just then taking an order from. On his return on Thursday to deliver whatever had been ordered he would expatiate on some of his older news, add new items, and trace further moral and spiritual implications of the various events. His job done, he would remove his gold-rimmed glasses, polish the lenses, thank the woman for the order and for the cup of tea which some gave him, clear his throat, and depart.

How he or any of the other shopkeepers extracted a living from such a



Calvin College Men's Dormitory, circa 1900-1930.

marginal business I could never understand. But he did, and he managed to rear several children in that tiny emporium, intelligent kids who were readers of theology and science. One of his children became a

distinguished medical man; another did well in business, and the two spinster daughters, who seldom left the shop, were noted for intelligence, learning, and piety. ♪

## Baxter Years

John Pastoor

In 1940, when I was seven years old, I transferred from Sigsbee Public School to Baxter Christian School. Every Monday morning my mother pinned a sealed envelope to my jacket.

*John Pastoor teaches English at the Montcalm Community College in Sidney, Michigan.*

Written across the envelope was a word I didn't understand, *Tuition*. The envelope contained four dollars and fifty cents.

Baxter Christian School was three (long) blocks west of my home at 1347 Bemis. En route, I could count five neighborhood grocery stores and a shoe store that were doing business.

On the east side of Benjamin Street,

between Sherman and Dunham, there was the C. Thomas grocery store. It was a tidy, solid-looking building set back from the sidewalk by a ten-foot concrete apron, with a brick front and a center entrance that was flanked by two large plate glass windows. It was brightly lit inside, with spanking clean linoleum tile flooring. Compared to most neighborhood stores, it seemed more antiseptic than a hospital. C. Thomas delivered groceries in a shiny black GMC panel truck, with "C. Thomas" lettered on its side in gold script. The store intimidated me, made me feel out of place. I had the feeling that it was a store for rich people. A block west, on the west side of Fuller

## Origins

Street, between Sherman and Dunham was Hulst's grocery store. This was a dilapidated two-story frame building, the upper story of which housed the Nick Hulst family. Hulst was a burly man, who also operated a huckster wagon, a Model-A Ford truck with racks to display produce, behind the cab. Hulst would stop the truck every two hundred feet or so in the middle of a street, would shut the engine off, dismount, flit his head back, and shout in a thunderous voice: "Nice fresh beans! Good 'nanas! Sweet fresh peas!" And then he would stand and wait for customers to come out of their houses, his powerful stomach pushing against the front of his bib overalls.

On Baxter Street, within half a block of Baxter School, there were four small stores. Battjes' grocery, on the north side of the street, was the smallest, its stock pretty much reduced to a few fairly staple items: canned soup, oatmeal, bread, milk, butter,

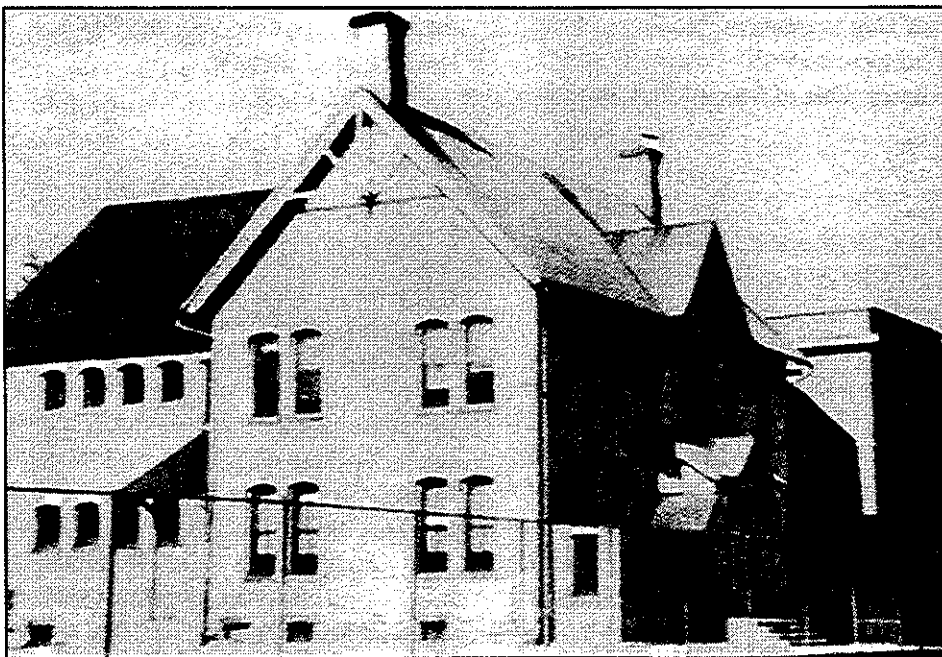
store. Besides the light coming from the front windows were two interior lights, bare electric cords with a socket and bare bulb on their ends hung from the grimy embossed tin ceiling. Up front, near the door, there was a candy counter. There were two gambling devices on one of the candy counter shelves: two punch-boards. Punch-boards were about an inch thick, about a foot and a half square, with paper-covered cells. The "big board," as we called it, had cells large enough to hold a gum-ball; you punched through a paper-covered cell with your finger and a gum-ball came out below into your cupped hand. Usually, the gum-ball was white. If you punched out a red gum-ball, you not only got the gum-ball, but another free punch. It cost a penny to take a chance. Or you could ask for "the little board." Its dimensions were about the same as the "big board" but its cells were only about an eighth of an inch

can key. It cost a nickel to play that punch-board. If you got a slip with a black round spot on it, you won your choice of three nickel candy bars, an almost unimaginable glut of candy treasure.

The "little board" was the most thrilling. If you lost, you lost your whole nickel. Only the bigger kids played it, the eighth and ninth graders. The "big board" at least gave you a gum-ball for your wager. I couldn't wait until I got old enough to get the guts to bet a whole nickel.

Two or three times a year, in assembly, in a basement room of Baxter Christian School, our principal would deliver a sermon on the evils of gambling at Battjes' grocery store. This always left me with a small dilemma: how could someone with a Dutch last name (Battjes) possibly be leading Dutch children into sin? On one hand, I more or less believed our stern old principal, a man who dressed in a double-breasted black suit, in a black vest, in black socks and shoes, in a white shirt and black tie. I thought of him as a stand-in for Jehovah, the God of wrath, and he gave emphasis to the meaning of the epigram on my report card: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." On the other hand, I couldn't bring myself to indict congenial, grandfatherly, Dutch-accented, white-haired old Mr. Battjes, who ran a gambling den in the front of his grocery store. The issue settled itself: for the six years I attended Baxter Christian School, the thrill of gambling was greater than the fear of damnation.

We acquired a new principal when I was in the sixth grade, and he was new to the neighborhood and perhaps he didn't know about Battjes' gambling operation. His campaign against gambling took another tack. He simply forbade playing marbles. We played marbles in the dirt (grass didn't have a chance) between the sidewalk and the



*Baxter Christian School, 1906-1951.*

candy, cigarettes, cigars, and pipe tobacco. It was also the neighborhood gambling den.

It was a little gloomy inside the

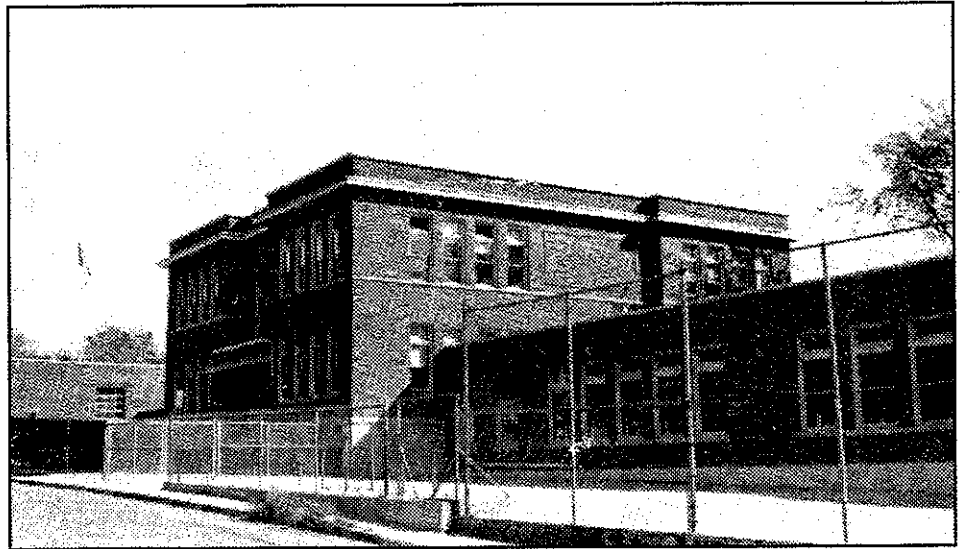
in diameter. The cells contained tightly rolled up slips of paper, which were punched out with a metal key that was a shorter version of a sardine

curb outside the school, digging pot-holes with our heels. The object was to shoot (with your thumb, the marble being cradled on your index finger) an opponent's marble into the pot with your marble, something like playing pool without a stick. If you succeeded you kept your opponent's marble. It was called "playing for keeps."

Another marble game involved dropping a marble from belt-height, to try to get it through a hole in the lid of another kid's cigar box. The pay-off was anywhere from one to five marbles, depending on the diameter of the hole in the cigar box. The new principal patrolled the school's boundaries, confiscating marbles and cigar boxes of anyone he caught gambling. It did no good to plead that you weren't playing for keeps. He never preached sermons. He confiscated. We wondered what he did with the loot. We hated him as much as we dared to hate an adult.

Besides punch-boards and marbles, there were other chances to gamble. On Wealthy Street, between Diamond Avenue and Cherry, there were three restaurants that hosted pin-ball machines. Scores above a machine's established minimum racked up free games in a no nonsense little window in the comic-book garish score board. It wasn't easy to win free games in that pre-flipper era. The only manipulations of the ball were with the shooting plunger (to get the ball to drop just-so to begin its course through the bumpers) and by jolting the machine's corners with your palms, just short of lighting up the tilt sign, which ended the game, no matter how many of the five balls there were left to put in play. Free games could be played. Or they could be cashed-in at the rate of five cents a game.

For a couple of years there was a pin-ball game called Monterey in one of the restaurants. I got better and better at playing it. I came to feel just



*Baxter Christian School, 1951-1970.*

how hard I could jolt it before it tilted, and I got the feel of the plunger. Some weeks I made as much as three dollars from that machine, not as much as the four-fifty I got for peddling 110 copies of *The Grand Rapids Press* six days a week, but it was a nice supplement of sinful wages that I didn't dare to report to my parents and that I spent on movies and Milky Ways and Clark bars and hamburgs on toasted (five cents extra then) buns and bottles of Pepsi-Cola (six ounces more than Coca-Cola for the same five cents). I remember the jingle:

*Pepsi-Cola hits the spot,  
Twelve full ounces, that's a lot —  
Twice as much for a nickel, too:  
Pepsi-Cola is the drink for you.  
Nickel, nickel, nickel,  
Trickle, trickle, trickle, trickle.*

Stuit's grocery was across the street from Battjes'. It was a small store, in a brightly painted frame building, and it was fairly busy. It did a brisk delivery business, especially on Saturdays. Unlike patient Mr. Battjes, a woman named Pearl hurried our selection of candy by saying, "Come on now, make up your mind."

Monsma's meat market was next door to Stuit's. Its two-story frame building was faced with substantial red brick. Its proprietors were John and William Monsma, sons of its deceased founder. Their mother lived above the store. The sign that hung over the sidewalk said MONSMA in gold letters against a black glittered background; the sign in one of the front windows said Monsma's, perhaps honoring the founder; the bills they presented to customers were headed Monsmas', perhaps for the sake of accuracy. Besides meat, there was a fair stock of groceries, and it did a good delivery business, with afternoon runs every day and two runs on Saturday. The Monsmas had modernized the store by replacing the incandescent light fixtures with fluorescents. One of the Monsma brothers was thin, brisk, gray and silent; the other was taller, full-fleshed, ruddy, and talkative. It was the talkative brother I once saw blowing into his felt hat and then putting his nose into it as though to smell his own breath. He noticed me watching him and said, "I think I may be coming down with a cold." I knew better, but using a line I had heard on the Jack Benny radio show, I quipped,

## Origins

"Well, halitosis is better than no breath at all." The furrow between his eyes deepened as his expression changed from bemusement to resentment. "You come here," he commanded from behind the meat display case. I walked around the counter and followed him past the chopping blocks and the band saw and into the gloomy back of the store, where we sat on crates, facing each other. With his ruddy face a foot from mine, he preached a short sermon about "the unpardonable sin of taking the Spirit lightly." Afterward, I repented to myself for having been stupid enough to intrude into the sacred world of adult propriety.

And on Bemis Street, across from Baxter School's east playground, was Hoodeman's, a shoe store. It was housed in a narrow, tidy, frame building whose shiny gray paint always seemed fresh. There were two small display windows on each side of its inset front door. The display changed seasonally. For half a year there were black work oxfords and boots; for the other half there were black rubber boots with metal buckles. I don't remember ever seeing anyone go into the store, and the only light I ever saw burning in it was a shaded incandescent bulb that hung over a work bench in the rear, where I could see someone bent over a repair job.

Directly east of Baxter School, on the southeast corner of Bemis and Diamond, there was another store, a grocery store that had closed. Its large plate glass windows had been white-washed from the inside, but the ubiquitous Salada Tea sign on the outside of one of its windows remained. My recollection may be faulty, but I wonder if the upper story was where a hunchbacked man lived. Now and then he'd be on the street, his head jutting forward like a turtle's, dressed in dark gray tweedy work pants, ankle-high, black work boots, and a windbreaker. Baxter School

students teased him by throwing sticks and stones at him and yelling, "Barney, Barney, Barney, crazy Barney."

There were two other small stores within a block or so of Baxter School. De Vries's grocery, in the middle of the 1000 block of Logan, was a

### Eastern Avenue 1920 - 1950\*

West Side		East Side	
347	Sevensma Books		
425	Rozema, M.D.	400	Visser Home
433	Knol - The Tailor		
503	Van Dyk's Barber Shop		
505	Gelder's Electric Company	506	Eastern Avenue CRC
511	W. Hoeksema - Shoes		
513	Smitter Books		
525	Louis Kregel Books		
527	Jim's Lunch		
529	Barber - Pete and George		
531	Ryskamp Paint		
543	Zondervan Publishing Company	538	Dr. Hunderman
539	P. Olthof - Ideal Food Market		
545	Steele Brothers - Coal, Grain, Feed	548-50	Eastern Dept. Store
551	Kwantes Store		
553	C.N. Smith, Eye Doctor		
559	Vander Ploeg Grocery		
603	Barker's Holland American Radio Shop	612	Oakdale Coal/Lumber
613	Kok's Bakery		
615	Keegstra's Meat Market		
617	Rosema's Candy Store		
623	Dykema's Garage	636	Calvin Dormitory
651-55	Kolkman Furniture		
701-03	Boerema Clothes/Shoes		
707	Knol's Garage		
711	Knol the Tailor		
735	De Boer Sisters	742	Koster's Bike Shop
743-45	Zaagman Funeral		Roskamp Super Service
753	Pastoor Meat	760	Immanuel RCA
800	John Oom Hardware		
800	Frank Kuyper, D.D.S.		

\* The occupants changed often over the years so that the merchants listed here are probably not exactly as everyone will remember them.



<p>DR. CHESTER N. SMITH <i>Optometrist</i> Examinations by Appointment Phone 8-7153 533 Eastern Ave. Grand Rapids</p>	<p>ROSKAMP SUPER-SERVICE STATION Corner Bates and Eastern Ave. Closed Sundays Located 13 years on Eastern Avenue In the tire and battery business we will appreciate whatever you can buy at our station. C. L. ROSKAMP, Prop.</p>
<p><i>For Expert Cleaning Call</i> RELIABLE CLEANERS Phone 86980 MR. J. R. WHITEFIELD, Mgr. Hats cleaned and blocked. All work guaranteed.</p>	<p>FRED G. MAHLER &amp; CO. 524 Eastern Ave. EXPERT WATCH, CLOCK, JEWELRY REPAIRING We Buy Old Gold</p>
<p>IDEAL FOOD MARKET P. Oithof &amp; Sons Fresh, Salt and Smoked Meats Smoked Fish and Poultry Phone 86-428 539 Eastern Ave.</p>	<p>SPECIAL LOOSELEAF NOTEBOOK WITH FIFTY SHEETS TEN CENTS D. KWANTES 5c-\$1.00 STORE Eastern Avenue Grand Rapids</p>
<p>HUSSELMAN'S SHOE SHOP Excellent Shoe Repairing Neatly Done 739 Eastern Ave. SE. Grand Rapids</p>	<p>ORIE'S BETTER FOODS 551 Eastern Avenue Meats — Groceries — and Imported Goods</p>

1936 Baxter Bugle advertisements.

brightly lit place that seemed to flourish. Like the other stores in the neighborhood, its front was established flush with the sidewalk. Another store, this one nearly dead, was on the north side of Sherman Street, less than a stone's throw from Neland Avenue. Its stock consisted of half a dozen items in a candy case and a few loaves of bread. Otherwise its shelves were empty. Its back room and its upper story were living quarters.

The nemesis of all of these stores was Food City, a supermarket, a few blocks north, in the 1100 block of Wealthy Street. After it opened, it

began to siphon off business from the small neighborhood stores. It wasn't as brightly lit as it might have been, and it was a favorite for shoplifting cigarette papers, tins of Prince Albert tobacco, and bags of dried peas (ammunition for pea-shooters, which were shoplifted from Seitz' dime store). A year or so later, however, an A&P opened, just to the west of Food City, on the southeast corner of Wealthy and Diamond. It did an enormous business. It employed night-shift stockers who came to work at eleven at night on Thursdays and Fridays stocked shelves until eight the next mornings, when the store opened for its busiest two days of the week. The stockers were mainly students. Since there was no managerial supervision on this shift, the first thing they did after punching in was to hustle beer into a frozen food display case, to cool it down as quickly as possible. Later, at about three in the morning, they fried A&P steaks in the back room, on a gas burner that was no longer used to render lard. The store was not completely self-serve. It had six times more meat display cases than Monsmas',

behind which customers were individually served (take a number and wait your turn) by a staff of white-smocked clerks. By nineteen fifty-five, the neighborhood grocery stores were all closed. Food City hung on for a year or two more before it closed. The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company had done all of them in.

Tom the Clipper's barber shop was across the street from the A & P. He had a reputation for being able to complete a pretty good haircut in about five minutes. But that wasn't his only cachet: his waiting area was well-stocked with comic books, proscribed reading among Dutch Calvinists. Tom, however, had an undeniably Dutch last name and his wife taught in one of the Christian schools. Most of his customers were Dutch Calvinist kids. It wasn't always easy to tell how many customers were ahead of you. Some of the kids came in to read comic books, pretending to wait for a haircut. Tom seemed to be an inveterate coffee drinker. He kept a quart thermos on the shelf beneath the mirror, from which he poured an amber fluid—just an ounce or so at a time—into a coffee cup, from which he took tiny sips. My mother insisted that I get my hair cut by a barber four blocks east, on Lake Drive, in the 1500 block, next to the Eastown theater. This barber went to our church and he charged five cents less for a haircut than Tom the Clipper. He could see the Eastown theater from his shop. Once, while giving me my bi-monthly haircut, he told me that he had seen me enter the Eastown (admission to the Saturday afternoon matinee was seven cents, a bag of popcorn a nickel). He preached at me through his loose dentures about worldly amusements, dilating on the immoral lives of movie stars, inflicting his bad breath on me, and concluding with a threat to inform my parents and my consistory. He never cut my hair again. It was then that I added theft to

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the sin of worldly amusements: before I earned paper route wages and won money gambling at pin-ball, I stole deposit bottles out of neighborhood garages and cashed them in, in order to afford the more expensive haircut at Tom the Clipper's. I gladly paid Tom the Clipper his nickel premium and got to read comic books while I waited.

The most frightening store near Baxter School was Sinz's, on the northeast corner of Sherman and Eastern. It was larger than most nearby stores. It was also more dilapidated. There was the ghost of a sign on its weathered gray wooden side: Sinz' Reliable Bronchitis Remedy. The place may have been some kind of drug

store. Its large front windows were streaked, dusty filters through which one could peer into a deep, mysterious gloom. I don't remember ever seeing any interior lights burning.

The mystery of the place was partly established by tales from my mother. When she was a child, she said, you could play a Ouija board there for a penny. According to her, Old Man Sinz would hold the board and somehow manipulate the flat-iron shaped pointer to spell out an ominous few words, letter by letter. Once, she said, it spelled out "Run for your life." "I ran out of there as fast as I could. I didn't go back to play Ouija for a long time," she said.

When I was in the sixth grade, one

of my classmates

suggested that we go to Sinz's to buy Cubebs. I didn't know what Cubebs were, but he explained that they were cigarettes that kids could buy legally. They were, I believe, some kind of herbal cigarette that presumed to be an analgesic

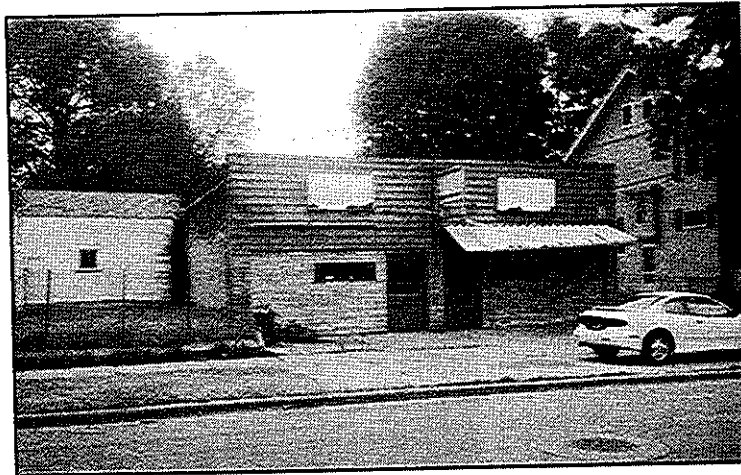
for bronchial ailments. It was, however, the idea of buying and smoking cigarettes that excited us, and I was glad for the chance to be led astray by an evil companion.

The interior of the store was as dark as dusk. Merchandise lay helter-skelter

behind the dingy glass of display cases. Behind the counters and cases the stock on the half-empty shelves was shopworn and dusty. It smelled like an ancient sepulchre. My wicked classmate seemed familiar with the place and I followed him to the rear of the store, where an old man sat at an ice cream table his hands resting on a cane between his legs. "A pack of Cubebs," my classmate said. The old man stared at him for a moment and asked, "You got a dime?" I scabbled my five-cents share of the price out of my pocket and put it in the old man's outstretched hand. My friend looked at me with his eyebrows tilted in a silent question. All I had was the five cents the old man had in his hand. Slowly the old man rose from his chair and limped and caned his way behind a counter. He took a pack of Cubebs from a shelf, opened it, counted out five cigarettes, and pushed them across the counter at me. We smoked them behind some bushes on a bank behind Sherman Street Christian Reformed Church and wondered about the mysterious pleasure that the Cubebs somehow didn't deliver.

Across from Sinz's was Henry's drug store, on the northwest corner of Sherman and Eastern. Henry was a dapper, sharp-eyed man. Rumor had it that he was the formulator of Pepto-Bismal. I couldn't reconcile the rumor to the fact that Pepto-Bismal sponsored a big-time network radio program and that Henry's operation seemed pretty small-time. But Henry seemed to be something of a local health guru. I often heard adults mention Henry when they were swapping stories about their ailments: "I asked Henry about them stabbing pains, and he said . . . ."

On the 1500 block of Wealthy Street, just west of Doeping's Dry Goods, was a pool hall. Its plate glass windows were painted a dark green from their bottoms to about five feet



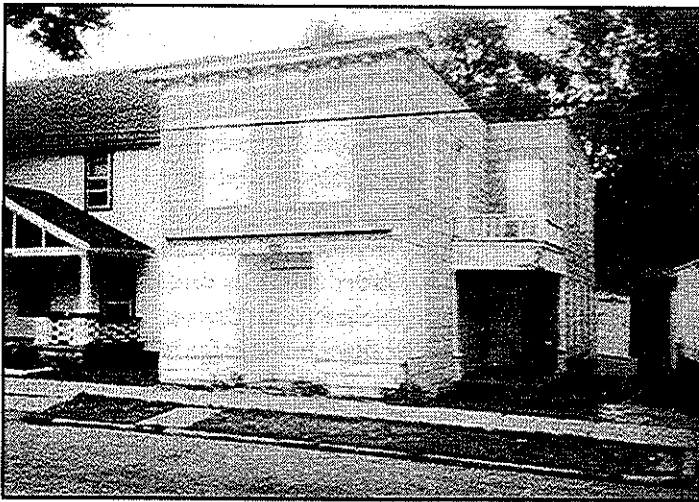
Store in the Baxter School neighborhood: formerly C. Thomas on Benjamin Street.



Store in the Baxter School neighborhood: formerly Hulst Grocery on Fuller Avenue.

high. I couldn't see over the paint and into the place, but I sometimes hung around the door to get a glimpse of what went on in there. There was a row of six or seven pool tables and chairs along the walls. Each pool table was lit by a pair of round green-shaded fixtures that hung down from the ceiling at the ends of their cords. Cigarette and cigar smoke slowly swirled under the lights. I could see

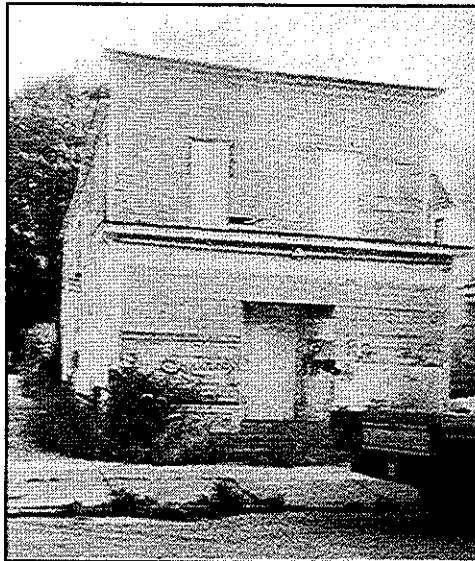
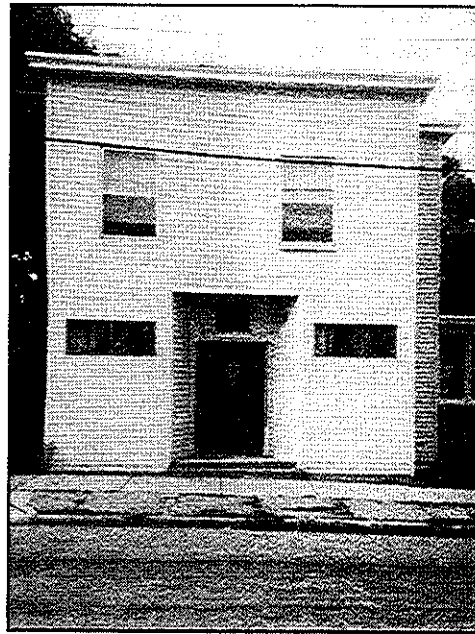
dered what *kind* of adult would do such a thing. I asked him about Recreation and he explained, "That's the devil's word for sin." My grandfather's explanation added excitement



Three boarded-up stores near Baxter Christian School site.

men with felt hats bent over the tables, with cue sticks in their hands, with cigarettes or cigars tucked into the corners of their mouths. It looked sinister (a word I now knew from listening to the radio drama "The Shadow") and decadent (a word I would have used if I had known it). I knew nothing about pool or billiards and I couldn't understand why the place had the word Recreation as part of its name, so I asked the only adult I could trust about the place. My maternal grandfather told me, "There are only two kinds of people who spend time in such a place: people who belong there and people who don't. The people who belong there are low-lives, but the term was close to self-defining. The idea that there were adults who did things that they knew they shouldn't probably shouldn't have surprised me but it did. I won-

to what had been mere curiosity. I snatched an empty chicken crate from behind a nearby grocery store and stood on it so I could see over the paint and into the pool hall. The third or fourth time I did this, I saw a red-haired man who most certainly didn't belong there. He and his family almost always sat only a few pews from us in church. It was perhaps ten years later, when my parents were away for a week and I was playing hooky from high school, that I encountered the same man in the second floor hallway of an old hotel in Newberry. I had been fishing and had rented a room in the hotel. The bathroom was down the hall but it was occupied. As I stood and waited, I



heard water splashing and an off-key baritone singing "Buffalo Gals": "Ain'cha, ain'cha, ain'cha, ain'cha comin' out tonight, to dance by the light of the moon." Five or ten minutes later, the red-haired man came out. He was unsure of his balance, and when I greeted him by name he said, "Jus' call me Red, kid. I know yer ol' man. C'mon, lemme buy yuh a beer."

I took two routes to Baxter Christian School. The more conventional was down the sidewalks. The more interesting was down two long blocks of alleys between Bemis and Logan streets. There were garages to see into. There was old man Smith's '34 Ford,

up on blocks, its tireless rims waiting for tire rationing to end. He had finally given up driving it on the rims. Once, he had tried stretching his gasoline ration by diluting gasoline with kerosene: it was a wonderful bewilderment to hear the noise of the rims on the pavement and to see the black smoke pour out of the exhaust.

And there was the adventure of thinking I had discovered a corpse. I found a fully-clothed man lying on his back, next to the alley in a large lilac clump, his hat off to one side, his face turned to it, and his eyes closed. I

raced home and told my mother that I had found a dead man. She came with me and when she saw him, she said, "It's only old man Honneker," and turned and went back home. That night, at dinner, there was a guarded dialogue between my parents, partly in Dutch, the gist of which was that, well, old man Honneker didn't make it home from A-L-S—their code word for Al's, a saloon on Lake Drive — and no wonder he'd rather sleep in the lilac bushes the way his wife always yelled at him.

And there were, sometimes, my tormentors, boys, a few years older

but he continued to torment me. One day, when I was halfway down the alley, I saw them turn into it half a block away. It was winter. There was a Flexible Flyer sled in a back yard, up on a bank. I climbed the bank, took the sled, and hid behind the side of a garage that projected above the bank. When they drew even with the side of the garage, I hurled the sled at them from the top of the bank. One of them screamed. I ran. When I got home from school that afternoon, my mother was on the phone, talking in an apologetic, somber set of inflections. After she hung up, she cross-examined

tion than it was a lecture: "O, Father in heaven, we come to Thee today to beseech Thee in Thy ever-loving grace to enter the minds and hearts and spirits of these, Thy children, that they may multiply the talents Thou has given them, so that they may grow in knowledge and wisdom, the better to serve Thee and to honor Thee and to honor their parents who have sacrificed for the sake of Kingdom work . . ." etc. One noon-hour, a classmate and I were fooling around in a neighborhood barn (its owner milked half a dozen cows and peddled milk from a horse-drawn van) and discovered enough baby mice in the hay to fill two Blue Tip matchboxes. Ten minutes before afternoon classes began, we distributed the baby mice into each of the teacher's desk drawers. It took better than an hour for her to open a drawer. When she discovered a mouse, she picked it up as though it were as ordinary as a piece of chalk and with perfect, unstudied nonchalance, tossed it into the wastebasket at the right-hand corner of her desk. She repeated this once or twice during the afternoon. We were in the power of a woman who was not subject to the ordinary laws of human nature.

A few months later, we were all dazzled and awe-stricken by something she had done *outside* of class. *The Grand Rapids Press* was impressed enough to put her unsmiling picture on its Saturday front page. We fully expected her to show up in class on Monday morning, dressed in glowing white raiment. Well, she showed up in class on Monday, dressed in her usual tailored suit, a full, cream-colored blouse with a large droopy tie at its throat, seamed, rayon stockings (the seams up the backs of her legs were never crooked), and her sensible Cuban-heeled, laced shoes. She conducted classes as usual. She never mentioned the event, not even when the two Ruthies—who were always



Typical neighborhood grocery store interior.

than I, who also walked the alley en route to Baxter Christian School. I sometimes spoke to them but they'd snarl back, telling me not to walk closer to them than twenty feet. The diminutive of the first name of one of them was ambiguous, one of its meanings a vulgarity. I'd taunt him about his name; he'd throw me in pricker bushes or put snow down my neck or roll me in a mud puddle. I couldn't resist taunting him and I had the foolish notion that one day I'd be able to resist him and beat him up. Finally, I learned to quit taunting him,

me about the events of the morning, wondered about the wickedness of injuring someone's back and at the seriousness of hospitalization. I denied everything. I was secretly satisfied. The bullies never bothered me again.

One of the teachers at Baxter Christian School seemed imperturbable. Our nick-name for her was Miss Vander Stern. We were callow enough to be amused by the ambiguity. She was a no-nonsense person whose tight reins kept our mouths and manners in place. When she prayed the opening prayer of the day, it was less supplica-



campaigning to become teacher's pets—asked how she had the courage. Her response was to pause to let the icy effect of her stare settle over everyone and then to resume her obsession with the difference between transitive and intransitive verbs.

She, who could not drive a car, amid panicked shrieks of passengers on a city bus, had calmly risen from her seat, had made her way to the front of the bus, and with her hands had pushed on the brake pedal, and had stopped it. The driver had collapsed over the wheel, and the bus began to careen down Michigan Street hill. She had explained (matter-of-factly and a little impatiently, I imagined) to a reporter that she had often watched bus drivers' feet while they drove their buses, and of course knew which was the brake pedal.

I wish I could remember her as an intact monument to rigid poise and relentless purpose. A hairline crack, however, began to develop when another student and I were being punished by staying after class to write lines, three hundred repetitions (on lined Jumbo pads): "I hereby resolve to deport myself in class in a more seemly manner." She never assigned short little sentences, such as "I will not chew gum." And there was to be no cheating. If she caught us trying to hold two or three pencils at a time, she threw away what we had written and you had to begin again. And she always caught us. This punishment was exquisite torture: we both had large paper routes, and the hour it would take to write the lines would put us way behind our schedules. I'd miss *Jack Armstrong*, *Captain Midnight*, *Tom Mix*, and *Terry and the Privates*, fifteen-minute radio adventure serials. My classmate would miss an hour of playing (he later became the Wealthy Street champion) pin-ball machines in Wealthy Street cafes and drug stores. While we were laboring at our lines,

someone knocked at the door. Miss Vander Stern opened the door, stepped out, and shut the door. We could hear a muffled conversation taking place outside the door. My classmate got up, opened a window—we were on the second story—crawled out onto the ledge, leaped, caught the limb of a maple, went hand-over-hand to the trunk, and made his way down to the sidewalk. I shut the window.

When she came back into class she asked, "Where is Robert?" I was tempted for a moment to ask who Robert was—we called him Toothy, because he had a full set of dentures, which he'd take out and show you if you asked—but I thought better and said, "I don't know." This was the technical truth: I didn't know *exactly* where he was. He could have been on Diamond Street, heading for his papers, or on Wealthy Street or on Virginia Street, peddling his papers.

She looked in the closet. No Toothy. She asked me again, "Where is Robert?" raising her voice a few decibels louder than I'd ever heard from her. Again, I gave her the technical truth: "I don't know." Her eyes narrowed and her lips stretched into a thinner than usual straight line. While I pretended to concentrate on writing my lines, I was secretly thrilled by her teetering a little on her platform of imperturbable composure.

The next morning, immediately after the "Amen" of the morning prayer, she asked, "Robert, where were you?" What she really meant was, how did you get out of the classroom without my seeing you? He replied, "What do you mean, Miss Vander Stern?" That did it. Toothy's slip of using her nick-name and his feigned innocence cracked her wide open. She twisted her face into a confusion of anguished, tortured lines. She screamed: "Tooth—Robert Kuik-ster-maas! Tell me this instant where you were!" He answered, "I don't know

what you mean." She fled from the room in tears. We were horrified and delighted.

Helen Van Laar's sixth grade class began every morning—after prayer—with a bit of singing. Song books were passed out—was it the *Golden Book of Songs*?—and students suggested songs and Miss Van Laar accompanied us on an old upright piano. One day a student suggested that we sing "Skip to My Lou," a song we sang now and then. Miss Van Laar looked non-plussed, and with a frown on her face, half mumbled that she had been told that we could no longer sing that song. Later, Ruthie De Borst told me that her father, a Board member, had said that "Skip to My Lou" was proscribed because it was about dancing, a worldly amusement.

Many of the stores in my expanded neighborhood seemed fascinating and significant to me when I was a child, perhaps because many of them seemed to be extensions of their owners' personalities. Baxter Christian School seemed a strange place to me indeed: for years, the students and teachers, who seemed so unlike me, fascinated me. By 1948, however, when I graduated from Baxter's ninth grade, neither the neighborhood nor the school had much of a grip on my imagination. The neighborhood had become, little by little, to seem hopelessly provincial. I felt a restless ambivalence about Baxter School: on one hand, it seemed to me to be as boring and provincial as the neighborhood; on the other hand, Ray Kooi and Katherine Doezema, two very good ninth grade teachers, had intelligence and elan, and that seemed to validate some of what went on. ♣

# Netherlanders in the Muskegon, Michigan Area

Tressa M. Rop LaFayette

Muskegon has a rich Dutch heritage reaching back nearly 150 years. Isaac Brandt, who made his home on Myrtle Street, was one of the first Hollanders to settle in Muskegon. He came from the Netherlands to Sheboygan, Wisconsin in 1848. After living for short periods in Wisconsin and Chicago, he and his brother James moved to Muskegon in 1853. They worked for their passage to Muskegon aboard a schooner on Lake Michigan.

Of his early days in Muskegon, Brandt told a reporter for the *Muskegon Daily Chronicle* in 1899, "I was, I think, the third Hollander to come to Muskegon, then a village of no great size, the ones before me being John Beukema and John Bronson. My

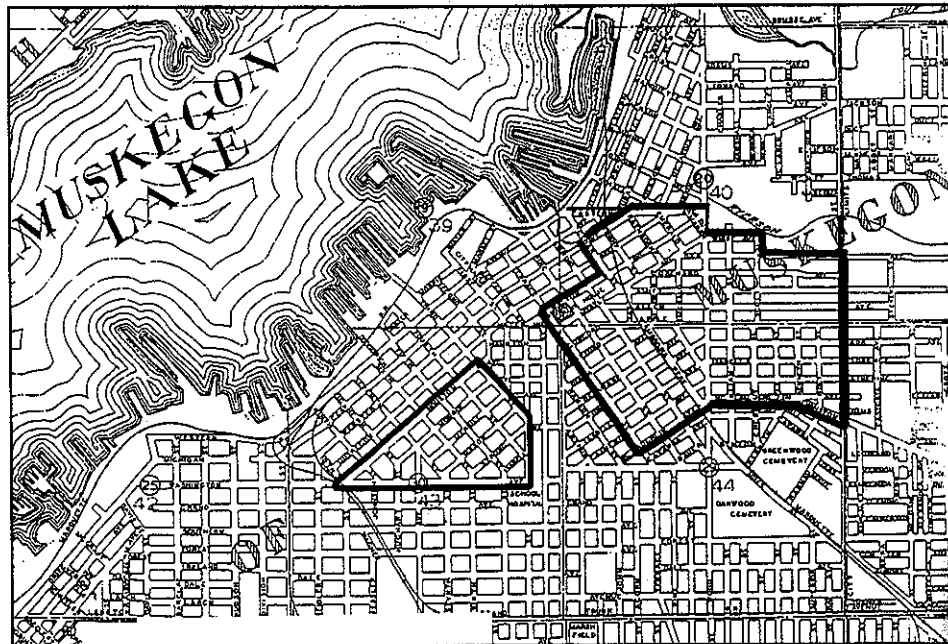
brother, James Brandt, made four of us Hollanders here then."

Brandt spent thirty-five years in the horse-teaming business and was a highly respected citizen. John Beukema was also very well known in Muskegon, and his descendants played a major role in building the community. Between 1853 and 1857, Dutch people trickled into Muskegon slowly, but by 1859, their numbers were increasing rapidly. Most came directly from the Netherlands. A few settled first in Spring Lake or Grand Haven before moving to Muskegon.

## Early Churches

There were no Dutch religious services in Muskegon until 1858, when Isaac Brandt's Dutch father-in-law,

*Tressa M. Rop LaFayette is a native of Muskegon, a genealogist and the Muskegon history writer for the Muskegon Chronicle. She was the secretary to the editor/publisher of the Chronicle for twenty years, retiring in 1990. In addition to working as secretary, she also began writing Muskegon history for the newspaper beginning in 1982 and continuing to the present. She is a life-time member of the First Christian Reformed Church of Muskegon.*



Map of Muskegon with Dutch areas outlined. The larger area outlined in black was called "Little Amsterdam" and the smaller "Little Rotterdam."

Cornelius Wagner, held church in his house. On June 22, 1859, a large group of residents met and organized the First Dutch Reformed Church, which was originally located at the corner of Spring and Myrtle Streets. It was several years before any other Dutch churches were built.

In 1867 four men, Gerrit Yonker, Egbert N. Van Baalen, John Waalkes and Derk Szerda, met for the purpose of organizing a Holland Christian Reformed Church, which later became known as the First Christian Reformed Church. At first they gathered in a barn and in various members' homes. On October 26, 1867, the church was formally organized by Rev. D.J. Vander Werp, who also became pastor of the church in 1873. The congregation, which grew rapidly, met in several small buildings until the erection of a church building on Terrace Street in 1881. On May 16, 1891 that building was completely destroyed in the infamous Pine Street fire which wiped out most of the area lying between Terrace and Spring

Streets from Clay to Iona Avenues. The First Church and its school were in the path of the fire.

**Rapid Arrival of Immigrants**

There was a great influx of Dutch to Muskegon County in the 1880s. A large number first settled in Montague, but many of these migrated to Muskegon after the lumbering boom ended. In the 1800s, Muskegon's harbor presented a sight never to be forgotten. Booming company tugs were towing vast rafts of logs, while the sorting pens and

coupling grounds were swarming with men, and schooners lined every dock.

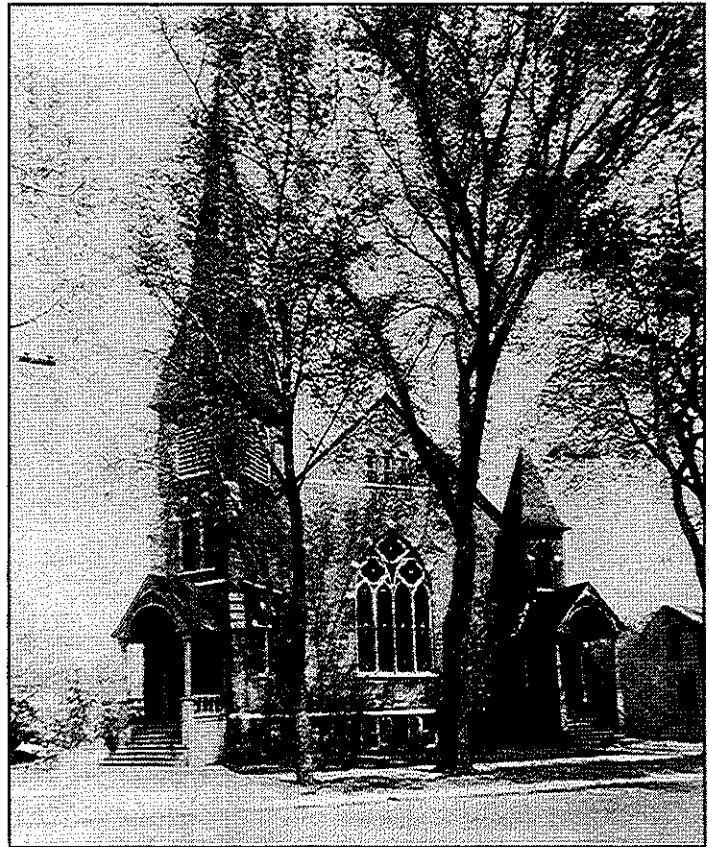
In the beginning the sawing of white pine logs overshadowed everything else. Muskegon was blessed with the finest harbor on the great chain of lakes. It was reported in 1881 that twenty-three sailing vessels had cleared the port within an hour and a half. This was not at all unusual at that time. According to the census of 1890, the Dutch population of Muskegon numbered approximately 6,500.

By 1900 the largest part of the Dutch contingent had arrived. Extensive genealogical research reveals that most

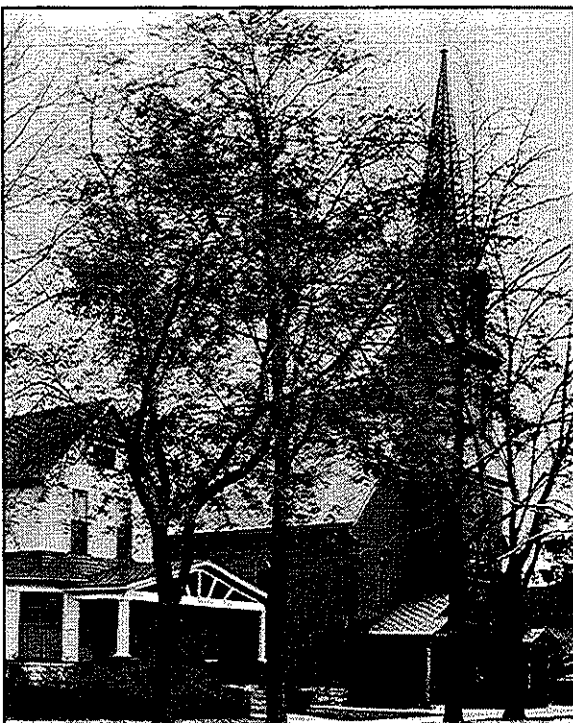
of the settlers who arrived between 1880 and 1900 were from Groningen and Friesland, the two northern provinces of the Netherlands. Several factors prompted the Dutch to immigrate. Many young men had expressed concern over military service in the Netherlands, and were motivated to leave their country rather than serve in the army. Another reason for leaving was the many economic hardships they had to face.

**Dutch Settlements**

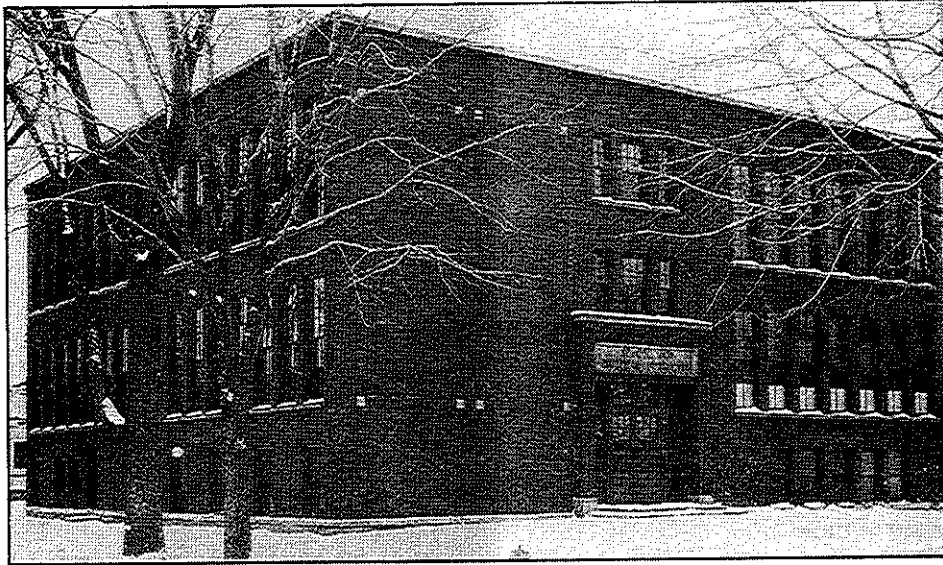
Most of the Dutch settled in two sections of Muskegon. They were known at one time as Little Amsterdam and Little Rotterdam. One section was bounded by Spring and Getty Streets on the east and west, and the Ryerson Creek lowlands and McLaughlin on



*First CRC. Photo of the First Christian Reformed Church which was built immediately following the destruction of the original church building that was destroyed in the Pine Street fire. This building was erected on the same site as the original building.*



*Immanuel Christian Reformed Church 1887-1973.*



Muskegon Christian High School.

the north and south. The other section was in the Fourth Street and Mason Avenue area.

Still later a group settled in Muskegon Heights where several Dutch street names are evident—Waalkes, Rotterdam and Amsterdam. The Dutch pressed on with the business of making a living and supporting their families in their new land. Most of them worked originally in the lumbering business until the 1900s.

### Christian Schools

By 1880 Muskegon was queen of the lumber towns, the heart of the thriving lumber industry of West Michigan. By this time it became apparent that such a large group of families from the Netherlands would want a Christian school. At a consistory meeting of the First C.R.C. in August of 1880 a school was organized, but classes did not begin until August 7, 1882. The school was built adjacent to the church, but was destroyed in the 1891 fire. A new school building was located on Hartford Street and became known as the Hartford Street School. This building is still being used by Baker College. J.O. Vos was the first principal of the school and served

faithfully until October 1919.

In 1891 the Allen Avenue Church also founded a Christian school on Wood Street, known as the Wood Avenue School. Both the Hartford Street and Wood Avenue schools continued as two separate organizations until they were merged in 1923. Today Muskegon boasts of a thriving Christian school system. Recently Muskegon Christian Elementary

School and Western Michigan Christian High School were merged under one board and operate under the name of Muskegon Christian Schools.

### Small Dutch Businesses Came Into Existence

Many of the men that lived in the Little Rotterdam area where the Second Christian Reformed Church was located, became the owners of small businesses. One of the earliest shopping centers—where residents went to buy anything from a loaf of bread to a pint of milk or a spool of thread—was on Third Street between Houston and Merrill Avenues.

Among the first to start business in that area was Dirk Kampenga, who owned a grocery store. Soon thereafter A.D. Boelkins also started a grocery business two blocks south of Kampenga's. In 1885, J.F. Stulp and his son operated a hardware store on Third Street. Al Valk had a shoe store across the street. Third Street was also home to the Dekker Furniture Store and bicycle shop.

Louis D. Plant came to Muskegon



1921 graduates of Muskegon Christian High School.



in 1882 and opened a confectionery store near Houston Avenue, and not only sold candy but baked goods, milk, tobacco, newspapers and periodicals. Next to the Plant store,

Andrew Ten Hove operated a dry goods store for thirty-one years, which was later taken over by his son Peter. In 1959, after forty-one years of operation, Peter closed the business and said that he was actually tired and needed a vacation.

### Celery Growing

The Dutch residents of Little Amsterdam became pioneers in what was to become the thriving industry of growing celery.

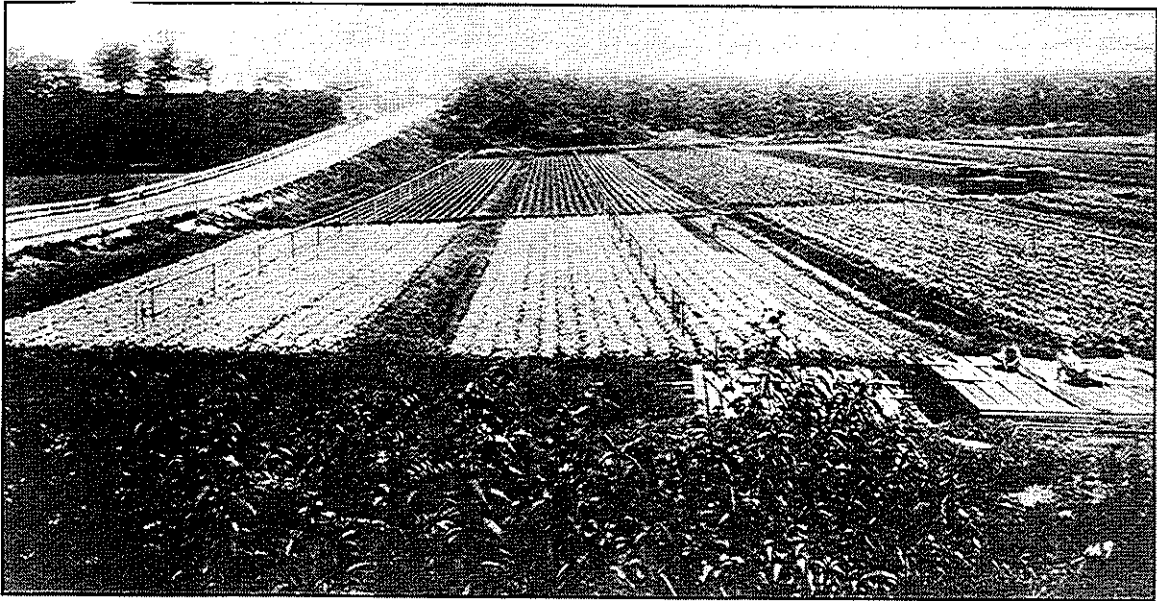
Perhaps most of the celery growers in

Muskegon were of Dutch descent because they recognized the value of land reclaimed from water. The first grower of celery in West Michigan was a Dutchman named Lendert de Brayn who owned a piece of land in Kalamazoo. The early settlers first thought they needed soft, warm loam and never dreamed of using marshland for growing celery. De Brayn soon discovered that he could not grow celery on sandy soil, and then attempted to grow it on drained marshland and met with success. Soon marshland was sought eagerly in both Kalamazoo and Muskegon.

In December 1884, the *Muskegon Daily Chronicle* called attention to the fact that there were many acres of land in Muskegon County that were peculiarly adapted to celery growing. Named was land near Bear Lake in North Muskegon, in the area of Little Black Creek and along Ryerson Creek

in the heart of the city of Muskegon. Muskegon's Dutch immigrants were the first to see value in Muskegon County's abundant swampland. Hard working and persistent, they, with

the Ryerson Creek area and celery fields soon sprang up east and west of the street. For many years Leonard Fisher and Jacob Bishop farmed the land on either side of the Getty Street



*Fisher Farm. Photo of the Fisher celery farm originally farmed by Leonard Fisher and later by his sons, Bernard, Joe and Casey Fisher. Getty Street runs through the middle of the Ryerson Valley. To the left of the street in the photograph is the farm of Jacob Bishop.*

large families, cleared the land by hand and everyone worked hard.

The Salmon family was first to cut into the muck along Ryerson Creek. Getty Street ran through the middle of

hill, Fisher on the east and Bishop on the west. Other early Ryerson Creek growers were: John and Fred Bishop; Peter, Gerrit, and John Bush; Julius De Boer; Evert and Cornelius Dekker;



*Celery farm workers (unidentified).*

## Origins

Edward Doornbos; Fabor Havenga; Claude Herder; Gerrit Kooi; Gerrit Henry, and Jacob Lintjer; Jacob, John, and Otto Rop; Alt and Drewes Tuuk; Henry Vander Molen; Evert and John Wagenmaker; Peter Witt; and Abe and Louis Workman. Simon Workman and his sons farmed in the Little Black Creek area and John and Jacob Bishop with the Willbrandt family worked in the Bear Lake area in North Muskegon. Gregory Willbrandt farmed the marshland on North Getty Street below Marquette Avenue.

Although Kalamazoo was the original celery capital of Michigan, in 1951 the title passed on to Muskegon. Eventually poor drainage caused the Ryerson Creek area to disintegrate, and by the mid 1950s nature was reclaiming the creek lands and many of the neat farms disappeared from the scene.

### Other New Dutch Businesses Sprang Up

After the lumbering business ceased to exist many of the Dutch went to work for the lumber companies such as Thayer Lumber Company and Langeland Lumber Company, whose founder, Henry Langeland, played an important part in the building of the city. Langeland's firm, at its peak, employed sixty-five men. In the late 1890s and early 1900s when celery growing developed rapidly in Muskegon County, Langeland's company supplied most of the crates used in shipping the celery.

Muskegon was surrounded by rich farming country and many immigrants became farmers. The sandy beach-type soil in the Norton Township area nearest Lake Michigan also was ideal for the growing of fruit and many large fruit farms developed.

Large numbers of Dutch natives also went to work in the many diversified industries that came into existence after the lumber was depleted.

Despite all the hardships the immigrants suffered in their ocean voyages (often in steerage), and the early difficulties of settlement, they were not fearful of the future. They were free to worship as they saw fit and able to earn a decent living. Many of Muskegon's new residents and their descendants went on to become important citizens of Muskegon. Doctors, lawyers, mayors, city officials, judges, educators, large business owners . . . all have made a great impact in Muskegon County. The present Muskegon mayor, Elmer Walcott, was also the principal of Muskegon Christian School for many years and the long-time basketball coach for the school.

Five well-known Christian

Reformed ministers, past and present, were natives of Muskegon: Peter Eldersveld, John A. Hoeksema, Lewis B. Smedes, Wesley Smedes, and Howard D. Vanderwell. Several others from Muskegon have been and are ministering in the Christian Reformed Church: Winston Boelkins, Roger Buining, Russell Palsrok, Edward Pekelder, Keith Tanis, Samuel Ten Brink and Robert Tjapkes.

Today the descendants of Jacob and Dieuwerke Kweekman Rop, who arrived in Muskegon in 1889 from Uithuizen in the Province of Groningen, number at least 1,100 in Muskegon County, including this writer. The Dutch remain as one of the largest ethnic groups in the city. ❧



Third Street. A portion of Third Street where many of the Dutch owned and operated small businesses. In the photograph is seen the Dekker Furniture Co. and A. Ten Hove & Son drygoods store.

## Montague — Once a Dutch Colony

Montague, once a hurly-burly lumber town, is located in the upper part of Muskegon County on the north side of White Lake between Lake Michigan and U.S. 31. It was incorporated in 1883, and is today one of Michigan's most picturesque cities. Montague, which is historically linked with the lumbering era, was also the home for new immigrants from the Netherlands in the 1870s and 1880s.

The city's history begins with the lumbering industry. At one time in the 1880s there were eight mills in operation in the area. About five hundred men, living in cabins and shacks which dotted the shores of the lake, worked in the mills and on the docks. Most of the early Dutch immigrants began work, as laborers in the lumber mills, but some who lived on North Hill, eventually got into celery farm-

ing. Others established small businesses.

A Dutch Reformed church, now known as the Ferry Memorial Reformed Church, was established in June 1874, at the corner of Dacey and Stanton. For many years, traveling into Montague from the south, the first thing one would notice was the steeple of the church, towering above the trees. A Christian Reformed church was also organized at Montague in December 1881, under the leadership of the Rev. J.C. Groeneveld who left the Dutch Reformed church (because of his opposition to lodge membership).

With the death of the lumber industry, Montague experienced a slump and most of the inhabitants moved away. But many of the remaining residents began farming on the

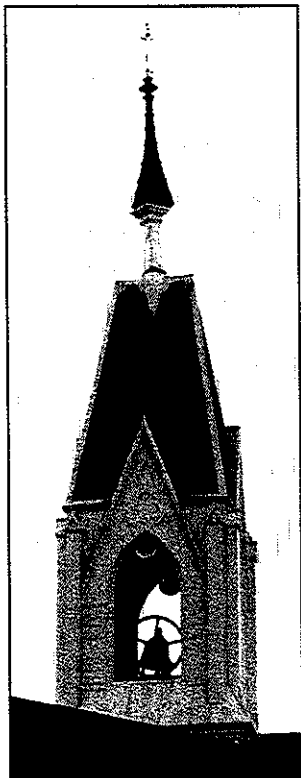


Montague, Michigan — White Lake Inn.

## Origins

cleared land and the town was saved. Hielka Sikkenga became a farmer and Louis Sikkenga went into celery growing and remained in the Montague area. The family of Bernard Vander Ploeg also decided to remain near Montague.

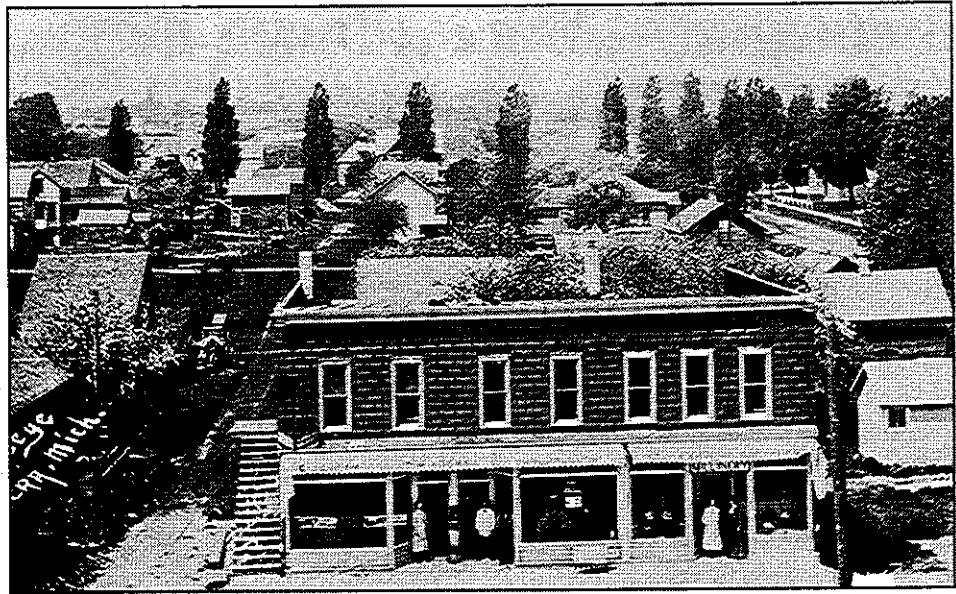
The families of John, Louis, Nicholas and Webber Hamm also remained and were eventually joined by other new immigrants. Many moved to New Era just north of the Muskegon County line, where the Holland



Landmark bell tower of Montague, Michigan's Ferry Memorial Reformed Church.

Christian Reformed Church of New Era had been established on January 5, 1894. The Rev. Geert H. Hoeksema, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Muskegon presided over the initial meeting. The Montague CRC disbanded in 1928 and most of the

Dutch living in and near Montague joined the New Era church. Today a large number of Dutch families reside in the New Era area. §



Bird's-eye view of New Era, Michigan ca. 1910.



Railroad crossing in New Era, Michigan ca. 1910.



# Bethany Christian Ref. Church

MUSKEGON, MICH.

A. D. 1887-1974.

A seasonal, two-day service, after which our congregation gathered for the first time in the new Bethany Christian Ref. Church, 1515 Terrace St., Muskegon, Mich.

The 24-page book tells us that the first service was held in the old parsonage, 1515 Terrace St., Muskegon, Mich., on the 10th of August, 1887, at the home of Dr. M. A. Stedek.

On the 10th of August, 1887, the organization was effected, 16 families joining, of whom 18 persons were communicants—a total of 96 souls.



REV. JOHN DOLFIN

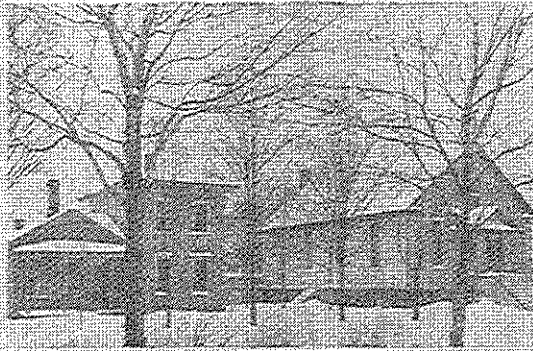
Jan. 21, 1884 marked the date of the dedication of the first church building, a humble house of worship located on the corner of Terrace and Hafford Sts. The house next to it, formerly called the "James property," bought in 1882, was used as a parsonage.

Meanwhile the first pastor had been installed, the Rev. J. W. Beink, (Sept. 25, 1883). He laid the foundations of congregational life earnestly and well. His farewell took place Jan. 17, 1889.

That same year, Aug. 12, the present pastor, Rev. John Dolfin, was installed, and his brother has not since ceased what Rev. Beink had sown, but nearer this was instrumental in having a goodly number added to the congregation, so that at present it numbers 112 families, 418 communicants, a total of 294 souls. This is an encouraging record of steady growth, calling for much gratitude.

During the 22 years that this congregation has existed, not less than 124 made public confession of their faith.

## THE BANNER



THE OLD BETHANY CHURCH AND PARSONAGE.

The new parsonage shown here was erected in 1910.

The Sabbath school at present has an enrollment of 295 scholars. A Men's Bible Class was organized some time ago.

The Ladies' Aid and Missionary Society has 12 active and 40 Associate members. The Young Women's Guild enrolls at present 29 active members.

The Y. P. S. shows an enrollment of 36 active and 178 associate members, while the Ruth Mission Society has 35 members.

April 22, 1914 it was decided to erect a new church building on the site of the old one. The front page shows what a beautiful edifice it is, one of the finest of our entire denomination. It is a structure of pressed brick and tile, with a seating capacity of 250 in the main auditorium and 100 additional in the lecture room to the rear. No organ has been installed, but a fund for that purpose has already been opened. The addition is finished in shell golden oak and is heated by an indirect electric lighting system. The pews are also of oak with quartered oak ends and are of the improved double

type. The two large windows, one on each side, have figures, one of Christ in Gethsemane and the other representing "I stand at the door and knock." The large window in the front of the building has in relief with the inscription, "I am the vine and ye are the branches." In the basement are to be found the auxiliary room, class room, kitchen, library and storeroom.

The dedication of the new edifice took place, Tuesday evening, Dec. 7. After an organ prelude, an oration was the opening number, "Great and I do not know." Then the congregation sang 477, which the pastor led in prayer. In a few opening remarks, the Rev. Mr. Dolfin thanked all those, both of God and outside of the congregation, who contributed toward the erection of the building, also dwelling upon the importance of the three big windows given by the Sunday School, Young People's Society and the Young Women's Guild. After a second number by the organ, Prof. L. Berkhof of Grand Rapids delivered the dedicatory sermon based upon Ps. 134:1-2. Not only was this a very appropriate sermon, but one that



THE NEW PARSONAGE OF BETHANY CHR. REF. CHURCH.

will be long remembered by the great number that heard it.

After the sermon the first offering in aid of the new church was received. It was assured that the offering will be taken up in this church in such a way that it will be apparent that this is a definite part of the worship and not merely a necessary adjunct.

Rev. G. Houckink, pastor of the Second Ref. church, and president of the Muskegon Pastor's Conference, also addressed the gathering, after a word of hearty appreciation and congratulations on the words of the Psalmist: "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

The oration sang a closing number, Rev. H. J. Muller of the Second church offered a closing prayer, and the pastor pronounced the benediction, after the congregation had once more sung from the Pastor. Thus the new Bethany church was dedicated to the service of God.

The Souvenir spoken of above contains a history of the church and its various auxiliaries, illustrated with pictures of both the old and the new. Officers, members, former and present pastors, original and present contributors, building and finance committees, etc. Copies of this souvenir can be had by applying to Mr. F. J. Kappers, 155 Fifth St., Muskegon, Mich. The price has been set at 35c.

We appreciate it very much that The Banner was permitted to make use of some of the cuts found in this number. May the Lord continue to bless pastor and people of "Bethany." EDITOR.

The Immanuel Christian Reformed Church, the second CRC in Muskegon, was incorporated on November 9, 1887. A page in area religious history was written when the congregations of First and Immanuel merged in October 1974. On February 19, 1889 eighteen members of the First CRC organized the Third CRC, later named the Allen Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

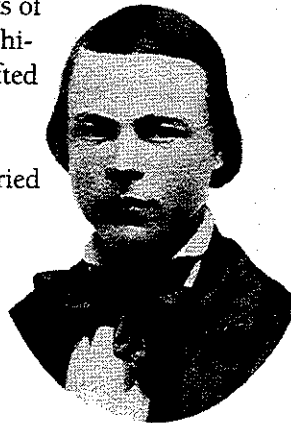
During the next decades several other Christian Reformed churches came into existence: Bethany, Muskegon Heights, East Muskegon, Calvin, Grace, Bluffton, Hope, Green Ridge and Fruitport. Today only seven remain. There also have been a number of Reformed churches organized in the Muskegon area.

## Muskegon Lumberman — Jan Vogel

H.J. Brinks

Muskegon, Michigan or "Lumbertown" flourished between 1880 and 1910 as a major port city from which milled lumber sailed and steamed away on thousands of Great Lakes ships. Logs cut from the virgin forests of Central Michigan were rafted down the Muskegon River or carried by logging trains to Muskegon's many sawmills. Cut lumber found major markets in Milwaukee and Chicago but also in thousands of Midwestern towns and villages connected to Chicago by rail and barge.

Dutch immigrants were not major participants in the lumber industry although several hundreds did work in logging camps and in sawmills. Most often they took such employment to accumulate cash for the purchase of farm land, and since most land was heavily wooded they gained valuable skills in the lumber camps for clearing their own farmsteads. Rural people with largely (80 percent) peasant roots, these Dutch immigrants idealized independent farming as an attractive objective which brought with it an elevated social status. At the same time carpentry was the most prominent skilled trade represented among them. In fact most Dutch village immigrants were skilled in several trades because



*Jan Vogel at eighteen.*

farm hands in the Netherlands were seldom busy throughout the whole year. A large number of immigrants therefore crafted livelihoods from carpentry and other building trades. But, again, very few were heavily engaged in logging or in sawmill ventures.

The most prominent exception to this pattern was the career of Jan Vogel (1839-1907), who immigrated from the village of Noordelos in 1854. At twelve he had been apprenticed to a local carpenter, Herman Diepenhorst, and during the third year of that contract Jan joined the Diepenhorst family in its trek from Noordelos, the Netherlands, to a wooded area near Holland, Michigan—a place which was quickly named Noordelos, Michigan.

Until he enlisted to serve in the U.S. Civil War Jan Vogel completed his apprenticeship and constructed homes in various places—Grand Haven, Grand Rapids and finally Groningen, Michigan. His last employer, Jan Rabbers in Groningen, Michigan, influenced Vogel's career very significantly. Rabbers was a daring and courageous frontier entrepreneur who built a sawmill (1847) on a Black River tributary, operated a grist mill (1847) and opened a general store. His death in 1860 left Vogel without his most intimate and respected mentor.

Responding to President Lincoln's call for volunteers Jan Vogel joined a group of twenty-five young men to form Company D, the Second Regiment of the Michigan Cavalry. War service engaged him in campaigns throughout the border states (Tennessee, Missouri, Kentucky) and south along the Mississippi River. Following his reenlistment for another three-year term in 1864 Vogel was wounded twice—a grazing wound on his forehead and a flesh wound to his left leg which, due to infection, nearly resulted in amputation. After the War



*Jan Vogel (center) and companion cutting timber.*

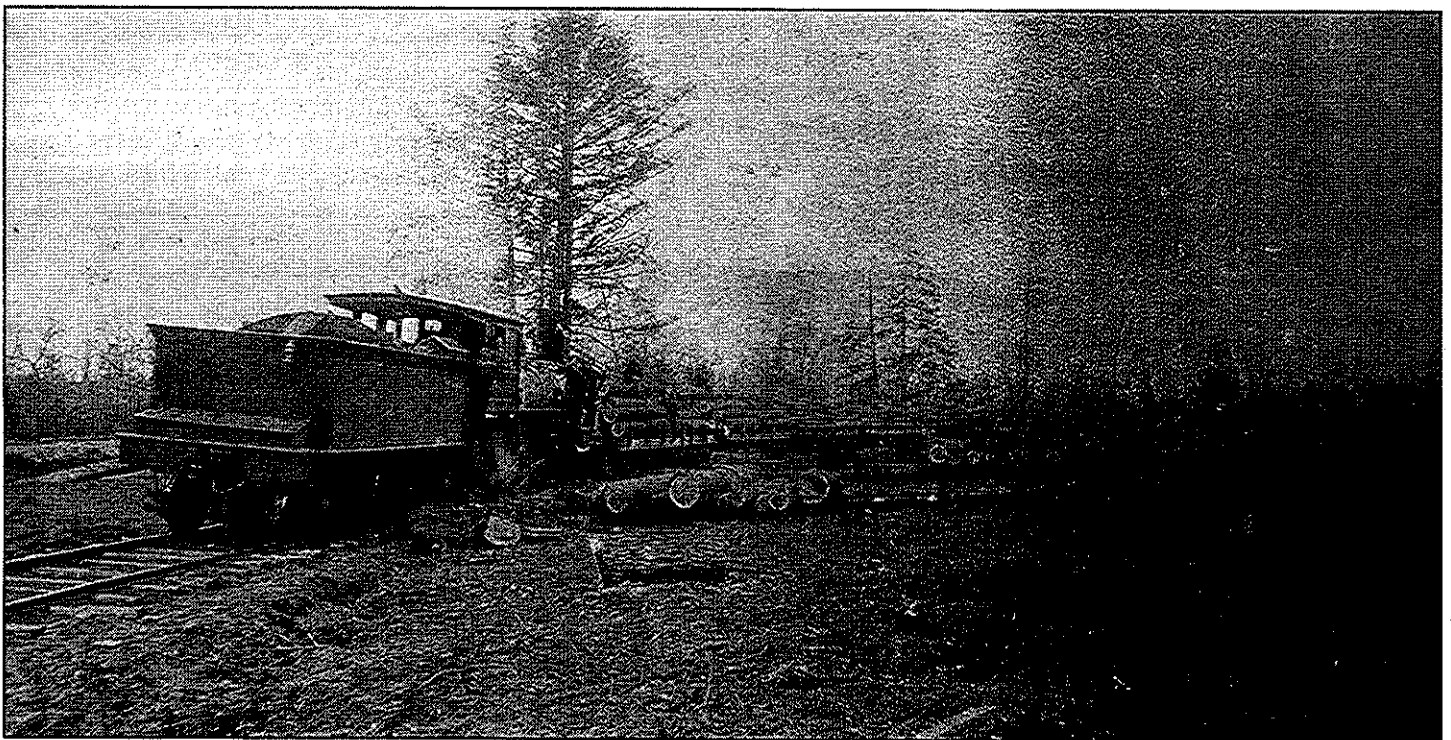
ended he was discharged (August 1865) from Detroit's Harper Hospital on crutches.

Soon thereafter Vogel returned to the Netherlands to finance and assist

the immigration of his parents and siblings who settled with him near Noordelos, Michigan. There he built a saw and grist mill which burned down one year later in 1867. With his assets

reduced to \$200 from an accumulation of \$1,500 in 1865, Jan looked northward to start afresh.

In Missaukee County the current site of Vogel Center, Lucas, McBain and other Dutch settlements Vogel established homesteads for himself, his parents and other family members. He opened a general store and organized the Clam Union Township. With his extended family and others he conducted informal worship services which eventuated (1872) in the founding of the Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church. Traveling across Central Michigan by ox cart, on foot and on horseback gave Vogel precise knowledge about the area's lumber resources and, as the elected Supervisor of Clam Union Township, he was regularly involved in estimating the tax value of wooded land. These skills launched his career as a lumberman, a pursuit which engaged the major part of his life between 1874-1907. In 1881



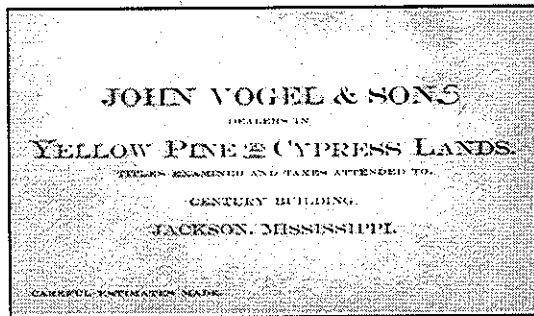
*Logging train hauling lumber into Muskegon.*



Ducey Lumber Company Mill in ruins, North Muskegon.

he moved to Muskegon which stationed him at the center of the lumber industry.

As an employee of the Torrent and Ducey Company Vogel purchased woodlands and supervised logging operations in Central Michigan, in the Upper Peninsula and as far away as



Business card, John Vogel and Sons.

Northern New York. He acquired thousands of acres in every location. In the U.P. alone he purchased 195 million feet of standing pine. He also selected timberlands for himself while selling off logs from about 5,000 acres of land acquired earlier in Missaukee County.

After 1884 Vogel gained a one-quarter interest in the Ducey Lumber

Company which included the right to saw his own logs at the Ducey mill in Muskegon. There, his newly-built home on the corner of Terrace and Catawba Streets became the center of business affairs which included his supervision of two sawmills in North Muskegon. Until it dissolved in 1890

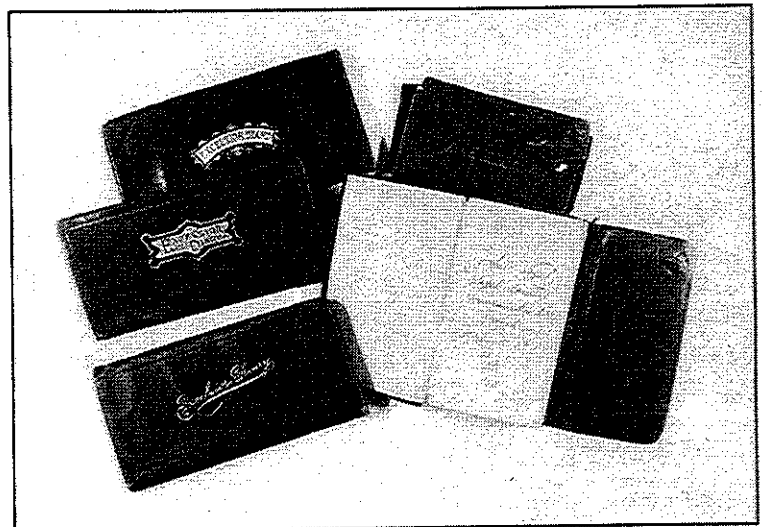
Vogel accumulated an increasing interest in the Ducey Company which in its peak year (1888) processed over 63 million feet of logs. When it was sold the company's assets provided Vogel with an \$18,000 profit.

But, during the following year, 1891, business was so disastrous that he nearly went bankrupt and he was forced to sell most of his property to

meet outstanding obligations.

Attempting to regain his financial footing in 1892 Vogel moved to Chicago where he had some real estate holdings but when that effort went sour he returned to Muskegon. From there he moved a sawmill to Sault Sainte Marie in the Upper Peninsula and he began again to log off several sites in Central Michigan. None of these ventures were profitable. So once again (1894) Vogel became a salaried employee of lumber companies which relied upon his woodland appraisal skills.

Between 1894-1907 he spent part of every year estimating cypress and pine forests in Louisiana, Mississippi and elsewhere along the Mississippi River. During one season (1896) he managed a whole logging operation near New Orleans. He wrote, "This was a very hard and complicated job with 120 men in the woods camp—both black and white. The work was done with steam [powered] machines to get the logs out and with three tug boats to tow the logs sixty miles to New Orleans. There was all water and mud in the woods—



Display of notebooks used to record activity as a lumber estimator.

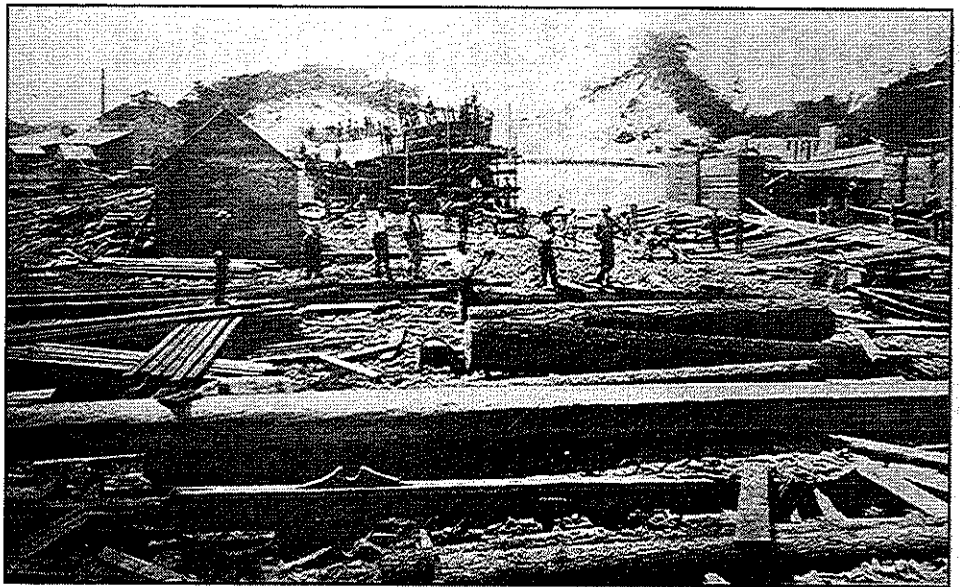


also alligators, large snakes, frogs and innumerable insects in the water and the air.”

For the most part, however, he estimated southern lumber stands for others such as D.A. Blodgett of Grand Rapids. Eventually Vogel began to purchase wood lots on his own and he joined hands with his sons, Otto and Frank, to form the John Vogel and Sons Company. These efforts were successful enough to reestablish his family's financial status but not to the level he had reached before the hard years of the early 1890s. He died in Muskegon at sixty-nine years of age in 1907.

The Jan Vogel Papers which came to the Calvin College and Theological Seminary Archives in 1995 contain Vogel's autobiography and a collection of twenty daybooks which record the details of his life from 1881 to 1906. His days were astonishingly busy with constant travel across Michigan, trips to Chicago and later rail travel to the South. He was often gone for months in a stretch. His last daybook entry (December 31, 1906) asserts, "This has been a fairly good year and all good health. We are all full of hope for the next year, but we are [already] in easy financial circumstances."

Death, of course, he did not expect in 1907 but even so Vogel left a substantial legacy of information from which historians and others can discover a wide range of information—about lumbering, about railroad travel and daily life under a broad spectrum of circumstances. His was an exceedingly exceptional career, particularly for a Dutch immigrant from the unforested flatlands of the Netherlands. He was thoroughly acclimated to American business culture and he embraced it with gusto, daring, and considerable success. ♣



*Muskegon's lumber port.*



*Civil War — hand carved picture frame made by Jan Vogel during convalescence in 1865.*

# Promoting Ethnic Pride: The Dutch-American Social Clubs of Chicago

Robert P. Swierenga

Rob Kroes noted in his sparkling book on the Dutch Calvinist Colony of Amsterdam, Montana that “there is always a wide grey zone where an ethnic community trends to blur into its environment.”<sup>1</sup> The Dutch social clubs operated in this grey zone; some were high brow, others low brow; some looked outward, others inward; some were secular, others more openly Christian. The Dutch Reformed churches and their schools and societies, by contrast, stood in the white zone in the center of the community. The pioneers always first planted churches, which provided the glue of ethnic identity.

Besides the Sunday worship services, the churches organized mid-week social contacts to build up the community. There were men's and women's societies and their feeder groups for young people, ladies' sewing circles, choirs and bands, mission clubs, holiday fests, picnics, and sports. These activities kept Dutch Calvinists busy and ensured that free time would be put to constructive uses, thereby avoiding the “temptations of the world.” Only after the immigrants had gained a solid economic foothold and developed a sense of being Dutch in a foreign land did

successful businessmen and professionals start social clubs to preserve a bit of Holland in America.

The three most prominent clubs were the Holland Society of Chicago (1895), modeled after its aristocratic predecessor in New York City (1885); the *Algemeen Nederlandsche Verbond* or General Dutch League (1895), a world-wide federation of Netherlanders, Flemings, and Afrikaners that was patterned after the *Alliance Francaise* and the *Algemein Deutscher Verbond*; and the Knickerbocker Society of Chicago (1924), which also had its New York City counterpart.

Lesser clubs were the William of Orange Society (1890), the Saint Nicholas Society (1906), and the Frisian Society *Ut en Thus* [Away and Home] (1925). Despite the names, these clubs were not really Dutch but American in character.<sup>2</sup>

The first club was the William of Orange Society. It grew out of calls in 1890 by the Reverend Bernardus De Bey, long-time pastor of First Reformed Church of Chicago, to honor the *vader van onze Vaderland* on the Tercentenary of the victorious Dutch Revolt against Spain by erecting statues in Dutch-American settlements. The Chicago Hollanders had the added stimulus of the upcoming 1893 Columbian Exposition. At a mass meeting at the church, the Society was constituted and the officers immediately laid plans to raise at least \$15,000 to create “a worthy monument to our Washington, the idol of the Dutch, in one of the famous Chicago parks.” When Fair visitors from around the world admire their heroes, the

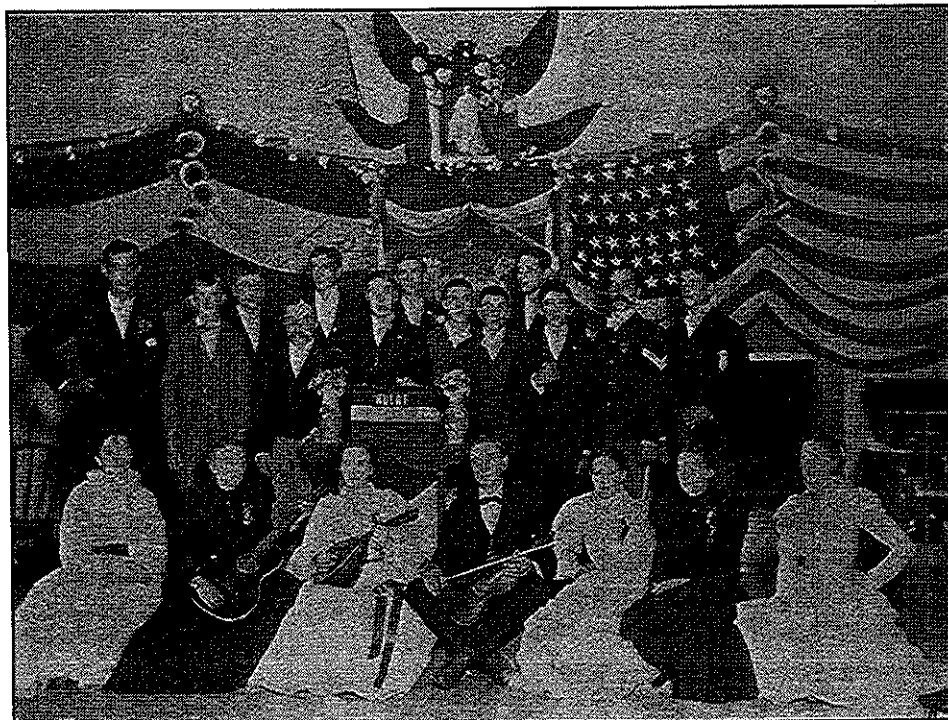


Photo — Commemorating the Inauguration of Her Majesty, Wilhelmina, as Queen of the Netherlands, at Madderom's Hall, Chicago, Illinois, September 8, 1898. Christian Recitation Society. Luurt Holstein - immediate left of podium.

Dr. Robert Swierenga, emeritus professor of history at Kent State University, resides now in Holland, Michigan where he is Research Professor in the A.C. Van Raalte Institute for Historical Studies.

founders declared, "surely the Dutch and the Knickerbockers, and all descendants of the Dutch, should see to it that this one of the foremost and grandest leaders of all ages shall then be so honored." Ten successful old settlers subscribed \$1,340 to launch the project, but it came to naught. The William of Orange Society soon disbanded without fulfilling its dream.<sup>3</sup> Forty years later another club, the Knickerbocker Society, was still talking about raising a monument to William for the World's Fair of 1933.

The Holland Society of Chicago (1895) had broader ambitions to foster "true Americanism" and promote Dutch ethnic pride, while enjoying "social entertainment." They scheduled their main meetings on William's birthday (April 16) and attendance ranged up to 100 persons.<sup>4</sup> Society members had to prove their Dutch ancestry and U.S. citizenship, the former by furnishing a "pedigree chart" to the committee on genealogy. For the many Old Dutch Yorkers, this involved a multi-generational family tree. The Chicago chapter held annual banquets in posh places like the Congress Hotel and the Chicago Athletic Club, and published classy annual yearbooks containing their speeches and resolutions.

At the 1899 banquet George Birkhoff, Jr., the Dutch vice consul in Chicago, offered a rousing toast for the South African Boers who are engaged in the "same struggle for liberty and independence as were our forefathers in the 16th and 17th centuries in the struggle with Spain." Birkhoff went on to castigate the "corrupt and perfidious" American press, pro-British as it was, for reporting on the Boers' struggle based on "malice and race prejudice."<sup>5</sup> Although the faces of the Holland Society blue bloods preserved the "Dutch look," few were immigrants and most members of this noble order of "Vans" gathered mainly for

PROGRAMMA.		PROGRAMMA.	
1. Opening door des Presidant..... G. J. Bovenkerk.		12. RECITATION..... S. Kulphof.	"He never told a lie."
2. VOCAL QUARTET. C. a F. v. d. Meer, B. Vellinga, J. Sizoo. "Wilhelms Van Nassauwen." (nieuw volkslied.)		13. VOORDRACHT..... N. Versnel.	"Hoe en Boek."
3. FESTEHEDE..... Mr. L. Holstein.		14. VOCAL SOLO..... Clara v. d. Meer.	"Neerland's Koningin."
4. Zingen door de voorgadering. "Wien Neerlandach Bloed."		—Ververschingen.—	
5. VOORDRACHT..... J. Bovenkerk.		15. VOORDRACHT..... W. v. d. Saude.	"Een vlieg mensch."
"Prins Maurits voor Rijkskerk" (1601.)		16. RECITATION..... F. v. d. Moolen.	"A domestic tempest."
6. PIANO DUET..... C. v. d. Meer, M. Spoolstra.		17. VOCAL DUET. (op verzoch)..... C. en F. v. d. Meer.	"The celebrated lesson duet."
"Huzaren Marsch."		18. RECITATION..... R. Leistra.	"Be careful what you say."
7. OUSTEL..... W. v. d. Saude.		19. VOORDRACHT..... Mr. L. Holstein.	
Prins William van Oranje "De verlosser des Vaderlands."		20. VOORDRACHT..... J. Sizoo.	"Rika's spoorocht."
—Ververschingen.—		21. VOCAL QUARTET. "Een Neerlandach Volkslied."	
8. CONCERT— Piano en Vloot..... M. Spoolstra, J. v. d. Veer.		22. VOORDRACHT..... W. Leistra.	
9. SAMENSPRAAK..... 8 personen.		23. Closing Hymn by Audience. "My Country 't is of thee."	
"De Inaming van den Beiel."			
Burgemeester: Jan Pieters Nikker. G. J. Bovenkerk.			
Rechtsleden: Hendrik van der Nieuw. N. Versnel.			
Dirk Dirckx. B. Zoeterman.			
Jan Jansz. W. Leistra.			
Dirk Martens. S. Kulphof.			
De Veerman: Koppesloek. J. Bovenkerk.			
Een Bediende. J. Sizoo.			
Een Burger. R. Leistra.			
10. VOCAL QUARTET. "Nederland en Oranje."			
11. VOORDRACHT..... H. Bakker.			
"Verainde te koop."			

Program of September 8 meeting.

socializing. It was a passing fancy that faded away after 1915.<sup>6</sup>

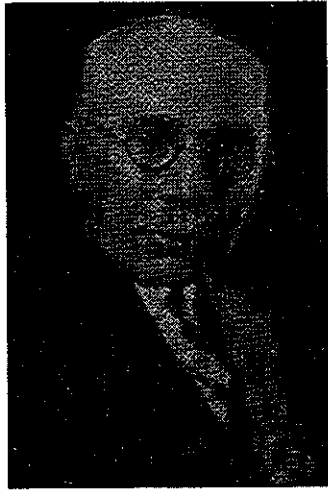
The *Algemeen Nederlandsch Verbond* or General Dutch League stood in sharp contrast to the elitist Holland Society with its largely ceremonial activities. The League was truly an effort by immigrants to foster nationalistic sentiments, preserve their language and identity, and propagate "the faith of our fathers," i.e., the Dutch Reformed world view.<sup>7</sup>

J. Hoddenbach van Scheltema, a Chicagoan originally from Arnhem, inspired the idea of the League in an 1893 article in the Chicago paper *De Nederlander* which lamented the loss of the Dutch language and called for conscious efforts to save it. With the help of Flemish Belgians, the League was launched in 1895 in Brussels and headquartered after 1897 in the famed city of Dordrecht. It grew in the Netherlands and among Dutch patriots around the world because of rising national pride upon the coronation in 1898 of Queen Wilhelmina. The interest was sparked further by the revered Calvinist leader Dr. Abraham Kuyper in his lecture

tour in 1898-1899, which heralded Afrikaaner resistance in the Boer War.

A weak North American branch sprang up in New York City, but the League thrived in the Midwest among Netherlanders who wanted to remain Netherlanders. The organizational meeting of the midwestern branch took place at Hope College in 1899 and soon there were clubs in Holland, Zeeland, Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Chicago, Roseland, Fulton (IL), Pella (IA), and Minneapolis. By 1910 the League counted nearly 11,000 members worldwide, who were linked by the official monthly organ, *Neerlandia*.<sup>8</sup>

According to its by-laws, the League aimed "to foster group consciousness among Dutch people, [and] their descendants . . . It has the spiritual, moral, and material strength of the Dutch people in view." Further, the organization planned to maintain the Dutch language, strengthen Netherlandic pride, and promote "patriotic use of the Dutch national anthem." Specific goals were to establish customs houses and Dutch chambers of commerce in American



*Obituary: Our friend Mr. L. Holstein passed away at about ten o'clock last Friday. It was obvious for several days that he probably would not be able to fight off his demise. Our brother was born on October 18, 1866 in Leens, Groningen. He served as Editor of Onze Toekomst for eleven years. The Editor and staff sympathized deeply with the grieving family.*

determination to fight the "slanderous attacks against people of our lineage... [and] to step in wherever Dutch people are being threatened or oppressed."<sup>9</sup> This was an obvious reference to South Africa.

In 1905 H. Jacobsma helped found the Chicago chapter with thirty charter members. He had belonged to the Grand Rapids Section until moving to Chicago. Reformed and Christian Reformed church leaders cooperated in the effort. The League met monthly in church basements and auditoriums and organized periodic "open meetings," picnics, and outings. "Every time the opportunity presents itself the Dutch American again feels that he has not forgotten the land and people and especially the language which he formerly called his own," declared an enthusiast.<sup>10</sup>

Titles of League lectures speak volumes: "The Influence of the Netherlands on America." "The Influence of the Netherlands on

Cities, to patronize Dutch bookstores and publishers, and to encourage schools to take up the study of Dutch history and culture. As an advocacy group, the League declared its

American Legal and School Systems," "Our Calling as Hollanders in America," etc. The speakers played on the idea that Dutch Reformed principles had guided American law and government, which views Kuyper had given impetus to in his famous Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1899.<sup>11</sup>

The first successful League project, launched in 1907, was to push the University of Chicago to establish a chair in Dutch History, Art, and Literature. Columbia University had created such a chair in 1898 under Leonard Charles van Noppen, with generous funding from the Dutch government. Chicago was a logical site for a second professorship because, the promoters declared, the city and its celebrated university "are situated in the center of three quarters of the present Dutch immigrants of the United States of America." Not only did the university enroll several Dutch-American students, but it was destined to become the "center of Dutch civilization and influence in the United States."<sup>12</sup>

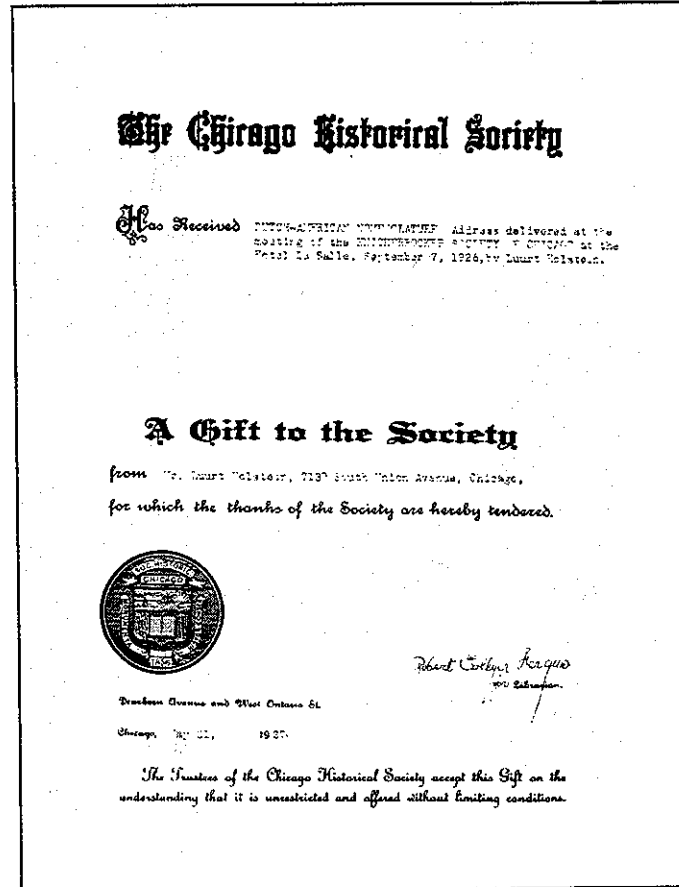
The campaign took five years and required a national fund-raising effort and a petition drive that mustered 1,000 signatures. Endorsements were obtained from President Theodore Roosevelt; West Michigan Congressman Gerrit J. K. Diekema of Holland; Abraham Kuyper; and Dr. Herman Bavinck, the renowned Reformed theologian of the Free

University of Amsterdam, founded by Kuyper's government. The League also enlisted the cooperation of the Holland Society of Chicago.<sup>13</sup>

The editor of *Onze Toekomst* waxed eloquent about the venture. It refutes the "accusations often made against the Dutch, that they are too sectarian, too narrow-minded, too selfish, ever to be able to co-operate for a Dutch national purpose and much less to seek the best that the Dutch, with their glorious history, could do for the American nation.

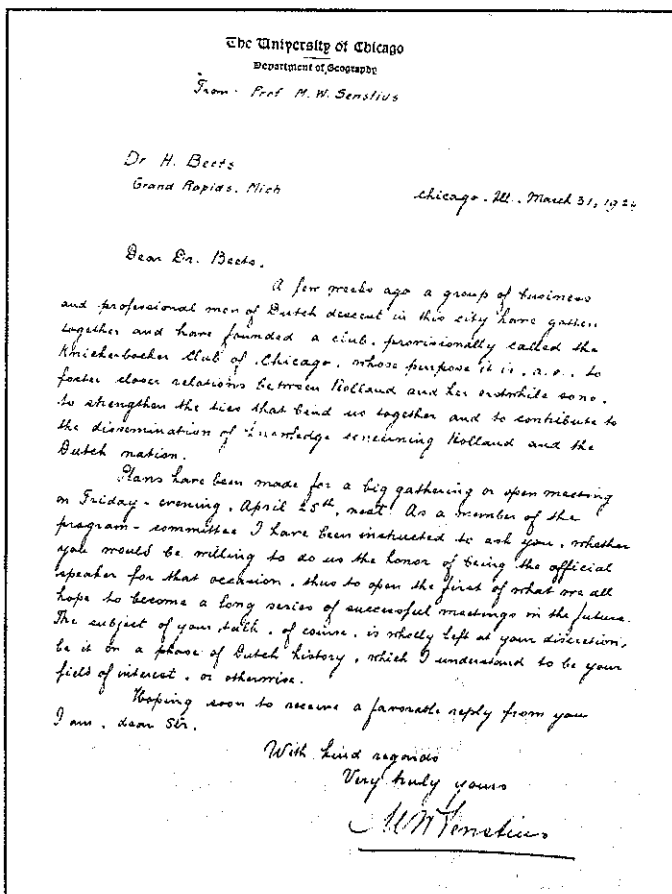
... Is it not beautiful for the Dutch heart, for the American of Dutch descent, yes, for every genuine American, to know that a long line of earnest men are busy with a movement to make Dutch history, art, and literature better known in the center of American national life?"<sup>14</sup>

When University President Henry



Chicago Historical Society.





Invitation to Henry Beets asking him to speak at the founding meeting of the Knickerbocker Society of Chicago. Beets could not attend.

Pratt Judson and the departments of history and art reported early in 1909 that they were favorably disposed to the idea of a Dutch Chair "as soon as finances are sufficient," the Chicago Division went to work with a will. They appointed a high-powered committee that succeeded in raising \$1,000 for a salary and reached an understanding with the University, that if the program prospered, the chair would be made permanent.<sup>15</sup>

The sourest note in the campaign came when an unidentified professor at Hope College, likely Albert Raap, warned that the holder of the Dutch Chair at the University of Chicago would be "like a mouse in a strange warehouse," one man among four hundred, who would be overwhelmed and compromised. The editor of *Onze Toekomst*, who had vigorously pushed

the project from the outset, countered this pessimistic forecast by publishing strong letters of support from Kuyper and Bavinck.<sup>16</sup>

Success came in 1911 with the appointment for two years of Tiemen L. de Vries as lecturer on Dutch institutions. De Vries was a graduate in theology and law of the Free University and an associate of Kuyper in the Anti-Revolutionary Party. He was a true Calvinist who fulfilled the hopes of the advocates by attracting several dozen students. In December, 1912, in the middle of De Vries's second year, his students peti-

tioned the University to reappoint their professor. That year De Vries had published his first year's lectures with the Eerdmans-Sevensma Company of Grand Rapids, under the title *Dutch History, Art and Literature for Americans*.<sup>17</sup> In February, 1913 the Men's Bible Class of Fourth Christian Reformed Church of Muskegon, Michigan also sent a letter requesting that the University endow the chair. This shows that the wider Dutch Reformed community took an interest in the professorship.

Despite the letters of support, President Judson and the University trustees "placed on file" the matter and took no further action. De Vries left in 1913 after fulfilling his contract and the dream ended in bitter disappointment.<sup>18</sup> Subsequent attempts by the midwestern branches of the League to

found similar posts at the University of Illinois and the University of Michigan also failed.<sup>19</sup>

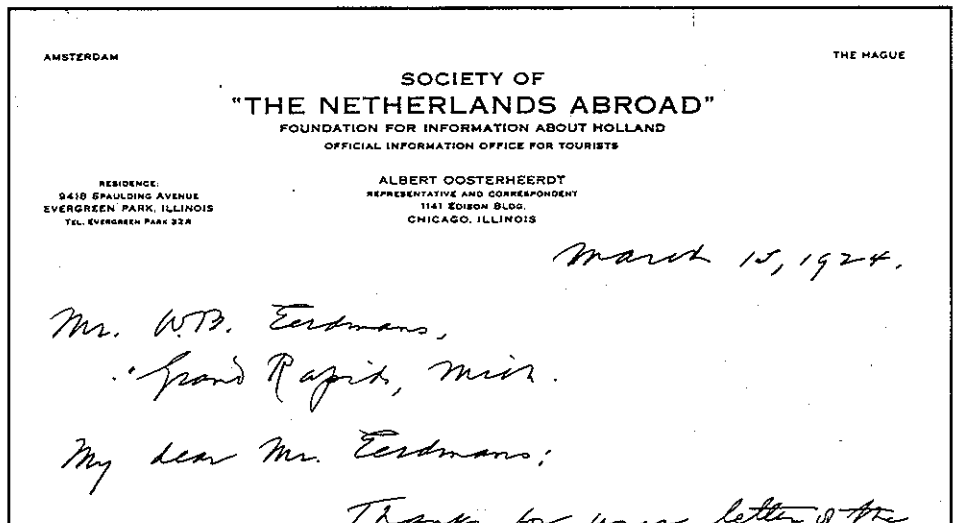
The League was more successful in establishing a Queen Wilhelmina Library of Dutch-language books in ten American cities, including Chicago. The Queen herself donated \$500 in 1906 to launch the program, of which the Chicago Division received \$50. "Nothing else," opined the *Onze Toekomst* editor, "could serve better to teach our people Dutch grammar, knowledge, and wisdom of all descriptions, as a respectable collection of Dutch literature."<sup>20</sup> The Chicago League also purchased and hung pictures of Queen Wilhelmina in the Dutch Christian schools, colleges, and seminaries in Chicago, Holland, and Grand Rapids.

In 1909 the Society began the practice of celebrating the Queen's birthday (August 31) with speeches and music by church bands. This is for "our Dutch people, a day of national rejoicing," declared *Onze Toekomst*. "It is a pity that we have been unable so far to make of this day a General Netherlands Day. It could be celebrated by all the Netherlanders irrespective of political and religious affiliations. The time for it has come now."<sup>21</sup> After the birth on April 30, 1909, of Princess Juliana, the first child and heir to the Dutch throne, the club also celebrated her birthday each year. The Chicago chapter could then count only thirty-eight dues-paying members at \$1.50 each. Most Dutch were indifferent, believing the League to be too intellectual and "too high." The most assimilated immigrants also refused to join, because they believed such nationalistic organizations to be un-American.<sup>22</sup>

Another opportunity to tout the Dutch heritage was the 350th anniversary of the defeat of the Spanish Duke of Alva at Den Briel on April 1, 1572. Hundreds of Chicago Hollanders

turned out for a commemoration on April 1, 1922, at the First Christian Reformed Church of Englewood to hear an address by Dr. John Van Lonkhuyzen, then editor of *Onze Toekomst* and a Christian Reformed Church cleric. The twenty-fifth anniversary of Queen Wilhelmina's reign in September 1923 marked yet another occasion for celebration throughout the Dutch empire. Van Lonkhuyzen presided over a distinguished committee of ten, including ex-President Theodore Roosevelt, which arranged for the publication of a richly embossed album of Dutch-American historical essays that was presented to the Queen at her Jubilee celebration. The Roseland Division of the General Dutch League likewise celebrated the Queen's birthday. The faithful assembled at Palmer Park (111th and Indiana avenues) to listen to speeches and music amidst unfurled Dutch and American flags.<sup>23</sup>

The Saint Nicholas Society first met in 1906 as a club for "old Dutch settlers" who wished to reminisce about the "struggles of the pioneers" and to celebrate the arrival of



Letterhead "Society of Netherlanders Abroad" — Chicago representative, Albert Oosterheerdt.

Sinterklaas (December 6) with a party. Initially, the club restricted membership to naturalized Dutch immigrants who had arrived prior to 1870. But this proved untenable, so in its second year the Society reduced the minimum residency requirement to fifteen years. The fact that only naturalized citizens were admitted speaks volumes. This club was for those committed to rapid Americanization.<sup>24</sup>

The annual banquet at the Bismarck

Hotel on December 6 drew well, especially after the very controversial dinner of 1908. The speaker, Henry Vander Ploeg, who was a prominent attorney and member of First Reformed Church, used the occasion to lash out at close-minded Hollanders who resisted Americanization by ghettoizing themselves and founding Christian day schools. These people, Vander Ploeg declared, came chiefly from small villages and country districts, where wages are low and the necessities of life dear, they arrive there with very fixed notions and prejudices, which are often the result of their birth and environment instead of a sound education and wise judgment . . . I am afraid that the majority of them are also opposed to the study and adoption of what is best in American life and manners. They seem to have such fixed notions and habits that it is difficult for them to realize the new view of things. They wish to continue to measure and to judge things by the standard of the home they have left, and not of the home they find. So extreme is this obstinate adherence to Dutch customs and usages, that our worthy Holland people establish Dutch parochial schools in many places and would, if

JOHN VAN LONKHUYZEN



CLERGYMAN and author. He was born on June 15, 1873, at Kesteren, Province of Gelderland, in the Netherlands. He first married Katie Dijkstra of Grand Rapids, Michigan, on June 2, 1914. His second marriage was to Wilhelmina Hollander of Arnhem, Netherlands. He has six sons and one daughter: John Henry Coligny, born 1915; William Marnix Samuel, born 1917; Mary Jane Louise, born 1919; Calvin Gustaph Adolf, born 1921; Maurice, born 1923; Paul Christian, born 1924.

John Van Lonkhuyzen is a grandson of Johannes Van Lonkhuyzen, landowner at Heteren in the Netherlands, and a son of Johannes Hendrikus and Jenneke Van Lonkhuyzen. He attended Grammar School and French School in the Netherlands and was graduated at the Gymnasium. He also studied at the Free (Calvinistic) University of Amsterdam, Holland, where he received his doctor's degree in Theology.

He first served as Pastor in the Netherlands at the Reformed Churches in Wilnis and Aarlanderveen. Thereafter he was sent to Buenos Aires, Argentine, to organize the Dutch Churches and schools in that South American country. He returned to the Netherlands to become Pastor of the Reformed Church in Rijswijk, Province of South Holland, a suburb of The Hague.

In October, 1911, he accepted the call of the Alpine Avenue Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, and emigrated to the United States, of which country he has since become a naturalized citizen. In 1918, he went to Chicago, Illinois, to become Pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church there. However,

in 1928 he returned to the Netherlands as Pastor of the Reformed Church of the City of Zierikzee, Province of Zeeland. After having become emeritus, he lived in Zeist, Province of Utrecht, but returned with his family to America in 1941.

In addition to the books listed below, he has written numerous pamphlets and contributed to the Amsterdam "Standaard," "De Reformatie," "De Wachter" and other Christian weeklies in Holland and America. He was also editor-in-chief of "Onze Toekomst," a Dutch weekly published in Chicago.

Works: Herman Friedrich Kohlbrugge, 1907; Het Diaconaat, 1908; Van Woorden tot Daden, 1909; Argentinië, 1909; Billy Sunday, 1916; Reformed Church Politic, 1939.

Address: 621 Madison Avenue, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

John Van Lonkhuyzen, photo and biography from Netherlanders Who Helped Build America.

they could, establish exclusive small Dutch villages or settlements, even in our large metropolitan cities.<sup>25</sup>

The Chicago press approvingly printed a full resume of the "old timer's" speech, but Dutch immigrants used the pages of *Onze Toekomst* to lash out angrily at Vander Ploeg's "foul imputations," "crude attacks," and "incentive against everything Dutch, and everything precious to them." He not only "heaped nonsense upon nonsense" but "besmirched the character of our Dutch nation." The furor over the meaning of Dutchness eventually blew over and in 1910 more than eighty persons attended the Sinterklaas dinner at the Bismarck.<sup>26</sup> But one can be certain that few members of the large Christian Reformed community ever affiliated with the Society. It had alienated them by demeaning the immigrant mentality.

In 1924 the Dutch-American *creme de la creme* formed a branch of the Knickerbocker Society at Chicago, with twenty-three charter members including the Dutch consul John Vennema, vice consul F. Posthuma, and a number of prominent businessmen and professionals. Like its predecessors the Holland Society and the St. Nicholas Society, Knickerbockers had to be U.S. citizens of Dutch descent and of "good moral character," a code for high social rank. The Grand Rapids chapter, which began twenty years earlier, also limited its membership to those of standing.

The Chicago Society, which grew to thirty-five members by 1927, held monthly meetings at various hotels and clubs—the La Salle, Sherman, Palmer House, and Graemere; and the Hamilton Club, Illinois Athletic Club, and Dental and Medical Arts Building—to listen to speakers such as Gerrit Diekema, former U.S. Congressman from West Michigan and U.S. Ambassador to the Netherlands, and Illinois Supreme Court Justice

Frederick R. De Young of Roseland. They staged an annual ladies' night banquet at suitable hotel ballrooms, where members displayed Dutch heirlooms and curios. During the summer hiatus, golf tournaments brought the men together. During the bleak Depression years, the Society sponsored Lake Michigan picnic excursion trips to St. Joseph, Michigan, with ship masts flying the Dutch flag and church bands playing Dutch music.<sup>27</sup> The Netherlands' Ambassador to the United States, Dr. J.H. van Rooijen, even joined the Chicago chapter in 1931, which announcement at the meeting met with "loud acclaim."<sup>28</sup>

At the time of the Chicago World's Fair, the Knickerbocker Society went into high gear, promoting "our Dutch type of civilization" as a means to uplift the "spiritual, moral, and cultural life of our city." Member Jacob Baar, the former postmaster of Grand Haven and an old Chicago settler, represented the Society on the World Fair committee and ensured the Dutch a permanent place in the "Century of Progress" exhibition. The Exhibition council also set aside August 31, 1933, Queen Wilhelmina's birthday, as Holland Day at the Fair and thousands of Netherlanders came from far and wide to commemorate Dutch contributions to America.<sup>29</sup>

As a warmup to Holland Day at the World's Fair, the Knickerbockers in cooperation with the Reformed churches in April held a mass com-

memoration of the 400th anniversary of the birth of Prince William of Orange. The *Onze Toekomst* editor crowed: "In droves Dutchmen came from east, west, north and south" to the Chapel of the University of Chicago to sing "Wilhelmus" and listen to speeches, among others, by Dr. Henry Beets of Grand Rapids, Judge De Young of Roseland, and Rabbi Dr. Louis L. Mann of Chicago's Sinai Temple. The rabbi praised King William as a prophet of toleration and religious freedom, making Holland a



Tieman De Vries appointed, 1911-1913, lectures on Dutch institutions at the University of Chicago.

place of refuge for Jews in contrast to Germany. "We are highly pleased," the editor continued in the warm afterglow of the rally, "that the Dutch spirit had finally been awakened from a deep winter sleep . . . We can hardly contain our enthusiasm and call out: 'Come Hollanders, continue on this path.'"<sup>30</sup>

In the decades after World War II the Knickerbocker Society degenerated into a social gathering, with a *rijst-tafel* (Chinese-Indonesian rice dinner) in the spring and *Sinterklaasfeest* in the winter, and occasional *borreluurtjes* (cocktail hours) to fill in. This club is

the only one in the Chicago area still continuing. It held its annual Dutch heritage dinner on November 11, 1995 in the Scandinavian Club in Arlington Heights, Illinois.<sup>31</sup>

Frisians, true to form, insisted on their own social club, the Frisian Society of Chicago, organized in 1925. They chose the name *Ut en Thus* [Away and Home], meaning that Frisians who had left the homeland could feel at home in the club.<sup>32</sup> Activities included the well-known Frisian ball game of *keatsen*; singing, dancing, and talks on Frisian history and heroes; and the enjoyment of traditional foods.

### Conclusion

The heyday of the social clubs spanned the four decades from the Columbian Exposition (1893) to the World's Fair (1933), when the immigrant community was at its high point. The clubs served the educated professionals and self-made businessmen who were largely assimilated but harbored a nostalgia, a romantic attachment, to the land of their birth.

Luurt Holstein, editor of *Onze Toekomst*, voiced these sentiments in an address to the General Dutch League in 1910:

We shall always love that little patch of swampy, seaweed-covered earth across the Atlantic where we (or at least our forefathers) first saw the light of day—the place where we learned our mother-tongue in Mother's arms or on Father's knee! Are we not overwhelmed with heartfelt emotion, almost reverence, by the privilege that is ours tonight of once again seeing our beloved old red, white and blue as it is displayed beside the stars and stripes of our country?<sup>33</sup>

Such rhetoric provided a veneer of cultural remembrance for "*de fijnen*," but it was too intellectual and high brow for the vast majority of immigrants, who showed little enthusiasm

and interest in Dutch national culture. Devout Calvinists were content with their humble church societies, which very well sustained the Dutch religious heritage and language. Thus, it was inevitable that the social clubs would wither and slowly disappear.<sup>34</sup> In their day, however, they made a valuable contribution by easing the feeling of loss and emptiness experienced by some immigrants, who likened themselves to Israelites in exile in Babylon. The societies also passed to the second generation a sense of Dutch pride that still nourishes their descendants. ♣

### End Notes

1. Rob Kroes, *The Persistence of Ethnicity: Dutch Calvinist Pioneers in Amsterdam, Montana* (Urbana, 1992), 9.

2. Dutch stock in Chicago and Cook County totaled 20,000 in 1900, or 1.1 percent of the population. See Robert P. Swierenga, comp., "Dutch in Chicago and Cook County 1900 Federal Census" (1992). Amry Vandenbosch, *The Dutch Communities of Chicago* (Chicago, 1927), 1-3, tallied from church directories 17,000 Dutch Reformed adherents (both communicants and baptized) in Cook County in 1920, out of 22,000 of Dutch birth and ancestry: 7,000 in Roseland; 2,000 in South Holland; 4,200 on the West Side; and 3,500 in Englewood, for a ration of 77 percent Reformed. Histories are Jacob van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America*, Swierenga, gen. ed. Adriaan de Wit, chief trans. (Grand Rapids, 1985), 153-156, 308-309, 346-349, 352, 792-794, 829-830; Henry Lucas, *Netherlanders in America* (Ann Arbor, 1955, repr. Grand Rapids, 1987), 227-232, 325-332; Hans Krabbendam, "The West Side Dutch in Chicago," *Origins*, IX, No. 2 (1991): 4-8. Illuminating reminiscences are Henry Stob, *Summoning Up Remembrance* (Grand Rapids, 1995), chaps. 1-4; William Dryfhout, "Chicago's Far West Siders' in the 1920's and 30's," *ibid.*, 5 No. 1 (1987): 2-19. For Chicago's Dutch Jews,

which numbered less than a thousand, see Swierenga, *The Forerunners: Dutch Jewry in the North American Diaspora* (Detroit, 1994), 267-289.

3. *Christian Intelligencer*, Dec. 3, 1890, p. 11. The first officers were George Birkhoff, Jr., president; H. Pelgrim, vice president; J. Van der Poel, secretary; A.C.H. Nyland, corresponding secretary; and Henry Valk, treasurer. *ibid.*, Mar. 25, 1891, p. 11.

4. John Broekema, an executive of the Marshall Field & Company department store, was the key organizer of the Chicago section, founded on December 14, 1895. Broekema had arrived as a youngster with his immigrant parents in 1867. See *Chicago Record-Herald*, Dec. 9, 1908, with photo of John Broekema. The list of 58 charter members is in *Yearbook of the Holland Society of Chicago, 1895-1896* (Chicago, 1897), 4; and a list of 79 members in 1901 is in *ibid.* (Chicago 1901), 208-209. See also *Onze Toekomst*, Apr. 19, 1907; Apr. 22, 1910. In 1900 D.J. Schuyler was president, George Birkhoff, vice president, Robert H. Van Schaack, secretary, and George E. Van weert, treasurer (*Chicago City Directory*, 1900). In 1902 the Society had 66 active members, 12 of whom lived out of the Chicago area as far as New York City (Peter Bosch and William S. Hofstra), Boston (Henry D. Lloyd), Holland (Gerrit J. Diekema), and Grand Rapids (Anton G. Hodenpyl). Officers in 1901 were: George Birkhoff Jr., president; Daniel R. Brouwer, vice president; Benjamin I. Van Aken, secretary; and Robert H. Van Schaack, treasurer. Other members included: William K. Ackerman, Cornelius V. Banta Jr., Henry Bosch, Edward C. Cooper, Frant H. Cooper, Volney W. Foster, Samuel Eberly Gross, Daniel J. Schuyler, Henry R. Vandercook, Adrian Vanderkloot, Herman Vanderploeg, Charles Van Horne, N. Van Ness Person, Peter Van Schaack, George E. Van Woert, John Vennema, and John Warnshuis. Dr. Abraham Kuyper of Amsterdam was one of the honorary members. See "The Holland Society of Chicago, List of Members April 6, 1902," and "Sixth Annual Banquet of the Holland Society of Chicago, Grand Pacific Hotel, Nineteen Hundred and One, in Commemoration of the Birthday of William of Orange," John Vennema Papers, The Joint Archives, Hope College, Holland, MI.



5. *Yearbook of the Holland Society of Chicago, 1895-1896* (Chicago, 1897), 4, 6, 14; *ibid.*, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1900 (Chicago 1901), 14, 154, 185.

6. Lucas, *Netherlanders*, 595-596. Officers in 1907 were Holger De Roode, president; John H. Roseboom, vice president; Christian Kreuzenga, secretary; and Alfred B. Roseboom, treasurer. *Onze Toekomst*, Apr. 19, 1907. In 1910 William A. Dyche was president and other leaders were attorney Henry Vander Ploeg, Charles T. Wilt, John Broekema, and Harry Martha, *ibid.*, Apr. 22, 1910.

7. *Onze Toekomst*, Jan. 26, Apr. 6, Sept. 14, 1906; Jan. 25, 1907; July 19, 1922. Van Hinte, *Netherlanders*, 1002-03; Lucas, *Netherlanders*, 1002-03; Lucas, *Netherlanders*, 592-95; Vandenbosch, *Dutch Communities*, 71-73.

8. *Gedenkboek van het Algemeen Nederlandsch Verbond bij gelegenheid van zijn 25 jarig bestaan, 18998-Mei-1923. Geschiedenis en invloed van den Nederlandschen stam* (Amsterdam, [1923]). The membership figure is in Luurt Holstein's 1910 address. See L. Holstein Papers.

9. By-laws paraphrased in Luurt Holstein's address at a 1910 rally of the Verbond (typescript in L. Holstein Papers, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI).

10. *Onze Toekomst*, Jan. 25, 1907. The Reverend Marinus E. Broekstra of First Reformed Church of Englewood spoke at the initial open meeting in the First Christian Reformed Church of Chicago and its pastor, the Reverend Evert Breen lectured at the second meeting at the Hastings Street (First Reformed) Church.

11. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, 593.

12. Luurt Holstein of Englewood, a salesman and agent for forty years of the Holland-American Steamship Company, was president of the League at this time. He belonged to the Christian Reformed Church. *Onze Toekomst*, Dec. 13, 1907.

13. *Onae Toekomst*, Dec. 13, 1907; Nov. 20, 1908; Feb. 12, 1909; Holstein address to Algemeen Nederlandsch Verbond rally, Chicago, 1910, in L. Holstein Papers. A Oosterheerdt of Chicago led the petition campaign.

14. *Onze Toekomst*, March 31, 1911.

15. The committee consisted of Chicagoans Albert Oosterheerdt, chair,

Jacobsma and Birkhoff, consul general John Vennema; and Central College professor Jan Nollen. *Onze Toekomst*, July 31, No. 20, 1908; Feb. 12, 1909. League officers in 1907-1909 were Birkhoff, Oosterheerdt, Jacobsma, Holstein, Henry Berrends, Henry U. Masman, John De Boer, Th. Koopmans, Reverend Nicholas Boer, Conrad Ottenhoff, and theo Koelikamp. Membership in 1907 totaled 32.

16. *Onze Toekomst*, Mar. 24, Apr. 7, 1911. The editor did not identify the Hope professor, but it was likely Albert Raap, professor of Dutch from 1903 to 1924, according to Professor Emeritus Elton Bruins of Hope College in a letter to the author, November 5, 1995.

17. Tiemen de Vries, *Dutch History, Art and Literature for Americans: Lectures Given at the University of Chicago* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., 1912), 15-17. De Vries claimed he was giving voice to eight million Americans "who feel Dutch blood in their veins."

18. I am indebted to Maureen Anna Harp, doctoral student in history at the University of Chicago, for searching the University Archives concerning De Vries's appointment. See University of Chicago *Annual Register*, July, 1910 - July, 1911. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1911), 54; Board of Trustees, Minutes, vol. 7 (1909-1913), pp. 242, 446, Vol. 8 (1913-1914), pp. 1-2, typescript, University of Chicago Archives.

19. Vandenbosch, *Dutch Communities*, 71-73; Lucas, *Netherlanders*, 596-9

20. *Onze Toekomst*, Apr. 13, 1906.

21. *Onze Toekomst*, July 23, 1909; Aug. 26, 1910.

22. *Onze Toekomst*, Aug. 26, Sept. 9, 1910.

23. *Onze Toekomst*, Apr. 5, July 19, Aug. 30, 1922; Vandenbosch, *Dutch Communities*, 73-74.

24. The society was conceived in 1905 by Christian Kreuzenga, Henry Vander Ploeg, and John Broekema. The organizational meeting in 1906 elected Dr. D. Birkhoff president, Sietse De Vries vice president, and John Tillbuscher secretary. *Onze Toekomst*, Nov. 15, 1907. Leading members were the medical doctors Henry B. De Bey and Robert L. Van Dellen, Robert's brother Professor Elias L. Van Dellen, and the Illinois lawmaker Cornelius J. Ton.

25. *Onze Toekomst*, Dec. 25, 1908.

26. *Onze Toekomst*, Jan. 8, Dec. 10, 1909; Dec. 9, 1910. Other members were Edward E. Takken, John Vennema, Henry Reininga, and Harry Bierma.

27. The Society, organized in January 1924, was led first by insurance agent Gelmer Kuiper, an official of the Pere Marquette and Chicago Grand trunk Railroad; Dr. J.H. Hospers; and James J. Van Pernis, editor of *Onze Toekomst* (Vandenbosch, *Dutch Communities*, 70-71). Subsequent presidents were Dr. Gabriel J. Heyboer, a dentist in Englewood, and Theodore S. Youngsma, a Chicago independent insurance agent. For reports on monthly meetings, see *Onae Toekomst*, Feb. 20, Apr. 16, July 30, 1924; June 15, 1927; May 20, 1931; Aug. 26, 1936. The March 1, 1933 issue includes a history of the Society. Charter members were Dr. F.A. Bisdom, Luurt Holstein, Dr. F.J. Hospers, Dr. J.H. Hospers, D.L.H. Kiel, Gelmer Kuiper, Professor J.C., Penn, vice Consul F. Posthuma, Jacob H. Rook, Professor M.W. Sensstius, Amry Vanden Bosch, J. Vander Vries, James J. Van Pernis, Consul John Vennema, I.O. Yntema, and Lucas J. Zwiers. The most significant historical contribution of the Society was to publish in 1927 Amry Vanden Bosch's masters thesis at the university of Chicago, *The Dutch Communities of Chicago*.

28. *Onze Toekomst*, Feb. 12, 1931.

29. *Onze Toekomst*, Jan. 21, Feb. 13, 1931; Jan. 25, Mar. 1, June 26, Aug. 29, 1933.

30. *Onze Toekomst*, Apr. 2, 26, 1933; Consistory minutes, first reformed church of Chicago, Mar. 2, 1933, p. 165.

31. *Onze Toekomst*, Jan. 21, Feb. 1931; *De Nieuwe Amsterdammer*, Nov., 1995.

32. Ut en Thus in 1925 elected D. Driesbergen president, H. Brilsma secretary, and Piet de Painter treasurer. *Onze Toekomst*, Mar. 11, 1925.

33. Luurt Holstein Address, Algemeen Nederlandsch Verbond Rally, Chicago, 1910, in L. Holstein Papers.

34. Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America*, 1003.

# Dear Queen . . .

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

Stories of emigration are as many and varied as the people who emigrated. There are, however, some common threads running through these stories. There is the dream of a better life, the wrenching decision to leave family and friends, and, not in the least, the concerns of how to



Queen Regent, Emma.

finance the voyage. Since most people emigrated because they were poor, passage fares were a very real problem. One way, of course, was to sell all your belongings to raise the necessary funds. Others depended on loans from friends and relatives. Now and again a timely inheritance paved the way. Klaas Sjaarda's story of how he raised the necessary funds is not only refresh-

*Janet Sheeres is a family historian, genealogist and a Frisian language enthusiast.*

ingly ingenious, but somewhat humorous as well.

In 1893 Klaas Sjaarda, thirty-one years of age, was living in the village of Arum, Friesland, with his wife and three children.<sup>1</sup> Economic conditions were bleak, and although Klaas worked hard as a farm laborer, he had difficulty providing for his family. Glowing reports from friends in America urged him to emigrate. In a memoir which Klaas wrote toward the end of his life, he states:

In the early spring of 1893 I made up my mind to leave Friesland and go to America. We, my wife and I, did not have money to buy tickets for the journey. Neither of us had relatives in America. The tickets would cost fl.250<sup>2</sup> for myself, my wife and our three children. Another fl.200 was needed for food and other expenses during the trip for a total of fl.450. By selling everything we had, including my wife's golden *oorijzer*<sup>3</sup> and silverware, we collected fl.300. Three friends were willing to co-sign a note at the bank for fl.50.00 leaving us still fl.100 short of the minimum requirement of fl.450.00.

But Klaas was not defeated. In fact, Klaas was, in a way, the very kind of person who embodied the American "can do" spirit, before he was even in America! While he prayed for the Lord to provide, he devised a plan. He remembered his two brothers, who had served as palace guards, telling him what a wonderful person their Queen-Regent, Emma, was. Well, why not write and ask her for the fl.100? This insurmountable sum to him, would be a mere pittance to her. And so on a

fine spring evening in 1893, Klaas sat down in his humble home in Arum, and wrote to the Queen-Regent of the Netherlands in her palace.

To Her Royal Highness,  
the Queen-Regent

*I, the undersigned, am so bold, to turn to Your Majesty, and to put myself at your Royal Highness' disposal. My two brothers<sup>4</sup> served Your Majesty at the court as militia and they told me about Your Majesty and encouraged me to find favor with Your Majesty and to tell you about my situation and desires—I am thirty-one years of age; I have a wife and three children, and have been brought up as a decent human being, and having always earned my clothes and keep as a laborer, it now seems that I can no longer meet my needs. I have applied here and there for a possible position, but have not been successful due to the many other applicants. Therefore, I have decided, if at all possible, that I would go to N(orth) America to find my fortune there, but this plan also fell flat because I am still 100 guilders short for the necessary travel expenses, and therefore, I have decided to turn to Your Royal Highness for compassion and help inasmuch as it will please Your Majesty to do so, and whatever Your Majesty sees fit to send me, I will pay back if at all possible. I greet Your Royal Highness with all respect and remain your humble servant,*

*Klaas Sjaarda at Arum, County of  
Wonseradeel, Province of Friesland*

Emma, Queen-Regent of the Netherlands, was thirty-four in 1893 when Klaas Sjaarda's letter was brought to her attention. She was the widow of King Willem III,<sup>5</sup> and the Queen-Regent for crown-princess Wilhelmina. Emma came from the small German principality of Waldeck-Pyrmont, and she and Willem married in 1879 when she was only twenty and



Arum, Friesland. The village of Arum, Friesland, as drawn by Jan Bulthuis around 1790.

he was sixty-two! As a young girl in Germany, Emma was tutored by a governess who had a profound influence on her. The governess taught her social values, among others, to be sensitive to the plight of the common man—the factory and field worker.<sup>6</sup> During her lifetime, Emma was known to entertain many a commoner at the palace. Her motto was, “not to be happy, but to make happy, that is the highest honor.”<sup>7</sup>

But Emma was no pushover for a sad story. She made sure her beneficiaries were truly needy and worthy of a helping hand. And so she dispatched her Director of Goodwill and Benevolence to find out from the Mayor of Wonseradeel,<sup>8</sup> what kind of man this Klaas Sjaarda was and whether he really meant to use the money to go to America.

Waldhaus-Flims 16 May 1893

To the Honorable Director of Good Will and Benevolence of Her Majesty the Queen at the Hague

Her Majesty the Queen-Regent has charged Your Honor with — the letter, enclosed, of Klaas Sjaarda, wherein he states his need for fl.100 to go to America. Her Majesty wishes to know if the petitioner really has plans to go to America and, if so, if he would have

any future there rather than to go there to live on welfare. Is he connected with any society or organization? If the answer is favorable then the Queen feels disposed to grant him his request with the stipulation that the money be used solely for this purpose.

The Administrative Assistant  
in the service of Her Majesty the  
Queen-Regent

Years later Klaas wrote in his memoirs:

Four days later the police came with an order that I had to appear before the mayor. I was scared and wondered what had I done; however, I could not think of anything—my conscience was clear. I left work and went to the mayor. The mayor said, “Good day, Sjaarda. Say, Sjaarda, what have you done?” “Nothing I know of, sir.” At the time I was not thinking about the letter I had written to the Queen. He asked, “Did you write to the Queen?” “Yes, sir,” I said, but thought, was that out of place? The mayor continued, “I have received a letter from the Queen asking me to inquire about you as a person. What shall I write?” I asked him if he would say a good word for me to the Queen.

Whatever the Mayor thought of Klaas going straight to the top to ask

for money is not known. However, he was gracious in his reply regarding the person and character of Klaas Sjaarda, for he wrote back:

Addendum, Missive of 20 May 1893 n. 305 regarding Klaas Sjaarda

To the Honorable Director of Good Will and Benevolence of Her Majesty the Queen at the Hague

In answer to the enclosed addendum, I have the pleasure to inform your Honor that the petitioner is an upstanding citizen of good moral character and has a good reputation as a laborer. He really does intend to go to America where a friend of his has settled who has promised to help him get started. He is not tied to any organization or society, but will try to better his financial situation by working as a laborer, though he is also skilled as a carpenter. As far as the petitioner is concerned—there are good reasons to respond favorably to his request.

The Mayor of Wonseradeel

Klaas wrote in his memoirs: “Four days later the police came again. I was asked to come to the mayor again. The mayor greeted me, ‘Good day, Sjaarda, I have news for you. ‘What do you have, what does the Queen say? Is she willing to help me?’”

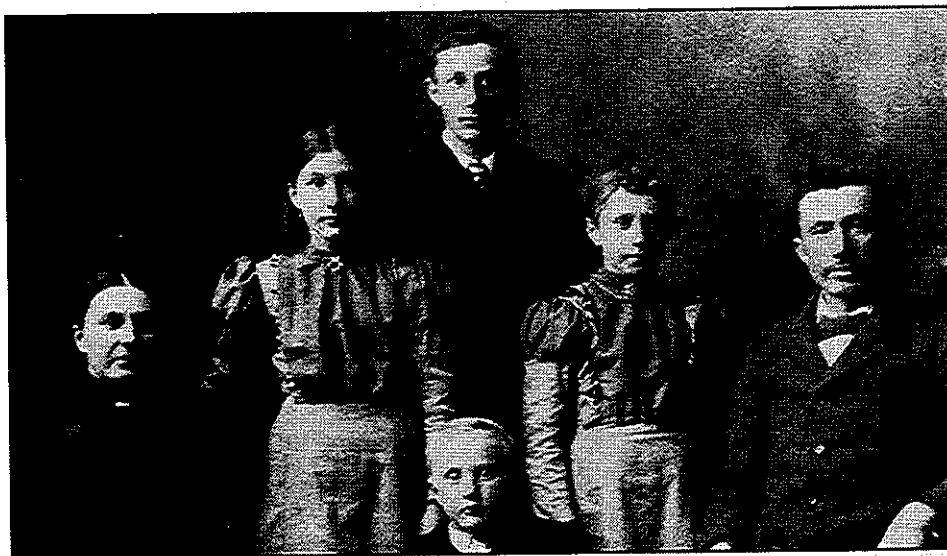
The mayor had in his hands the answer directly from the Queen’s secretary to her Director of Good Will and Benevolence. It had been forwarded to the Mayor of Wonseradeel, who in turn passed it on to Klaas.

Waldhaus-Flims 2 June, 1893

Special Appropriation

To the Honorable Director of Good Will and Benevolence of Her Majesty the Queen at the Hague

Issued 5 June 1893. In compliance with the wishes of Her Royal Highness, the Queen-Regent, I have the pleasure to answer Your Honor’s letter to Her Majesty of 25 May to wit—“that Your Honor’s proposal to award Sjaarda



Klaas Sjaarda family in the USA, 1896.

fl.100 be granted and that His Honor the Mayor is instructed to go ahead with request with the stipulation the money be used solely for the purpose stated" Her Majesty wishes to ascertain that extra special notice will be taken that the moneys will be used for passage to America.

*The Administrative Assistant in the Service of Her Majesty the Queen-Regent*

It was not everyday that the Mayor of Wonseradeel did business with Her Majesty's staff, and he insured them that he would carry out the Queen's wishes as stipulated. The fl.100 was safe with him until Klaas could show him his tickets for the trip.

*Addendum*

To the Honorable Director of Good Will and Benevolence of Her Majesty the Queen at the Hague

In fulfillment of your Missive of 5 June 1893, I have the honor to return to you the enclosed, signed receipt. To endure that the funds will be used for no other purpose than the one for which Her Royal Highness the Queen-Regent has stipulated, the beneficiary, Klaas Sjaarda, and I have agreed that I will retain the funds in my care until such a time when he shows me his tickets for

the journey. The beneficiary is very grateful to Her Majesty.

*The Mayor of Wonseradeel*

We can imagine how Klaas felt as he headed home from the mayor's office to tell his wife, Wendtje, about their good fortune. The letter he wrote his Queen reflects his joy and gratitude.

Arum, 10 June 1893

To Her Royal Highness, Queen-Regent

To my great joy, I was able to see for myself the truth which my brothers spoke about Your Majesty, and your compassion for needy people like myself when I received the news from the Mayor of Wonseradeel when he said to me, see here Sjaarda, the favor of your Queen. The Queen has granted your request and has sent you the fl.100 to help you complete your journey to America. For this help I am so exceedingly thankful to Your Majesty that I do not have words to express it, because I was really counting on it! I hope to express my gratitude by writing letters to you. If all goes well, we leave June 30.

We respectfully remain your loyal subjects,

*Klaas Sjaarda and wife  
Wendtje Heins*

Almost one year later, again in early spring, Klaas wrote a final letter to the Queen.

Orange City, Iowa, 16 March 1894  
To Her Royal Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands,

As I promised Your Highness a letter from me from the United States, should we by God's grace be well, I am now finding some time to fulfill my promise and will do this as well as I am able. Should you find anything inappropriate in my writing, please forgive me. It has been some time now since Your Grace in God's hand has helped me to arrive at this place. And all this time my wife and I have often spoken about Your Highness because such a great favor is not something we will ever forget. Especially when we realize that you must have many people complaining in the Netherlands. As for us, we are happy to be here. Eight months ago we left the Netherlands, the land of our birth and that was very difficult, but God provides what we ask for in faith. Also your gift to us was an answer to our prayer. And you, O Honored Lady, will receive grace from God in the Life Everlasting. Because all you do for the needy is remembered by God, and He will reward, not according to what we deserve, but according to the grace of our God who lives and reigns. I did not write to you sooner because I first wanted to gain some knowledge and experience of America. We travelled with an English shipping line, from Harlingen, Friesland, to Hull, England. From Hull we travelled by train to Liverpool and there we stayed for three days before boarding our boat to Philadelphia. The line was good but there were many unsavory characters among the passengers which made the trip less pleasant. We arrived in Philadelphia, and even though our eyes had seen much in England, we were amazed at the sight and great number of all the beautiful pleasure boats sailing in the

Philadelphia harbor. We arrived at three in the afternoon and left at six in the evening. We were very happy that the ocean voyage was behind us because train travel here is beautiful and comfortable. We were all still healthy and well and travelled straight through until we got to the State of Indiana. There we had a layover of four hours. We used the time to wash and refresh ourselves. We continually saw much forest and high mountains. I was amazed that America was so hilly. Also, I can tell your Majesty that when you travel through America for the first time you see some strange sights. In the cities the buildings are tall and grand and arts and crafts flourish, but in the country you see some very modest dwellings. Well, my eyes tired from seeing so much. What wonderful great and powerful works. O Queen Emma, you know much also about America, but still to see it all with one's own eyes is most excellent. We arrived in good shape in Roseland (Illinois). God has kept us safe on the great journey. Although travelling is not as bad as some people say. If you keep calm and behave yourself you will have no problem. After we were at our destination only about four hours our baggage arrived as well. But what really astonished and also disappointed me was the first thing I heard—that there was no work in America.<sup>9</sup> Well I was amazed, but still I had faith that God would support us. And although I thought I would earn my keep in Roseland, God had other plans for us. I was in Roseland twelve days, eight of which I worked and four of those in the great factory of the Pullman Company, the same one you O Queen have several cars from so I was told.<sup>10</sup> Then I went from there to Orange City, State of Iowa, because the work in the factory was at a standstill. Roseland is about five to six hundred miles, or about two hundred hours,<sup>11</sup> from Orange City. Now we have been here as long as I mentioned earlier. My wife and I are

very content to be here even though at first I had to do quite a bit of chasing and running around, still good things take time. But with the Lord's help I have been busy. And God has, first through you and now through the people here, blessed me enormously. I was able to save enough for one cow and twenty chickens and a pig<sup>12</sup> and the good people here have helped me so much that now I have two cows in the barn, 115 chickens and three pigs. I have rented a house with thirteen acres of land, so we are wonderfully happy to be here. And we are still very thankful for your help. And as far as living here, we enjoy living here because we have very good preachers here who preach in the Dutch language. Our children are learning to read the American language and I can help myself somewhat (in English) as well. We have a beautiful school here with eight rooms or grades. The people here are dressed very well and we like being here. Well, Queen, I am going to quit writing. Rejoice with us. And if Your Majesty should like to know anything else, I am at your service. However, I would really like to know if my letter reached you personally. We wish your Majesty God's richest blessing, and receive the greetings of Klaas Sjaarda and wife Wendtje Heins, born in Arum Friesland.

Besides living in Orange City, the family moved several times, at one time living in Pease, Minnesota, where Klaas was one of the first two elders of the Pease CRC. He read the sermon during their first church service. Simon and Hendrik Sjaarda followed Klaas to America one year later. Klaas died in Orange City, Iowa, in November 1943. Queen Emma died in March, 1934. Of her it was said, "She was strong, wise, and steadfast, and she had a generous heart." Klaas Sjaarda would have agreed.✠

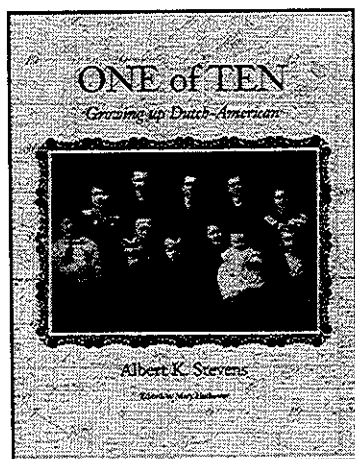
#### End Notes

1. Jan (John), born 17 April 1885; Ytje (Eta), born 3 February 1888; Trijntje (Kate), born 30 January 1890; one son, Nicholas was born in Orange City, Iowa on 23 July 1895.
2. Guilder (fl.) = 100 cents. The currency rate in 1893 was \$1.00 to 2.50 guilder.
3. Ornamental headpiece worn by Frisian women made of lace and gold or silver.
4. *Simon Sjaarda (born 1863) and Hendrik Sjaarda (born 1870)*.
5. King Willem III (1817-1890) was previously married to Sophia of Wurtemberg. His three sons by Sophia died without issue by the time Wilhelmina, his only daughter by Emma, was four years old.
6. Bauer, H. (1994) *Koningen Emma, Margriet, #19 Haarlem, the Netherlands: Medianet*.
7. *Ibid*.
8. County in Friesland in which Arum was located. Witmarsum was the county seat where the mayor resided.
9. In June 1893 the stock market crashed in the USA due to the government's decision to go off the silver standard. Silver dollars were worth only sixty cents and continued to drop. Six hundred banks closed, seventy-four railroads and fifteen thousand businesses collapsed, resulting in wide-scale unemployment.
10. Queen Emma used the tram to travel extensively throughout the Netherlands always with young Wilhelmina; thus the nation had an opportunity to get acquainted with their young princess while Wilhelmina got to know her subjects. This public relations endeavor on the part of Emma was hugely successful.
11. Walking hours — (many of) the Dutch measured distance by how long it took to walk from point A to point B.
12. Klaas wrote in his memoir: "Our first winter in America, the winter of 93-94 went well. I had patented a mouse trap and sold them that winter. The next spring I chopped down trees and sold them."



# books

Reviews by Conrad J. Bult



## One of Ten Growing up Dutch-American

Albert K. Stevens,  
edited by Mary Hathaway\*

Albert K. Stevens (1901-1984) spent his childhood and youth in the Fremont, Michigan area. He graduated from Calvin in 1924, married Angelyn Bouwsma in 1925 and did graduate work at the University of Michigan during the years 1925-1927. From 1927 until retirement, he taught in the department of English at the University of Michigan. He was a member of the First Presbyterian Church in Ann Arbor and an active participant in organizations reflecting his liberal economic and political ideas.

The first 250 pages contain 89 autobiographical sketches on a wide variety of subjects. Among the intriguing titles found here are: "Our Privy," "Puppy and Adolescent Loves," "Typical Day on the Farm," and "School Day Games." More serious topics are discussed under the headings "My Politics Progressive," "Calvin

College," "Dutch Culture, Yankee Land," "Huisbezoek," and "My Inner Religion." Of great value to anyone concerned about the political climate in America during the late 1940s and 1950s is a sixty-page appendix containing letters between Stevens and his past students, correspondence with relatives and friends, and one letter to the famous poet W.H. Auden.

Mary Hathaway, a daughter of Stevens, has edited this illustrated volume which also contains a 1900 plat map of the rural area around Fremont and two sections of a 1920 railway map depicting the towns and settlements surrounding Fremont and Ann Arbor. From Fremont to Ann Arbor was quite an intellectual journey for A.K. Stevens, a man who cherished

the English language and his Reformed heritage even though he was not fond of those who exhibited a self-righteous attitude or ethnic provincialism.

In a few pages titled "Understanding Dad," Stevens expresses regret for not getting to know his father better. Perhaps after reading this book you will regret not knowing Stevens and not talking with him about topics of mutual interest. Some of those might be pea-shooters, poverty, puberty, philosophy of life, Dutch-Americanism, peppermints, Calvin College, and the Christian Reformed Church.

\*To order, please send \$18 + \$3 postage to Mary Hathaway, 1407 Wakefield Avenue, Ann Arbor, MI 48103 (checks payable to Mary Hathaway). Paperback (8 1/2 x 11), 323 pages.



## A Dutch Romance . . . An American Dream!

Millie Van Wyke  
Denver, CO: 1995.\*

Jan and Neeltje van't Sant van Wijk spent their youthful years in Haarlemmermeer, were married there in 1890, and left the Netherlands for the United States in 1893. Northeastern Colorado was their destination. Soon after their arrival in an area near Sterling, Colorado, they realized they had been victimized by a fraudulent

Dutch company employing salesmen very adept with pious words. These unscrupulous individuals had urged Jan and Neeltje and many other unsuspecting folk in the Netherlands to settle in Colorado. After a few futile attempts at farming in Colorado, the Van Wijk family moved to Maxwell City in northeastern New Mexico, their home during the years 1899-1908. Prosperous times were few there and in 1909 the Van Wijk's made their final move to Kuner, Colorado, a settlement sixty miles northeast of Denver.

As the author states, "Here they would try to recreate the Haarlemmermeer in America a third time. Here they would stay." Through the efforts of the Van Wijks and a few other like-minded folk, a Kuner Christian Reformed Church was established in 1909 and existed until 1918 when it was disbanded for lack of members. After this date the Van Wijks shifted their membership to the Denver Christian Reformed Church.

Though Jan van Wijk achieved modest financial success ranching and farming in the Kuner area, grasshop-

pers and lack of rain often meant crop failure rather than a good harvest. Nor did the Van Wijks ever find themselves in a vibrant successful Calvinistic community, even though they heartily and with great sacrifice supported this cherished but always elusive goal. Worn down by never-ending hard work, grief and adversity, Neeltje van Wijk, mother of ten children, died in 1925. Her husband Jan outlived her by twelve years. About Neeltje the author notes:

As one friendly, non-Dutch neighbor said, "I've never known a more lonely woman than Mrs. van Wijk." Yet triumph of the human spirit

looms large in this narrative and is most clearly evident in Part II titled, "A Dutch Romance" which contains Jan and Neeltje's 1887-1890 love letters. Surreptitiously exchanged and delivered to the lovers by mutual friends, these letters reveal a courtship constantly threatened by neighborhood gossip, differing family status, Neeltje's vacillating father, Calvinist theology, various interpretations of the writings of Abraham Kuypers and a host of relatives and friends who viewed the four-year courtship either optimistically or with pessimism. Profoundly poignant, these letters reveal a depth of religious commitment

and pious pragmatism coupled with a robust faith expressed frequently by both Neeltje and Jan.

Millie Van Wyke has written an engrossing book about her ancestors. Once you have read it, you will never forget Neeltje and Jan. Maps and well-chosen illustrations help the reader vicariously participate in the varied experiences of this couple both in the Netherlands and America.

*\*To order, please send \$23 + \$2.25 postage to Millie Van Wyke, 3575 E. Vassar Avenue, Denver, CO 80210 (checks payable to Millie Van Wyke). Paper, perfect-bound (8 1/2 x 11), 349 pages. Please add an additional \$2 for each copy of the genealogy.*



## To Lie In Green Pastures

Everett Vande Beek\*

In 1910 fisherman Jan Duyst (1859-1937) and his family left their ancestral home, Spakenburg a small fishing village on the Zuider Zee, for far-off Chile. Economically, the Duysts did not thrive there and perhaps of more significance, these devout folk found themselves without the spiritual sustenance provided by fellow believers with whom they could worship and share their faith. During the years 1920-1921 a few members of the Duyst family migrated from Chile to Minnesota. Finding the winter cold inhospit-

table and farming methods much different than in Chile, the intrepid Duysts went west and settled in Hanford, California. During 1923, the last of the Duysts were reunited in California's San Joaquin Valley where they became successful dairy farmers.

From archival materials available in the Spakenburg Historical Society, Everett Vande Beek, a grandson of Jan Duyst, recreates the history of the town and region where his ancestors had lived for many generations and furthermore quotes extensively from the letters of his Uncle Cornelius (Case) Duyst, who in the 1950s wrote a series of letters about the migratory wanderings of the Duyst family for the *Bunschoten Bode* (*Bunschoten Messenger*), the local newspaper of Bunschoten, a town directly adjacent to Spakenburg. Also of great value to Vande Beek were the letters of Jan Zyl, Jan Duyst's brother-in-law, who had also found a new home in Chile. Unlike the Duyst family, he did not leave Chile. His letters reflect the thoughts of a keenly observant man who found that his new environment held little financial promise while it also eroded family ties with the distant Duyst clan in California.

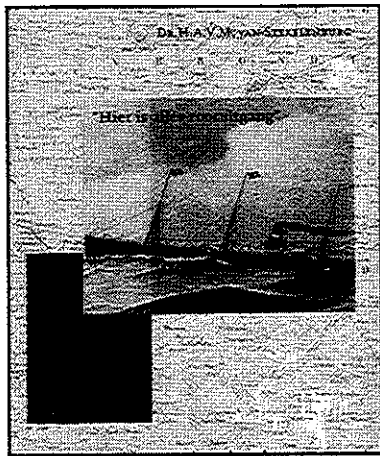
The unsung heroine of this fascinat-

ing family history is Gijsbertje Duyst (*nee Zyl*), the wife of Jan Duyst, a resolute woman of frail health, who early in life had endured much sadness owing to the death of two young brothers. Even more, the death of her twins and the constant worry about her husband while at sea made the life of this mother of seven a less than happy existence. About her Vande Beek writes:

All sources agree that it was Gijsbertje Duyst, not her husband Jan, who was determined to leave the Netherlands. Jan was quite content with his fisherman's life.

To this day the departure of the Duyst family from Spakenburg is an event not forgotten by the ancestors of those who actually witnessed what at the time was a far from ordinary occurrence. While reading this well illustrated narrative, you will share the dogged determination of the Duysts in their quest for a congenial place to make a living and live a life in accordance with their deeply held Reformed religious views.

*\*To order, please send \$18 + \$3 postage to Gerrit Vande Beek, 921 Barcelona, Santa Barbara, CA 93105 (checks payable to Gerrit Vande Beek). Paperback, 203 pages.*



### Hier is alles Vooruitgang

Dr. H.A.V.M. van Stekelenburg

Stichting Zuidelijk Historisch Contact  
Tilburg, 1996

by Anthony Hop

With "Hier is alles vooruitgang," or "It's All Progress Here," with this title Henk van Stekelenburg introduces to the public his study on emigration from the Dutch province of North Brabant to North America. It sequels his 1991 dissertation concerning the transatlantic emigration from the same province between 1820 and 1880, involves the period 1880 to 1940. Throughout this interval, in which Europe experienced severe economic hardship, wars, industrialization, and a population increase, many Europeans, including some Dutch, felt compelled to emigrate to North America in an effort to secure a prosperous future. Therefore, one would expect that many people in North Brabant had followed this European trend. Surprisingly this was not the case. Only a mere 5,000 North Brabanders gave up everything they had in exchange for a residence in North America. This number is even more astonishing when one realizes that the province's population during this interval doubled from about a half million to one million inhabitants. The

burning question van Stekelenburg ponders is why so relatively few North Brabanders considered emigration to North America a feasible option?

To answer that question van Stekelenburg demonstrates that the living situation in North Brabant was relatively prosperous compared to other regions in the Netherlands and Europe. The negative effects of the dramatic population increase, and the agricultural crisis, caused by cheap grain imports from North America, were largely offset by the process of modernization. According to van Stekelenburg, modernization occurred in North Brabant in the form of specialization and innovation. The result was a more efficient agriculture, with an increased production. At the same time the expansion of both the industrial and service sectors took place, offering enough employment to a rapidly growing work force. It is this unique interaction of population growth, agricultural crisis, and modernization which allowed people in North Brabant to enjoy a relative prosperity in an era bringing so much despair to fellow Europeans.

In addition to the relative economic well-being, Van Stekelenburg points to the Roman Catholic Church as a factor hindering emigration. Out of fear for emigrants jeopardizing their external existence and their material existence, the church forbade all its institutions and organizations founded and operated on Roman Catholic principles to encourage or propagate emigration.

The observed caution concerning emigration was not without foundation. Van Stekelenburg devotes considerable attention to emigrant recruitment activities in the Netherlands. Special interest groups such as shipping companies and railroad companies in North America often recruited and added to their payroll Dutch Americans and Dutch Canadians. These agents, including clergy,

were commissioned to round up as many people as possible for emigration in the Netherlands. Preferably, these potential emigrants had to settle on uncultivated lands in the West and Midwest of America and Canada. Recruiters were relying on printed matter portraying even the North American plains as the Garden of Eden. Consequently, emigrants wooed by this propaganda, arrived in North America with high expectations. Upon arrival, they discovered that by and large, they ended up with a desert, contrary to the promised lot in a land of milk and honey. Some emigrants died broken hearted, some persevered and made progress, while others in agony returned home.

As more and more stories of adversity found their way to North Brabant it became clear that the recruitment of emigrants had become a rather 'shady' business. In the course of time, the Dutch government offered some solace. Finally, in 1936, the selection of emigrants became regulated by law. Thus, some of the unscrupulous recruitment practices in Europe discontinued. But by that time, the stories of adversity and hardship experienced by many North Brabanders in North America had already produced an effect. Together with the relative prosperity in the province, they kept the number of North Brabant emigrants to North America to a minimum.

*It is All Progress Here* offers the reader great insights into issues surrounding the emigration from a province in the Netherlands often neglected in emigration history. Furthermore, the moving, intriguing illustrations van Stekelenburg selected to accompany his thesis makes this book a pleasure to read by those people fascinated with the emigrants' plight before World War II. In short, I heartily recommend van Stekelenburg's work to *Origins'* readers. 6

# for the future

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



“Wrong Side Up” —selections from William Recker’s autobiography, Chicago to Montana (1894-1953)

Working together for Good: An RCA/CRC Family Heritage by *Thomas Boslooper*

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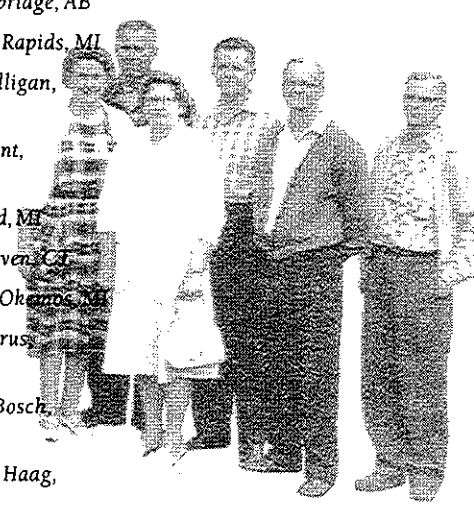
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