

# Origins

## Origins

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*Cover illustration  
Rescue scene lithograph, Harper's Weekly,  
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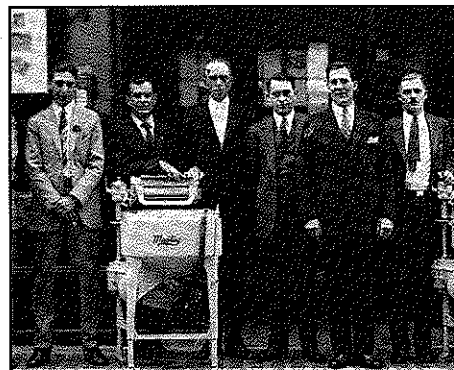
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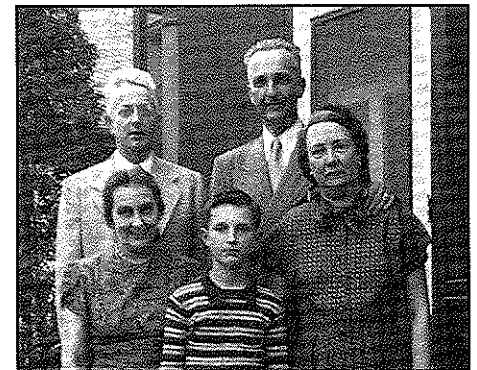
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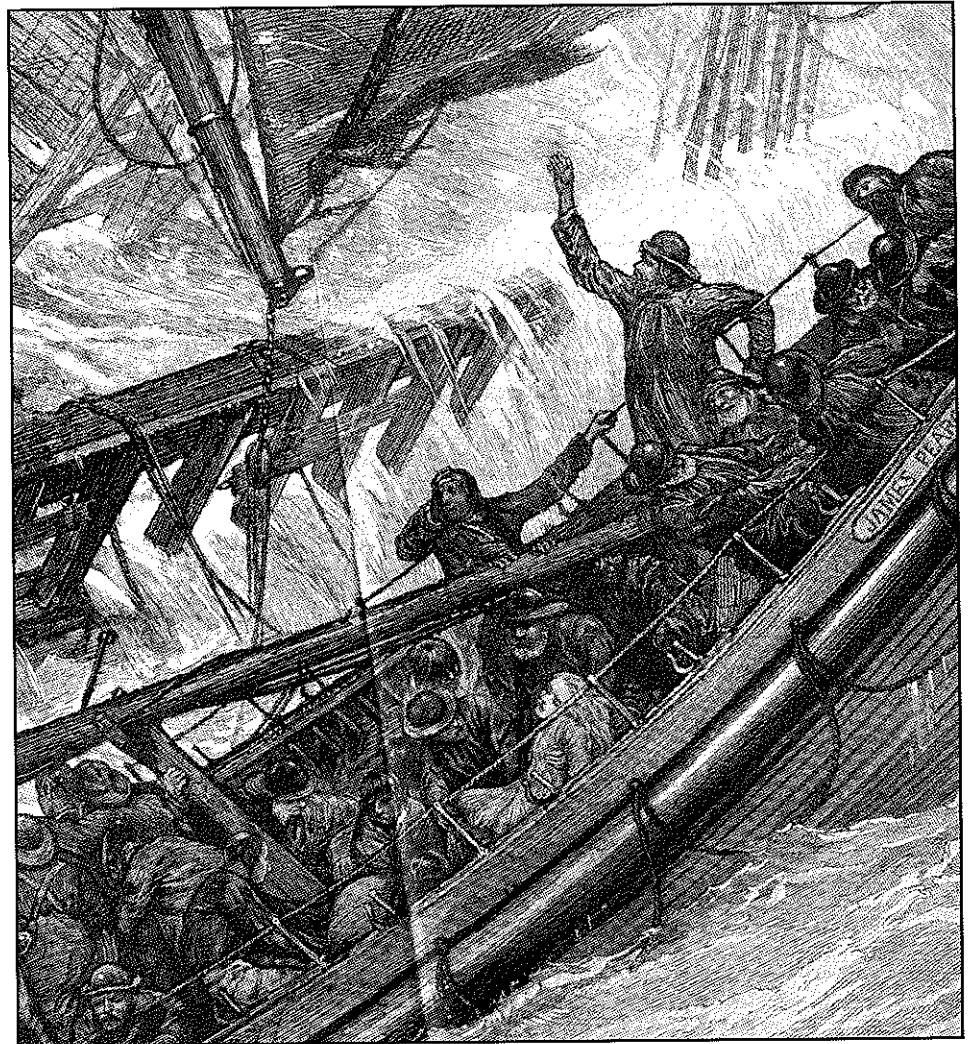
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# The Wreck of the William and Mary

by Loren Lemmen

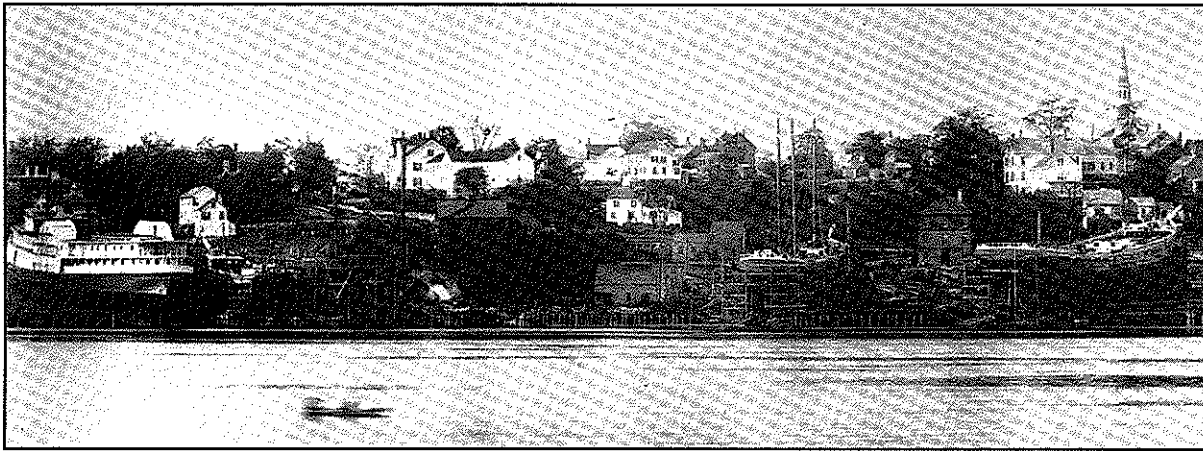
On May 16, 1853 the *New York Herald* reported the wreck of the *William and Mary*, a disaster then estimated to include the loss of over one hundred and seventy emigrant passengers. This nearly new sailing ship, captained by Timothy Stinson, struck a submerged rock and sank near the Bahamas. With a cargo of Irish, Frisian and German emigrants

destined for New Orleans, the ship had just passed through the Northwest Providence Channel when it foundered. The captain, with his officers and six crewmen, escaped in a small lifeboat which the *Reuben Carver* rescued as it sailed toward New York City. There Stinson and Stephen Perrington, one of his crew, described the tragic events of May 3. Their only hopeful news concerned the probable rescue of the ship's longboat with about thirty passengers. The captain's report soon circulated in London and thereafter in Friesland, the home of eighty-six passengers who had set out for the United States under the leadership of Oepke



Mr. Lemmen is an avid local-history researcher, the joint author with Swenna Harger of *The County of Bentheim and Her Emigrants to North America* and author of "The Early Church of Polkton, Michigan," *Origins*, Vol. XII, no. 2, p. 39.

Detail from rescue scene lithograph, *Harper's Weekly*, March 28, 1874, p. 286.



Bath, Maine, home port of *William and Mary's* captain, Timothy Stinson; with permission from the Maine Maritime Museum.

Bonnema.<sup>1</sup> The news "went like a thundering through the whole province, it struck the whole population, many tears were shed and our hearts were very heavy."<sup>2</sup>

This initial information was soon modified by the news that those left behind on the *William and Mary* had been rescued before the ship sank. Eventually they were taken to the US where they gave accounts that differed considerably from those of the captain and his crew. Several of these accounts appeared in newspapers, including one by Joseph Brooks who wrote his story for the British Consul in New Orleans and another by a Dutchman named Herman DeJager whose second-hand version was an attempt to obtain humanitarian aid for the Frisians.<sup>3</sup> Several Frisians produced their own accounts including Siberen Wesselius, Sjoerd Bekius and Hendrik Kas who told the story in letters to relatives.<sup>4</sup> Bonnema's bookkeeper, Broer Haagsma, wrote a detailed account of the entire trip which was later published<sup>5</sup> in the Netherlands. The following article is an attempt to provide an accurate chronicle of this unusual story.

The Frisians arrived in Liverpool, England, on the first of March, but because the group was too large to book passage on their ship of choice, they agreed to wait for the newly built

*William and Mary* that had just arrived from Charleston. They were finally able to depart for New Orleans on March 24, and for several days they enjoyed good weather, but then strong headwinds from the southwest plagued their effort for nearly two weeks. Sickness and disagreements with the crew over rations made the trip miserable for the Frisians who seemed to suffer more than the other passengers. Captain Stinson attempted to be of help but, with medications like ham to combat fever, he provided little relief and eleven of the Frisians, mostly children, died during this time.

The weather had improved by the time they approached the Bahamas and Stinson hoped to make land before dark on May the second, but failed to do so. Stinson was the first to recognize that land was near<sup>6</sup> by detecting changes in the sound of the water. They passed the Hole-in-the-Wall on Abaco Island at 7:00 A.M. with the winds blowing from the southeast. Then he ordered a "heavy press of sail" hoping to reach the Straits of Florida before dark. The day passed without event, although by supptime the weather had deteriorated so much that they could no longer determine how far west they were. When the sun set at seven the visibly nervous captain stated that he

would be up all night again because they were in a very dangerous place. At eight, believing they were west and north of the Great Isaacs, he ordered the course to be changed to west by south. He admitted however, that he did not know exactly where they were and was deeply concerned about dangers from sunken rocks. He had the depth checked every fifteen minutes but they could not find bottom at twenty fathoms. Most of the passengers, unaware of the situation, were excited about the prospect of reaching land soon. What happened next can best be described by the sailor who experienced it:

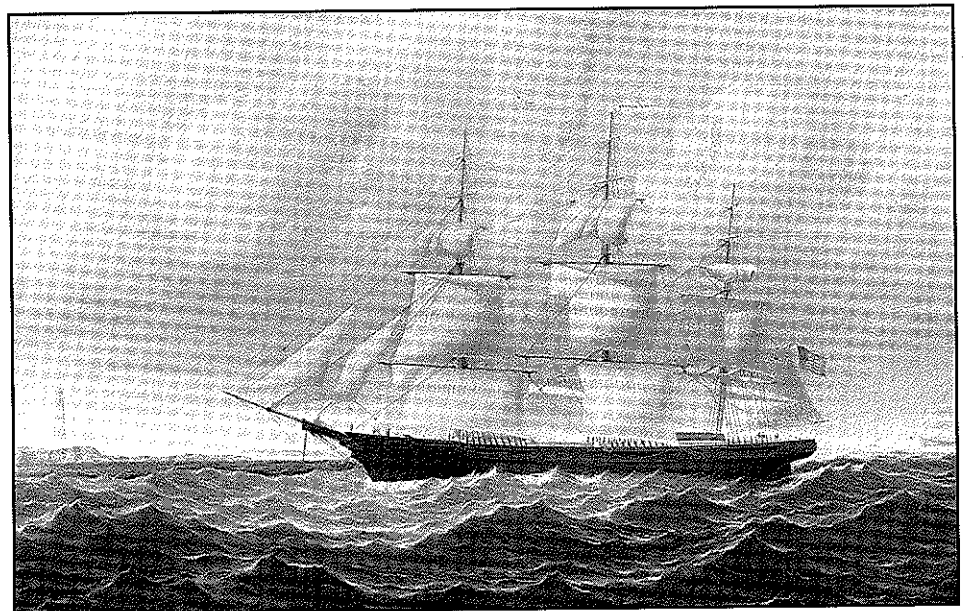
At eight I bade them (the passengers) good night, and in obedience to the command of the mate went aloft and helped furl the mainsail. After executing a few other orders, it being my lookout, I went forward and relieved it, as near as I can remember, about half-past eight. When I stepped on the forecaste [front upper deck] I heard the mate order the lead to be carried forward. The man just picked it up and got forward with it when she struck. Orders were given immediately to brace the yards round [adjust the sails], which was done as soon as possible but without effect. By this time the passengers were all on deck, running and screeching, 'We are lost! We are lost!' and crowding the deck so that it was almost impossible to get from one part of the ship to the other. The captain ordered the boats to be cleared and launched. The two lifeboats were launched first, and four men got into the starboard [right] boat, taking with them two cans of water, a compass and some bread.

They remained in the boat all night, and with the greatest difficulty kept her from being stove [broken up]. The larboard [left] boat was safely launched, but about half an hour after was stove under the quarter. This was caused by the decks being so crowded aft that the boat could not be dropped astern. The boat at the cranes was so filled by the passengers that they bent the cranes<sup>7</sup> down to the water. This boat was stove also. The longboat was still remaining on the after house, unfit to be launched without caulking. Part of the crew were ordered, however, to get that ready, and the remainder to lay forward and get ready to cut away the mast. The ship was now rolling very heavily, the sea breaking over her every few minutes during the squalls. Some of the head stays [guy ropes] were cut, and everything got ready to let the foremast go overboard, but the captain gave orders not to cut it, as the sails kept the ship from rolling. We were then ordered to lay aft, and do what we could to get the longboat ready to launch, after which we commenced caulking, tearing up our quilts, for the cotton, to caulk with. We had been here but a few minutes when she went off the rock; all expected she would sink immediately. Her anchors were let go as soon as possible, and after drifting a few rods she struck again so heavily that it prostrated many on the deck, and it was evident to all that the ship could not stand many more such shocks. The scene was dreadful beyond description. Some were upon their knees, praying for the Lord to have mercy upon them, some were crying, others were running, catching hold of the officers and crew, begging them to save them, telling them that they were unfit to meet their God. Some, who had the evening previous been boasting of their infidelity, were the first upon their knees, praying for the Lord to have mercy on them. It now seemed evident to all that the ship would go down immediately. Men, who before this had acted nobly, now ceased to make any effort to save themselves or others. Some went to a cask of liquor that was between decks, and there forgot their

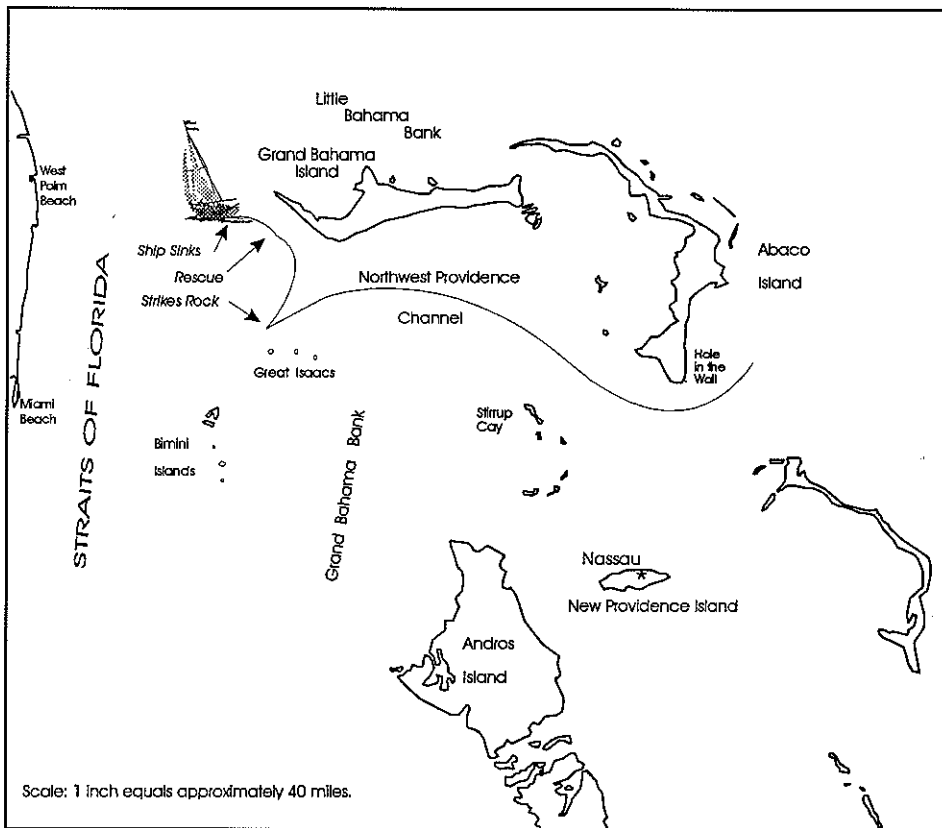
dangers and troubles. The mate and myself went down below about twelve to ascertain, if we could, the amount of water in the ship. It was then but little above the keelson [internal keel directly above the main keel], much less than we expected. We informed them on deck immediately, which seemed to encourage the hope that the ship might be kept afloat until some assistance could be procured. They labored more earnestly at the pumps, and all who were willing to work were kept caulking the longboat. It was almost impossible, in fact, to get them to work, as they despaired of saving themselves. The mate and myself again went to the hold to find out whether the water was gaining, and found there were seven or eight feet of water. We still endeavored to encourage the passengers to work at the pumps, hoping that she might be kept afloat till daylight.

Stinson painted a similar picture of the ship sinking steadily at the rate of one foot per hour during the night. Joseph Brooks had a quite different impression, he was present when Stinson called a meeting of all male passengers about eleven o'clock while the ship was still stuck. In this meeting the captain said that if they

kept the pumps going and the ship afloat until morning the tide would lift them off and then he would be able to run the ship ashore. Actually the tide was unnecessary because the ship floated free soon after Joseph and others began to work the pumps. Three hours later, Brooks, who was still at the pumps, was told there was three feet of water in the hold and that the level was decreasing. He was startled to find at daybreak that the first and second mates were in the lifeboat. He accused the captain directly of planning to abandon the ship. But Stinson denied it, stating that he would not leave the ship if they continued to pump. Meanwhile he ordered the longboat to be launched, which apparently took up considerable time. Stinson claimed that the passengers were too afraid of being swamped to launch it. Then, with the crew in the lifeboats and the pumps abandoned by the passengers, the ship was sinking so rapidly that he also boarded the lifeboat. All the other accounts agree that Stinson left the ship while the passengers were distracted by launching the longboat. According to Hendrik Kas, after



S.S. John Bell, sister ship of William and Mary. Courtesy, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA.



Map—wreck site of East Coast area, Loren Lemmen, Compositor.

entering the lifeboat Stinson removed his hat and proclaimed, "Friends, may you fare well." Stephen Perrington, however, remembered the events of that morning quite differently:

At daylight we looked after the boats, and found that the quarterboat [lifeboat near the cranes] was stove. The mate, not being aware of its condition, got into it and attempted to bale it, but making no progress, he was finally compelled to give it up. He then got into the [seaworthy] lifeboat, not daring to return on board the sinking ship, which was at this time rapidly going down. I got into one of the boats that was stove, and hauled myself along by a rope running from the ship to the lifeboat, into which I got. I was followed by John Best,<sup>8</sup> who jumped overboard and swam to the boat, which was now about as full as it would hold. The spray was breaking over it. The captain was the last who got into the lifeboat, and even

then he had to be urged very strongly before he would consent to leave the vessel. When the passengers saw him leave they knew there was no longer any hope, and became perfectly frantic with despair, screaming and calling wildly for that assistance which it was impossible to render them. As soon as the captain left, six of the crew, who still remained in the ship got ready the longboat into which several of the passengers jumped indiscriminately. I never saw anything in my life so fearful. Women and men jumped overboard from the after part of the vessel near where the boat lay, and many were drowned. One of the crew who was in the longboat was compelled, with a hatchet, to keep off the passengers who were crowding into the boat, and who, if allowed to enter it, would have undoubtedly sunk it. We cut our boat loose from the vessel, rigged a sort of sail, and ran before the wind.

The crewman with the hatchet

comes into play differently in each account. Haagsma claims that the sailor cut off the fingers of a young Irishman attempting to enter the boat and that a woman was then thrown from the boat because of her loud cries. DeJager tells a similar story, but identifies the victims as an old Irishman and his daughter. Bekius states only that three people drowned trying to reach the longboat, one of whom was a woman. He was in a state of shock at the time and wrote later, "I stood speechless and nearly fell down unconscious and prayed God that then and there He might cut off the thread of my life so that I might not witness the catastrophe which was at hand." Brooks agrees most closely with Bekius and details this incident as follows:

At seven o'clock the long boat was lowered and no sooner was it in the water than the passengers made a simultaneous rush to get into her. About twenty-five got into her. There were three more in the water who had hold of the rope that was attached to the boat, and who were trying to get into her, when one of the sailors cut the rope with a hatchet, and they fell into the water and drowned. Now commenced a scene impossible to describe, for when the boat was cut adrift it was found that some of those who were in the boat had left their wives,<sup>9</sup> some their fathers and mothers and some their brothers and sisters, and these stood weeping and tearing their hair, and calling upon them to come back, saying, 'Let us all die together!' A singular occurrence happened here. One of the women, whose husband was in the boat, was so enraged at his cowardly conduct that she actually took off her wedding ring and threw it after him, muttering something in German<sup>10</sup> I could not understand.

The first to be rescued were those in the longboat, who were picked up several hours later by an English ship



African hut in the Bahamas, 1840s. James Stark, *History and Guide to the Bahama Islands* (Boston: James Stark, 1891), p. 3.

bound for Liverpool. The lifeboat with the captain was close enough to observe this rescue but not close enough to benefit by it. But soon thereafter the *Reuben Carver* picked them up en route to New York with Captain Cobb, Master. No attempt was made to rescue those left on the ship and Cobb was criticized for this immediately upon his arrival in New York. Captain Stinson came to his defense, "It would have been impossible to have beat his vessel against the wind, sea and Gulf Stream, to reach the *William and Mary*, even if she had been afloat, which it would have been foolish to suppose." Stinson himself was soon under attack but he had quickly left for his home in Maine, which only served to make him look guilty. The *New York Daily Tribune*, while careful not to condemn Stinson, detailed the traditional expectations passengers had of sea captains and questioned how he and the crew could have been rescued while the passengers were nearly all lost. The *New York Times* went much further, suggesting he was guilty of incompetence in striking the reef, negligent in handling the rescue and

possessed of a coldness that "provokes disagreeable emotions" in his reporting of the shipwreck. He did not respond to their request for full report of the incident.

American papers<sup>11</sup> offered no hope for those left aboard, reporting that according to Stinson the ship had gone down "a few minutes after he had left". The truth was better than any dared to hope. On May 30, the same day English readers were first learning of the disaster, the Savannah newspapers reprinted an article from the May 14 *Nassau Guardian* based on interviews with two of the ship's crew, William Ward and Samuel B. Harris, who, with another sailor, "had refused to quit the ship and abandon the helpless and unfortunate passengers." From this account and the writings of Joseph Brooks we learn the basics of the rescue. After the captain and most of the crew left, the remaining sailors and some of the passengers conferred and agreed to restart the pumps, slip the chains [anchors] and attempt a landing on the coast which they had passed earlier. Ward and Harris claimed this attempt failed because the passengers

were of little use as sailors even though they worked hard at the pumps. Brooks claimed that they could not reach the coast because the head stays and braces had been cut away. Whatever the case, they were at the sea's mercy with the ship drifting to the northeast towards the west end of the Grand Bahama Island. At noon they began to make rafts and completed two with a capacity of fifty persons each. They saw a ship late that afternoon but "like the Levite" she passed them by. That evening there was a terrible storm and no one on board believed they would live to see daylight. In expectation of death the family of Siberen Wesselius and others connected themselves with ropes in hopes of dying together. When morning came they could see land and also the wrecking schooner *Oracle* which took them aboard and left them off on the Grand Bahama Island. The next day the *William and Mary* sank. The men who had remained behind to run the pumps were also picked up and then they joined the entire group for transport to the Western Barracks in Nassau where agents of the British government took charge of them.<sup>12</sup> The seamen immediately reported, "had not the captain and crew deserted the ship, the *William and Mary* could have been run ashore." Additional news from the Bahamas contained more serious charges. The passengers believed that the captain and crew had planned to abandon them from the start and had worked towards that end all night, even securing the chains to prevent their escape. The captain also lied to the newspapers about the level of water in the hold. Some of the rescued crewmen<sup>13</sup> also turned against Stinson.

US newspaper accounts contrasted the "heroic" efforts of the survivors and the *Oracle's* crew with the "cowardly and reprehensible conduct of

the Captain Stinson and his officers." Consequently demands for an explanation multiplied even before the full reports were received from Nassau. Stinson, however, refused to comply with his employer's requests for a complete explanation. Instead, he was reported to be unavailable because he was visiting his brother out West. The shipping company provided an account but it contained nothing new, explaining again that the anchors had been dropped and secured because it was dark and there were sunken rocks all around. They made no rafts because the passengers were beyond control. The ship was abandoned in

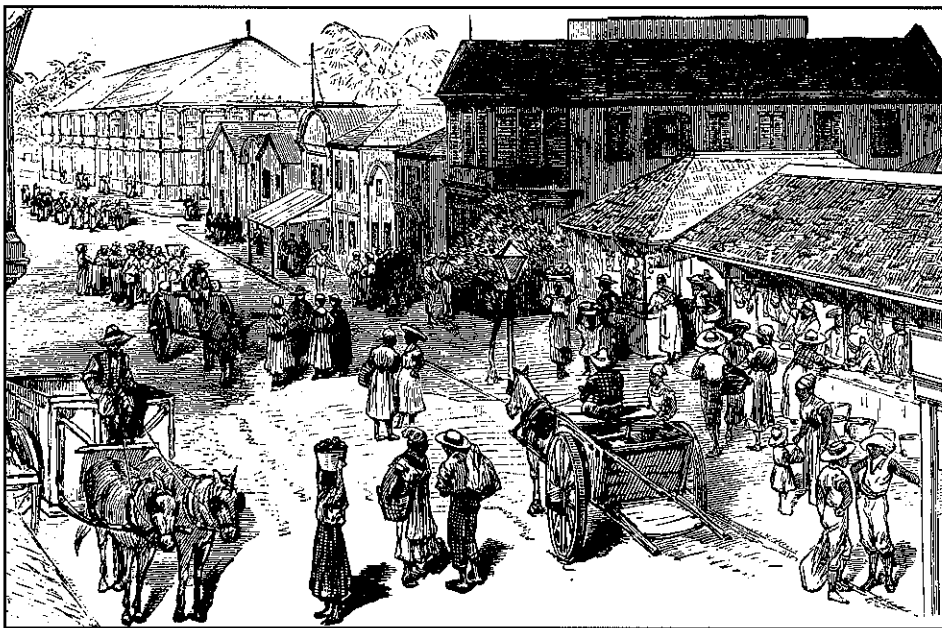
manage the ship he and the other sailors got drunk from the liquor which a German passenger had carried along in kegs. DeJager also accused them of plundering the ship including the trunks of the Frisians;<sup>14</sup> but he lavishes praise on the Bahamian rescuers.

On the fifth of May, they sighted a ship and they gave signals by shooting. There came help. The Negroes (the much hated race) became the rescuers of crew and passengers. With lifeboats the blacks got all of them out of the ship, risking their own lives by doing so. It took three hours, but before darkness set in all were safe on the Grand Bahama.<sup>15</sup>

The eighth of May the shipwrecked were able to transfer on a schooner to Nassau the provincial capital where they arrived on the thirteenth of May.<sup>16</sup> The sick were brought to the hospital. The rest went to a building, that formerly housed soldiers, there all their needs were met. The local Protestant church collected four hundred dollars for them. With this money, shoes and material for new clothes were bought. The local people helped the women to sew clothes. When they were ready and other clothing was collected, the goods were distributed. Some countrymen also found work in this city.

The other Frisian accounts echo DeJager's opinion of the Bahamians. Haagsma noted that everyone in Nassau "seems to make it a point of honor to do good," and Bekius wrote, "Most of the people were colored who were very sympathetic. Wherever we moved along the streets they offered us bread and many gave us money." Hendrik Kas asserted, "We met several black people and they are the best of all. They would give the shirts off their backs for poor seamen."

According to DeJager the crewmen who remained on the ship were thrown in prison in Nassau once the local authorities found out the true story. From there they were to be sent to New Orleans to stand trial. The Frisians and a few Germans arrived in New Orleans on June 10 aboard the schooner *Time* which had been chartered by the British government. Another sixty-seven survivors arrived that same day on a different schooner while the remaining passengers followed two weeks later. When the British Consul, which treated them well, appealed for funds, a local German Society took up the cause and gave them food as well as four hundred and forty dollars which was distributed equitably. Then, with tickets which Bonnema had prepaid in London, they traveled to St. Louis

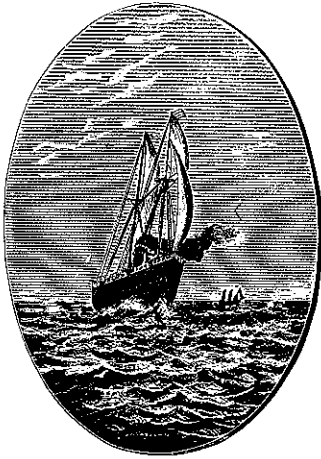


Bay Street in Nassau, Stark, p.9.

the morning because the wind was coming directly from the nearest land and the hold was so full of water that the ship was now unmanageable and seemed about to sink.

The full story, however, was not yet available. The remaining crewmen, who are the heroes in their own account, became the villains in DeJager's account. According to him one of the sailors, who was being held for stealing, proclaimed himself captain. After failing in attempts to

The shipwrecked were made to feel at home in the quarters of the Negroes, they were cared for with tenderness and love. With sorrow they told that they were not able to feed all of them. The meager supply of ship's bread was shown to them and each one was given a half potato and a little fish. This was all they had themselves too. They searched for potatoes in the woods and went fishing at sea in order to get food to share with the unfortunate. Those Negroes thanked the Lord on their knees for the rescue of the shipwrecked and pleaded with the Lord that he might have mercy on them.

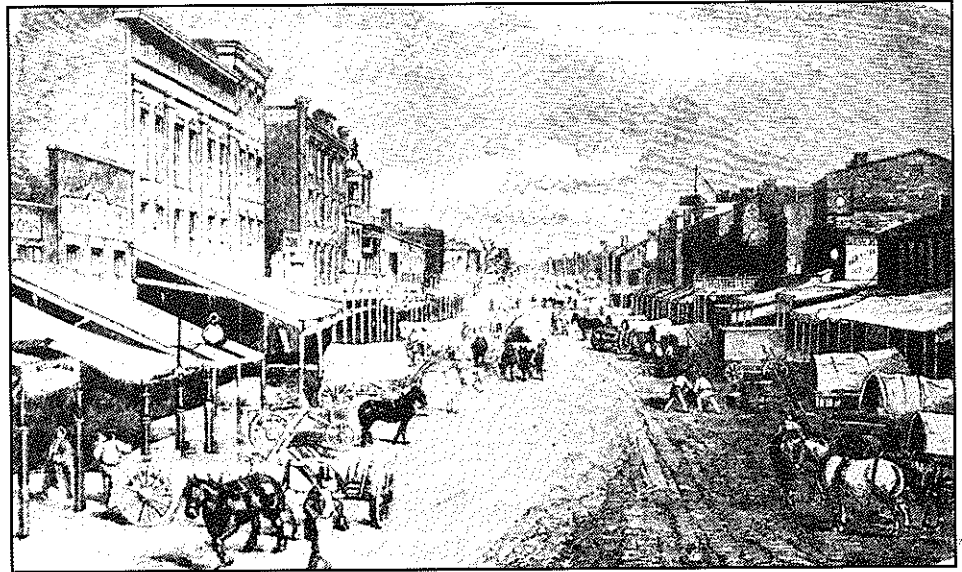


*Nassau Mail Steam—probable transport used for stranded immigrants, Stark, p. 3.*

on the *Grand Turk*. In St. Louis, however, the Netherlands Consul disappointed them when he indicated that he could only help them if they wished to work in St. Louis or return to the Netherlands. One Frisian couple and several of the others remained to work in St. Louis while the rest proceeded north. The Frisian group was now considerably diminished, because three of them had boarded the longboat and three others died after the rescue.

Eventually they reached Galena, Illinois where they met Herman DeJager, who described himself as the Frisian's "freedom-loving countryman." DeJager, who had been a school teacher in his native Gelderland, claimed to be a Huguenot, the son of patrician parents descended from Henry of Navarre.\* As the only Dutchman in Galena he probably felt an obligation to help, and he did that by issuing an appeal through the newspapers for additional aid. Most of the Frisians moved on to settle in LaCrosse County, Wisconsin, but some of those, including the Wesselius and Bekius families, eventually moved to West Michigan. Haagsma moved to St. Louis where he later became the Netherlands Consul.

\* French "Huguenot" King (1589-1610).

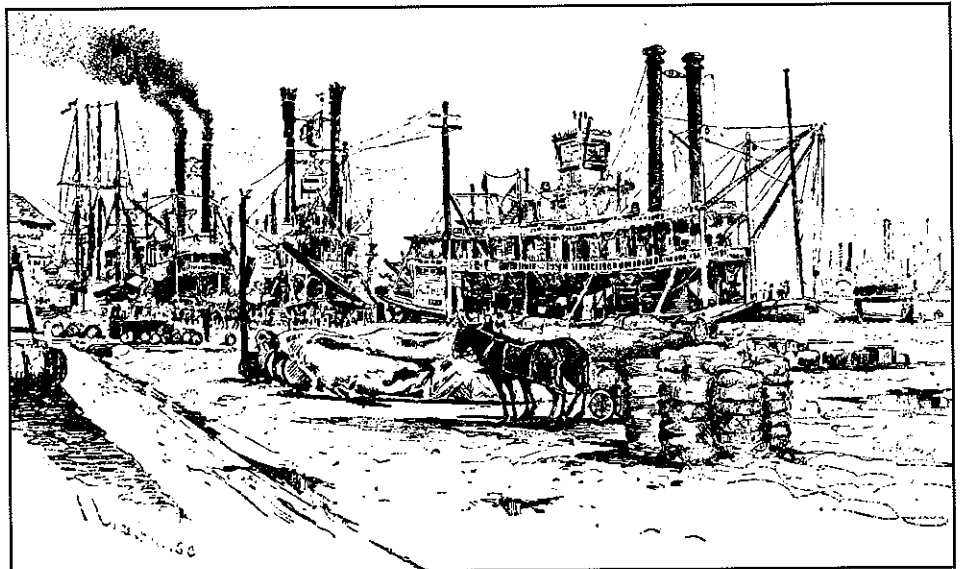


*Main Street in St. Louis, Missouri, 1850s. Walter Ryle, The Story of Missouri (New York: The American Book Co., 1938), p. 78.*

DeJager, a successful but somewhat reclusive merchant, served Galena as a city councilman, volunteer fireman and justice of the peace. His great passion, education, led him to assemble and share a library containing thousands of volumes which was reputed to be the largest collection of valuable books in Galena.

DeJager urged the authorities to bring Stinson to trial, but the captain, together with his wife and son, did

not return to Maine. A Bath newspaper,<sup>17</sup> *The Eastern Times*, reported that Stinson moved to Australia because "He could not stand the withering rebuke of an incensed community." The twenty-three passengers and three crewmen in the longboat arrived in Liverpool on the English ship which had rescued them. The three Frisians who had climbed into the longboat returned to the Netherlands where, apparently, they remained.



*New Orleans wharf, 1840s, The Creoles of Louisiana (New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1910), p. 225.*

### Endnotes

1 See *The Founding of New Amsterdam in LaCrosse County* in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Volume XXXI, p. 42-60, by Henry S. Lucas for the history of this group.

2 From a letter dated 14 October, 1853 by P. Runia of Friesland to B. Haagsma. Excerpts from this letter were printed in *De Hollander*, November 9, 1853. Translation by Swenna Harger.

3 See *De Hollander*, July 13, 20, 27 and August 3 and 10, 1853. Translations used here are by Swenna Harger. It is unclear how much money this appeal raised, occasional notes in the paper show receipts of small amounts of money "for the unfortunate victims of the *William and Mary*." Bonnema had paid the passage for the entire group many of whom could not have afforded to emigrate otherwise.

4 The account by Wesselius was sent by Jan Bijlsma to the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* where it was printed on July 12, 1853. Both it and the Bekius account were translated by Teunis Oldenberger and included in "The Bekius Blue Book" published in 1947. The Kas Letter is part of the Immigrant Letter Collection at the Archives at Calvin College and Theological Seminary.

5 *Lotgevallen van den Heer O.H. Bonnema en zijne Togenooten op reis uit Friesland naar de Vereenigde Staten van Noord-Amerika*, 1853.

6 According to Haagsma they had originally intended to sail north of the Bahamas. He credited Stinson, who he said had a "fine seaman's appearance" with preventing a shipwreck as they approached land during the night.

7 Joseph Brooks tells how despite repeated warnings the passengers overfilled the boat at the davits until finally the stern end broke loose and fell into the water, the passengers scrambling to be saved. The boat previously launched then struck it rendering them both useless. See the June 14, 1853, *New Orleans Picayune*.

8 See the *London Times*, May 30, 1853, for the entire account. According to Best's testimony he wanted to jump to the crowded lifeboat but received no encouragement from its occupants. He then took one of the ship's skysails thinking that with this as an offering they might let him in. This worked and

the rope was then cut by another sailor who was also allowed in. The boat was then so overcrowded they "seriously considered the propriety of drawing lost to see who would go overboard, as it was feared the boat would be swamped."

9 According to Haagsma the next day an English woman whose husband had left on the longboat gave birth to a premature child who apparently died as there were no English infants on ship that arrived in New Orleans.

10 The term German is used in the passenger list, by the crew and newspapers to cover both the Frisians and the dozen Germans aboard. In this case it was accurate as the Frisians on the longboat were all single.

11 The *London Times* of May 30 printed Stinson's full account which stated that "after half an hour the ship had disappeared and we assumed she went down" as well as the views of one of the rescued crewmen who believed that some of those remaining on the ship would have been able to stay afloat until a ship rescued them.

12 The British Passenger Act of 1852 specified that the British government would take full care of passengers and seek recovery of all expenses from the "owners, master, agents, and charterers" of the ship. In this case the estimated cost was \$1,000 not counting the charitable aid furnished by the citizens of Nassau. See the *Savannah Republican*, May 31, 1853.

13 According to the *New York Courier and Enquirer* one of the crewmen unable to get the faces and cries of the passengers out of his mind stated that "the Captain (that hard-boiled monster) did not cast his eyes on the ship from the moment he had left it." He also confirmed the passengers' claim that Stinson would have entered the lifeboats earlier had not the passengers prevented him. See the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, June 21, 1853.

14 Haagsma states that the booty belonged to the captain of the wrecking schooner, who was licensed for such activity. Wreckers in this area were sometimes accused of causing wrecks to obtain booty, Captain Sands of the *Oracle* was lavishly praised in newspapers for his humanitarian efforts.

15 Bekius fills in a gap left by DeJager here. The mosquito plagued

passengers slept under the open sky that night and the next day went exploring the island. A local official came forward and showed them where to obtain water and brought them what food he could, there being very little available. The next day they had nothing, they were however soon able to catch and eat some oysters.

16 At this point DeJager digresses into a discussion of civil rights. "You see here that the Negroes if they are free and not bound by slavery, are acting as human beings and as Christians. We do not have to be afraid of them. IN spite of all this, there are Netherlanders who are so low as to confess openly that they have no use for the idea of giving Negroes human rights. Yes, they swear that the fundamental principles of government cannot be drawn up under the guidance of God's infallible word. Are those members afraid that the Bible will betray them? Well then they can see the difference, if they care to study it, by reading Paine, Voltaire, Poiret and others, or for instance our countrymen, Spinosa, Deurhoven and Bekker."

17 *Eastern Times*, June 23, 1853. According to *A Maritime History of Bath, Maine* by William Baker the captain was T. Stinson of Bowdoinham. This is apparently Timothy Stinson, listed as a mariner in 1850 and not found in later censuses. Hiram Stinson, listed as a sea captain in 1850 and a farmer thereafter, may have changed occupations because the name Stinson of Bowdoinham was so associated with cowardice.



# The West Side

# West Side Letters 1880-1923

H.J. Brinks

## Introduction

The following letters, written by six Grand Rapids West Siders spans the four decades, 1880-1920, when the Dutch community was established and grew to become the most highly concentrated area of Dutch residents in the city. David Vanderstel\* asserts,

The West Leonard Street neighborhood was a rapidly growing area. The 1880 settlement extended along West Leonard and Crosby Streets for nine blocks between Fremont and Front Streets and contained seventy-three households. Twenty years later, the West Leonard-Alpine region was home for over one thousand Dutch households, a phenomenal 1300 percent increase. Within this burgeoning neighborhood, the Dutch established their homes, churches, businesses, and shops, thereby becoming the predominant group of that northwest precinct with 85 percent of the total household population.

Illustrating individual participation in that community Jan Janse (1880) provided a detailed account of his work as a furniture and barrel maker while Henk Reyerse reviewed (1923) a career of installing furniture in corporate offices across the nation. Others, Berkhof (1888) Renzema (1899) and Bouma (1902) discussed local schools, educational opportunities and family finances. Anthoon Bouma, an umbrella maker, offered an interesting justification for delaying

\* "The Dutch of Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1848-1900 Immigrant Neighborhood and Community Development in a Nineteenth Century City." Ph.D. diss., Kent State University, 1984. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, pp. 198-205.

the payment of his debts in the Netherlands. John Scheffer, although surrounded by Reformed churches, distanced himself from that community and provided a secular assessment of his neighbors. Together, these letters offer intimate glimpses of daily life among the Dutch immigrants of the West Side. (Author's comments will be shown in italics.)

### Jan Janse

1880-1881\*

*Within a week of his 1880 arrival in Grand Rapids Jan Janse addressed a letter to his last employer, a Nieuw Sint Joosland farmer named Fernand Polderdijk.*

*Jan wrote interestingly about many topics—ocean travel, the Castle Garden immigrant reception center in New York City, and the curious customs he encountered in Grand Rapids. There he resided successively at 32 Myrtle Street, 473 Broadway and 34 Grove Street, all within walking distance of riverside factories. His description of work routines in two factories provides rare and detailed glimpses of the daily activities which engaged thousands of Grand Rapids' citizens but especially the Dutch and Polish groups on the city's West Side.*

*Although he never names it, Janse probably worked for the Widdicomb Furniture Company which produced a*

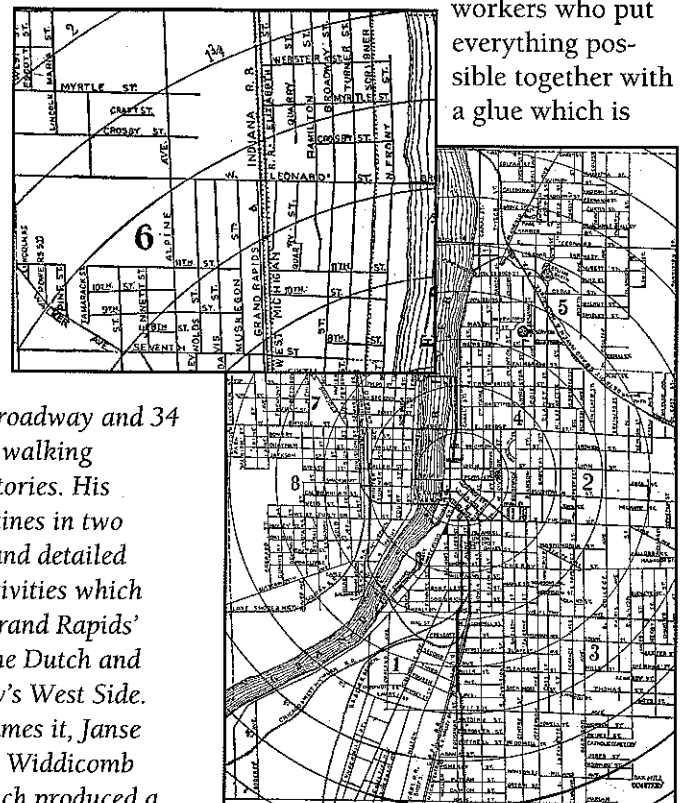
*wide variety of case goods—desks, cabinets, etc.*

At present, it is the biggest factory in the city. It has been enlarged so that from now on 550 to 600 people will be working there. All the machines are powered by steam—even the smallest shaving from a saw, the tiniest knob from the lathe, the smallest board and groove from the planing machine. Even the flowers, which were formerly carved, are now partly sawed and thereafter glued and finished so neatly that only an expert can see that they are not hand carved.

The saw, the planer, the lathe and the other equipment are all in one room. In that room a person can neither hear nor see anything and everything shakes overhead and underfoot.

After the wood has been treated by the saw, the planer and the lathe, it goes to the bosses of the cabinetmakers. Each boss has two or three

workers who put everything possible together with a glue which is



Grand Rapids Map—1891. West Side is enlarged.

\* Letters translated by Maria de Goot.

## Origins

unbelievably strong here. Even heavy doors and planks are glued together and then put through the planing machine. You would swear that it was made from one piece of wood because you cannot see any seams. They use a lot of walnut wood here.

The cabinetmakers do mostly piecework and they pay their helpers [apprentices] by the day. The best of these make nine to ten dollars per week. Second apprentices make six to seven dollars and the beginners make from three to four dollars. The bosses [cabinetmakers] earn big money. A neighbor told me that his boss contracted a job for \$80 and they did it in nine days with the three of them. The neighbor and his brother earned six dollars per week on that job so you can see that the boss made big money [\$80.00 minus \$20.50 equals \$59.50]. But there are carvers who make even more—seven to eight dollars per day and they also do piece-work.

When the wood has been cut to size or carved it goes to the filling room and that is where I worked. There the wood is dipped into paint so that the stuff runs off. This paint is called filling which must be scraped

off with flax waste or a hemp rope and then with a rag. Then all the little grooves are cleaned with a small piece of wood. These wooden tools are generally made from iron or cherry wood which are very hard. That was my job which I kept until I was making \$1.10 per day. One dollar is the lowest wage paid in this factory for an adult. Payday is every other Wednesday and it is said that they pay out between six and seven thousand dollars every payday.

From the filling room the article goes to the varnishing room where it is varnished and where the veneer is sanded. Veneer is the stuff which covers the top of the desk. After this it goes to the rubbers room where it is cleaned again. It is finished one more time before it is delivered or put in the warehouse.

The factory also has a steam-driven sawmill to saw the trees. Everything is put in motion by belts. You would be astonished by the unbelievable speed of the machines in America. . . . I wish you could see the unbelievable mass of wood that a mill saws in one summer. If you could see it I could convince you that all the wood cut by

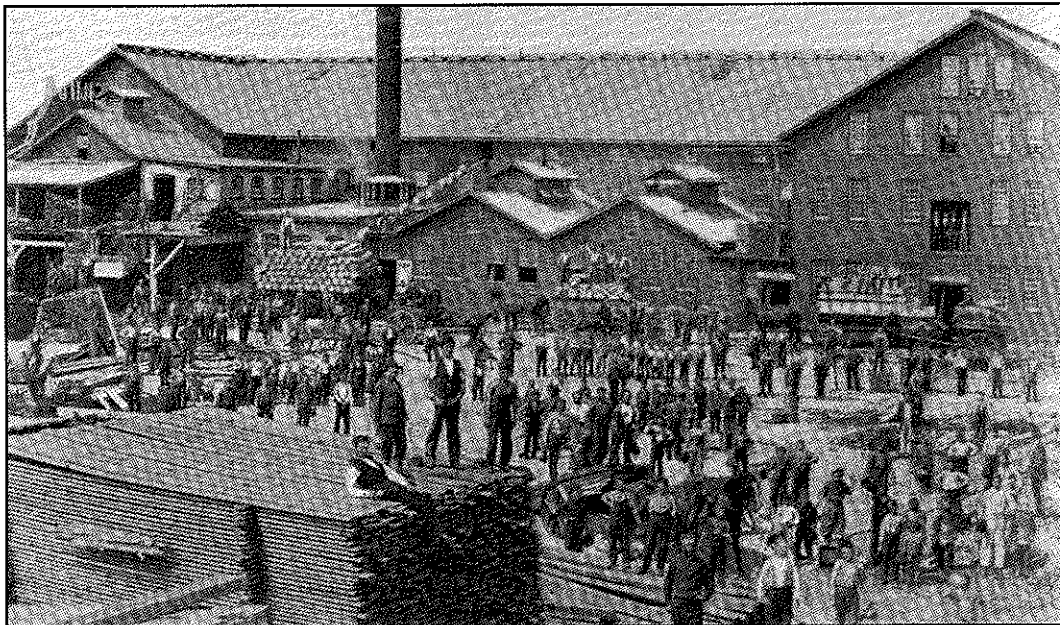
Bouwmeester, Alberts and Brueker combined [in the Netherlands] is only half what one mill can cut here. Working at the sawmill is very hard.

A river runs through the middle of the town and there are a great number of sawmills along its banks. Some time ago I walked over it [the river], not on ice because we do not have that on a summer's day. Not on water either because that is too thin in America. But over the logs which are pressed together so tightly that one can walk over them as far as the eye can see. Some were so large four of us could stand on them.

The logs are enclosed in certain parts of the river and each has been marked [branded]. Each mill had its own mark placed on the log when it was selected and sent downstream. The river always has a heavy current along with a six-foot high waterfall. Every mill has its own closure on the river through which its logs float for selection and separation. Some mills get their logs by train. The trains run all winter long and also supply some furniture factories.

*Because he suffered from unrelieved headaches, Janse left the furniture factory filling room and found employment digging a major sewer which carried the city's waste to the Grand River. But by September, 1881 he had returned to factory labor—this time as a plane operator in a barrel and box factory. And once again his detailed writing provides an exceptionally precise description of industrial activity.*

I operate the planing machine and now earn eight dollars per week. We always plane the wood while it is wet and green. It comes directly from the river to the sawing



Sawmill — undated. Courtesy of Grand Rapids Public Library, Michigan & Family History Department.

mill and from there to the planing machine. At times it works for fifteen minutes making little slats as thin or even thinner than a silver dollar. Then for another fifteen minutes it planes logs that are ten or even twelve inches thick. Sometimes a plank comes in which is as dry as dust. In short, the machine planes anything that comes along. The name of the factory is the Barrel Factory. Barrel is the same as "ton" in Dutch. I can't write about everything we make but mainly it's bins, boxes and barrels.

The wood is processed wet and green. You might think that such

The factory consists of a sawmill and the factory. They have about twenty saws, all circle saws except one, nine planing machines and lots of other equipment. Also steam-powered grinding machines. I don't know exactly how many people are working here but there are about one hundred boys (ten- to fifteen-year-olds).

I wish you could see one of these astonishingly big steam factories. Ours has seven boilers so we stoke seven fires. It is an awfully busy place. It has been reported that the factory owners made a 45 percent profit last year.

and then when something like this has happened. Immigrants stream into this place all the time but in spite of all their numbers there is much work here. . . . So Fernand, if you want to work with green wood, put it in boiling water for a while and it won't shrink.

### Gerrit Berkhof

1888-1889

*Gerrit Berkhof, a young immigrant from Noordbarge, Drenthe came to Grand Rapids' West Side in 1882. From boyhood on Gerrit's scholarly inclinations attracted the attention of his teachers and after immigrating he was urged to study theology. Nonetheless, for six years 1882-1888 he worked in furniture factories and West Side stores until, with funding from Classis Grand Rapids, he was able to enter the Grand Rapids Theological School.*

*His exceptional abilities and the knowledge he had gained from private study led to his teaching appointment in the theological preparatory school. Later, in 1893, he was appointed to replace Dr. Gerhardus Vos who left Grand Rapids to join the faculty of the Princeton Theological School. Berkhof's promising career ended in 1894 when he was just twenty-nine.*

*While still working on the West Side, 1888-89, Berkhof corresponded with Thijs Dunnink, a friend he left behind in Drenthe when the Berkhof family immigrated. Thijs Dunnink was a bootmaker in the Drenthe village of Nieuw Amsterdam, but many people will know that the Dunninks came originally from Staphorst, in Overijssel. Thijs was eleven years older than Gerrit, and may have been his spiritual*



Logs on Grand River, 1883. Courtesy of Grand Rapids Public Library, Michigan & Family History Department.

wood would shrink, but that's not true. There are products here in the factory (outdated models) that have been here for six or seven years, bone dry but still in the same shape as when they were made.

The logs which we plane go into boiling water while still green or they are placed in closed steam rooms for twelve to fifteen hours. Then they are taken out and sliced up by a big knife [saw] which goes up and down. The knife is ten feet long and cuts everything very easily. There are also smaller knives for smaller logs. It is important to match the knife and log sizes.

For the most part we use soft wood along with small amounts of oak, ash and elm. In the late fall, December, pieces of ice fell off the logs onto my legs as the logs went through the planer. The logs come directly from the river to the saws and the planing machines. Well, enough about this.

*Janse concluded his report with bits of local news—news much like that which dominates television news today.*

Last Sunday a man drowned here and another was shot to death. Their dogs had been fighting and they got so angry that the one man shot the other. I'll send you a newspaper now

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counselor because Thijs Dunnink's family vigorously supported the seceded church in Staphorst. Family historian D.M. Dunnink writes, "As a church leader in the 'Afgescheiden Kerk' [Thijs



William Widdicomb, major West Side furniture manufacturer who employed thousands of Dutch and Polish immigrants.

Dunnink] became a close and trusted friend of the Berkhof family as well as others who later immigrated to the United States."

Gerrit's brother, Louis

Berkhof (1874-1957) became a widely acclaimed Calvin Theological School professor and the author of Reformed Dogmatics together with another forty books and booklets. He joined the seminary faculty in 1906, twelve years after Gerrit's death. The following letters (1888-89) describe Gerrit's transition from factory hand to full-time student.

Gerrit Berkhof to Thijs Dunnink  
July 25, 1888

Dear Friend,

It has been a long time since I have written you a letter, probably four years, and I have never received an answer. I would like very much to hear something from you and about your community.

By God's unbounded goodness we are all well. Father is still working in a factory and is well satisfied. Mother is about the same. My brother Lucas\* is

\* Louis Berkhof.

also working in a factory. John goes to a Dutch school in the neighborhood. Ralph, the youngest, is a cute four-year-old toddler and speaks Dutch and English equally well depending on the circumstances.

Personally, I can readily report, "the ways of the Lord are wonderful." When you received my last letter you will probably recall that I was then working in a factory. I did that for about three years, but because of my poor health I began to do other things—selling books and beginning my own business. I have sold garden supplies, shoes, flour, feed and other things. I did this for two years. During that time I experienced an irresistible urge to serve the Lord in His vineyard. Because I believed that I was redeemed by God's grace and by the blood of the cross, I applied to and was accepted [in the seminary] at the expense of the student fund. The fund was able to support only two of the twelve who applied but the Lord, who has all hearts in his hand and directs them like water brooks, inclined the committee in such a way that, though unworthy, I was accepted. You can imagine my joy more clearly than I am able to describe it.

I have now completed my first year

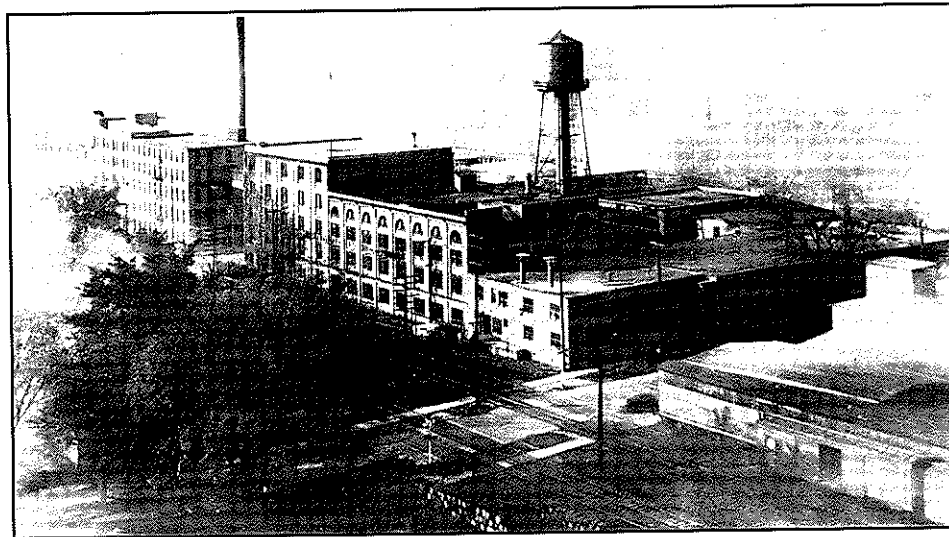
of study and have six more years ahead of me. My God grant that I live through these difficult times, and, with my eyes fixed on Him, be able, finally, to labor humbly in his vineyard.

We now have three professors at the school, G.E. Boer, G. Hemkes, and Dr. Gerhardus Vos who has just arrived here from Germany. We are now on vacation until September and I, meanwhile, am teaching in a school about a quarter mile from here.\*\*

There are four Dutch congregations of the Christian Reformed Church in this city (in one of these [La Grave Avenue] they have English services). We belong to the congregation [Alpine Avenue Christian Reformed Church] where Rev. P. Ekster is the pastor. This congregation has about three hundred families including many immigrants who arrived here this year.

How are things in the Netherlands? Write and tell me about your congregation—about Rev. Meiering (is he ordained), about the work revolt of the dock workers, about yourself and

\*\* The Dutch-language school which held classes during the summer to prepare immigrant children for participation in Dutch-language church services.



Widdicomb Furniture Factory. Courtesy of Grand Rapids Public Library, Michigan & Family History Department.

Vander Meer, and Vos, about the nonconformists, etc., etc.

Our temporal affairs are as favorable as possible. We are making a better living than we did in the Netherlands.

Receive hearty greetings . . . from your friends who will never forget you. God bless you.

*G. Berkhof and family*

Gerrit Berkhof\* to Thijs Dunnink

January 17, 1889

*Dear and most beloved friend,*

The joy your letters caused is beyond description. . . . I am happy to know that you and yours continue to enjoy good health, a privilege which we share here as well.

Father still works in the factory, as does my fifteen-year-old brother Lucas [Louis].

He earns \$4.50 per week in the furniture factory and he is very clever. I wish I could show you some of his fine workmanship—but that can wait until you are here.\*\*

When I wrote my last letter I was trying to teach the Dutch children the first principles of their mother tongue—a language which very few of them care to use. It was a tough job and I cannot deny that I was happy when the time passed. I much prefer being at the feet of my professors—even if I must work harder there. . . . The first lesson we have had to learn is that we are very ignorant and that we must overcome that great fault with zealous labor. It is too bad that we are not always inspired by that

\* Grand Rapids, Michigan to Nieuw Amsterdam, Drenthe.

\*\* This was intended humorously because Thijs had long resisted his friend's urgings to immigrate.

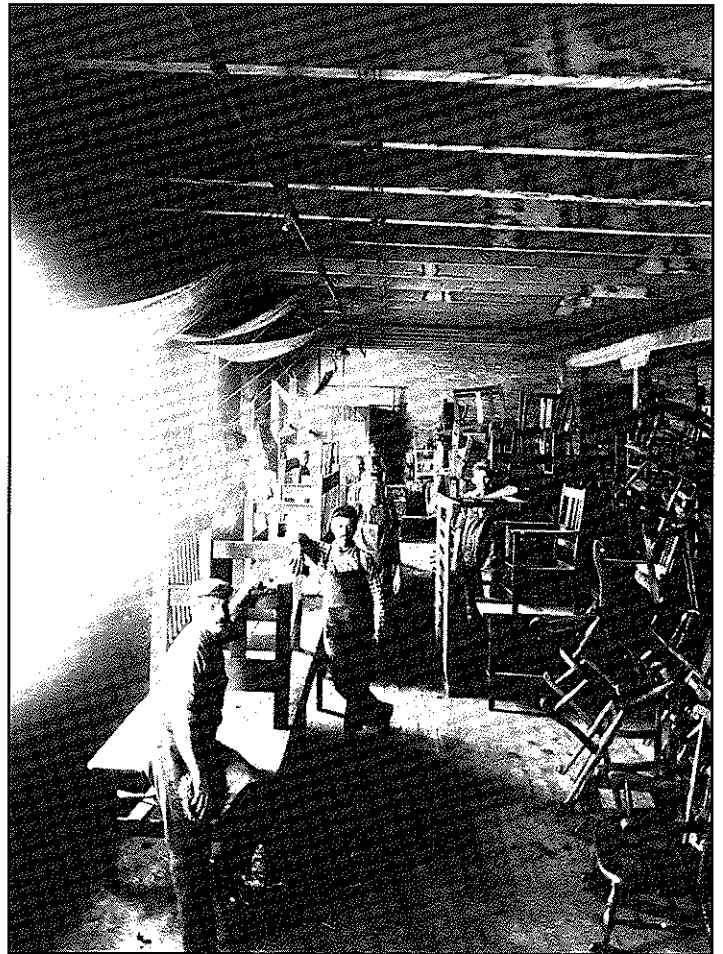
zeal and that at times, we are bowed down by discouragement. For that, fortunately, we have a refuge in prayer to Him who said, "If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask it of me."

I think I told you in my last letter that we have had a new professor since September. Dr. G. Vos is a young man, only twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, but his knowledge surprises everyone. In addition he is very modest so it is no wonder that everyone respects him. At present there are twenty-six students in our school.

Two are in the seminary, two are in the second class and three in the first. All the others are in the literary department [i.e. preparatory school].

A new Dutch church has recently been constructed in the northwest side of the city. It is located near the hill near to the place where father has always lived. This church [West Leonard CRC] was built because the congregation of Rev. Ekster [Alpine Avenue CRC] became too large for its building. Until now there was no congregation in that northwest corner of the city.

In some of our congregations the people are experiencing the clear working of the Lord's Spirit. Among them is Reverend Sevensma's congre-



*Furniture factory workers, about 1890. Courtesy of Grand Rapids Public Library, Michigan & Family History Department.*

gation [Sipke B. Sevensma, Eastern Avenue CRC] on the southeast part of the city. Many young people are being brought from their evil ways to a true saving knowledge. Great changes are recognizable. Young people, who only a short time ago were either indifferent or very irreligious, are now among the believers. They are becoming very numerous and at times thirteen- and fourteen-year-old children testify to the great deeds of the Lord.

At the last four consistory meetings sixty-four persons were accepted as members of the congregation after making confession of their faith. They were all publicly confirmed at the same time on January 6, 1889. This is a hopeful sign for the future of our church. . . . It causes us to see that the Almighty reigns and He remains true



West Leonard CRC - 1908.

to His promise that the portals of Hell will not prevail against the church.

Even so, some deceivers, masked in piety, attempt to [corrupt the church]. Last year a certain Rev. Meijster, who was deposed by Classis Delft for immoral behavior, gained a following here because he preaches skillfully. Later Rev. Van Den Broek, whom you probably know because he preached often in Nieuw Amsterdam, left Paterson, New Jersey and came here. If he had remained in Paterson they would have put him in prison but he came to Kalamazoo under an assumed name—as a Catholic priest named Father Van Den Berg. He was recognized immediately and fled to

Grand Rapids where he has already gathered up a congregation consisting primarily of ignorant Zeelanders.

We have had a great deal of political activity here during the past year—the time of the

Presidential election. Because every citizen has a right to vote everyone pays a great deal of attention to political issues. Two political parties oppose each other—the Republican and the Democratic. Before the election, meetings are held in various places where capable speakers appear. There are long parades with thousands of participants all with burning torches. Some ride and some walk. They are accompanied by fireworks, the thunder of cannons and earsplitting shouts from the crowd while the parade passes along the street. Everything was focused on the election, but now, after the election, a person hears almost no political conversation.



Ludwick Brothers (Edward, John, S. Abraham) at West Side Market, about 1916.

Perhaps we will see you here in person someday, and your letter causes me to suspect that that is not impossible. If you are seriously thinking about it [immigration] I will be happy to give you all the necessary information you wish. Oh, how I would like to have you here. We are doing very well here. So far.

Receive hearty greetings from your friend and brother.

G. Berkhof and parents

### Renzema Family

1899-1906

In 1876 Durk and Klaaske Renzema immigrated to the USA from Berlikum, Friesland with seven of their eleven children. The family settled first on a farm in Englishville, a crossroads village five miles west of Rockford. By 1882 the Renzema children were moving to Grand Rapids' West Side for employment. One son, Jan, migrated to Springfield, South Dakota, where he became a farmer. His siblings Harmen, Dirkje, Moeder, Maartje, Antje and Tjettje worked in furniture factories or as maids and store clerks. But by 1900 several had married and moved to farms in nearby villages. \* Three additional children joined the family in Grand Rapids between 1876 and 1889. The thirty-five letters which they wrote were addressed to Simon Renzema, his widow Jacoba Lautenbach or their children. The three translated letters below reveal

\* In 1900 Durk Renzema wrote about his children, "Jan lives in Dakota, Dirkje lives in Allendale [her married name is not recorded although her husband's first name was Oebele]. Antje [Seestman] lives in Vriesland. Maartje [Terpstra] lives in Lamont—all on farms. And the others all live close to each other here in the city. Harm, Jacob, Antje and Jan are still Reformed but all the others are seceders [CRC]."

*patterns of life which the Renzemas shared with many of their West Side neighbors.*

**Jacob Renzema to Simon and Jacoba Lautenbach Renzema**  
*April 6, 1890*

*Dear Brother and Sister,*

[Begins with news of family status—health, birthdays, purchase of eye glasses for father, Durk Renzema.]

Antje [19] and Tjettje [17] are healthy too. They both work in a store. Antje is courting regularly with a young man from Oosterbierum [Friesland]. He is a fine person and attends the young people's group at church here. Piet [Terpstra] and Maartje have a healthy young boy born just three weeks ago this Friday. No doubt they have written about that.

Piet has made a nice linen cabinet

Our children go to the English [public] school. Jan also goes to school in the morning. We live near a large school that has eight rooms and nine women who are teachers. One of them is the principal. The school bell rings when the students must come in and when they leave.

We also live near our parents\* and we have a comfortable house—two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and a small garden for beans and cabbage. We also have eight hens and a rooster. We eat the eggs ourselves. They have laid many eggs because it has been mild this winter, but today it is very rainy.

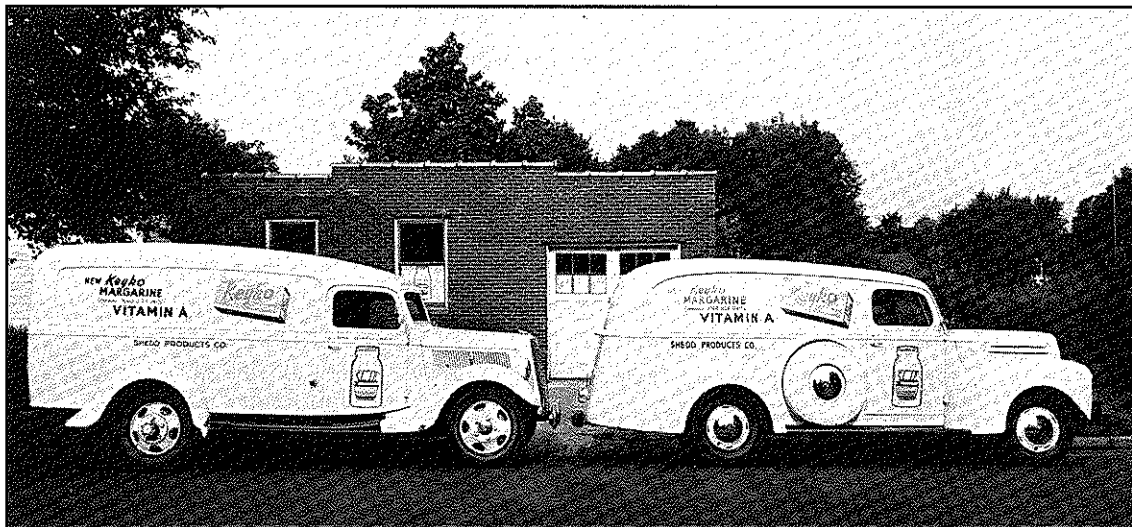
Our little Dirk is doing well too now. He is quick, bright, and already beginning to speak English. How are your children—are they healthy and well? We learned from the newspaper that you have a new baby girl. That

third time. They have one child together, a boy. Now he has four children—from his first wife, Dirk (who works in the factory already), and two girls from his second wife. She had a boy as old as Dirk before they married.

You wrote to Father asking if we took all of your gifts along and if they were undamaged.\* I know that Father wrote to you, but I don't know what he said. We passed out all the gifts in this way—the tea canister with its spoon and the six little knives went to Mother; the cigar pipe was for Harmen; the ring for Tjetje which pleased her. Everyone received one of the knives except us because Mother felt sorry that Jan Miedema had nothing.\*\* She gave a knife to him.

Write soon and return our greetings to Jelle and Fogeltje.\*\*\*

*Jacob Renzema  
 and wife*



*Bill and Bud Stehouwer, Shedd Products distributors, located at 11th and Powers Streets, 1941. Courtesy of Bud Stehouwer.*

for us. We bought a new coal cooking stove. . . . Jacob works at the furniture factory now. The work is from 7:00 AM to 12:00. He eats from 12:00 to 1:00 and then works again from 1:00 to 6:00 in the evening. He earns one dollar per day so things are looking better.

makes four for you—the same as us.

Uilke [a forty-one-year-old brother] has his own home and as you probably know he is married for the

\* Various addresses, i.e. 1910 - 396 West Leonard, Uilke Renzema; 1884 - Fifth and Stocking Streets, Moeder/Mary Renzema; 1885 - 123 West Leonard Street, Jan Miedema.

to be changed much in the ten years since we last saw each other. But of

\* Jacob Renzema, the immigrant who wrote this letter, carried gifts to his parents and siblings from Simon and Jacoba Renzema in 1889.

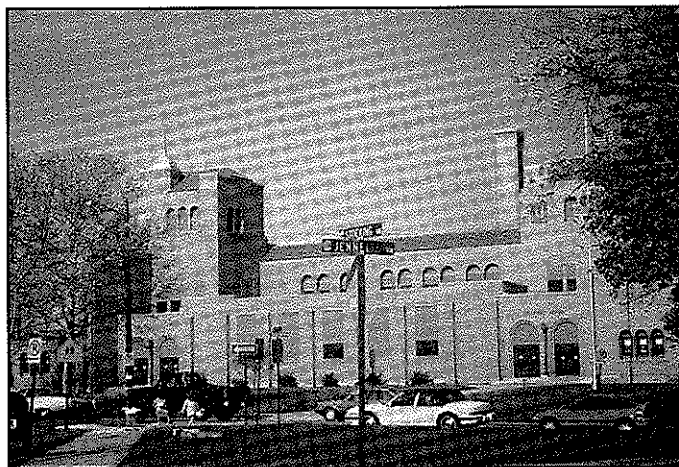
\*\* Widower of Moeder/Mary Renzema.

\*\*\* Fogeltje immigrated in 1905 after her husband, Jelle, died.

**Jacob Renzema to Jacoba Lautenbach**  
*October 24, 1899*

*Dear Sister, Nephews  
 and Cousins,*

The arrival of your letter and portraits pleased us very much. Father was specially happy with the pictures. He has three and we have three. We can have additional copies made here. They look very nice and you seem



Stocking Street Public School.

course much has changed since the death of your husband [1895].

Father [Durk Renzema] has a housekeeper who is about thirty years old. She is a seceder [CRC]. She was engaged to be married in the Netherlands four years ago but that person [her fiancé] died suddenly. This disturbed her so much that she went through a conversion and became a Christian. She has been in America for two years now and has two brothers and a sister here also. Her parents live in Heerenveen.

Jan Miedema and his wife Imke had a son about two weeks ago but they could not enjoy that blessing for very long. He who gave them the son took him back. At first everything went well—the child ate well but then had convulsions and did not live long after that.

At this time we are all healthy. Jacob [Renzema] still works in the factory. Jan [a son] is a delivery boy for a big store in the city. Anne [a daughter] works in a grocery store serving clients from 8:00 AM until noon. After coming home to eat she works again from 1:00 until 7:00 PM. On Wednesdays and Saturdays she

only works until 10:00 AM. For that she is paid three dollars per week.

The store owners are our neighbors and came from Het Bildt [Friesland].

The other children, Dirk and Dora, go to school. We live near Dora's school and Dirk is in the higher grades. His school has eight rooms, each with

forty-five students. Dora is in the fourth class. Dirk is in the highest class. If he does well he will go on to another school with six rooms. Jan went there last year but now, during vacation, he is at work because he must earn something too. They have to go to school until they are sixteen. That is the law here.

I hope you will forgive me for being so slow in writing. I was intending to write before mother died [Klaaske Wiersma Renzema]. She died suddenly from a stroke. She felt very badly on one evening and we put her to bed and then her understanding was already effected. She was very "benauwd." The pastor was here to pray with her and soon thereafter she went to her eternal rest. We hope that the Lord received her in grace. She spoke very little about that. But the pastor had hope for her because she read much in the Bible and enjoyed it. Of course father misses mother the most and he is still in good health. He comes to visit the children by turns.

Now I have to stop writing. It is so warm that we have the windows and doors open.

Greetings from Jacob Renzema  
and wife

Uilke D. Renzema\* to Nephews and Nieces

January 31, 1906

Dear Nephews and Nieces,

We are all well and pleased to receive your letter. We will write back quickly but it is difficult to write about things here because everything will be strange to you.

This winter has been more mild than any we have ever experienced here. It is better for farmers when we have frost and snow so they can remove trees from their woods more easily. There is always "plentie" work here. We work in the factory where we make bed sets (or bedsteads as you call them) and more things than you can imagine. That work goes on year after year in factory after factory in this huge *Amerika*. Huge indeed—just this Monday a young man from our church was sent off to be a missionary to the Indians—two thousand miles away. These Indians, the Zuni tribe, have red skins and live far to the Southwest of us. Our church group, the Christian Reformed, has about twenty-five Holland congregations here. But many other groups also have as many churches—Germans, English, Polish, Jewish and still more.

Your grandfather [Durk H. Renzema] remains in good health. Greet [everyone] for us—Jelle, etc. As for sister Vogeltje, we are surprised that she never writes one word to us. Our esteemed nephews and nieces would please us greatly by writing letters regularly.

We pray that the God of heaven and earth will bless you richly.

\* 396 West Leonard Street, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**Anthoon Bouma\***

1902-1904

October 16, 1902

Dear Hendrik and Fakje:

You cannot imagine what my situation here is because you cannot experience it with me. Of course I am sorry that circumstances forced me to leave you as I did but I could only choose between evils so only evil could result. I would either have had to suffer in an unbearable situation or I would have had to surrender everything in bankruptcy.\*\* The very thought of it was enough to drive me to America.

Besides, Brother, people can only see what their eyes permit but the Lord sees what is in the heart. Do not judge from appearances. Do not judge and then you will not be in danger of judging incorrectly . . . I know a man who is considered to be a model of honesty. He fled to America because of his debts and later returned to satisfy his creditors.

. . . It may have been this man's desire to return for many years, but if he had not lived to return the world would have thought of him as a low-down fugitive. The Lord saw his heart. . . Remember the person who desires to pay up. Because we cannot see into the heart we often err in our judgments. So it would be the part of wisdom to remain silent—especially when we remember that the Lord has warned us to remove the beam in our own eyes before we can remove the sliver from our brother's eye.

\* Anthoon Bouma, 608 West Leonard Street, Grand Rapids, Michigan to brother and sister, Hendrik and Fakje, Franeker, Friesland.

\*\* This relates, apparently, to a 500 guilder promissory note due to be paid in full by May 2, 1892.

Also, you have failed to show me why it was sinful for me to go to America. . . Was my flight a sin? Prove that to me. No one has done so and I do not see it as sinful either. Jacob deceived his father [the biblical Isaac] and that I think was a sin, but I have never considered his flight to be a sin—even though he did not bid his father farewell. I know [my leaving] has been sad for Mother, and I would not like to see one of my children disappear either, but Hendrik, does that make my leaving a sin? Did I ever promise any of my creditors that I would remain in the Netherlands?



Alpine Avenue Christian School, undated (Note Ten Commandments in Dutch on the blackboard)

Did I? Was I not free to go where I wished? If that is so, then where have I sinned? . . . My case is like the man I wrote about:

As long as I do not pay up I am dishonest. But if I ever have the privilege of paying my debts with interest I will be pointed out as a man of unusual honesty.

Congratulate Mother for me on her birthday. I had a letter ready for her when yours arrived, but now this letter will serve the same purpose. Everything here is as satisfactory as one could wish. I already have several

orders here for Christmas presents which is [celebrated] here about the same way as you celebrate St. Nicholas Day [December 6].

With greetings,  
Your son and brother, A. Bouma

February 24, 1903

Dear Mother, Brothers and Sisters,

I received your January 22 letter in good health . . . and I wanted to give some thought to [my response]. A month ago a man came to ask me

about Siebren [Anthoon's son]. He wanted to place Siebren in a machine shop as an apprentice—not to do boy's work, but to start directly on the machines and to learn the trade . . . Siebren is a friend of his son and called at his house

from time to time and he was apparently liked there. It is one of the few American households in this neighborhood.

This is primarily a Dutch neighborhood. Well, because Siebren was happy to get the opportunity it was difficult for us to refuse. He will only earn \$3.50 per week and he already earns \$5.50 at the other job. But [in the machine shop] he will get a \$1.50 raise every year for four years. So by the fourth year he will get \$8.00 per week. And this man says that if Siebren completes the four years he will be able to earn \$2.00 per day

anywhere. So, though there will be a loss at first, Siebren will come out all right in the end if he takes care.

Now regarding Van der Plaats—you wrote, Mother, that since I now earn such a good living, etc. [But let me explain.] Earning a living is not the same as earning a lot of money. . . . As I remember it, I wrote that I never imagined that I could earn my daily bread as well and as easily as I now do by making umbrellas. I marvel about it everyday and I would desire nothing more than I have if it were not for that unpaid debt. You must remember that I cannot do everything. As you know I do need an easy job and it is especially on that account that I am so pleased to have something I can do well and easily. I did write you about my ailment which was and still does cost much time and money. I think it is getting somewhat better rather than worse lately. In short, I cannot do that [pay up] now. But when I can do it, I hope to do it. But I must make sure that I make the money without involving my wife because she says I do not want to work for the Old Country. So something has to turn up independently of my wife so she does not have to work for it. We work together in the umbrella shop. I am writing this with her knowledge. Just the same, if someone is entitled to be paid it is he [Van der Plaats].

I am enclosing a separate note to cover the other matter. You should not forget that, although we live well during the winter months, we have to earn extra during the summer because we earn very little during the winter.

December 26, 1904

Dear Brother, Sister and Children:

Today, Monday morning, Boxing Day,\* we received your letter and portrait. Ciene, Siebren and Marie have

\* First weekday after Christmas—a British holiday.

gone to the Sunday school Christmas celebration. Johannes is playing in the backyard with his sleigh.\* It rained a little this morning for the first time in a long while. There is no snow, but much frost in the ground so you can imagine that it is very slippery. Now while I'm alone for a moment, I'll write you a return letter.

Our health leaves nothing to be desired except (and that is bad enough) that my ailment is little or no better. I have been bleeding every day for the past three weeks—and not just a little bit. Sometimes I think I will have an operation, but many who do have a recurrence. Now, however, there is a specialist here that cauterizes it or kills it with electricity. He says that if they come back within ten years he will do it over free. We would have made much more progress if it had not been for that [ailment].\*\*

Just the same, we may not com-

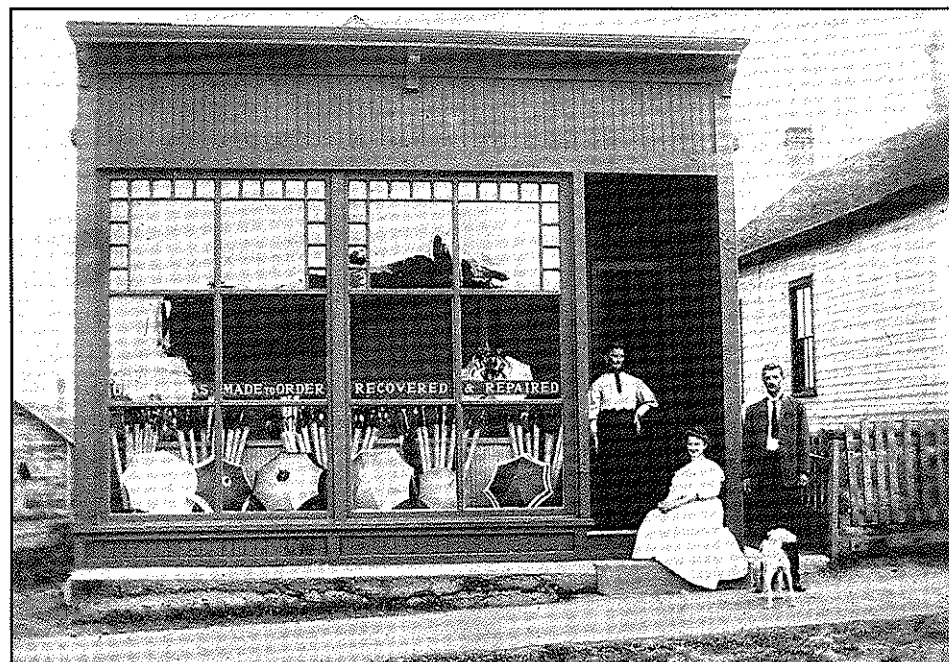
\* The Bouma children—the celebration of Christmas, when it fell on Sunday, occurred on a day apart from that of regular worship.

\*\* Probably hemorrhoids.

plain. Even though it has not rained here apart from a few cold showers, we still have a fair amount of work. And that is worth a lot.

Our Siebren, who turned eighteen on the 10th of November, is bigger and heavier than I. But just like me he is skinny for his height. Marie will turn fifteen in the spring. She is a stocky, heavysset girl bigger than Ciene. Johannes was six on November 30 and has been going to school for about a month now.

So, you are balancing your accounts. I have to do that too with the New Year but that does not take me very long. First I do not have any debts. Never have had any. Once, when we had been here for about one year, I tried to buy a piece of meat on credit but I could not get it. Why? Because we do not have a steady place where we buy and we were not yet well known here. Therefore, fortunately, we have no debts and, even



Anthon Bouma family shop, 608 West Leonard "Umbrellas Made to Order - Recovered & Repaired" about 1910.

though we can get credit now, we do not use it. We buy everything with cash and pay less. Second—my business is mainly on a cash basis and when I grant credit it is not for long. And I am not afraid to ask for what is owing to me. Third—I do not need a large inventory so there is little to measure and count. I do know that I have more inventory than ever before and we also spent quite a bit on our little house this past summer. I bought it for \$325.00 and I think I could easily get \$800.00 for it now. It is in much better condition now and everything is more expensive.

My dealings with my manufacturer, going on nine years now, are also in cash. I send the money in advance and for that they give 6 percent discount. I have never seen the manufacturer or a traveling salesman. Everything comes from a catalogue with a list of prices.

We wish you, Mother, and all the relatives a happy and blessed New Year. Also [brother,] congratulations on the increase of your years. It's your thirty-seventh [birthday], right?

Your loving brother, Anthoon

### Jan Scheffer

1907

September 14, 1907

Dear Friend,\*

In answering your letter, I will first say a few words about my account. I know you will understand that I cannot pay up at this time even though I would like to do so very much. When people first arrive here, especially when they have had to borrow travel money, they have many expenses. It's like starting all over again and having to buy everything. It's tough.

\* Jan Scheffer to P. de Rook, fish merchant. 430 Tamarack NW, Grand Rapids, Michigan to Lemmer, Friesland.

Regarding your request to help Mulder's son find a loan, that, I must say, would be very difficult. Put yourself in the position of being asked to lend money to someone you do not know. But the Mulder family would have no trouble working here to repay a loan [provided in Friesland]. Let me explain. Jacob Mulder, the oldest son, could earn \$10.00 per week in the summer and \$9.00 in the winter. Hendrik [the father] could also figure on \$9.00 per week. His second son could earn \$8.00 and the third son \$6.00 or \$ 7.00 to begin with. Altogether that makes \$33.00 per week, or at least \$30.00. An amount that will allow them to pay back reasonable installments rather easily.

The cost of living has gone up slightly here over a few years ago but life here is still good for a laborer. Here are some prices:

- meat -
- beef 9 cents per pound
- pork 13 cents per pound
- lard 8 cents per pound
- sugar - 6 cents per pound
- coffee - 20 cents per pound
- butter - (expensive lately)  
30 cents per pound

- flour - 75 cents for 25 pounds
- potatoes - 50 cents per bushel

House rent varies between \$6.00 and \$9.00 per month. These homes are different than those of the Netherlands but suitable for a laborer. For example: \$8.00 per month will get you a house with a living room, a kitchen and two or three bedrooms—that includes a kitchen and shed in the back of the house. For \$6.00 I have a small house with a large living room and a large kitchen and two bedrooms. In addition we have a rather large shed where my wife keeps her stove in the summertime.\*

I have not yet spoken to Tieke since your letter came. He is working at a factory now and earns, on average, more than \$9.00 per week. Simon Spaan makes as much as I do [\$10.50 per week]. It is very easy to buy a house here. If you have \$25.00 or \$150.00 cash in hand you can buy a \$1,000 house and repay it like rent with a rate of 6 percent interest.

\* Detached rooms (kitchens) were common to prevent fires and to keep the house cooler during the hot summer months.



C.W. Stehouwer, about 1920. Note Broadway Avenue CRC in background

Shoes and clothes are not expensive here but the quality is inferior to that of the Netherlands. A pair of decent Sunday shoes cost \$2.50. Because it is warm here in the summer people wear rather thin clothes.

You asked if people here go to the theater. Yes, they do and the cost is about the same as in the Netherlands—25 cents to \$1.00. The Dutch don't make much use of it. They prefer going to church—preferably three times a Sunday! It's really a pity. There are thirty-five Dutch churches here. The people here do drink liquor but not on Sundays. It's just like Urk\* here on Sunday—you can't even buy a glass of beer.

The price of liquor or beer is about equal to that of Holland—a glass of beer is five US cents—and for that reason it is often consumed in excess. In my opinion people here are rather uneducated which is not what I expected of American people. I imagine this is so because all kinds of people came here and often not the best kind.

For about sixteen years now they have had electric trains here, which go from one end of the city to the other—a distance of about one and a half hours and it costs five cents. The train ride to Lake Michigan also takes one and half hours. At times two boats sail between Grand Rapids and Grand Haven [on the Grand River] but because of low water levels the service has stopped for a time.

The weather here is currently beautiful. This spring, though, we had bad weather and that made the fruit more expensive. But from early May until now we have had excellent weather—occasionally a rainy day, but not often. In contrast to the Netherlands there is not much wind here. For days on end the smoke goes

straight up out of the smokestacks. As long as I have been here, eleven months, I have experienced only one big storm—last year in November. They called it a tornado.

I am learning to speak English rather easily but I am slowed down a lot because of my working with Dutch people and with Poles who either speak poor English or don't speak it at all.

Nearly all the houses here are made of wood, with a stone foundation raised a few feet above the ground. Nearly every house has a small front porch and all the houses are separated by a narrow strip of yard. That only applies to homes. The shops in the city are [arranged] just as they are in the Netherlands.

Grand Rapids has 100,000 inhabitants with a city budget of 2.5 million dollars. I think one should add another 2.5 million for the water system from the Big Lake. A laborer who does not own a house or any other real estate does not have to pay taxes. The school is free and compulsory through the age of fifteen. I will be sending you some newspapers from this place and hope you will send me Dutch papers in return.

*Greetings, J. Scheffer*

## Hendrick Reijerse\*

1923

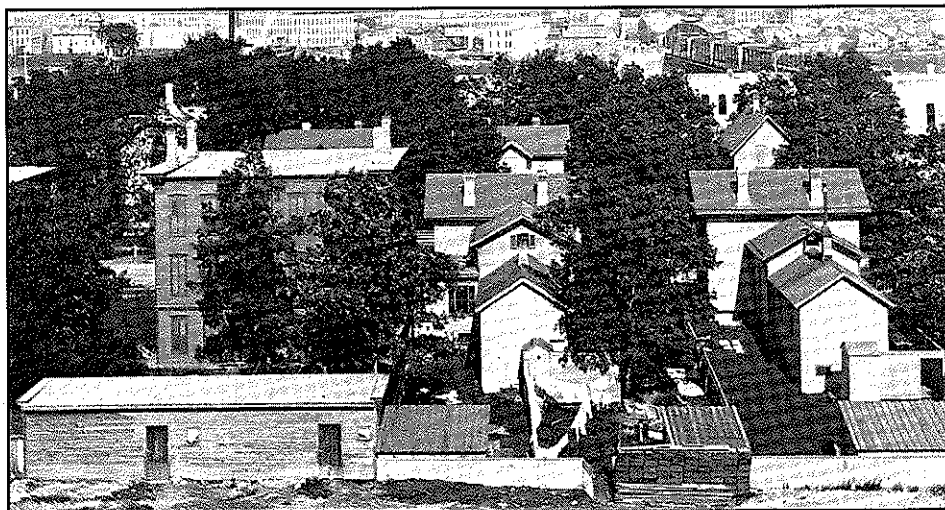
*Highly esteemed Friend and Family,*

Well, friend Jan, I received your letter with great pleasure.

I am sending you some family pictures which, no doubt, will be very surprising. My house would be full if you included my two married boys and their children. We have had thirteen children but we lost two of them in the space of three days—a girl of three and a half and a boy of seven months. Had they lived they would be twenty-six and thirty years old.

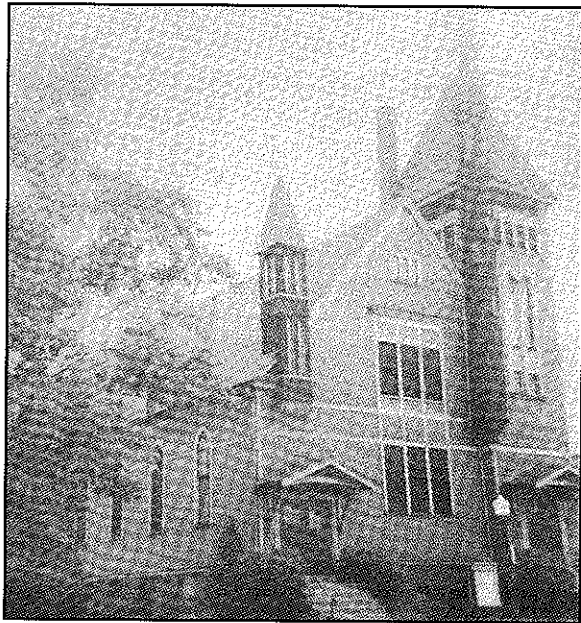
I'm still working in the furniture factory. Arie Abel does that too but I have not seen him for a long time. He makes furniture for homes and I make furniture for large stores. Until four years ago I worked for a factory that only made furniture for banks—savings banks and National Banks. I did that for twenty years and I traveled a great deal because I went with the

\* Hendrick Reijerse [Reyerse], 1104 Lincoln Avenue NW, Grand Rapids, Michigan to Jan Geuze, 's Heer Arendskerke (near Goes in Zeeland).



*Factories and back yards. Courtesy of Grand Rapids Public Library, Michigan & Family History Department.*

\* A very conservative fishing village on the IJssel Sea located near Lemmer.



(top) Seventh Reformed Church - at Leonard and Jenette, built in 1892.

Seventh Reformed Church parsonage.

furniture to set it up in the buildings. Sometimes I was away from home for two or three months. I have been all over America and in Canada too. I traveled sometimes from seven to nine thousand miles in a year's time going from one place to another. Many times I visited the place where I arrived in America on the boat in Hoboken. I have seen tobacco, cotton and oranges growing in fields. I've had Blacks and Indians working for me. I've been in Washington, the Capitol, and in the President's White House. I've sat in the seat of President Roosevelt. I have seen and done much, Jan, during the thirty-five years that I've been here. Now as I grow older I prefer to stay at home—at

fifty-one that is best . . .

I've been in the following states: New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, Michigan, Canada. So, you see I've seen quite a bit of America. Michigan is twice as big as the whole Netherlands. And Michigan is not nearly so big as some other states. So now you can understand how much I have traveled.

Jan, you asked if my brothers live here too. Brother Leen lives close to me [a few doors away]. Cornelis lives on the other side of the city about six miles from us. He rents a piece of land there and with that he works part time in the city—in a milk factory where my son Adriaan also works. At the moment he is home digging potatoes. Brother Leen has a shop where he sells bicycles and motorcycles.

He repairs them too. He does rather well but he works hard too.

I still work nine hours per day and earn about \$7.00 per day. On Saturday I work only five hours in the morning. You have to scratch here too, Jan, especially if you have a family.

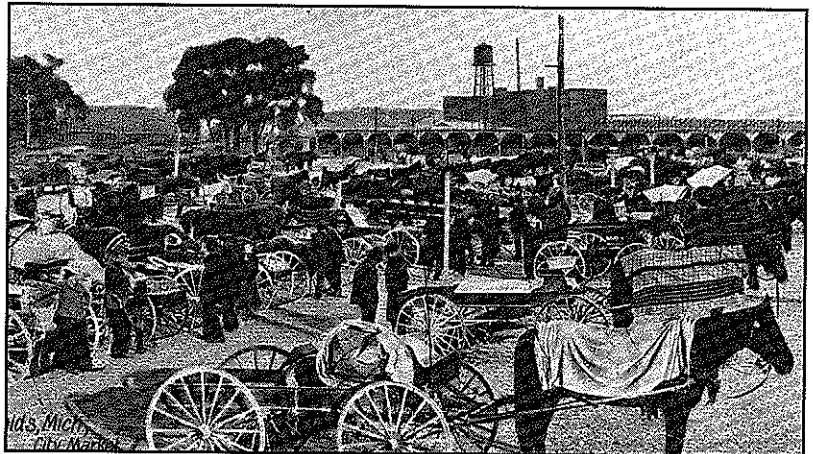
The taxes are high here too now. I have to pay about \$50.00 per year taxes on my house. The street in front of my house was just paved with cement and that cost \$200.00. I always have something that needs to be paid. But it is good here anyway.

I have clean work—always inside during the winter and warm. The work is not hard. But everything is getting expensive here. A suit of clothes costs \$35.00 to \$40.00. Butter is forty to forty-five cents per pound and eggs three to four cents each. Shoes cost five, six or seven dollars. Everything is more expensive than it was earlier.

We took an automobile trip with my son Adriaan this past spring. With his wife and children and with my wife we traveled to Chicago, to Milwaukee, and then to Vesper, Wisconsin, the place where my wife's aunt lives. Then we came back to Milwaukee where we took a boat across the lake to Ludington, Michigan. We drove about 1,100 miles in a week. [In Vesper] they have a farm worth \$10,000. It is good and attractive land. They milk twelve cows.



*Greetings from all of us to all of you,  
H. Reijerse*



West Side City Farmers' Market, about 1910

# West Side Memories

by Walter Lagerwey\*

On the day of their wedding my parents said goodbye to their relatives and began the long journey to America. They came to Grand Rapids in June 1917 and settled in the Dutch community in the vicinity of the old Coldbrook Christian Reformed Church. They rented an upstairs above an old wooden store on Prospect Street where I was born in 1918. My father, a carpenter by trade, was able to find employment in a factory, but that was a great disappointment for an immigrant coming from a good middle-class family in Utrecht. The joy that my parents experienced at the birth of their first son was also dimmed by a major calamity. Overheated stove pipes caused a fire that burned out the upstairs. My mother providentially awakened in time to rouse my sleeping father and to snatch the baby from, I am told, an already burning crib. My parents fled into the night, all their possessions burned, as well as the clothes of another family whose washing mother was doing to make a little more money. Thus they survived the fire, even as they had overcome the swine flu epidemic some months before, a fatal disease to which so many succumbed in World War I. We moved then a little further

west to another upstairs apartment on the corner of Leonard and Alpine. Thus began the saga of an immigrant family which could get a fresh start thanks in part to the helping hands of a community of Christian friends, in part to their own hard work.

~\*~

Later my parents moved to a house on the corner of Eighth and Jennette Streets, the boundary between the Dutch and Polish communities where, it seemed to me, all of the West Side, north of Eighth Street was Dutch. On the other side of the street lived the Polish. The Dutch people were clustered around their belfry-dominated churches at Coldbrook, Alpine, West Leonard, Broadway, and Jennette Streets. They were all Christian Reformed or Reformed. Our Polish and Lithuanian neighbors were all Roman Catholic, as far as I could tell from all the things that their kids could do and we children could not do. They all lived around churches with strange sounding saint names like Saint Adalbert's, Saint Mary, Saints Peter and Paul; and all of them bearing crosses. I recall especially Saint Adalbert's with its green copper domes and crosses and bugle-blowing angels! We went our separate ways, almost like the Jews and the Samaritans, although I must admit that we did meet as playmates on the sandlots where we played marbles and baseball and football or flew kites on the Sand Hills along Walker Avenue. It was in those football rushes that a Dutch boy named Wouter soon got the nickname, the wild man from

Borneo, as he charged fast and furiously into the enemy lines!

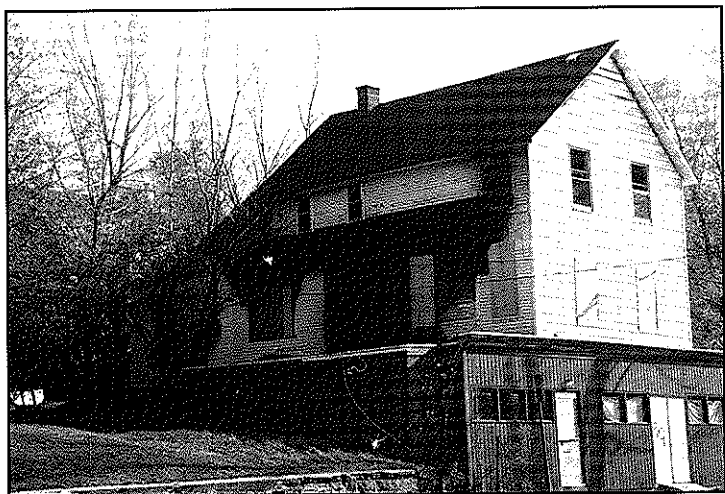
At the age of seven I lost my father, i.e. he entered Pine Rest Hospital and remained a psychiatric patient until his death twenty years later. The stigma attached to mental disease in those days cast a somber shadow over my boyhood, but another consequence was that our family, my mother, brother and sister, were drawn together in intimacy and a determination to become self-reliant.



Lagerwey family - Walter, Sophia, Peter

When my mother was no longer able to make house payments we moved into our small upstairs quarters and rented the larger downstairs for income. To augment her meager pension mother went out working, taking her infant son along to places where she washed walls and did housecleaning. She also took in washing and ironing. To do that she purchased the newest and best electric washing machine, an event which came to the attention of the deacons who were paying our Chris-

*\*This version of Dr. Walter Lagerwey's recollections has been shortened for inclusion in Origins. The full text is available in the Calvin College Archives. Walter Lagerwey is Emeritus Professor of Germanic Languages.*



Original Lagerwey residence—burned again in 1994.

tian school tuition and my father's hospital bills. But the deacons quickly approved of that expensive purchase when they realized how important it was for my mother's hard and endless day of work.

The street that separated Dutch and Poles reflected a religious as well as an ethnic barrier. On the one side of the street were such familiar Frisian names as Tolsma, Thomasma, Boersma, Medema, Steensma, Folkertsma; also some Dijkstras, Buurstras and Boonstras. Still others followed another pattern: Van Aelst, Van Soest, Van Wijk, Van Dijk, Van Den Berg, Van't Hof, Van Antwerpen. The people on the other side of the street had strange names, or so we thought. There were the Hansknechts, a Schmidt here and there, but for the most part the names all ended with *ski*: Pihotski, Levenski, Pinski, Piotroski, and so on.

Jennette Street where we lived for about ten years was the most memorable of my boyhood homes. My father and mother had learned no English so that Dutch was spoken in our home. My mother tells me that I was speaking more Dutch than English when I entered kindergarten in Stocking Street Public School, which I attended only one year. My

recollections of that year are not many, but I do seem to recall that as children we learned the pledge of allegiance to the flag, a pledge which was repeated each day as a kind of religious ritual! I do not recall that this was done in the school I next

attended, West Side Christian on Pine Street. Nor did any of the Dutch churches have an American flag on the pulpit, a common characteristic of American churches. Very early, then, the role of the flag as a symbol of national pride was impressed on my mind.

I was intrigued by the history of our country. At school we subscribed to a special weekly called *Current Events*, which informed us about what was going on in America and in the world. And I read many books that fired the imagination, especially those about the Civil War and about the frontier. It was fortunate for a poor immigrant boy that there was another typically American institution that offered a broad education, the public library. We had a small book box in the classroom which provided reading material for those who finished their written assignments. But I needed a library of books, and weekly I trekked to the Widdicomb Public School for a bundle of books. Much of my education was obtained there. The library was a wonderful place for a boy with an inquiring mind. Of course, there was a censor at home, my mother, who proscribed murder stories, mystery novels, and books with bad language. The forbidden is attractive,

and I sometimes spent quite some time at the library, more than was needed just to find books!

I envied my Polish friends who were Boy Scouts. I envied the uniform, wanted to learn the crafts, go camping and participate in the parades on national holidays. I wanted to join the Boy Scouts, but the reply to my repeated request was always a firm, unequivocal "no." There was one reason for the refusal. To become a member of the Boy Scout organization you had to take an oath of allegiance. Reformed Christians took the Ten Commandments seriously and even literally in those days. To take an oath, to call upon the name of God in this kind of situation was unnecessary and evil, it was taking God's name in vain. And of that we Reformed Christians were deathly afraid. We had something of the Old Testament Jew's feeling about using the name of God. Only in situations of gravity, standing before a judge in court, might one call God to witness to the truth of a statement. And to err here was to invite damnation.

From all that I have said it is clear that the church and religion were at the center of our life as a Dutch community. In the typical Dutch Reformed home every meal began with prayer. There were in addition the morning prayer at rising and the evening prayer at bed time. The Bible was a most familiar book. We attended two worship services each Sunday in which the preacher exegeted texts and passages for three-quarters of an hour and more. Besides, there was the instruction in school, in Sunday school and catechism class. The worship was to me a solemn occasion which began officially when the minister opened the council door and began his march to the pulpit followed by the serious looking elders and deacons who took seats at either side of the platform. At

West Leonard Street church those morning services were always in the Dutch language, the evening in English. It seemed that we were more orthodox than the neighboring churches because we had retained the Dutch language. English was the language of churches which were becoming Americanized, and they were in danger of becoming liberal, and some, we thought, were tainted with liberalism already. How much did a boy understand of those lengthy, weighty sermons? It is hard to say, but I certainly developed a fine awareness of our theological and religious tradition, and an intimate

acquaintance with the Bible. It was common practice in those days to visit relatives and friends on Sunday evening, and the subject of discussion was inevitably theological. Again and again the subject concerned total depravity—how to reconcile unconditional election unto salvation with human responsibility. I frequently got the impression that the greater the emphasis upon man's depravity the better because then the grace of God would be all the greater! Debates such as these sharpened the mind, but I don't believe they contributed much to my spiritual growth.

Nonetheless I am convinced that

our Reformed understanding of the Christian religion did provide me with an anchor of faith in God's providential grace and a solid foundation for the house of my life. Though isolated, its windows afforded perspectives on the world enabling me to become a modern Christian with an appreciation of both the New World in which I was born and the Old World of my Dutch ancestors. It provided a foundation for a deepened understanding and appreciation of both our Reformed heritage and of the ethnic and religious variety which God created to know Him and His word.

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## A Polander Remembers the West Side Dutch

H.J. Brinks

Joan Dressler, raised Catholic in the Saint Adalbert parish has vivid memories of childhood interactions with her Dutch Reformed neighbors during the 1930s. She and her friends were not instructed to shun the Dutch but they were warned about developing close relationships. Parents feared that friendships could lead to courtship and marriage and then to conflicts over church affiliation, the education of children and to fractured families. One case of this sort involved a Polish man who married a Dutch Reformed spouse and then joined the Christian Reformed church. Thereafter, to avoid difficulties for his children, he adopted a Dutch surname. An event of that sort sent shudders through the Polish Catholic parish.

It's not surprising then that Joan

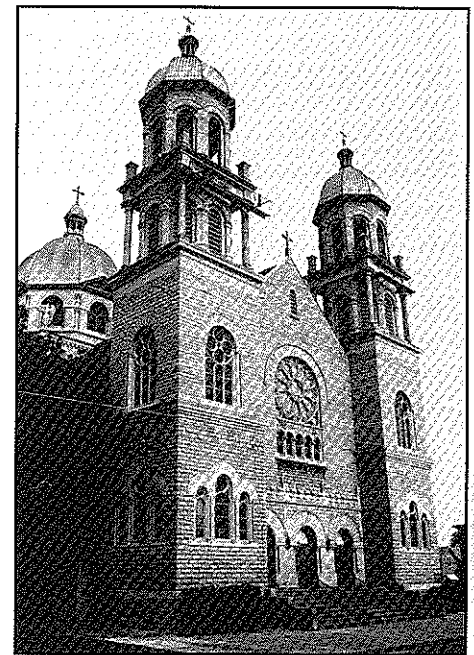
was forbidden to enter Dutch Reformed houses and churches. She recalls a day when all the neighborhood kids were invited to join in a general cleaning of the Alpine Avenue Christian Reformed Church grounds—a time of fun combining pop, cookies and work. When Joan's grandparents observed her in the crowd they alerted her parents. In short order she was marched home, scolded and warned to keep away from those Protestants and especially from their churches.

Despite stern parental reprimands the young people of both communities found ways to meet each other, test the limits of their social restrictions and create rules of their own.

A popular Bridge Street hangout "Harry and Carl's" offered soda pop and a juke box, attractions which

brought Joan Dressler and a young fellow named Vander Ploeg together for a brief period of courtship. He, Joan recalls, was a real gentleman but neither she nor he dared to appear together at the front doors of their homes.

The two West Side ethnic groups



St. Adalbert's Basilica. Courtesy of Grand Rapids Public Library, Michigan & Family History Department.

also met at the ice cream store on Leonard Street and at the Richmond Park swimming pool, but intimate and sustained friendships between Dutch and Polish kids were rare. From the Catholic perspective Dutch sabbatarianism seemed strangely excessive. With doors closed, shades drawn, and a nearly eerie silence the Dutch Reformed Sunday seemed curiously gloomy to Saint Adalbert's parishioners.

Joan recalls no single time when she or her friends were invited into Dutch homes for lunch or dinner and the Polish were equally protective of familial turf. On one occasion Joan Dressler was invited to a neighborhood birthday party, and with prior permission she took along two of her cousins. Dressler, a German/Jewish name raised no eyebrows but her cousins, the Kujawa kids, could not escape their ethnic identity. After introductions Joan recalls that she and her cousins were served a piece of birthday cake and sent off hastily to play elsewhere.

When they employed each other for household services and even in some light industrial companies, Joan remembers that the two groups were mutually respectful, honest and reliable. Workplace associations were friendly but not intimate. Everyone seemed willing to do readily what duty and civility required.

That rather moderate ethic was elevated when neighboring Hollanders joined forces with the Polish folk to rebuild the Dressler family garage after it was destroyed by fire. Without advanced indications or negotiations the Hollanders appeared on the scene when the lumber arrived. Together with the Polanders they sawed and hammered throughout one and a half days of work. But they toiled in a silence punctuated only by an occasional "ja" with head and hand

motions. Otherwise they spoke not a word and left the building site as mysteriously as they arrived. Why? No one knows. Perhaps it was an honest effort to cross ethnic borders

with Christian charity in a surprising but awkward demonstration that things can, sometimes, be as they ought.

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## Grand Rapids West Side Story

by Paul Zylstra

**O**ur fathers came to the West Side to establish churches. Almost simultaneously they founded schools. They came with a strong conviction of their special relationship with a covenantal God. That conviction had already led them to uproot themselves from a European homeland and transplant their families to America. They wanted us, their children, to be bent as little twigs toward God.

• When I began school in 1926 there were 484 pupils, 114 in junior high. That same year twenty pupils in the higher grades sought permission to organize an orchestra with an instructor from Calvin College. The board's answer: "Yes, if you practice outside school hours."

• Tuition was \$1.50 a week. After I repeated first grade in 1927, a rule was made that a pupil had to be at

least five and a half years old to enter the first grade. Meanwhile Charles Lindberg was crossing the Atlantic in a single-engine plane and the first "talkie" movies arrived. Also in 1927, complaints arose about bad playground behavior (immoral talk, fighting, and lack of discipline).

• In 1929 the school nurse inspected regularly for head lice and dirty fingernails. The teachers got no coffee breaks. (Recess is a time to help slow learners, or to write lessons on the blackboard.) After the stock market crash, nearly 20,000 USA citizens committed suicide. The count went much higher two years later.

• In 1930, two teachers were not rehired due to the drop in enrollment. In 1931, one more teacher (probably through attrition) was dropped. Teachers rebated 5 percent of their 1931-32 salary. John W. Sharpe got special thanks for saving the school \$150 by offering to direct all athletic activities free of charge.

• In 1932 an ungraded class of sixteen was discontinued for lack of finances. Said the board with their shameful slip showing, "Too bad; such a class is the only solution for retarded children." Also in 1932, all parents working for scrip were excused from paying tuition. Principal

*Rev. Paul Zylstra, author of the Broadway/Westview hundredth anniversary book, A Centennial Journey Led by the Light, has been writing industriously about his life and times on the West Side. When he has completed this project copies will be available to those who may be interested. Watch for a notice in our Newsletter.*

Ben Engbers was to “use his discretion in supplying free school supplies to children of scrip workers.” Miss Hanna Datema, school clerk, was replaced “because she was to be married.” There were 433 kids enrolled; 40 dropped out. In 1935 the principal was offered 25 percent of all the tuition arrearages he could personally collect. (It isn’t his task, but he can make some money.)

• When we graduated in January 1937, FDR observed: I see one-third of our nation ill-clad, and ill-nourished.

### Class Reunion

Profiles were compiled of all classmates, both the living and dead. Questionnaires helped jump-start

some fading memories. Sifting through the brief and lengthy, sunny and dull, amusing and painful profiles, I was struck by the diversity of the stories. Life occupations included a news analyst and business consultant, a preacher and essayist, office workers, CPA’s, homemakers, nurses, care-givers, interior decorators, an artist, civil servants, a tech machine repairman, schoolteacher, printers and a plumber.

### School Memories

Jerry Jonker sold “Shopping News” as a Dutch immigrant school student and would get the rubber bands to form them into rubber balls, shooting them against Tolsma’s school window—until the day Richard Tolsma

happened to throw open a window for air just as one rubber ball was zinging through the air into the school room. It hit Tolsma on the forehead. For his shenanigans Jerry got the full treatment from Sir Richard, a private trip to the nurse’s aide room and Tolsma’s paddle. An older generation student, Ed Joling, had a slingshot with ammunition of paper wads. He got booted out of school for a while.

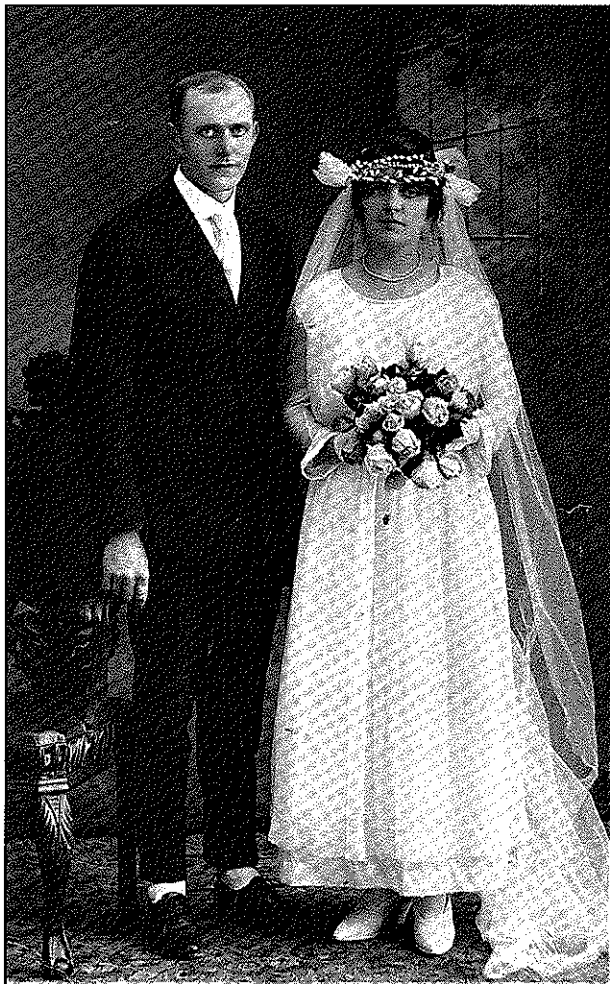
All of us who weren’t goody two-shoes got our turn getting booted out of the classroom into the hall where the principal could spy such culprits from his lookout post in the front office. Bob Rodenhouse got his share for mischief-making. “I’d see Engbers come slowly down the hall and I’d try to hide behind long coats hanging on wooden pegs along the side. He’d stop abruptly

because although he didn’t see me he saw my feet. He’d pull aside the clothing, then say, ‘Oh, you again!’ and all the while he was there he’d dig his thumb into my shoulder muscle and work it in til it hurt. To further inflict punishment I had to smell his bad breath.”

Engber’s hearing was also bad. One day Nella Rickers in his session room came up to his desk and whispered, “May I please go to the bathroom?” He bent closer and she had to repeat it. He still didn’t hear, so she said it louder. He cupped his ear for another round, when the whole class became privy to the one-sided conversation. Finally in exasperation he said, “Do you want to put it on paper?”

Dave Zylstra and Carl Van Baalen in Engber’s session room were talking up a storm. Said Engbers, “Next time I come back and you’re talking I shall keep the whole class after school.” They were caught the second time and had to stay til 4:55. Three of the boys in that class had paper routes, so the perpetrators of the crime felt they should make amends. Dave lifted lanky Carl up and he set the clock at 4:50. Engbers returned, looked up at the clock and said, “Well, I hope you boys and girls learned your lesson. It’s ten minutes to five and I’m going to let you out early.”

In 1924 second grade teacher, Miss Haverkamp, put on Bud De Vries’ report card, “He plays with matches.” Another way to be found out: Miss Borst excused two elementary basketball stars, Bud Kunst and Johnny H. Zoet, an hour early to play basketball at Widdicomb School. Their classmate who wanted to watch them, played sick “Miss Borst, I’m real sick; can I go home?” It worked. But the next morning Borst asked fellow teacher Jeanette Stehouwer, “How’s your brother Bud?” “He’s OK, why?” “Well, I sent him home sick yesterday.” Bud was caught red-handed.



Wedding photo, 1916, of Albert and Luwena (Hartigh) Zylstra

# Andrew and Anna Zylstra

by Paul Zylstra

Shortly after arriving in America with his widowed mother and his siblings, Andrew Zylstra left the West Side to work in Chicago and learn English. He returned in 1894 and boarded at 246 Hamilton near his mother's Wieland Street home. Following his marriage in 1897 Andrew and his wife, Emma Kraay, had two children (Anna, 1897) and Richard. During that time and until 1912, Andrew lived desultorily with many changes of residence and employment. He worked successively at the Sligh (1901), Phoenix (1904) and Nachteggall (1908) Furniture Companies. His first wife died during that period (1901) and his second wife deserted him within one year but took his son Richard with her. For several years (1904-09) Andrew lived alternately with his mother and at various nearby addresses. After becoming a draftsman he moved to Detroit. Meanwhile his daughter Anna worked as a domestic servant while living with her grandmother.

In 1912, while working in Detroit, Andrew experienced a radical conversion and returned to Grand Rapids to announce the great change in his life. He persuaded his daughter Anna to join him in "allowing the Holy Spirit to take command of her life," a decision which had major consequences for the Zylstra clan. Anna's own story, constructed from interviews with Paul Zylstra, follows:

In 1914, when Andrew returned to Grand Rapids he and his daughter were reunited and together they attended the City Mission Church pastored by Rev. Andrew Urshan. There Anna met the Gilbert family with whom she boarded after her father Andrew married for the third time. In the Gilbert home Anna became acquainted with Jonathan Nader, a young Assyrian who was a longtime friend of Rev. Andrew Urshan.

When Jonathan Nader came to visit the Gilbert family he spent some time browsing through the family's picture

album in which he noticed Anna's portrait.

"Who is this?" he asked.

"She boards with us."

"Aha. I'd like to know more about her."

"But she's only a girl of fourteen."

For the next three years Jonathan took opportunities to become acquainted with Anna—walking her to Central High School, attending Gilbert family gatherings and the City Mission Church. At first the relationship was not romantically motivated, Jonathan was, after all, ten years older than Anna. There were other encumbrances. Jonathan was entirely devoted to his ministry in a Chicago mission and he had no real understanding of Anna's Dutch background. In any case her relatives had strong reservations about this kind of mixed ethnic relationship. Nonetheless, the friendship grew and Jonathan attempted to gain some kind of supernatural approval of his inclinations.

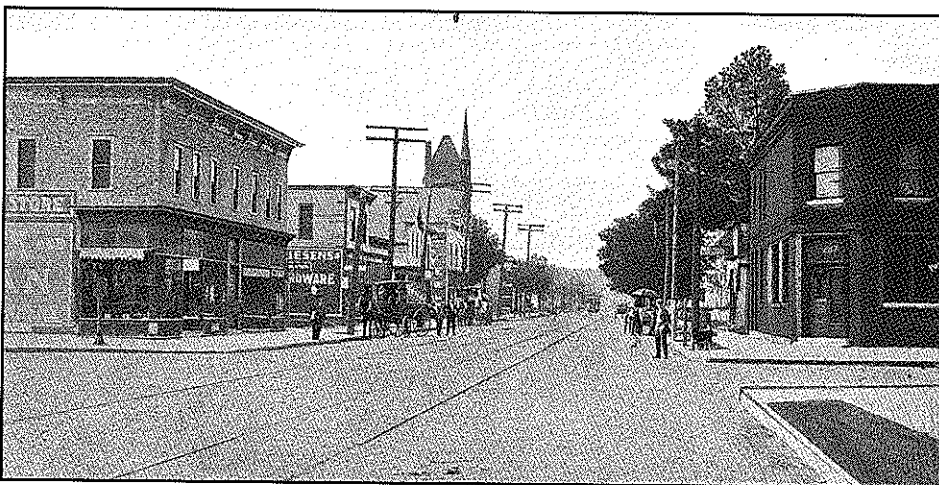
During an evening visit, Jonathan asked Anna to bring him a drink of water. "Certainly," she replied. Moments later he made a snap decision. If she asks if I'd like another glass of water, I'll take it as God's approval and ask her for a date. His heart jumped when Anna asked, "Would you like another glass of water?"

Some days later he sought his confirmation. He surprised her by asking for a date. Four months of sporadic courtship ensued during which Anna turned seventeen. One night he pleaded for her hand.

"But Jonathan, I'm too young, and I'm different from you—and we hardly know each other." Behind that distinctive husky voice of hers the heart began to pound.

"But I love you," he said simply. He seemed genuine.

"I love you, too, in the Lord, but I



West Leonard, west of Alpine Avenue.



Anna Zylstra

hardly know you enough to love you in—in, um, other ways. You've walked me to school when you were in town, and we've been at church meetings together, but . . ." Her voice trailed off in muted gear, almost as if her withering honesty was too heavy a load to go on with.

Jonathan looked at her wistfully. Then in a plaintive tone he began to contend. "But how can we know each other better? I'm in Chicago; you're in Grand Rapids. We can solve it by just getting married."

Anna protested. "Can't we wait awhile . . . and see?" She wanted to leave the door open a crack. "Daddy is unhappy about it all; Grandma is *mussputten*\* about it all the time."

Jonathan was persistent. "I'm ready now." He looked longingly at her, then broke out with a ready smile.

That night alone in her room Anna

had long thoughts. She had no mother and no sisters. Relatives? Relatives were fussing because she had left the CRC for her father's strange church where they made a lot of noise.

"And now you keep company with this little Jew," they muttered. They sneer, thought Anna. But he did look the part. Swarthy. Prominent nose. Beady eyes. Short stature.

Her reservations about Jonathan's overtures became weaker. She did crave a caring, loving person and a settled-down atmosphere.

She finally relented. They were married by Jonathan's Chicago consort, her new preacher from the mission church, Rev. Bob David. It was a low-key wedding.

Anna's suspicious relatives, unsure at first if this match could ever work, did a complete flipflop. Now he could do no wrong—this unique person penetrating their Dutch ghetto.

"At first I was sure my relatives loved Jonathan more than me!" she concluded with a wry smile.

Cousin Anna Nader and her family developed two circles—two different worlds—and she felt at home in both: the first was the Assyrian Connection into which she married; the second was her West Side Grand Rapids Dutch cousins. Sentiment was thick when either side had their festivals. Naders would swap stories of the days when they rode Chicago streetcars and subways, taking periodic long visits to Grand Rapids and Flint. These were high points for all relatives alike. The venerated couple were usually the life of the party, standouts in a Dutch crowd because they never paid homage to boredom.

Married life began seventy years of serving others. The home was always open house for everybody. In time Anna became church organist, unofficial counselor, mother to the motherless, friend to the friendless, teacher of Bible classes, and homemaker-mother for her own four children.

She taught in Assyrian for fifty-five years. They had planned a move to Persia in 1914 when World War I broke out to ruin that. She learned the language anyway—in six months. Gregarious, she wore her Christianity like a bright-colored insignia.



1904 Flood. Boy with catfish.

\* Distaught.

## West Side Glimpses

*Barber shops* along Leonard Street were routinely offering “a shave and a haircut—two bits.” One smart aleck advertised 15 cents for half a haircut. Often on a winter morning, when someone dared to come in just as the door opened, the barber would groan loudly, “Get outa here. It ain’t warm enough. I just got the fire lit.”

*Arnold Kuzee* had a candy store on Leonard near Tamarack. Three bars for 10 cents—the same cut-rate price as Muirs downtown Monroe Street store.

*Andy Visser* offered several boys a quarter each to help him load a “couple calves.” The kids rode along to Andy’s farm and piled out to face a big thousand-pound

bull. Andy proceeded to pile a bunch of chicken coops five feet high on each side of his tailgate to funnel that bull into the truck from a gate twenty-five feet away. The kids were instructed to nudge the bull into the truck. Andy opened the gate and the bull came out with no intention of getting into the truck. He tore the place up with chicken coops flying in all directions. The kids raced for home on foot—a three-hour trip. They never did get their two bits.

*During the winter* on Saturday nights bobsleds were given the right-of-way in both the pastures and the streets. When the bobsled came down the hill with 12-15 passengers the smart ones

fell off near the bottom and scattered so they wouldn’t have to pull the heavy thing back up the long hill.

*During the Depression* there were many newsboys. Some bought their own paper routes while others worked directly for the Grand Rapids Press Circulation Department—84 cents per week for a route of fifty houses. Customers paid 12 cents per week to boys who were supporting families. The money was crucial. One mother put it bluntly to her son’s customer, “If you’re 2 cents behind, we drop you.”

*Ice men* brought ice to your door according to the amount listed on a card in your window, anything from 25-100 pounds. But people could also buy directly from ice shanties. At the end of the season, when the shanties were almost empty and left untended, kids came to pick up the leftovers in pails. They sold it for whatever they could get.

*A favorite Halloween trick* was to wrap up old tires in new paper and place them on the roadside with a rope tied to them. When someone stopped to pick up the tire the pranksters behind bushes pulled the tire away.

*On Saturday nights* young people marched up and down Leonard Street between Powers



Broadway Avenue CRC Sunday school teachers, circa 1931

(Left to right, back row) Jack Van’t Hof, Ed Venema, Nell Weeda, Frances Naber, Mrs. Richard Bylsma, Lillian Youngs, Lucille Van’t Hof, Maude Tepper, Winifred Sonderfan, Harriet De Boer, Jeanette Stehouwer, Frances De Lange, Frances Van Erkel, Angeline Meerman, Adrianna Velders, Frances Van Ysseldyk, Hilda Pastoor, Gerrit Siereveld. (Second row) Sidney Werkema, Robert Andree, Gerrit G. Buist, Webb Vander Meulen, James Wagner, Jappe De Boer, Fred Velders, Fred Tepper, Bram Ter Veen, John Kroon. (Front row) Dave Prose, John Garvelink, Nick Nederveld, Dennis Stouten, Albert Zylstra.

Street and the Grand River. The women were looking to be found and the boys were looking to find. Many couples found life-long mates during this ritual which took on a great magnitude for them.

*Mrs De Roos*, wearing a blue bonnet and a Salvation Army uniform, went up and down Leonard Street selling the Salvation Army magazine *War Cry* at five cents per copy.

On Saturday nights the Army set up a circle of ten to twenty people at the corner of Alpine and Leonard Streets. There, with tambourines, horns, singing and testimonies, they drew crowds to their weekly meetings. It even drew Rev. William Masselink from his parsonage. He gave a ringing testimony one night to show his support of the group.

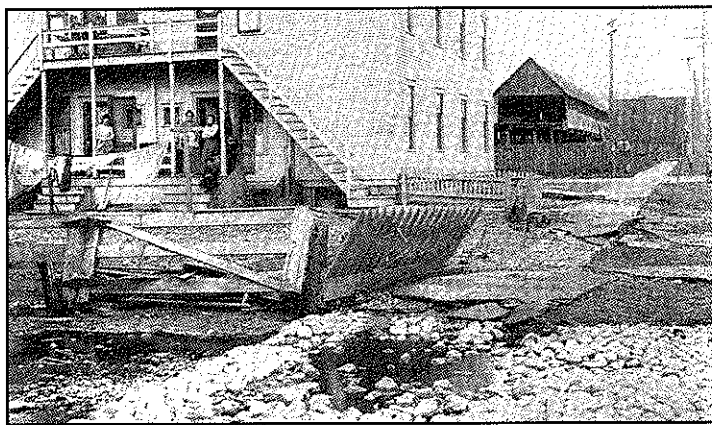
*West Side Glimpse contributors*

- Casey Bruggema
- Marvin Maat
- Harold Cooper
- Pearl Van Neuren Malecoot
- Bud De Vries
- Edith Versluis Medema
- Joan Vant Hof Fennema
- Andy Rodenhouse
- Gerrit Gritter
- Bob Rodenhouse
- Bea Kunst
- Connie Post Rodenhouse
- Bud Kunst
- Doc Stehouwer
- Larry Kuzee
- Bud Steensma
- Jean De Boer Langarek
- John Van Soest
- Dave Zylstra

# A Typical West Side Story

by Paul Zylstra

During the 1893–1904 Cleveland administration depression, 1893 was the worst year both financially and ideologically. For the first time in history, there were more folks living in the cities than in rural areas. The 1893



1904 Flood. Webster and Turner Streets.

Depression triggered many work layoffs. A number of pioneer West Siders fell on hard times. But life went on. It was tough going but they loved their freedom . . . freedom of worship, freedom from the class system, freedom to buy cheap lots, to drive down their stakes and eke out a living. This is what the Zylstra's faced and what all their Dutch brothers and sisters on the West Side faced.

The immigrant, Albert Zylstra, was just four years old when his Uncle Sipke Postma picked up the Zylstra family from the Grand Rapids' train station on May 12, 1892. Their first residence, selected by Postma, was at 224 Hamilton and from there Albert attended nearby schools until he was thirteen.

He was always fascinated by the stories Uncle Tonne Postma told about local history—Indians living in the forests near the Grand River and the wagon trails leading to and from the Louis Campau trading post.

Uncle Tonne reported,

When they named streets like Mon-

roe and Canal you could not use them in wet weather because of the slippery clay. Our old West Side had lots of low land along the river which had to be filled in. Sometimes men worked on the roads in payment for taxes. They put down a thin layer of sand and gravel and then covered that base with limestone. Later when that roadbed was rutted and impassable they covered it with planks, cobblestones or wood blocks of pine and cedar.

That street on which you walk to work everyday, Scribner, well, a fellow named Scribner settled on our side of the river and bought a large tract of land. He named one street after himself and took others from his home, New York City. That's why we have Turner, Crosby (Fifth), Broadway and the streets numbered one through twelve.

In 1901 when, at thirteen years of age, Albert and many of his cousins worked at the Widdicomb Factory, his life was like that of most West Side boys. Widdicomb was the largest factory with about six hundred employees. The machinery was steam powered. At fifteen he began to work

for the Oriel Cabinet Factory and the next year (the year of the 1904 flood) he began to learn the sheet metal trade at the Hopson-Haftenkamp

Company in downtown Grand Rapids. Meanwhile the family moved from Hamilton Street to the corner of Muskegon and Leonard.

Albert opened his own sheet metal shop on that same corner in 1912. The brick veneer structure he built there is still standing.



## The Polish-Dutch Connection — Then and Now

by John Witte, Sr.

This is a tale of two peoples, one city, and a “connection” which history forged in ancient days as well as in more modern times. At first glance, one would think that there is a minimal relationship between people of Polish descent and those of Dutch extraction due to religious, linguistic, and cultural differences. In Europe the Poles and Dutch are separated geographically by the large land mass of Germany while in Grand Rapids they are separated by a narrow ribbon of water, the Grand River. The Poles settled primarily west of that river while the Dutch congregated on the east side.

A more careful survey of ancient and recent history demonstrates that there is a “connection” between these two groups. This was vividly demonstrated during the 1976 bicentennial when the boards of the Polish Heritage Society and the Dutch Immigrant Society joined hands to celebrate the U.S. bicentennial and filled the 4,500-seat Welsh Auditorium. But, after this historic event both groups more or less returned to their cultural and social enclaves as parts of the American mosaic.

The cooperation between the Poles and Dutch in Grand Rapids in 1976 was not the first effort to cross the cultural frontier. The historian, Dr. Lucia Thyssen, author of the excellent

book entitled, “1,000 Years, Poland and the Netherlands” clearly demonstrates that there was a long and honorable relationship between the Netherlands and Poland.

During the 16th and 17th centuries these nations enjoyed a very intensive commercial relationship. Both were very powerful in Europe at that time—Holland as a sea power, and Poland as a land empire encompassing Moscow, Ukraine, Ruthenia and Moldavia. Danzig (Gdansk) was Europe’s most important grain harbor. From there the Poles, via the Netherlands, exported salt herring, wood, etc. throughout the world. Dr.

Thyssen believes that most of the wooden poles on which Amsterdam was built came from Poland. In 1600, thousands of Dutch merchants, bankers, and artists lived in

Gdansk where the influence of Dutch architecture is still visible.

In the Netherlands students from well-to-do Polish families came to Leiden, Franeker, and Amsterdam to study in the Dutch universities. Officers of the Polish army attended military school in the Netherlands. Most Polish atlases were printed in the Netherlands. Of the 503 atlases from the 16th and 17th centuries which are still in Poland’s libraries more than half were printed either in Amsterdam or Antwerp. At the schools of navigation at that time, the Dutch language was used for teaching the students. Dutch was also the “lingua franca” for the technical operation of Polish ships and most others in Europe.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries both Poland and the Netherlands experienced foreign occupations and vastly diminished fortunes. Consequently, when Germany in-



December 23, 1994. Burial of General Maczek attended by Queen Beatrix and Lech Walesa.

vaded its neighbors during the Second World War the Dutch and Poles were quickly subdued. Germany invaded Poland from the west, and some weeks later, the Soviet Union invaded from the east. The Polish army fought bravely against the invaders, but after it was clear that the battle was hopeless, those units of the army which were not surrounded by the enemies were ordered to leave Poland for possible service to the Allied cause in other countries. General Stanislaw



*Eisenhower and Maczek, 1945.*

Maczek and his brigade escaped via Hungary and North Africa, to join the Allied forces in France.

In Bretagne, France, General Maczek commanded a Polish training camp, and when Germany started their "Blitzkrieg" May 10, 1940 the Polish division helped defend the Maginot Line in France. When it became clear that France was planning to capitulate, the Polish divisions were ordered to leave the continent. General Maczek ended up in Scotland. There he convinced the Polish High Command to build up a modern-panzer division, and in 1942 enough funds were available to organize that division with the most modern equipment. It took part in the D-Day invasion on June 6, 1944, and was instrumental in the liberation of a part of northern France, Belgium, and the southern part of the Netherlands.

After fierce fighting which resulted in heavy losses of Polish soldiers and Dutch civilians, the western province of North Brabant in the Netherlands was liberated. Here again an important connection was made between the Netherlands and Poland. Before the Polish panzer division came to the area of Breda they liberated several cities in Zeeland and, in the spring of 1945, they liberated the cities of Winschoten, Emmen, and Veendam in Groningen.

During the 1944-45 winter, the war fronts in the Netherlands remained static and the Polish soldiers drew close to the people of North Brabant. Later because Russia dominated Poland, many soldiers who had fought with the western Allies could only expect imprisonment or execution upon their return to their native land and they remained in the Netherlands. In the city of Breda, a Polish community was formed and today some "Dutch" families there carry Polish blood in their veins.

On May 5, 1945 the German army in the Netherlands surrendered to the Allies. With the unconditional surrender of Germany, six years of devastating warfare came to an end. Many of us watched the recent television documentaries commemorating D-Day, the landing on Normandy, and the liberation of France, Belgium, and the southern part of the Netherlands. Unfortunately, it took about forty years before the Polish soldiers, who fought so bravely in Western Europe, could return to a free Poland.

On October 6, 1994 General Stanislaw Maczek and his comrades were honored with a special ceremony in the villages of Made and Drimelen where heavy fighting had taken place. A special monument was unveiled by the Polish President,

Lech Walesa, and her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands participated in the ceremony. By then, under Walesa's leadership, Poland had become a free democratic nation.

Needless to say, the people of the Netherlands followed the Polish liberation with more than normal interest. During the Polish resistance, food became scarce and a state of emergency was declared. The people of the Netherlands came to their aid. Trucking companies and private owners made their trucks available for a food transport to Poland. Truck drivers, doctors, nurses, and many other Dutch people volunteered. In a very short period of time, they had collected food, medicine, clothing, supplies, and even toys. On December 13, 1981 one hundred and twenty-two trucks, tankers and ambulances left the Netherlands for Poland. All along the highway, thousands of people bid farewell to this big transport group, thus demonstrating their support and appreciation to the Polish people whose gallant soldiers were so instrumental in liberating large parts of the Netherlands.

After World War II, General Maczek settled in Edinburgh, Scotland because he was not welcome in his Russian dominated homeland, and when Poland did finally become a free democratic nation, he was too old to travel. General Stanislaw Maczek passed away in Edinburgh on December 11, 1994, at the age of 102. It was his wish to be buried in Breda, the Netherlands, at the Polish War Cemetery in the midst of his soldiers who lost their lives liberating that part of the Netherlands in 1944. Prominent representatives of the Polish and Dutch governments were in attendance at the funeral with full military honors which took place December 23, 1994.

# Henry Wierenga: Sunday Isn't Sabbath

by H.J. Brinks

The theological issue associated with Professor Ralph Janssen's career and dismissal in 1922 was, and probably still is, the CRC's most notable tar baby. Virtually every pastor, professor and educator who publicly defended Janssen suffered either aspersions on their orthodoxy or severance from the denomination. Janssen taught at the Grand Rapids Theological School from 1902-1906; 1914-1922. Throughout most of that era he was the only professor with a doctoral diploma (Ph.D., Halle, Germany, 1902). His education in several German universities, together with additional study at the Free University of Amsterdam (Th.D., 1908), shaped his teaching of biblical interpretation (exegesis), an obviously



Dr. Ralph Janssen, 1920s.

crucial aspect of theological training. He taught his students to interpret scripture with what he called, "The application of strictly scientific



methods of exegetical study."\* That required a careful analysis of the original languages, an understanding of specific literary types (poetry, history,



Quirinus Breen, above, and Henry Wierenga, 1920 Calvin Theological Seminary graduates.

proverbs etc.), an effort to identify the authorship of each book and a study of the cultures surrounding biblical accounts. It demanded, in other words, the questions careful readers ask of any book—who wrote it and when, to whom was it addressed, and why it was written.

When several of Janssen's most ardent disciples displayed the products of this method in their sermons, disputes followed because the method fosters a critical examination of traditional interpretations. Quirinus Breen, a Janssen student who defended the Professor, left his Twelfth Street, Grand Rapids congregation in 1924 after Synod denied validity to any part of his sixteen-page protest against Janssen's ejection from the Seminary in 1922. Breen subsequently became an internationally prominent historian of the Protestant Reforma-

\* *Year Book of the Theological School and Calvin College, 1919-1920, p. 11.*

tion. Frederick Wezeman, another “Janssen man,” sustained a barrage of theological examinations during the 1930s while teaching Bible studies at Chicago Christian High School.

Nonetheless he continued there until



Dr. Fred W. Wezeman, 1930, principal of Chicago Christian High School.

1951 when he became the President of Northwestern College (1951-55) in Orange City, Iowa. Rev. Henry

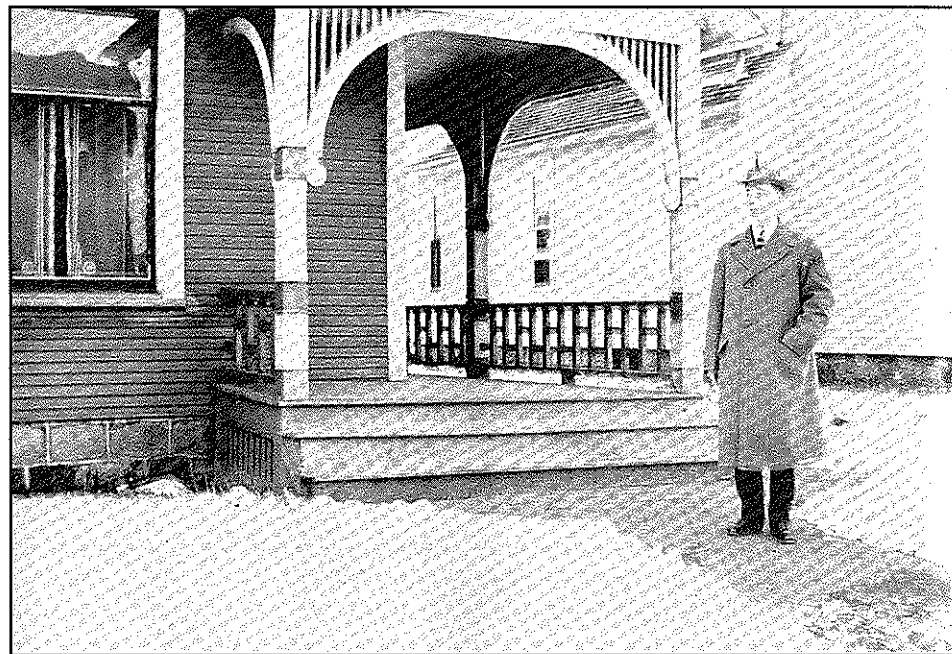
Wierenga, who was dismissed from his Jamestown pastorate in 1926, refused to reenter the ministry under any institutional umbrella. He chose instead to found and develop an appliance business in Grand Haven, Michigan. Although he turned down opportunities to serve the Presbyterian denomination, Wierenga did minister to vacationing cottagers for many years.

The “Wierenga Case,” although long forgotten by nearly everyone apart from his descendants, provides a revealing snapshot of a watershed decade in the history of the Christian Reformed church—a decade in which the CRC adopted English rapidly and began to define itself as part of the American church world while also shrugging off the Netherlandic mantle which had, until then, defined its most important debates and ecclesiastical patterns. Wierenga grew up in the West Side of Grand Rapids, enrolled at Calvin’s prep school (high school) in 1913, and after just one year advanced to the college course. He graduated from the seminary in

1920,\* but his first pastorate, Jamestown, was his last. A 1944 summary of his service there declares:

Candidate H. Wierenga heeded the call of the congregation and began his labors with youthful energy and idealism. During the early part of his ministry greater use was made of the English language in our activities, a new organ was acquired, the budget system of giving was introduced, and the erection of a new church building was discussed. We came to an unpleasant experience in our history at this point. Classis Zeeland, with the advice of the synodical delegates, found it necessary to depose our pastor from the gospel ministry because

The details of this “unpleasant experience” are delineated in Henry Wierenga’s papers which include the offending sermons and the proceedings of Classis Zeeland together with a cluster of correspondence from Dr. Ralph Janssen, and the Reverends John Van Lonkhuyzen, Jan K. Van Baalen, Edward J. Tuuk and Quirinus Breen. The papers also include Wierenga’s four-part article titled “The Light of Nature” in *Religion and Culture*, Feb.-July, 1923, a slice of research which established his credentials as a careful scholar, a Janssen protege and a vigorous proponent of common grace.



Wierenga’s home (1913), on Grand Rapids’ West Side, 1914 Tamarack NW.

it was judged that he held erroneous views regarding the fourth commandment and the New Testament Sabbath. We are reminded that the church lives in an imperfect world, and she herself is far from perfection in the midst of her world.\*\*

\* High school, college and seminary in eight years. Wierenga delivered the Seminary Commencement Oration titled, “Immortality,” which was printed in the *Calvin Annual*, 1920.

\*\* *Fiftieth Anniversary: 1894-1944 Jamestown CRC*, np.

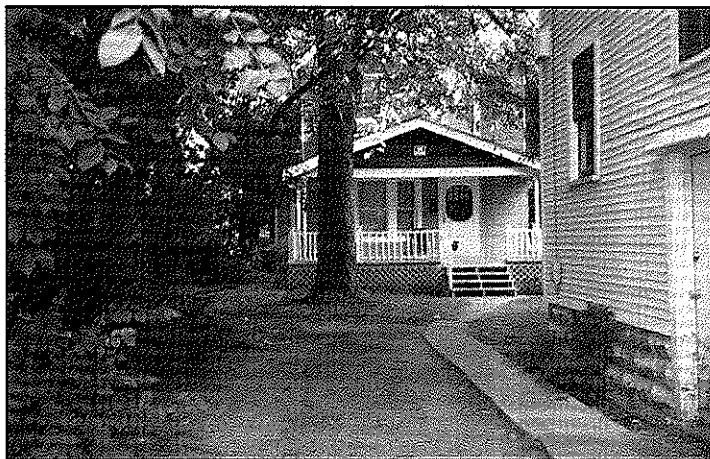
Wierenga’s two Jamestown sermons on Lord’s Day 38 examined a number of New Testament texts\* which led him to conclude that the Sabbath as instituted in the biblical creation account and by the fourth commandment were not applicable in the New Testament era. He highlighted instances when Jesus and his

\* Exodus 20:8-11; Mark 2:27-28; Mark 3:4; Acts 15:28-29; Romans 14:5-6; Galatians 4:9-10; Colossians 2:16-17.

disciples publicly violated Sabbath rules to challenge the Jewish religious establishment, and he cited Christ's words (Mark 2: 27-28), "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath," as the key to understanding Sunday observance. Furthermore, Wierenga argued that by his behavior and preaching Christ's view of the Sabbath was concentrated in Mark 3:4 which asks, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to kill?" The obvious answer, "to do good" implied a number of things for Wierenga which he proceeded to delineate.

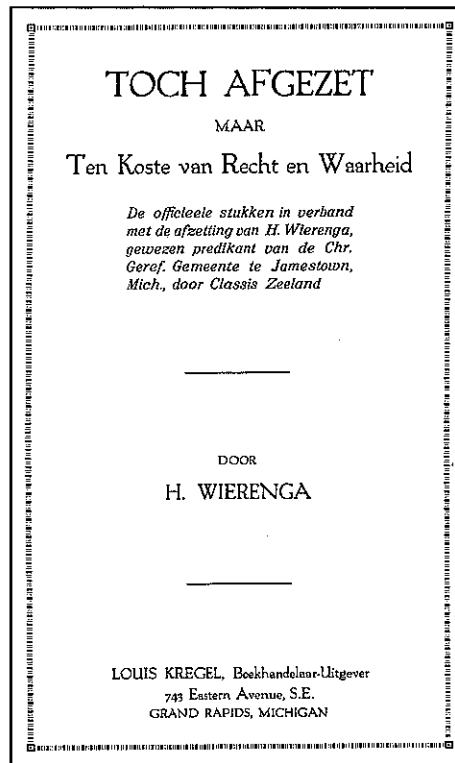
"Doing good" certainly incorporated the primary features of a typical CRC Sunday—attending and participating in worship, teaching, tending the sick, the elderly and others in need. But, Wierenga argued, these good things were required every day and moreover every day was equally holy. With that assertion the young pastor broke new ground and challenged settled behavior.

He asserted that Sunday had no



Back-lot house on Prince Street.

hallowed status in the New Testament and was nowhere sanctified as a replacement of the Jewish Sabbath. He did not dispute the fact that the first Christians gathered on Sunday to commemorate the resurrection, but he did challenge the view that Sunday



Pamphlet cover page, "Toch Afgezet."

had been thereby institutionalized. For proof he cited Paul's letter to the Romans (14:5-6). "One man considers one day more sacred than another,

another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." Wierenga was entirely content with the selection of Sunday as the proper day for Jamestown's parishioners to gather for worship, but he was against elevating

that day above others. More controversially still, he asserted that the Old Testament Sabbath with all of its ceremonial rules and especially its proscriptions on work had no status in the Christian era because Christ fulfilled that Sabbath. Or, in other

words, the eternal peace and rest which the Jewish Sabbath foreshadowed had become a present reality with Christ's advent, death and resurrection. Again Saint Paul (Colossians 2:16-17) provided Wierenga's proof. "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."

With these presuppositions Wierenga concluded that the church had no biblical foundation either to establish Sunday rules of to discipline those who did not observe a traditional Reformed Sunday. He argued instead that the Lord's Day existed for believers to celebrate the resurrection and experience the Lord's promised presence. All behavior should enhance that objective, but there could be no specific formula to gain that end. Nonetheless Christ's example—doing good on the Sabbath—pushed in the direction of feeding the hungry tending the sick, visiting prisoners, and other functions including work and even recreation if properly conceived.

Although Wierenga's sermons may not seem very radical today, in 1924 they created immediate unrest in his Jamestown consistory and led to his examination by and deposition from Classis Zeeland in 1925. Classis asserted and the Synod of 1926 agreed that the early Christian church and the Reformed tradition had sanctioned the transfer of the Jewish Sabbath day to the Christian Sunday. And although that transfer did not include ceremonial laws, it did include the requirement of rest as indicated in Genesis 2:2-3. Furthermore because the CRC Synod of 1881 had adopted six Sabbath observance rules from the 1618 Synod of Dordrecht, Wierenga's views conflicted with that decision.

## Origins

Those rules, and especially points five and six, required the observance of Sunday as the Lord's Day which was "so consecrated to worship that on that day we rest from all servile works except those which charity and present necessity require. And also from all such recreations as interfere with worship."

To be fair, Wierenga did not argue

the Heidelberg Catechism and the 1618 Synod of Dordrecht. In theory, that is true, but confessions and rules can only be changed when Synod concludes that a particular practice or viewpoint does not merit biblical support. In Wierenga's case the 1926 Synod decided that his protest was wrong on all counts both procedural and substantial.



Grand Rapids Maytag Company, 1926. H. Wierenga, third from the right.

for wage earning on Sunday nor for frivolous fun and games. He did allow that a walk in the woods or on the beach could be worshipful and that gardening on a Sunday afternoon need not be sinful. His aim, though, was not to construct a list of permissible Sunday activities, but to hallow all Christian behavior on Sunday and every other day.

Classis and Synod were not convinced by his biblical interpretations and the conclusion that his views conflicted with church order could not be contested easily. Wierenga's adherence to Janssen's "scientific" exegetical perspectives assumed that biblical evidence superseded church rules and even major confessions like

Before Synod dealt with the issue a number of CRC pastors encouraged Wierenga to request a hearing at Synod and to point out procedural irregularities involved in his deposition by Classis Zeeland. Nearly every CRC journalist, including *Banner* editor, Henry Beets, had questions about the procedural rectitude of the case and they were especially distressed by the speed of its implementation. "Why," Beets wrote, "was there so much haste in following up suspension . . . with final deposition. Why was not the young brother given more time to make up his mind?"\*

John Van Lonkhuyzen, editor of the Chicago area's *Onze Toekomst*,

\* *The Banner*, May 22, 1925.

urged Wierenga to "publish the whole thing in a little booklet addressed to Classis [Zeeland] in the next session. But in the meantime have it sent to various papers and advertise it for sale. In the booklet I would relate the procedure and state my grounds. *Do this as soon as possible*. May the Lord grant you great wisdom." \*

In accord with that advice Wierenga produced a 95-page booklet titled, *Toch Afgezet maar Ten Koste van Recht en Waarheid\*\** (Deposed, but at the Cost of Truth and Justice). With that the whole matter became public for those who could read Dutch and that certainly included the Synod in 1926. After Synod spurned Wierenga's position, his support in the denomination vanished, probably because the whole church was wearied by major disputes which had engaged the CRC in 1922 and 1924. The first of these resulted in Ralph Janssen's deposition and the 1924 debates led to a denominational split and the establishment of the Protestant Reformed Church. In a sense, Wierenga's case was a footnote on the Janssen matter. Similarly, Quirinus Breen's carefully crafted protest in 1924 would have required a thorough reexamination of Ralph Janssen, an unattractive prospect at best. Finally on August 15, 1926 Wierenga resigned from the CRC and requested a statement of his membership status from the Jamestown congregation.

"Brethren," he began, I would be pleased to have you send to my address a statement to the effect that I and my family have been up to this present date members of the Christian Reformed Church at Jamestown. I have waited for a synodical reply to my final communication but since it is not yet forthcoming, I am taking this means to sever my relationship

\* Letter of John Van Lonkhuyzen to Henry Wierenga, 1925.

\*\* Grand Rapids, Louis Kregel Publishing Co., 1925.

with the Christian Reformed Church. Assuring you that I have no feelings of any personal animosity to any member of the consistory or congregation, that I think back with much pleasure and satisfaction on the amicable relationships which existed during our more than four years' stay in your midst, that I regret keenly if in the performing of my duty I have been the cause of trouble or sorrow to anyone—that I would not for the world undo what I have done or deny the thrust of my message to you and finally assuring you that without troubling myself about this case anymore, I am laying it before the final tribunal knowing that the Judge of all the earth shall do justice. I am yours in the service of the Master, Jesus Christ. H. W.

*P.S. I would be glad to have you read this my final word to the congregation.*

experienced periods of bitter reflection which tested their faith. Breen, after attempting a business career in Cincinnati returned to study as a graduate student at the University of Chicago. Recalling his time of rage Breen wrote in 1927,

Spiritually I stood on as low a plain as the least of them,\* if not lower.

For I despised them in my heart. And I have learned to repent of that. My soul has experienced a thaw as in an early spring. I have been ecstatic since I have learned to use not only my head but my heart.

You may be surprised to learn that all my intellectual difficulties about matters like the resurrection of Christ have vanished. Scientifically I cannot prove them. Neither can I prove the existence of God scientifically. If I relied merely on science I would now be the agnostic I was becoming . . . I do not regret my experiences or my rebellion . . . They have taught me to be very considerate of the revolutions of youth. But there came into my life a time when I must confess to a cardinal sin—the failure to give God the glory and think of Him as central.

I care very little what the affect of my [current transformation] will be on others. Nor do I consider whether the Christian Reformed Church will rejoice [gloat] or not. What if they do? Am I better than they? Oh, if the organization wants me back, it will have to take me as I am, Janssen man, reformer, critic (but also love and all). Only six weeks ago I thought Janssen was too mild for my taste when he told me that I shouldn't think that church was *all* wrong. Of course, under the present circumstances I can't join it. What

I'll do in the future I don't know. I predict nothing of myself.

Breen, obviously, had regained respect for the institutional church, and particularly the creedal expressions associated with the Presbyterian and Reformed family of churches. Wierenga, however, remained wary of institutional links. He, of course, had experienced official rejection. Breen, by contrast, left the CRC voluntarily before an impending ejection could be effected. That difference probably explains Wierenga's initial determination to maintain an independent ecclesiastical posture even though he did ultimately affiliate with the RCA. Some people, including family members and friends, misunderstood him. His detractors branded him a modernist, and others viewed him as a fundamentalist.

Wierenga answered these concerns in his December 23, 1927 letter addressed simply, "Dear Friends."

I am neither a modernist nor a fundamentalist but I confess gladly and wholeheartedly that I am a Christian . . . that I am justified by faith alone and for me that belief means that I know God, that I have fellowship with Him and that I am deeply moved to do His will. That belief means that I am bound to Jesus Christ and I desire to be more like him. At this same time I undoubtedly interpret some teachings differently than some orthodox Christians. But I am fully in accord with the beliefs that the Christians of all ages have affirmed against the enemies of the faith\* and I enjoy the wonderful expectation of eternal life. I am strongly convinced that my interpretation of the Christian religion is in full agreement with the demands contained in God's word. And that includes, obviously, the demands established by Christ himself.

I subscribe wholeheartedly to the words of Paul the apostle,\*\*

\* Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed.

\*\* Philippians 3:10.

\* His former cohorts in the CRC pastorate.



Andrew Schaafsma's Grand Haven Harness Shop (1920s) when it doubled as Wierenga's Maytag sales store, 21 South Second Street.

After 1926 Wierenga's correspondents narrowed down to those who, with him, left the CRC. And among these, the letters of his classmate and intimate friend, Quirinus Breen, arrived throughout the following five decades. Both Breen and Wierenga



Grand Haven Appliance Center, 1950s. Henry and James (wearing sport jackets) and the staff.

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death and so somehow, to attain the resurrection from the dead.

With his convictions untarnished Henry Wierenga devoted the balance of his life to business and a part-time pastorate. At a time when even the typical pastor often enjoyed more security than a struggling appliance dealer, the Wierengas left Jamestown to rent a small back-lot house on Prince Street in Grand Rapids. There Henry found work as a Maytag appliance salesman, a position which led to his gaining a Maytag franchise in Grand Haven, Michigan.

His 1975 recollections of these crucial months describe the events which changed his career.

After paying one month's rent I recall that we had about \$60.00 left over. That, the furniture and an auto were all of our earthly possessions. . . . So we settled down to life in Grand Rapids. No income. No job. Yet I don't recall that we were worried. . . . but we still had some loyal friends in Jamestown. They visited us and each time they brought food with them—vegetables, potatoes, eggs. And I remember one big chunk

of dried beef. Within a short time I received invitations to preach in Presbyterian churches . . . these preaching engagements did give me some cash and helped keep the wolf from the door. We paid our rent and somehow kept out of debt.

Meanwhile I kept looking through the want ads for a job. I spotted one for a job working in a store—also office work. . . . the sign in the store was "the Grand Rapids Maytag Company." I went in to make application and was told the job was taken (it was a come-on ad) but they offered me a salesman's job working on commission only. My territory extended from Wealthy to Hall Street and everything east of Division Street.

After first considering this yet another fruitless effort, "Mom said, why not try it. You are out nothing but shoe leather." Henry canvassed his territory for six solid weeks without results. Finally a lead in his territory came when a client visited the store and consented to having a demonstration. That led to his first sale and his first \$18.00 commission. During the next three months (August-October) he sold another twenty-one Maytags and in the best of those months he earned \$198.00.

While visiting relatives in Grand Haven Wierenga noticed that the local

Maytag franchise was rather inactive and contacted Michigan's factory representative to discuss the acquisition of that franchise. It was agreed that if Wierenga could raise enough capital he could acquire the dealership. Henry recalls,

I had to pay cash to the factory for a stock of washers. I think I bought ten washers the first time. Where to get the money? I made a trip to Jamestown, contacted the Van Rhee, Kloostra and Zagers families and put my cards on the table. The result was that each of those families loaned me \$500 without security. That gave me \$1,500 working capital. Needless to say I paid them back as soon as possible.

The next problem was locating my new business. I knew that Uncle Andrew had plenty room in his harness store and he was doing very little business. Besides I needed someone to watch the store while I was away and to help me deliver. Consequently I made a deal with Uncle Andrew—\$5.00 to him for every washer I sold but no additional rent. He had a good deal because I soon sold ten washers every month . . .

Before moving to Grand Haven I bought a used (very much used) truck for \$50.00. It was a Model T with side curtains. So then I was in business.

My first effort was to canvass all the homes in town. That, I knew, was the only way to get prospects and make sales. First I would get permission to demonstrate the washer in the home. Uncle Andrew and I would deliver it one day and I would return at whatever time the housewife was set up to do the washing. As you can imagine it was generally early in the morning. Then I would have to go back in the evening to sell the man of the house. I'm sure I didn't miss contacting more than twenty-five homes in Grand Haven. All the others I canvassed. And I made sales. Before long I was buying washers by the [railroad] carload and getting them financed through the bank. The profit was substantial. As I recall I paid \$105.00 per washer and sold them

for \$165.00. The business prospered until the Depression came in 1929 and it got really bad in 1930-31.

Along with tending his business Henry Wierenga continued to preach and conduct worship services. Although he affiliated with the Grand Haven RCA he was also a frequent guest preacher in the local Presbyterian church. During vacation seasons, June-August, he led worship services at the Lakewood Resort Chapel. Meanwhile his appliance business flourished, particularly after World War II when the "Appliance Center" on Main Street provided an expanded inventory of major and small appliances including radios and televisions sets.

Until his death in 1978 Henry Wierenga provided pastoral counseling to a wide range of Grand Haven's citizens. He was active in both civic and cultural affairs including contri-



Dr. Wm. H. Jellema, 1950s.

butions to the "Wranglers" a local group which met to discuss world and local issues such as "The Problems and Possibilities of Lasting Peace." When he was forty-five Henry addressed the "Wranglers" on the topic, "My Life and My Job". He reported,

I have learned that I must guard my individual freedom zealously but I have also discovered that that goal is only possible if I spend time and effort assisting someone else to be free. To help others involves all the actions covered by words such as kindness, helpfulness, understanding and tolerance—and to be of service to others without any thought of remuneration. But I must also keep my own soul in touch with the good and beautiful things in the world round about me by acquainting myself with the worlds past and present. That, to me, is living a full rich life.

"Keeping in touch with the good and beautiful" involved a number of friendships which persisted throughout Wierenga's long life. Of these none was stronger nor more persistent than his relationship with Quirinus Breen. They had together been the leading students of their 1920 class of Calvin Seminary graduates. There, too, they grew to be fast friends of Dr. William Harry Jellema who often addressed the Fortnightly

Club, a group which discussed topics much like those which engaged the attention of Grand Haven's "Wranglers".

During the mid 1960s these three friends were reunited when Quirinus Breen and William H. Jellema (both then emeritated) joined the faculty of Grand Valley State University. Henry Wierenga's Grand Haven residence, about fifteen minutes away from the Grand Valley campus, facilitated his participation in frequent meetings. They recalled the times of their youth and the separate paths their lives had taken. They remembered especially the 1920s, a crucial decade for each of them—years when Rev. Breen became a historian, when Rev. Wierenga became a businessman, and Dr. Jellema left Calvin College to study in Berlin.\* In the CRC's theological debates of that decade, they were the losers. Had it been otherwise their lives and the history of the CRC would have been vastly different.\*

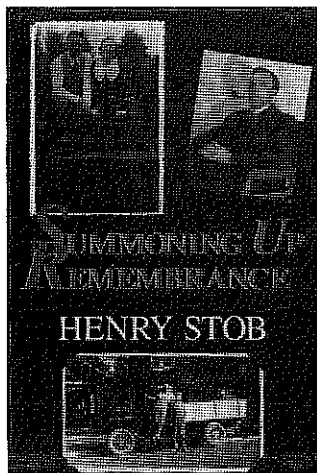


Breen and Wierenga families, 1940s. Quirinus and Helena Breen with son Quintin; Henry and Cornelia Wierenga.

\* Dr. W.H. Jellema was associated with Calvin College from 1920-1935 and then, after teaching at the University of Indiana from 1935-1947, he returned to Calvin in 1947 and retired from the faculty in 1963. Thereafter for more than a decade after his seventieth birthday, he taught philosophy at Grand Valley State University.

# books

Reviews by Conrad J. Bult



## Summoning Up Remembrance

Henry Stob

Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans  
Pub. Co., 1995. 354 pages. \$14.99.

With candor, conviction, thoughtfulness and wit, octogenarian Henry Stob writes about his childhood, church, youth, education, military service and teaching career at Calvin College. His memoirs end with his synodical appointment to the Calvin Theological Seminary chair of ethics and apologetics in 1952, a position he held until his retirement in 1975. For the reader Stob recreates the world he lived in during the first half of this century. Included are detailed sketches of his experiences in Chicago, Grand Rapids, Hartford, Gottingen, Japan, Korea and the Netherlands.

Born in 1908 of immigrant parents, Stob spent his youth in Chicago, years interrupted only by a brief stint in Texas (1910-1913) where his parents hoped to escape Chicago crime. They shared with other Dutch folk optimistic notions about farming in an area touted to be somewhat similar to the Garden of Eden. Especially valuable for an intimate picture of Dutch family life, religious behavior and domestic mores are Stob's appreciative remarks about his parents' faith and its effect on him. Also touched on are church rituals, Sabbath observance, childhood games and the popular patent medicines such as Doctor Pieter's Zokoro or the "evil-tasting Haarlemer Olie." (p. 38) The focus of family life was the kitchen and here Stob's mother reigned supreme. For Stob his mother's baking skills were second to none and he praises her efforts with these mouth-watering words,

From within the oven of that stove there periodically emerged the best pies and cakes in all of Cook County. (p. 12)

After graduating from grammar school in 1922, Stob attended Chicago Business College where for the first time he encountered many individuals who were not Dutch. About one in particular he has this to say,

I was tempted several times to accompany a pretty Jewish girl on her way home, but I invariably thought better of it and went my solitary way. What I gained or lost by such behavior I have not tried to calculate. (p. 52)

Stob did not consider a year of business training and subsequent two and one-half years with the Chicago Machine and Watch Company a waste of time, but in the spring of 1925, with the hearty endorsement of his family, Stob chose as a career the gospel ministry.

Stob graduated from Chicago Christian High School in 1928 and looks back on these years with great fondness. Especially he remembers history teacher-coach Henry A. Swets and John De Boer an instructor in literature who Stob states "... was one of the most formative and wholesome influences in my early life." (p. 77)

Stob devotes almost forty pages to his student days at Calvin (1928-32). When he enrolled as a freshman in 1928, Calvin's student body of 325 was taught by an all-male faculty of sixteen. Among Stob's friends who later became his teaching colleagues were William Spoelhof, Cornelius Plantinga Sr., John Timmerman and Henry Zylstra. Also during these years Stob rubbed shoulders with authors Peter De Vries and Feike Feikema, later known as Frederick Manfred. Most significantly, at Calvin Stob met his future wife, Hilda De Graaf.

Besides finding time for a pre-seminary course he considered "prescribed and rigid," Stob served on the Debating Team, was at one time or another a member of the Student Council, Chimes Staff, the Knickerbocker Club, the Neo Pickwickians, the Plato Club, and the "Friggers," a small group of self-appointed intellectual types. Also Stob had his favorite professors and endured those who did not fit this category.

For Stob, student life in and out of the classroom was never dull. His thoughtful comments about his intellectual development are hard to summarize but perhaps his own remarks say it best,

I had acquired a deeper awareness of the antithesis and of Christ's lordship over all culture; but I had also grown in my appreciation of the Greek mind and indeed of much that pagan and secular thinkers had contributed toward the formation of civilization and the establishment of a humane society. (p. 117)

As he did for his college years, Stob writes about the social and intellectual environment of Calvin Theological Seminary during the years 1932-35. He and his fellow seminarians learned much about systematic theology, and somewhat less concerning practical theology. Though Reformed orthodoxy was stressed, required reading in Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin were absent from the curriculum. Utter frankness characterizes Stob's evaluations of the teaching styles, training and intellectual prowess of seminary professors Samuel Volbeda, Louis Berkhof, Martin Wyngaarden, Henry Shultze, Dietrich Kromminga and Clarence Bouma. These professors were a formative influence in Stob's future life as was his proposal of marriage to Hilda De Graaf in early 1935. She accepted, and a bit later,

Stob gave his future bride a \$35 diamond ring.

Stob received a Th.M. from Hartford Theological Seminary in 1936 and a Ph.D. from the University of Gottingen in 1938. Written entirely in German, the subject of his thesis was Max Weber's thoughts about the sociology of religion. Henry and Hilda were married in 1936, and often with a twinge of conscience, Stob recalls her almost heroic sacrifices for the sake of his scholarly career. After a year of post-doctoral study at the Free University where he sat at the feet of Kuyparian luminaries Herman Dooyeweerd and D.H.T. Vollenhoven, Stob returned to America and in the fall of 1939 began his teaching career at Calvin College.

Stob replaced Harry Jellema who under less than happy circumstances had left Calvin in 1935 for a position at the University of Indiana. In 1947 Jellema rejoined the Calvin staff and for the first time Calvin had more than one person in the Philosophy Department. With the 1950 appointments of H. Evan Runner and Cecil De Boer, the Philosophy Department doubled in size from two to four.

Specifics and generalities abound in Stob's narrative about his college teaching years (1939-52) which were interrupted by three years in the military (1943-46). Though his teaching load was heavy and his classes large, he still found time for scholarly writing, sponsorship of the Plato Club, local politics, coaching the college baseball team and in 1951 with a few like-minded thinkers founded the *Reformed Journal*. Stob's contributions appeared frequently in this monthly as did articles by Harry Boer, James Daane, Henry Zylstra and George Stob.

Meeting in 1951, the Board of Trustees chose Calvin history professor William Spoelhof and Stob as

nominees for the presidency of Calvin College. Synod chose Spoelhof. About his reaction and that of his friends to this momentous decision, Stob pens the following poignant thoughts:

Since losing is not what one exults in, I too was somewhat taken aback by the news that reached me. However, I did not become disconsolate. I received Synod's judgment with the respect that was its due and bore it, I dare say, with matching equanimity. (p. 309)

The early Fifties were turbulent times for the college and seminary. In 1951 a group of pre-seminary students who came to be known as the "sacred seven" claimed that the teachings of six of their college professors lacked a Christian distinctiveness and in many ways resembled what was taught at secular institutions. Another controversy concerning the value of *The Road Ahead* by conservative political pundit John T. Flynn surfaced on the pages of *The Banner* where editor H.J. Kuypier after endorsing Flynn's ideas was somewhat chagrined by the fact that several Calvin College professors strongly disagreed with what they considered Flynn's reactionary nostrums.

Internal strife in the seminary embodying personal antagonisms, strongly-held ideas often considered by the holders to be principal, faculty politics, and student unrest culminated in the departure of four seminary professors in 1952. Those not reappointed by Synod of that year were George Stob, William Rutgers, William Hendriksen and Harry Boer.

Stob concludes his volume with his appointment in 1952 as seminary professor in the chair of ethics and apologetics. He does not gloss over what he considers flaws or shortsightedness in the mind of the Christian Reformed Church. Without a doubt

you know Stob's thinking about his colleagues, both those who shared his ideas and those who did not. The great value of this autobiography is Stob's graceful and plain-speaking prose where readers meet a man who paints in both bright and somber hues the subjects he knows best, those

being the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary. These institutions and those who made them possible, have been thought about long and hard by Henry Stob, a Christian philosopher who has a keen sense of the enigmatic philosophical questions and challeng-

ing theological dilemmas found in his mind, in the minds of his peers, and for that matter, in the minds of all of us.

Many of the illustrations in this book are as candid as the prose. For a variety of reasons *Origins* readers will enjoy this volume. \*



**George Roelofs of Zwolle,  
The Netherlands and  
Grand Rapids, Michigan,  
His Ancestry, Life, and  
Descendants.**

*Cora Helen Roelofs*

Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota  
Printing Services, 1994. 256 pages.

**C**ora Helen Roelofs Verbrugge (1918- ) is the daughter of George Roelofs (1853-1919) and his second wife Nellie Tromp (1878-1939). Roelofs' first wife Marie Dykema, whom he had married in 1875, died in 1912. Though George Roelofs is the primary subject of this book, much is written about his extended family and the host of individuals related to the Roelofs family. George Roelofs was born in Zwolle and came to America in 1872.

After settling in Grand Rapids Roelofs found employment as a bookkeeper but moved on to the more venturesome arena of insurance and real estate sales. His most public activity, editor and publisher of *Een Stem Des Volks* (1893-1900), revealed the wide range of his interests. Although first founded as a prohibition paper this periodical espoused a number of Progressive Era reforms—pacifism, women's suffrage and the living conditions of African Americans. Roelofs supported women's voting rights ardently and he was outraged

by the denial of civil rights to African Americans.

The author is both the historian and genealogist of the Roelofs family and her book is a labor of love in the best sense of the term. When writing about her ancestors and immediate family she is honest, informative and perceptive.

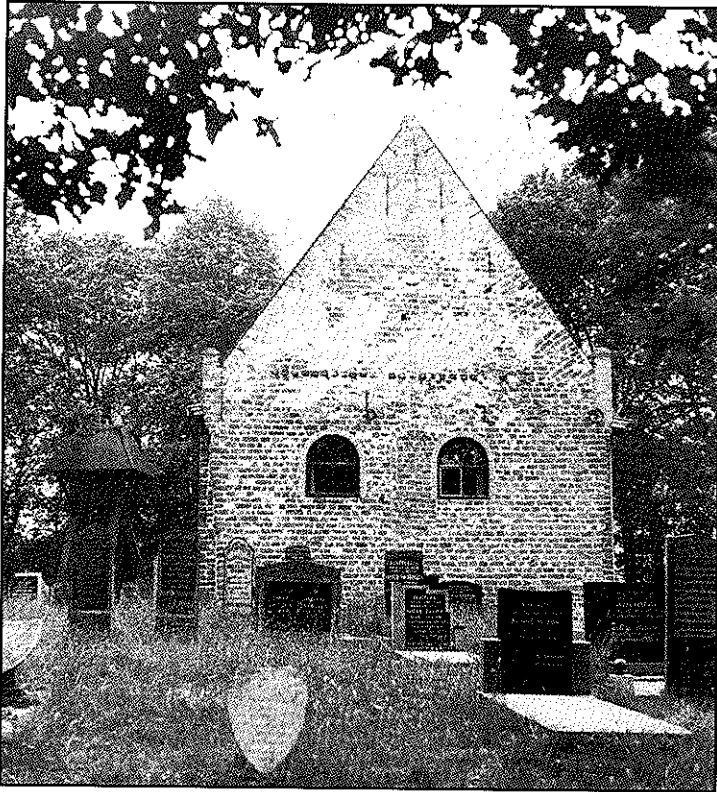
Included in this volume, which can serve as a model and guide for those interested in genealogy, are illustrations, maps, family trees, an index, a list of sources, and lengthy quotations of family letters.

Dogged persistence in searching for information is a trait all family historians must possess and this volume is an example of what can be accomplished by anyone willing to spend the time and effort necessary for a family history where ancestors are more than mere names in a genealogical tree.

Please send inquiries to the author:  
Helen Roelofs Verbrugge  
1666 Coffman #225  
St. Paul, MN 55108.

# for the future

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



*Frisian Countryside.*

Garden Farming in Roseland, Illinois —  
historical fiction by Jake Brouwer

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

The Dutch and Their Neighbors in Grand Rapids  
by James D. Bratt

The Dutch of Highland, Indiana by David Zandstra

Holland Michigan in Transition by Hero Bratt

Friesland, Minnesota: A Little Town that Couldn't  
by Robert Schoone-Jongen

Baxter Christian School Days by John Pastoor

Christian Education in Northern New Jersey

Frontier Women: A Different View of Immigration

Photography and Immigrant Writing by Rob Kroes

More About Pella by Muriel Kooi

Grand Haven — The Dutch Fishing Industry  
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Muskegon, Michigan, 150 Years of Dutch Activity  
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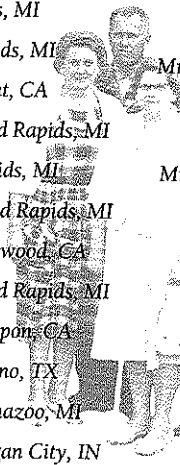
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