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This first annual issue is focused on the Chicago area, while subsequent numbers will treat regions such as Western Michigan, Ontario, Iowa, and California.

Cover: *Heritage*, original lithograph by Chris Stoffel Overvoorde; a limited edition.

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# Netherlanders in the Chicago Area



*Roseland, Illinois, 1907. Michigan and 111th Street—usually called "the Ave."*

Originating as a trading post in 1779, Chicago remained little more than a military outpost until after 1837, when, with a population of about 4,000, it became a city. Over the next decade, canals and railroads bound the city to a vast agricultural hinterland, and Chicago became a center for grain trade, meat processing, and the manufacture of agricultural machinery. As the railroad transportation center of the Midwest, Chicago attracted George Pullman's Railroad Car Company to south Chicago, where many Dutch immigrants found work; for by 1870 Chicago had become a large city with a population of 300,000.

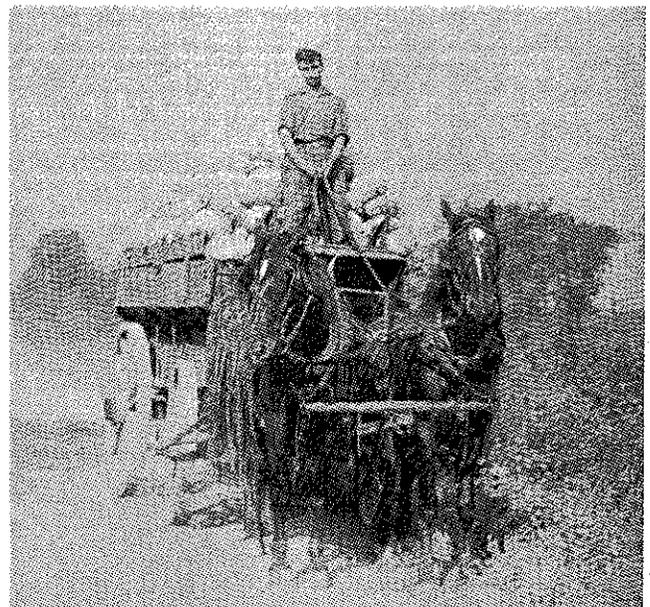
## **Two Settlements: The Low Prairie and the High Prairie**

The Dutch entered this area in 1846, when six families purchased segments of land along the Calumet River, which they named Low Prairie. Later, remembering their place of birth, they dubbed the village South Holland. There, they purchased the land for prices from between five and twenty-five dollars per acre.

In 1849 another cluster of Dutchmen occupied open land six miles closer to Chicago and named their settlement the High Prairie. After a time its name was changed to Roseland. Both of these agricultural communities found ready markets for their produce in Chicago, which readily absorbed the garden vegetables produced in Roseland and South Holland. In a short time Dutch settlers branched out to the southeast, occupying additional farmland in Oak Glen and Munster, so that by 1853 Dutch immigrants had claimed several thousand acres with access to Ridge Road, a main artery to the Chicago markets. Over the next forty years these original settlements spawned new communities in Highland, De Motte, and Wichert, all with access to Chicago's markets.

Among these early agricultural settlements, Roseland quickly became diversified because George Pullman

constructed his railroad car factory within easy reach of the Dutch settlement. The factory attracted a large work force and property values rose rapidly. Land purchased at five dollars per acre in 1849 sold for \$2,000 per acre in 1880. At such prices farmers sold to subdividers and moved to less expensive lands available among their countrymen in South Holland, Munster, and elsewhere. For example, Harm and Alie Tien came to the Roseland area in 1858, and after renting land for a time, they purchased a farm on 87th Street. As the land value increased the Tiens sold the farm, paid off their 9% loan,



*Mr. John Santefoort, South Holland farmer, with a wagon-load of cabbage bound for the Chicago produce market.*



Mr. Edward Van Kley, South Holland Postman, with mailbags; about 1935.

and moved to another location on 103rd Street. Then they moved again, selling the 103rd Street farm for about \$900 per acre. They remained on their third farm on 107th Street until 1880, when they moved to Graafschap, Michigan, to rejoin the German border folk with whom they emigrated in 1858. Other immigrants who joined the Roseland community after 1880 became urbanites, often finding employment in the factories of George Pullman, and by the turn of the century Roseland became a flourishing Dutch-American community.

### The Groninger's Hoek

There was also a growing concentration of Dutch-Americans close to Chicago's center. That neighborhood, often called the "Groninger's Hoek," dates from 1848. The earliest settlers there, primarily from the Dutch province of Groningen, found profitable employment in Chicago. Peter Ritsma from Vierhuizen wrote that he and his brother were "earning 18 dollars per month. We pay \$2.00 for board and laundry so that each month we can save 25 guilders and besides we have money for clothes, tobacco, and so forth. Jacob is working for a milkman, and I am working for a brewer."

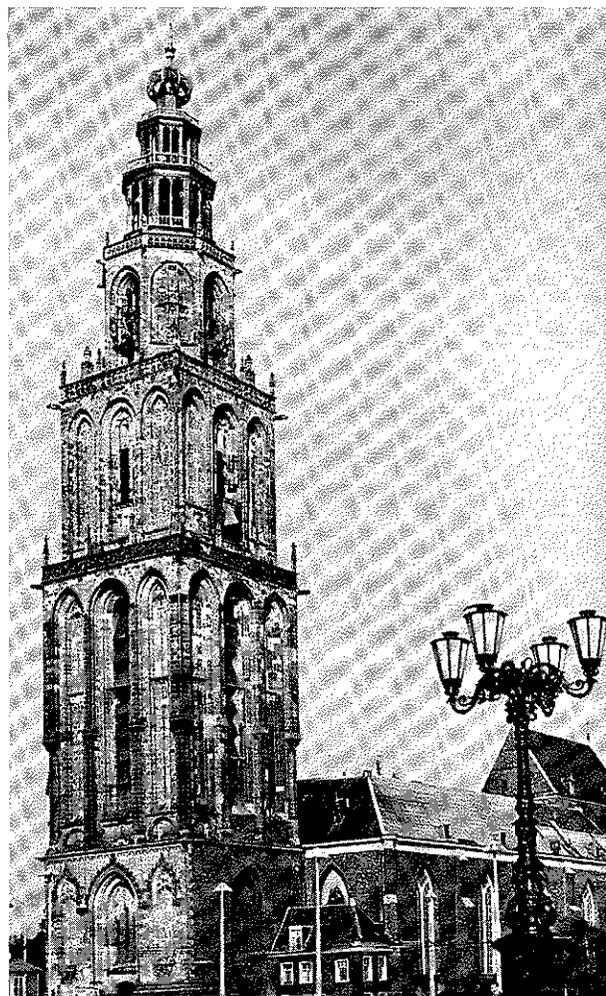
The Chicago Groningers had no Dutch church until 1858, and consequently they did not demonstrate the same degree of ethnic unity as was evident in the communities of South Holland and Roseland. But, beginning in 1858, Rev. C. Vander Meulen, the founder of the Zeeland, Michigan, Kolonie, organized the first Dutch Reformed Church, which he served until 1860. The church did not thrive though until Rev. Bernardus de Beij accepted its call in 1868. Without his vigorous leadership this Dutch community in Chicago probably would have been assimilated into other ethnic cultures in Chicago.

Like his parishioners, Rev. de Beij immigrated from Groningen, and he became an ardent advocate of immigration to Chicago. By 1869 he was already providing instructions to prospective emigrants. In the *Provincial Groninger Courant* he suggested that immigrants could avoid complications after arriving in New York by trav-

eling on the Pennsylvania Central Railroad. Earlier travelers had complained that their trip to Chicago had taken a whole week because of delays and false information. To avoid this, de Beij offered precise instructions:

People should follow these instructions—buy your tickets at the New York office located at No. 8 Battery Place and Pier, No. 1, North River, which is just a few steps away from Castle Garden. They will take particular care with your luggage. Immigrants will get tickets for their goods in Castle Garden and they will exchange these tickets for their luggage when they arrive at their destination. Every passenger is allowed 80 pounds of luggage without extra cost, and for those who buy tickets from the above named office, their luggage will be picked up from Castle Garden and other places and be carried to the railroad station without cost. The passenger cars are well ventilated, comfortable, and furnished with water and lights. The passengers, or immigrants, will reach Chicago from New York in just 40 hours and their luggage will be carried on the same train. Other destinations will be reached at the same rate of speed, depending on the distance from New York.

It is my concern and interest in the welfare of my kinsmen which motivated me to search out this infor-



Landmark in the City of Groningen, the Martini Toren (the tower of St. Martin's Church).

mation and people can rest assured that the above information is accurate and they can disregard whatever else they have heard.

From the day of his arrival in Chicago, de Beij reported that the city offered great potential, and, following the Chicago fire of 1871, he declared that opportunities for success were even greater. He noted that among those people attending the three Chicago Dutch churches, only two families had suffered losses. Of the Netherlanders attending English churches, de Beij could make no accurate report, but he estimated that no more than twenty Dutch families had been burned out by the fire. But concerning the consequences of the fire he wrote:

There will be work and high wages in this city for years to come—even better than it has been before. Thousands upon thousands will be able to find work here in the future. If ever there was a time when people could come to America with assurance that they could improve their situation by working diligently (and this had already been the case for many years), that time is now. But, just the same, no one should imagine that he can get money without work—and in most cases that work will be with one's hands.

Influenced by such encouragements, a large number of Groningers immigrated to Chicago, and a nucleus of these remained near the center of the city until the 1920's, but already in the 1880's a segment of that community had moved southward to organize the Englewood neighborhood.

Henry Stob, an emeritated Professor of Ethics at Calvin College, remembers his boyhood in the old "Groninger's Hoek." It was, he recalls, a tightly knit colony of Netherlanders who spoke Dutch at home, worked hard, and harbored intense loyalties for their Dutch churches. His father had attempted various occupations, including the cultivation of an eighty-acre farm on Chicago's western fringes. But, for most of his life, the elder Stob worked as a trash hauler or as the pro-

prietor of his own feed and grain store. During a three-year interval the Stobs attempted farming in a Dutch settlement in Winie, Texas, but the hardships of alternating drought and flood forced them to return to Chicago's Groninger Hoek. Several years later they moved to Englewood because the Christian High School was near at hand there. Thus, in all these migrations, the Stobs never deserted the supporting comforts of the Dutch church and its members.

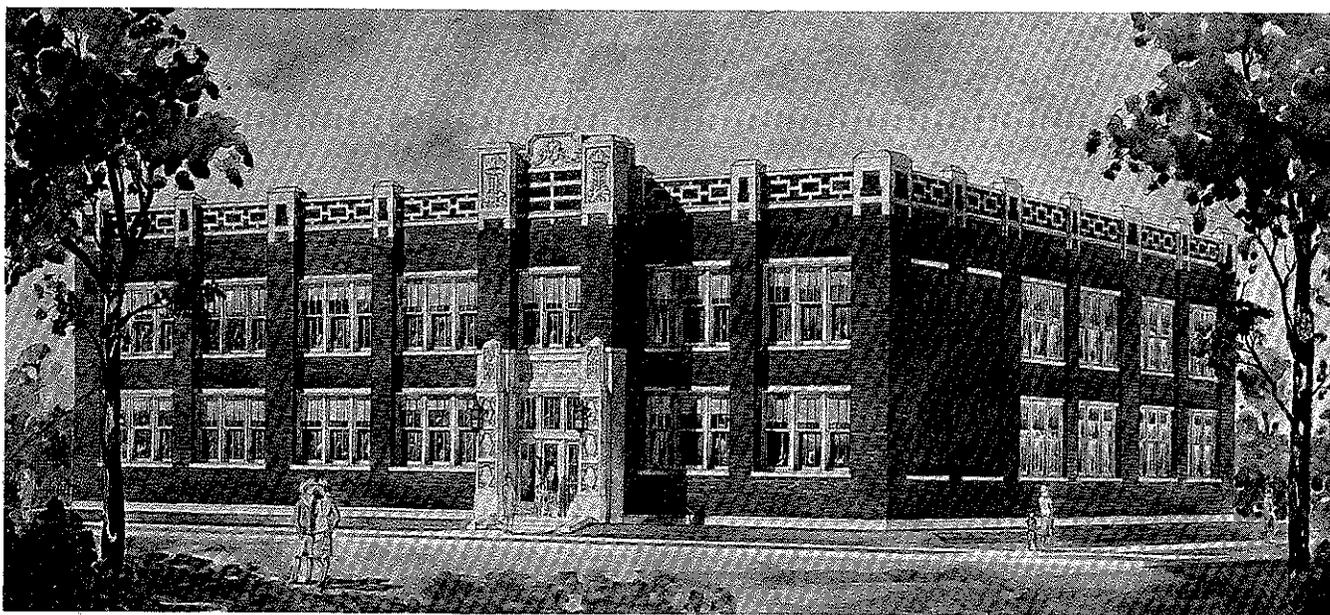
### Moving to the Suburbs

Today few Dutch-Americans remain in their original urban neighborhoods. Instead, they have relocated among their suburban countrymen. Often they were able to relocate in areas which had already constructed Dutch churches and Christian schools, built by immigrants who had chosen to be farmers near the borders of the city.

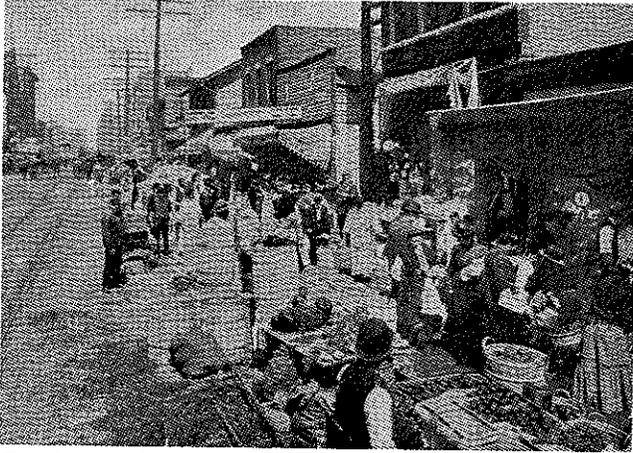
The village of South Holland readily illustrates this development. In 1950 the town had 3,247 residents, including 85 farms. By 1960 the population had risen to 10,412 and the farms were reduced to 47. At the same time, the number of major Dutch-American churches had increased from 3 to 7. Those farmers who wished to remain farmers had no difficulty selling their land in South Holland for \$2,000 to \$3,000 per acre. With such profits they could easily relocate in rural areas like De Mott, where again familiar Dutch-American institutions had preceded them.

Thus, for over a century, Dutch immigrants arriving in the Chicago area were able to select the occupations most suited to their skills and ambitions, while avoiding the harsher challenges of social novelty. As one immigrant, writing in 1853, said, "Come to live with us here in Roseland. Here we have freedom, equality, brotherhood—these are no idle words. Anyone who wants to work and is able to do so can easily earn a comfortable living—can live peacefully and enjoy life."

Writing about thirty years later, when Chicago had already grown into a large city, U. V. Nywening provided a wide ranging overview of the Roseland com-



Architect's depiction of Chicago Christian School completed in 1927 at 71st and May Streets.



*The Maxwell Street market—for many years the destination for "bargain" hunters among Dutch-Americans. Since Yiddish resembled Dutch, the Dutch immigrants frequently understood behind-the-counter conversations which preceded the final sales agreement.*

munity. To a friend in the small Drenthe village of Beilen he wrote:

You seem curious to know how farmers live here. Presently we are harvesting the crops which we planted in April. Crops grow rapidly here and produce large amounts... Many farmers raise two crops each summer here, for example: cabbage, beets, and pickles—also many beans. They plant the potatoes between the beans. There is not much dairy farming here... Most of the farmers here sell their crops in the large city of Chicago, which is the largest in the area. I have been there four times, and it is really a sight. It has more wealth and treasure than the whole of Germany. Some houses are located on lots larger than two acres. It is impossible to imagine unless you have been there.

Generally, American farmers are lazy and careless about farming. They could raise much more than they do. Still, there is no poverty here. Much of the crop goes to waste in the fields. Concerning potatoes, they harvest only the large ones and leave the rest to rot... When they have enough, most Americans are lazy and indifferent about such waste.

Every day, long trains go past my house loaded with meat and bacon. The meat goes to New York, and from there much of it goes to Europe. But the poor people of Europe hardly see any of it, while here, everyone eats as much as he wishes. So it should

be easy for you to understand that we enjoy life here... With my two boys I earn \$80 per month—so you can well imagine that, if we remain healthy, I will be a man of means in a few short years. Thus anyone who despises my new fatherland is no friend of mine.

#### **Roseland: Thorns or Roses?**

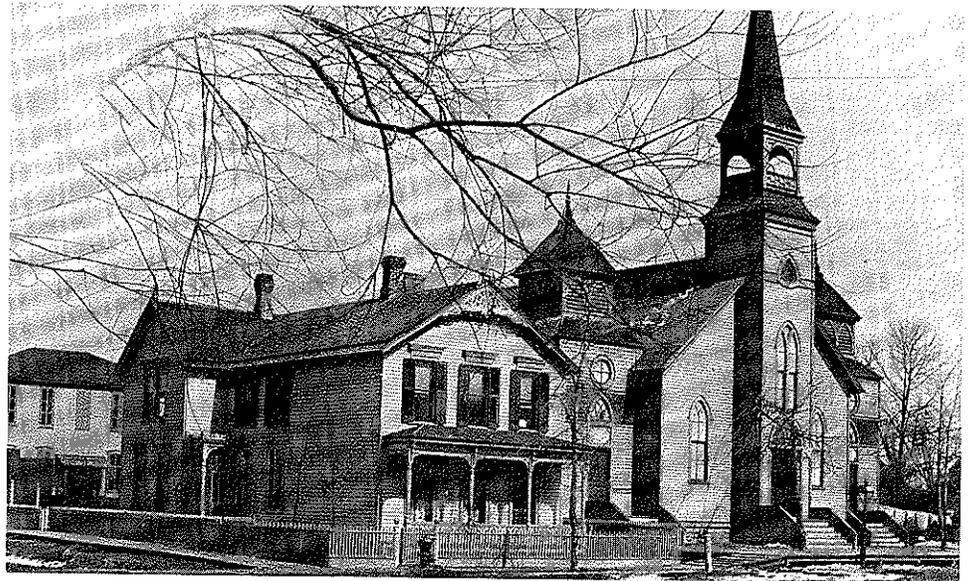
Others, however, found Roseland more than disappointing. Disputing reports of Roseland's prosperity in the *Nieuw Advertentieblad* of Friesland, William De Jong concluded, "You will seek vainly for roses in Roseland, but they have thorns in abundance."

This debate about immigrant opportunities in Roseland had begun in February, 1888, when De Jong had advised other Dutchmen to remain in the Netherlands if they were doing well. He further suggested that the winters in Roseland were unbearably cold and that employment in George Pullman's factory was poorly paid and difficult to acquire.

Reactions to these views appeared in two successive issues of the *Advertentieblad*. The first respondent, A. Van Ek, attempted to refute the criticisms, arguing that although employment might not be available in the Pullman works, ambitious people could always find employment elsewhere. He further suggested that too many immigrants imagined America a land of easy success, but Van Ek reserved his harshest attack for De Jong's advice to "remain where you are if you are doing well."

Why did you come to America? For no other reason than to improve your lot—right? Or did you have it good? If one does not expect to improve his situation, then, of course, no one would leave the land of his birth. Thus, your advice, to stay where you are if you are well satisfied, is totally useless advice.

Another correspondent, Wietze Posthumus, launched a bristling defense of Roseland.



*First Christian Reformed Church of Roseland, Illinois, 1888, with parsonage and Christian School in the background—111th Street.*



*Principal's house—Englewood Christian School, 1912.*

Perhaps thorns do grow on De Jong's path in place of roses, but I have seen absolutely no poverty here unless as a consequence of sickness or from the misuse of liquor. I will not lie, you must work hard here, but you also get good wages—everywhere people earn \$1.50 for ten hours of ordinary work, whereas you must work a whole week in Friesland for the same wages. I will not deny that there are many people here without work, but that is not always the fault of the employer, more likely it is the fault of the employee. There are folk all over the world who would rather be idle, and America is certainly no place for talkers who do little. Everyone who wants to work, and is able, can find work easily here in America, even though it cannot always be found in Roseland, for in the last few years there has been an excess of immigrants in the area.

Posthumus concluded:

So I will contradict De Jong and say: Come to America, because you can earn your bread here and that is not always the case in Friesland.

De Jong could not allow such assaults to remain unanswered. He admitted that Pullman factory wages had been good in the past, but, said De Jong,

Presently we have a recession here, and I wish to speak to these times and not about earlier days, and thus everything is not so rose colored as Mr. Van Ek presents it. He only speaks of earning good wages, but he fails to mention expenses. I can't understand how Van Ek can speak of saving when people earn \$1.25 per day while one must pay \$12.00 per month for rent. Is that any kind of life—with just \$.70 per day left over—and then having to support a wife and children?

The consequence of this, De Jong claimed, was, "There are many here who would gladly return to the Netherlands, but they cannot because of simple poverty."

This debate occurred during one of America's economic crises, and in all probability De Jong's advice, at that moment, was sounder than the optimistic suggestions of his antagonists. But over the years, Chicago has provided steady opportunities for immigrants of all sorts, and, for those willing to endure temporary setbacks, the prospect of social and economic advance was solid.

#### From Chicago to Texas and Back

Nonetheless, Dutch immigrants in Chicago retained an abiding interest in rural opportunities. As new land became available in the far west, speculators attempted to lure the urbanites with promises of inexpensive but fertile land. In 1894, for example, a committee of successful Dutch-Americans led by J. Broekema, a Chicago businessman, encouraged settlement on land near Alvin, Texas.

H. Koopman, an immigrant from Borger in Drenthe, had found work in Chicago as a gardener, but was much intrigued by reports of an agricultural paradise in Texas, where, he said, "Most crops can be raised twice a year in the same land, even including potatoes." His own success was further insured because, as he perceived it, American farmers were lazy and careless. "They till the soil poorly here," he wrote. "All they do is plow the land, and they rummage around in the soil like pigs, and then they flatten it with a harrow. Most farmers in this country are lazy. They don't even work for a third of the year."

Tempted by publicity, Koopman made the one-thousand-mile train trip to Texas in 1895, but after observing the new Colonie, he returned to Chicago and denounced the whole venture as misguided. The promoters, he said, were worse than Judas Iscariot, for that betrayer had at least returned the blood money. Koopman then exiled himself from all Dutch associations—the church, the Dutch consul, and the Dutch language newspapers which had publicized the Texas venture.

Reporting his experience to a nephew in Borger, Koopman wrote,

Two Dutch ministers sent many of their members to Texas where they had 5,000 acres belonging to a Holland organization. They put out a booklet saying that it was a land flowing with milk and honey. Four Dutch ministers and a leading man in a large business signed the booklet. I went to see Dominie Dykstra and asked him many questions because he had seen the settlement and I was interested in going there. So, I took the trip, but when I got to the last stop on the railroad line, I had to stay overnight in a hotel because the settlement was still twenty-five miles away, with no railway connections.

On the following day I started walking to the settlement. . . . When I saw it, I said to them, 'The land is on a level with the sea (the Gulf of Mexico), and when the sea comes up you will be flooded.' They need steam plows to break up the land; the people there were killing themselves. I lived there for two days on pancakes and coffee—they had no bread and

not one piece of meat, not even beans. I went away hungry, found a hotel in Alvin where I got a good dinner, and took the train back to Chicago.

Upon returning to Chicago, Koopman visited Dominie Dykstra and discovered that the minister had never actually visited the colony, but had gone only as far as Alvin, Texas. Koopman reported:

Then the minister had to ask me what kind of place Liverpool was and what I thought of it. I told him that it was poor for agriculture, and that with high water from the Gulf all would be flooded and that the people would be poverty-stricken and come back to Chicago. Within one year that is what happened. They were driven off by high water and they lost everything. They had to come back home begging.

After returning from Texas in 1898 Koopman worked as a street car conductor and, although isolated from the Dutch-American community, he continued to report glowingly of Chicago and its opportunities. In 1920 he wrote, "If you were here in Chicago, your eyes would pop out." Koopman's brother had written that their ancestral village in Drenthe was growing rapidly, but the new Chicagoan was not much impressed.

Chicago has houses one next to the other from twenty to thirty stories high. . . . They have foundations thirty feet under the ground and they have entrances like the gates of cities. You must not compare streets here to those in Holland. Here they are eighteen feet wide on both sides and four vehicles can easily pass each other. You can also see the elevated train built on metal posts, and the trains fly past one another to the west, south, and north. Lake Michigan is on the east side.

Koopman never returned to the Dutch-American community, but he maintained strong loyalties with his family in the Netherlands. After his retirement he wrote,

I am in good health, and live in pleasant circumstances. I don't work any longer. I have a furnished apartment on the Boulevard, and I go where I wish for pleasure. If I were in the Netherlands they would tax me heavily because I am worth 30,000 guilders i.e., \$15,000. Now I would be most pleased if you would write to me, and tell me who is still living and in what circumstances you find yourselves. I do not have much time left on the earth, and I do not wish to have my money divided among strangers when my time to die comes. I would be pleased to have you or your children think of me after my death, so I hope that you will write me quickly.

With such incentives, Koopman's Chicago address was probably carefully preserved in Borger.

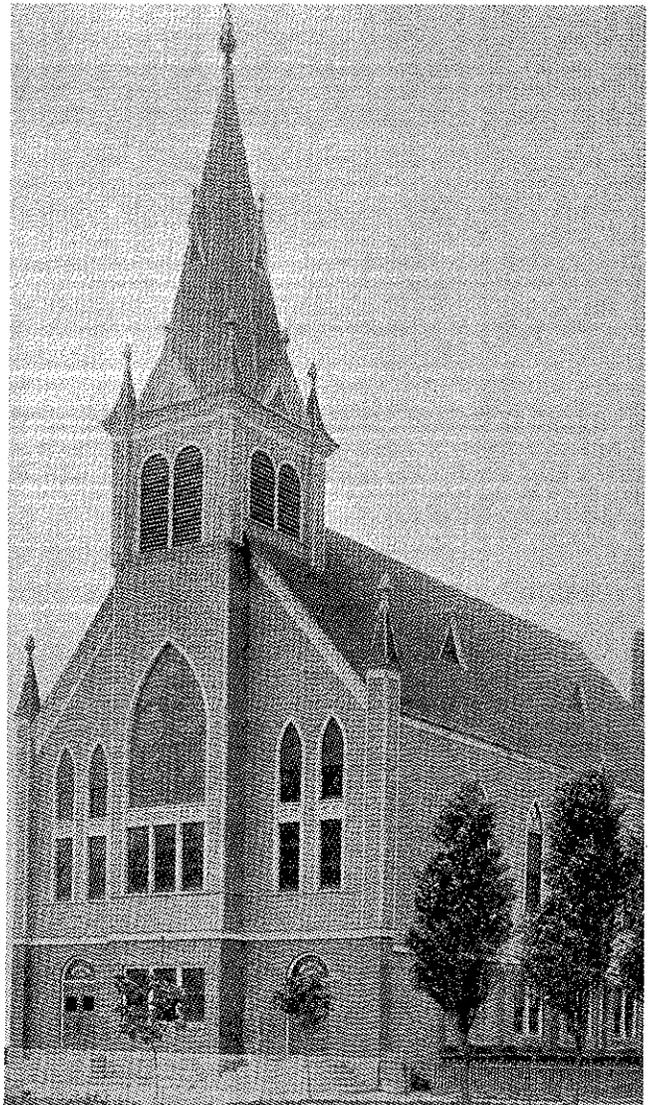
#### **Klaas Niemeijer: A Typical Immigrant**

Koopman's experience in Chicago was atypical. Most Dutch immigrants remained in their ethnic communities

finding comfort from its churches, and pleasure in the company of their own people. Klaas Niemeijer, who immigrated in 1904, followed a more familiar pattern. The Niemeijers traveled directly to Chicago, where they found temporary shelter with another Dutch family. Within four days he had rented an apartment at \$7 per month and Niemeijer had begun work as a teamster hauling trash from Chicago at \$10 per week.

The Niemeijers remained in the Groninger's Hoek for six years, settling into the community. Their children attended the Holland school, for which Niemeijer paid \$1.50 per month. The family attended the Dutch church, enjoyed sermons in their native tongue and drank coffee with fellow parishioners after the services. They traveled to other Dutch neighborhoods in the city to meet acquaintances and friends from the Netherlands, and they read the Dutch language newspaper, *Onze Toekomst*, which informed them of events in the Netherlands as well as in America.

Then in 1907 Klaas Niemeijer was able to make a proud announcement. He had become a farmer. This was, for him, the realization of a long-term objective. Before coming to America he had immigrated to Ger-



Englewood First C.R.C. constructed 1896.



*Cabbage market held in Groningen's famous Fishmarket square in 1913.*

many and had accumulated some capital by working in a coal mine. He used that cash to establish a pig farm in the Netherlands, but disease killed off his herd. With the balance of his money he bought passage to America. Thus, in 1907, when he finally achieved his goal, Klaas wrote,

We no longer live in Chicago, but close by—about three hours from the center of the city, or about twenty minutes from the city line.

We have rented 40 acres here for \$130 annually, that is 20 acres of crop land, and 20 acres of pasture. A house comes with the farm and it costs nothing extra. The streetcar is about five minutes from our door, and we take it to go to church, which is about a half hour away from us—it is a Dutch church. Our children go to the English school now which is about ten rods off from our house. There are 10 or 11 Holland families here and we all rent our farms.

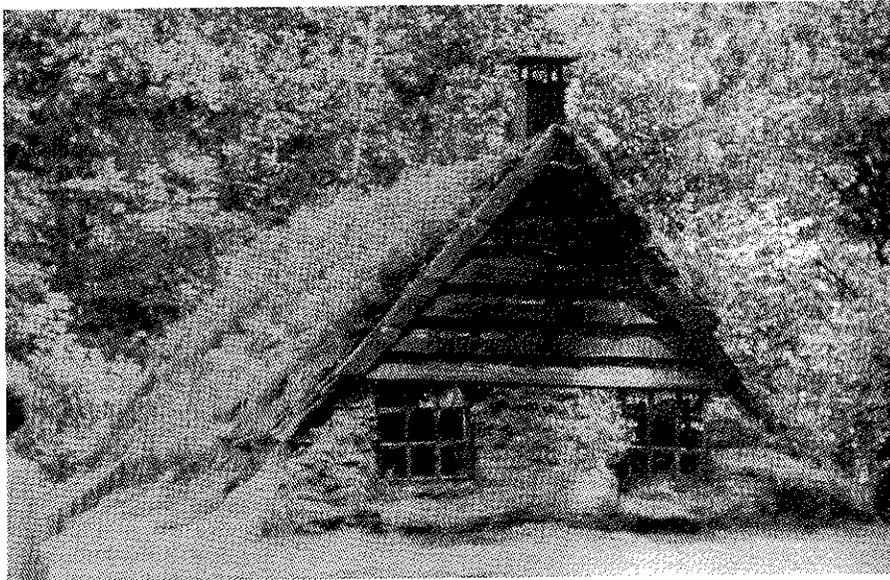
A German Jew lived here before us, and we bought from him two horses, a cow, and wagon for \$80. For \$15 we bought hay, three plows, a harrow, a sowing machine, two cultivators, and, as they say here, a mowing machine, but they are not worth much—a pitch fork which is also worth little. Also ten chickens, and then still more odds and ends. All of this we bought from the Jew, who also lives in this house, and now he must move so we can move in.

For all this we have paid \$550. Now we are farmers—farmers!

Niemeijer worked his garden farm for ten years, bringing crops to the Chicago market two or three times each week. For fertilizer, he hauled free manure from the Chicago Stockyards. But, as the city grew to the west, his land was sold and Niemeijer turned to wholesaling. He bought celery from Dutch farmers in Western Michigan and transported it to Chicago for resale. During that period he moved back into the Dutch community on Chicago's West Side. Finally, when he was too old to care for himself, Klaas lived with his daughter in suburban Hinsdale, where she had married a farmer named Schoonveld.

In 1953, when Klaas was 88 years old, he proudly reported, "I believe that I have 30 grandchildren and 40 great-grandchildren, therefore quite a group." His children had scattered somewhat, but for the most part, they lived nearby. One son, 200 miles off, lived in Muskegon, Michigan, among other Dutch-Americans. Thus, there were no serious breaches in the ethnic web.

Niemeijer's life followed familiar patterns carved from the opportunities embedded in the character of the Dutch settlements of the Chicago area and his personal history was duplicated by many others on both the south and west sides of the city. □



*Drenthe farm laborer's dwelling—sod with thatched roof.*

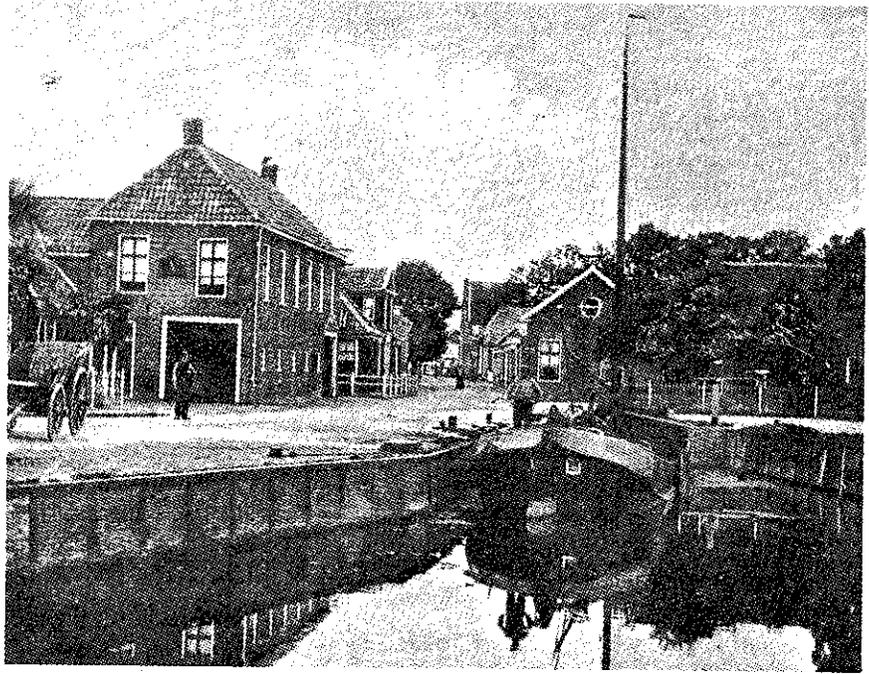


*Workers in Drenthe stacking peat for drying. Peat was used for fuel.*

*Typical farm of a wealthy Groninger.*



## Bernardus De Beij (1815-1894)



*Canal and Main Street in Middelstum, province Groningen, the village which Rev. Bernardus De Beij served for twenty-one years before immigrating to Chicago.*

Bernardus De Beij was the most prominent Dutch immigrant minister in Chicago, where his twenty-four-year pastorate in the First Reformed Church flourished. A new sanctuary, constructed early in De Beij's pastorate there, was feted in the 1872 *Chicago Pulpit*, which reported, "The First Reformed Church on the corner of May and Harrison Streets is now completed. The interior is neat, tastefully decorated, and furnished with an appropriate organ." But by 1873 the new structure was already overcrowded. Meanwhile, De Beij had been urging friends, acquaintances, and strangers alike to leave Groningen and join his growing church and community. He publicized the attractions of Chicago in the *Groninger Courant* and the enthusiasm expressed in his personal correspondence matched the optimistic rhetoric of the most visionary civic boosters. Thus, despite the relatively advanced age (53) at which he immigrated, De Beij revealed an exceptional level of enthusiasm for his new city and country.

Before migrating, he had served the church in Middelstum, Groningen, for twenty-one years, and that congregation had also flourished. The sanctuary was enlarged twice, and, when the Middelstum church celebrated its centennial in 1935, De Beij's reputation had not yet been forgotten. People recalled that on several occasions he had wielded a scythe, or shovel with as much skill and vigor as any farm hand. Clearly, the pastor made little effort to hid his humble origins.

That background probably had much to do with his unreserved admiration for the United States. Even though he had been a successful pastor in Middelstum for twenty-one years, he did not enter the ministry until he was thirty years of age. Prior to his study and ordination, De Beij had labored in the turf mines of Drenthe—a clear indication of his narrow economic status and

prospects. Thus, with little money and already approaching mid-life, he sought instruction from a local pastor rather than a formal university education. Rev. D. Postma, who instructed De Beij in classical languages and theology, also installed him in the Middelstum Christian Seceded Church. The new pastor did not forget his narrow escape from a life of drudgery, for he was known to criticize the rich farmers of Groningen for their stingy wages. Then, too, De Beij's origins in the laboring class probably lent credence to his judgment that, for common laborers, Chicago offered vastly better prospects than the farms, shops, and peat bogs of Drenthe and Groningen.

Throughout two decades, 1868–1888, De Beij penned a stream of correspondence which demonstrated his growing enthusiasm for the "Windy City." Addressing most of his letters to Rev. A. P. Lanting (his Dear Cousin), De Beij declared, as early as 1870, "We live here very comfortably, and perhaps you will have difficulty believing that our lives are more pleasurable here than in the Netherlands." Though he missed the companionship of friends like Lanting and others, De Beij added,

There are nonetheless many compensations here, including new friends. Above all though, we enjoy a carefree social, economic, and religious life here. We have gained a wealth of experience with a wide variety of people. . . . Everyone here treats me with respect, and that without pretense, and that is not usually the case outside of our own circle of seceders in the Netherlands. Yes, the fact is that a man from Groningen will greet me respectfully here and not stick out his tongue after passing me on the street. You know how it is in Holland, deep in their hearts

they despise us. Here, though, we live in a most beautiful and pleasant city which also contains much natural beauty. If I lived here for another twenty years I would not lack for new things to see—astonishing accomplishments in progress, power, arts, and good taste. I don't know how to begin in writing about it. It is surprising in every way. . . . My description can only degrade the reality.

De Beij remained in Chicago for twenty years, and his expectations were not disappointed. He constantly reported his wonder at the city's growth and development. Though he considered the Chicago fire of 1871 a great setback, De Beij portrayed that disaster as a mere prelude to great construction booms with unimaginable opportunities for gainful employment.

As late as 1880, during his twelfth year in Chicago, De Beij continued urging his cousin to emigrate because the Chicago pastor believed firmly in the future of his city and nation. "America," he asserted, "still has *room, work, and bread* for an ambitious man, for a thrifty woman and growing children. Men with energy should free themselves and steam across the ocean. We here consider them fortunate and bid them welcome."

Focusing on his city, the pastor reported,

Chicago, 16 miles long and 10 miles wide, with half a million people, is growing vigorously again. Building permits are granted weekly for structures costing forty and sixty-thousand dollars. That makes for work, wages and favorable prospects.

With modern, rapid, and efficient transportation, America is becoming the supply house of Europe and other parts of the world. She has minerals from the most costly gold to the least valuable ore—and that in more abundance than all the nations of the world combined. She has corn fields that cannot be equalled in the world. She has prairies of a hundred million acres which produce fat cows and oxen to feed foreign countries. She has a restored confidence [following the depression of 1873-1879], and can carry on her business as she pleases.

Chicago is the most important center of the great West, and it is apparent that in 50 years this city will surpass New York. Already it has the largest corn and lumber markets in the world. I often think that I came to America too late—that is, too late in life.

### "The Great Fire in Chicago—1871"

Dear Editor!

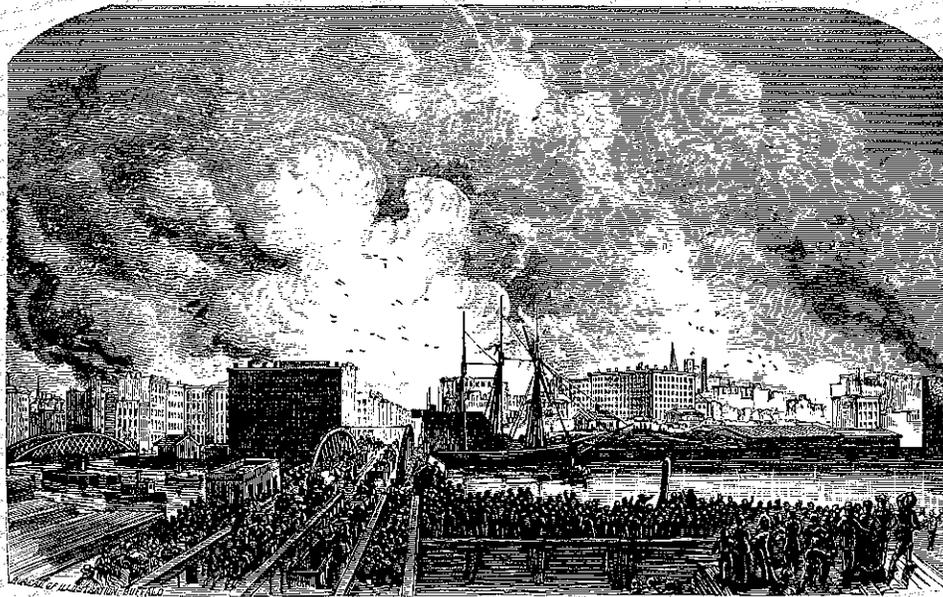
In your newspaper of October 11, 12, and 13, I read that you received short telegram notices of the fire which raged here. I was an eyewitness of the disaster. And since it is known in the Netherlands that I live in Chicago, a word from me will be expected. My friends and acquaintances desire such, and I would like to satisfy those expectations and desires at one and the same time in your newspaper.

It is true: about a third of the great, costly, and beautiful city of Chicago burned down. On Sunday night, the 8th of October, around nine o'clock, a fire broke out in a small barn in the Kovenstreet between Jefferson and Clinton Streets. A woman, in order to have light by which to milk her cow, took a lantern into the barn and placed it on a chair; when the cow bumped the chair, the lantern fell into hay and straw which ignited at once and soon burned out of control of the owner. People went to the fire box, and the alarm was sounded. The fire engines roared through the streets to the fire, but before they could go to work, the threatening fire had already spread. The problems were these: the neighborhood's wooden buildings, family dwellings, and barns had been built close together; a strong wind was blowing, and the firemen had already been working around the clock to put out a fire which had started on Saturday night which had ruined buildings in an area of 24 acres.

In a short time the fire spread over such a large area, that when the fire engines started, there were already three houses on fire for every fire engine.

Tens of thousands of people crowded the streets and were concerned about the raging fire; thousands of them fled with children, clothes, bedding, and furniture, looking for a place of safety. The fire marshal saw that

it was impossible to extinguish the fire because of the high winds; he then placed engines on the outskirts of the fire to keep control. He placed several engines on the west bank of the southern arm of the river to prevent the fire, spread by a southwesterly wind, from crossing the river. All efforts became futile. The wind whipped the fire with intensity. It soon surrounded two engines and blocked their return route. The firemen only saved their lives by jumping into the river, meanwhile leaving their pumps running, which as faithful laborers kept working till they were consumed by the fire. The wind blew sparks, embers, and burning pieces of wood ahead for sometimes more than two city blocks, so that new fires started everywhere across the river. The sparks and embers ignited fires in other city blocks, and with each additional fire, the heat and strength increased. By 1 o'clock, already 20 city blocks were in ashes. The fire kept spreading rapidly, and the fire department, although putting forth extreme effort, seemed to be helpless. The fire marshal telegraphed Milwaukee for fire engines. It seemed as if an almighty power could not prevent the complete destruction of this beautiful city. The sparks and embers were scattered over the city and fire alarms were constantly heard. The dome of the city hall was torched by the fire and for a time was doused by a guard. By 1:15 A.M. the fire had already leveled more than a quarter of a mile. Within this area, lumber yards stocked with piles of lumber were located. The railroad stations of the Chicago and St. Louis, the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne, and Chicago Railroads, disappeared in an unbelievably short period. At this time it could not be expected that the river would hold the fire because the embers spread farther than 200 feet on the east side of the stream and had started fires in a few buildings which were connected with the gas factory.



*The Chicago Fire 1871, illustration from Chicago and the Great Conflagration, 1872.*

With new fury the fire raged about, destroying everything within reach. The hope of saving the city in the direction of the wind was abandoned. The flames devoured wooden buildings in a few moments as if they were made of paper. Huge crowds of people swarmed through the streets, fleeing for their lives. Efforts to still save some possessions were fruitless, for as soon as the fire had reached a dwelling, the owner hardly had time to save his life. The gas factory (used for the south side) was destroyed. It exploded with a terrific roar, whereby the power and the intensity of the destroying element increased. Scarcely had one heard the terrible roar, then a raging ocean of fire was seen, which now broke out everywhere at the same time in such a degree of power and extent that it was beyond all description. Now the fire had reached that part of the city where the greatest affluence was concentrated, the greatest wealth existed, and the largest, finest and most beautiful buildings were located: the south side. Here were found the largest business establishments, wholesale and retail, all the banks and insurance offices, and all the best hotels. Lake Street with its tremendously large department stores, State Street with her equally large trading firms, the city hall, the post office, and the Union depot, along with hundreds of other fine homes made up the list of the most costly and finest buildings of the world. All have been destroyed. In this part of the city were located the so-called fireproof buildings; however, in a fire such as this, there is no known element which can be called fireproof. The heaviest granite walls crumbled and melted like cheese, as the iron beams and pillars bent and twisted like copper wire. The courthouse, a beautiful fireproof building, withstood the fire so long that there was hope that it would be spared. But no! It finally burned down and was soon a mass of ruins.

By morning the area from East Harrison Street to the mouth of the river was burned and the main part of Chicago lay in ashes. By the powerful efforts of the people, lead by the brave Phil Sheridan, who did dynamite

several buildings along Wabash Avenue and Congress Street, it became possible to prevent the fire from spreading any farther than East Harrison Street. But there was no force which could hinder the fire from spreading northward in an alarmingly rapid manner. In a moment, it was across the river and roared on at an accelerated speed until it had reduced everything to ashes in an area 1 1/2 mile wide and about 5 miles long. Outside the city, the fire burned itself out. In the northern division, the buildings were also close together and the majority were built of wood. The glow of the fires which could be seen cannot be described with a pen. It is impossible to give a clear impression to anyone who has not seen it. On the north side of the river were large warehouses, grain elevators between 100 and 140 feet high, and equally long and wide, with millions of bushels of grain. Also large stores, factories, distilleries and breweries, bridges spanning the river, beautiful churches (56 to 60 churches were burned), colleges, waterworks, public schools, magnificent homes, and numerous other buildings which in a short time became the prey of the flames. Between Monday and Tuesday nights, a Dutch family came to our house. They lived at no. 723 North Wells Street, not far from where the fire had stopped. They told us that their house was burned by 2 o'clock on Monday afternoon. Thus, in the short period of about 17 or 18 hours, an area of 3000 acres burned. As many as 10,000 to 12,000 buildings were destroyed and 100,000 people became homeless.

Yet more horrible is the thought of the calamity of the loss of the lives of animals, and especially, of people. Their number had been estimated at 1,000, although the number cannot be stated accurately. Nobody can imagine the extent of the despair which could be read on the faces of men, women, and children. Nearly the entire population of the city's 334,000 inhabitants was on the street. Masses of people were milling about in the wide alleys and broad streets. Buggies, barouches, carriages, carts, express wagons, were driven through the streets

# MAP OF CHICAGO;

SHOWING THE  
Parks, Boulevards,  
AND  
**Burnt District,**  
ACCOMPANYING  
**CHICAGO**  
AND THE  
Great Conflagration,  
BY  
COLBERT & CHAMBERLIN.

The Darkened portion of the Map shows the Burned District; area 2,124 acres, containing 17,450 buildings.

The Section Lines of the City, counting from South to North, are, Egan Ave., Thirty-First-St., Twenty-Second-St., Twelfth-St., Madison-St., Kinzie-St., Chicago Ave., North Ave., Fullerton Ave. From East to West the Section Lines are State-St., Halsted-St., Ashland Ave., Reuben-St., Western Ave., and two further Westward.

The Crossed street lines represent the tracks of steam railroads; the Dotted lines show the position of horse railroads, of which there are 55 miles of track; Alternate Dots and Dashes mark section lines.



Map of Chicago area, 1871. The darkened area indicates the path of destruction.

and were laden with an unimaginable variety of all kinds of articles and furniture. Men, women, and children carried bags, bedding, packages, baskets, and suitcases along the streets in order to save at least something when other means of transportation were lacking. Among the dense crowd there were frantic mothers, leading their children by the hand, or holding a dear little dog in their arms, or carrying a pot with a beautiful flower or a kettle, things which were hardly worth a few pennies, while valuable articles were left behind as food for the flames. One of the most heartbreaking scenes were the cries, "My husband!" "My wife!" "My children!" For many family members had lost one another and were afraid that they would never see each other again, which was actually the case for many of them. Many charred bodies which could not be identified have been recovered from the ruins.

Apart from all the grief, the damage totals five hundred million dollars, and according to some reports, more than that, when everything is accounted for: household items, furniture, jewelry, and articles of great or lesser value. This is certain: the crown of beautiful Chicago is fallen! That section of the city which because of her industry, expansiveness, splendour, vastness, and fine architectural planning compelled the admiration of spectators is reduced to ashes and ruins. And if it had not happened in America, and especially in Chicago, then it would take more than 20 years before Chicago would become again what it has been. However, in America exists a perhaps unequalled energy and initiative. In addition, Chicago is the center of the West and of western trade. It has one of the best harbors. Thousands of miles of railroads are concentrated there. It is the natural center of immeasurable mineral resources and has a produce market which is unsurpassed. Capitalists of the East and of the West have a great interest in the reconstruction and speedy rebuilding of Chicago. Already several hundred buildings are under construction and partially completed. While most of them have taken care of the temporary needs, a few

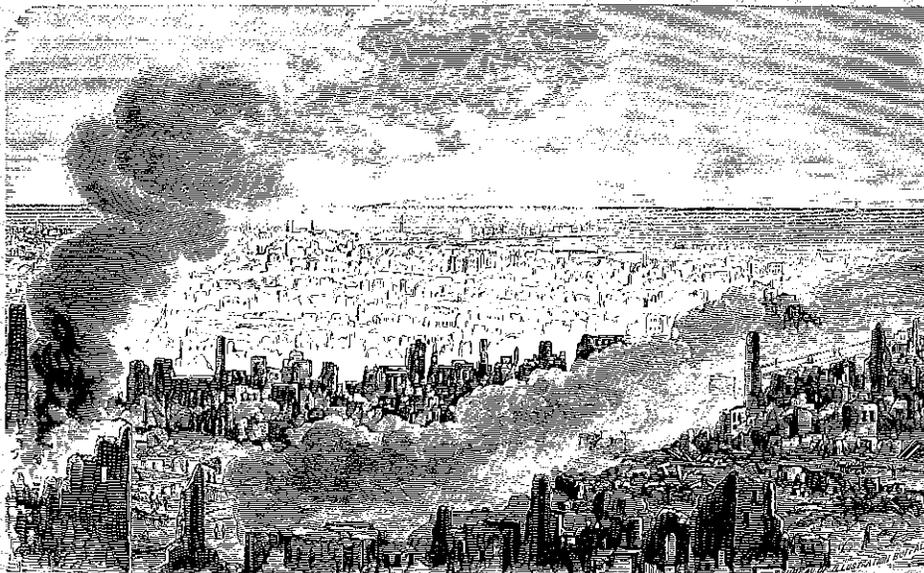
have already given an impression as to what can be expected within the period of a couple years. Many years of labor and high wages are to be expected, such as never have been known before in this city. And if there ever was a time that one could go to America with the prospect of improving his life through diligent work (and there was already such a time for a period of years) then it is now, especially in Chicago. However, no one must think that he can earn money without labor, especially manual labor almost exclusively.

Something for which we can thank God is that among our Dutch families, there are comparatively few whose possessions were destroyed by the fire. Within the three Dutch congregations only two families are known to me who have lost their belongings. But a few Dutch families living in the northern section shared the lot of many others. Some of those families belonged to English speaking churches, and others to no church at all, so that I am less acquainted with them and am not able to report their number. I do not think that their number would be more than 20. It is unfortunate for these Dutch people, but perhaps there will be some compensation which can ease the loss somewhat. The great number of Hollanders living in this city could do much to alleviate the misery, if true harmony and charity would prevail among our people.

See there, my ever beloved fatherland, relatives, brothers in the faith, friends in various circles, and acquaintances in various places, a report of the great fire in Chicago, reported as faithfully as possible in this short space. May it be to you as well as for many of us a lesson to firmly confess: "And the world passes away and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

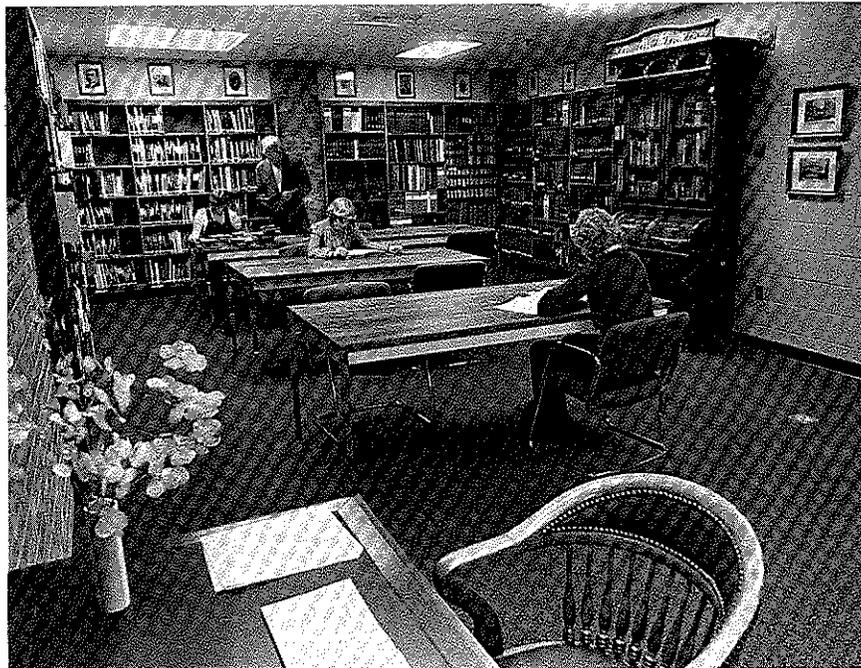
B. de Bey  
Minister of the First Reformed Church  
no. 414, West Harrison St. Chicago

[Translated by E. R. Post and Nettie Janssens from a report in the *Provincial Groninger Courant*.]



The Chicago Fire 1871, illustration from *Chicago and the Great Conflagration, 1872*.

# A Visit to Colonial Origins Collection



*View of Colonial Origins reading room.*

COLONIAL ORIGINS. This is the inscription you will find on the door to a suite of rooms on the south lower floor of the Calvin College Library. That door is always open to campus visitors. In fact, we strongly urge you to pay us a visit when you are in Grand Rapids.

Heritage Hall, as the suite of rooms is more popularly known, tells the exciting story of a tree of life planted in a new land nearly 150 years ago: its continuous budding, leafing, flowering, and fruiting. The records of the "roots" of hundreds of Dutch immigrant families have found a place of permanence here. These "roots," in turn, have become living plants in the new soil of America, and today they number nearly a third of a million souls!

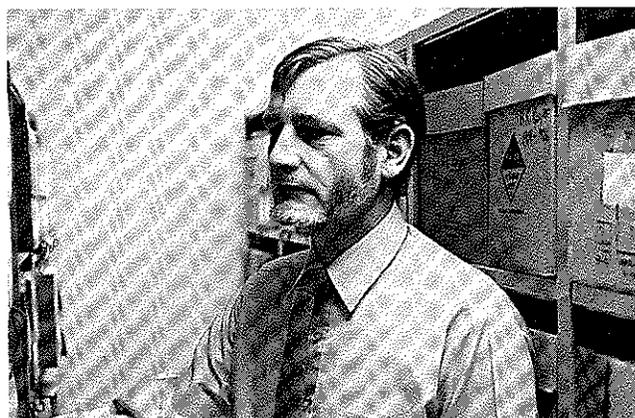
The Colonial Origins Collection, a distinct division of the College Library, had its formal beginnings in the nineteen-sixties. The initial idea for its formation seems to have been the brain child of the venerable Dr. Henry Beets, whose voluminous collection of papers and manuscripts occupies an honored place on its shelves.

The present holdings, well organized and efficiently managed, reflect the expertise of Dr. Herbert Brinks, professor of history and curator of the Collection. A curator's primary responsibility is to train the archivists and supervise the field agent and various assistants. He must also establish a pattern of organization for the whole collection and make responsible decisions as the need for them arises. In the past twenty years Dr. Brinks has been instrumental in amassing an appreciable amount of pertinent material of which future generations may well be proud. The Collection provides a rich source of material for research and reflection.

Dr. Brinks is ably assisted in this work by Mrs. Nettie Janssens, a research archivist, under whose watchful eye materials are received, classified, catalogued, and properly shelved. Her soft-spoken congeniality marks her as

an ideal hostess to our many visitors. Besides supervising day by day activities, she translates Dutch letters and materials and engages in research in response to requests that reach her by letter, telephone, or personal contacts.

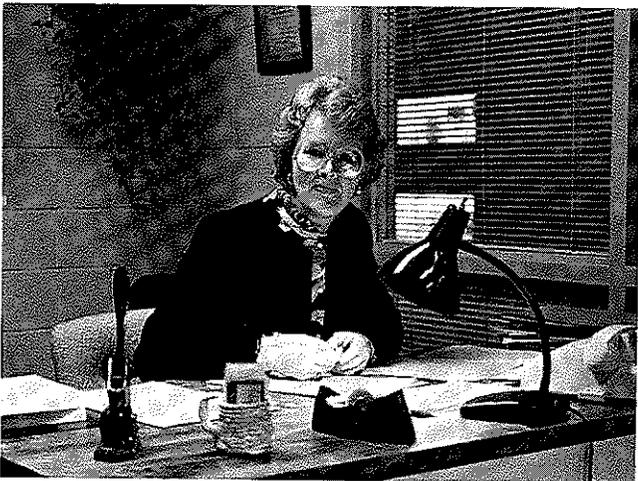
A second stalwart on Dr. Brinks' staff is Mr. E. R. Post, a former principal of Grand Rapids Christian High School. Familiar to most every Christian Reformed classis in the denomination, he has been most persuasive in getting congregations to permit us to collect and microfilm their important ecclesiastical papers and records, the contents of which are kept confidential and are only to be examined with the express permission of the consistory of the contributing church. When Mr. Post is not out in the field, he spends a large part of his time translating Dutch publications and letters and has been assisted in this work by Mr. David Van Vliet, a retired Christian School administrator. The field agent's primary task, then, is to gather historical documents of significance for the Heritage Hall Collection.



*Mr. H. J. Brinks.*

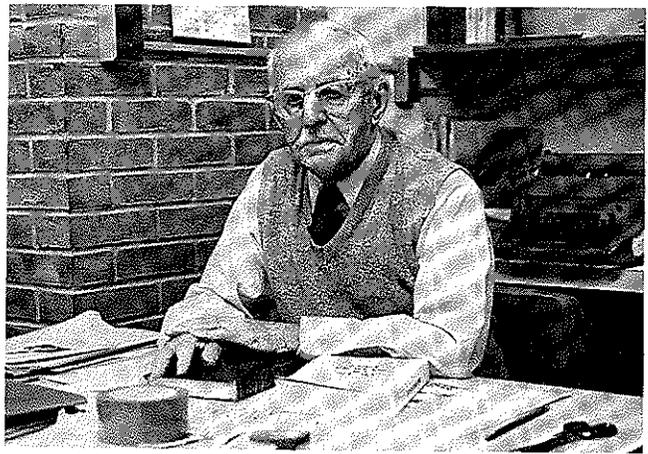
Dr. Henry Ippel, professor of history and research-archivist, recently has been spending part of his time making initial contacts with midwestern and eastern area representatives as he prepares to succeed field agent Post on his retirement. He is the author of a very informative Newsletter which describes in more detail the Archives of the Christian Reformed Church. Interested parties may have a copy of this material for the asking.

It is now over two years ago since I have been privileged to be associated with Heritage Hall. After having served the college for over thirty years in the Music Department, of which twenty-five years included an association with the denomination's radio broadcast as director of the Radio Choir, I realized that all of the contacts I had made through the annual spring choir tours throughout this country and Canada had given me a wide perspective of our denomination's constituency. It did not take long for me to sense with ever increasing awareness the reasons for Heritage Hall's existence. My specific area of responsibility as college archivist concerns institutional records, i.e., those of the college, seminary, and Christian day schools.



Mrs. N. Janssens.

Let me take you on a brief tour of the rooms which house the Heritage Hall Collection. Your curiosity and interest will be aroused, I am sure. Maybe you will catch the "bug" as I did. As you pass from room to room, you will see faded pictures, tattered letters, and official computerized printouts of immigrant sailings between 1820 and 1880. You can read eye-witness accounts of tearful farewells, stormy sea-voyages, and the great Chicago and Holland, Michigan, fires. There are interesting legal documents to inspect, even a secret formula for furniture finishing—all colorful tidbits of the dramatic story of the transplanting of Dutch roots into American soil. You will be free to browse through a score of shelves filled with publications related to our Dutch ancestry on topics as varied as biography, education, history, theology, and the arts—all reflections of the broad, creative spirit of our forefathers. Or you can scan the faces in our photographic file, faces which suggest the inner thoughts and feelings of successive generations of immigrants.



Mr. E. R. Post.

Once the new land had been reached, fresh history was in the making. The necessity to train new leaders eventually occasioned the founding of the Seminary and, later, the College. The amazing story of their beginnings in a single, second-story room in a parsonage, to our present Knollcrest complex is another example of the growth of that living tree under God's providence. Further migrations within the bounds of North America produced hundreds of congregations, each a potential source of new seed. The account of what transpired in the lives of these people and their religious leaders is, in part, what Heritage Hall is all about.

Daily, material is received from sources throughout the denomination. The executors of estates, faithful alumni, and concerned church members are realizing the value and satisfaction of depositing their family papers in Heritage Hall. Regularly, our college campus, comprising faculty, administration, and students, sends materials that will be available for future research, and which will serve as an attestation to their service to this institution. We need your help to make the Colonial Origins Collection as accurate and complete as possible. We're looking for buried treasures, you might say, and you can help us find them. You older folk, keep Heritage Hall in mind when you face the inevitable task of disposing of your valued possessions at life's end. Don't wait. Do it now! You younger and middle-aged, examine carefully those boxes Mom and Dad left to your care and keeping. Our climatized, air-conditioned rooms and vaults will preserve delicate letters and photos and records for years to come.

Heritage Hall is your story too!

James De Jonge



Mr. J. De Jong.

# Archival Holdings of Chicago Area Churches



Diploma issued to Frank Van den Berg—1904 prep school graduate of Grand Rapids Theological School.

The records of many of the Chicago area churches are preserved in the Archives of the Christian Reformed Church housed in Heritage Hall. This is a rich repository of history, some of it still in the original minute and record books and some on microfilm. Although many of the old city congregations have dispersed and become more suburban in character and new names have been substituted for old, the ancient records are still legally the property of current churches and access to the official church minutes is limited to researchers who have received consistorial permission.

Thus Ebenezer CRC in Berwyn has jurisdiction over the records of Chicago I and Chicago Fourteenth Street. Faith CRC in Elmhurst is responsible for the records of Douglas Park, Chicago IV, Cicero II, Warren Park (Cicero), West Suburban (Cicero), and Oak Park churches. The Summit CRC records are now with Archer Avenue and Lage Prairie minutes are incorporated into those of South Holland I. Lombard CRC brought together the records of Chicago III and Chicago XII as well as Cicero I. Lynwood CRC is formerly Roseland I and Calvin CRC in Oak Lawn was formerly Englewood I. Kedvale Avenue CRC in Oak Lawn now has jurisdiction over Englewood II, Roseland III, and West Evergreen Park while Orland Park was formerly Roseland II and IV.

A brief inventory of the archival holdings of several of these venerable churches is listed below:

Archer Avenue (formerly Summit CRC, Summit, Ill.)  
Consistory minutes, 1911-71

Ebenezer CRC, Berwyn (formerly Chicago I and Chicago Fourteenth Street)  
Consistory minutes, 1867-1962  
Membership records, 1867-1951

Elmhurst, Faith (formerly Douglas Park, Chicago IV, Cicero II, Warren Park, West Suburban and Oak Park)  
Consistory minutes, 1923-64

Evergreen Park I

Consistory minutes, 1915-66

Lombard, Ill. (formerly Chicago III, Chicago XII, and Cicero I)

Consistory minutes, 1912-67

Lynwood (formerly Roseland I)

Consistory minutes, 1877-1971

Deacons' minutes, 1892-1962

Financial records, 1878-1965

Society minutes, 1884-1957

Oak Lawn, Calvin (formerly Englewood I)

Consistory minutes, 1887-1955

Congregational minutes, 1891-1940

Oak Lawn I

Consistory minutes, 1913-75

Oak Lawn, Kedvale Avenue (formerly Englewood II, Roseland III, and West Evergreen Park)

Consistory minutes, 1903-75

Orland Park (formerly Roseland II and IV)

Consistory minutes, 1892-1974

Financial records, 1893-1917

Society minutes, 1898-1937

South Holland I

Consistory minutes 1886-1975

These archival holdings would be greatly enriched by membership books from many of these churches, anniversary booklets and historical sketches, memorabilia, correspondence, and photographs. Former members of these churches or their sons and daughters or grandchildren are encouraged to search their attics and closets for materials to be preserved in the Archives of Heritage Hall. The Archives is especially interested in finding copies of the Chicago area Dutch language newspaper *Onze Toekomst*. Please search your attics for this also.

Henry P. Ippel



The Archives, Calvin College & Seminary  
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The Calvin College and Seminary Archives is a division of the school's library which contains the historical records of the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin College, and other institutions related to the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands and North America. The Archives also contains a wide range of personal and family manuscripts.



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