Origins

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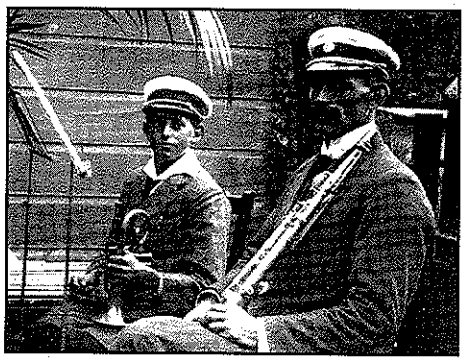
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Pulpit in Amsterdam's Nieuwe Kerk.



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Introduction

Harry Boonstra

The story has often been told that the Dutch settlers in Holland, Michigan, had barely finished their cabins before they were busy building a house of worship. The story of worship in the immigrant churches is an inspiring one. Here the immigrants found time and space away from their often grim workaday lives to listen to the Word, to sing psalms, to enjoy the communion of the saints.

Of course, even though worship is a deeply spiritual, God-glorifying activity, it is also very human. And, lest we glorify our ancestors too much, we need to recall that their times of worship were often far from perfect. In 1879 W.H. van Leeuwen laments:

> Some do come into the church as they do to market; they ignore whatever they don't like. The fervor of the preacher is no more to them than the yelling of the merchants on the market.
>
> (*De Wachter,* Feb. 27, 1879, p. 3)

Rev. H. Keegstra editorializes about that same era:

> Thirty or forty years ago I saw hundreds of times how dozens of people, as soon as the long prayer began, took the psalm book and sometimes handkerchiefs, put them on the pew back in front of them, and put their heads down so that they could go to sleep.
>
> (*De Wachter,* March 6, 1929, p. 149)

Also, in 1926, Dr. Henry Beets quotes from a Michigan church bulletin about the laxity of our congregation in the finality of our services. . . . We call special attention to the young people who leave our services without singing the Doxology or receiving the benediction (*The Banner,* Jan. 15, 1926, p.21). And a policeman was stationed in the balcony of Eastern Avenue Church in Grand Rapids in order to keep the young people in check.

The articles in this issue of *Origins* do not discuss all aspects of worship, but they seek to give a representative picture of worship in the immigrant churches. The essay by Dr. Bert Polman covers the psalms-versus-hymns issue, and my article is an overview of the main worship controversies in the Christian Reformed Church. We do not discuss preaching in any systematic way, but the role of ministers is obviously important in the churches, and we present profiles of Rev. H.J. Kuiper and two church musicians. This theme will be continued in the next issue of *Origins.*

Nearly all the attention of this issue is focused on the CRC, although the same worship customs and dynamics were at work in the RCA. We have not set an arbitrary time limit to our backward look, but for the most part it extends to nothing more recent than 1940.

Serving as guest editor of this issue of *Origins* has been a truly enjoyable experience.

Harry Boonstra is theological librarian at the Hekman Library of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary.

Worship Rumbles

Harry Boonstra

Prelude

Looking at the worship scene in the Christian Reformed Church today, one cannot help noting an incredible variety of worship practices. In contrast, a century ago the worship in CRC congregations looks very uniform. Below, I will sketch out the shape of that early liturgy and highlight its sameness. However, in this essay I am suggesting that views and practices of worship throughout this early history are not as uniform as they first appear. Already then one finds questions, disagreements, controversies, and music wars. Focusing on some of these controversies is not to suggest that the worship service was a continual battleground. The worship life of the church could be and was an expression of profound devotion and a source of spiritual nourishment. At the same time, a survey of some of the disputes often demonstrates what was important to the people, and it helps to define and characterize the early CRC.

Shape of the Liturgy

The shape of the liturgy in the early immigrant churches tended to be uniform. The churches inherited the liturgy as it had evolved in the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, often with the particular slant of the Secessionist churches. Although the order of worship was not derived from a denominationally approved book of worship or the Church Order, the uniformity among the congregations was very high. The *Acts of Synod 1928* (p. 287) lists the common order as it was inherited from the Dutch churches:

Votum or Invocation
Salutation



Prosper CRC in Falmouth, Michigan, 1898. Entire congregation with pastor Menno De Boer and Mrs. De Boer standing at the left.

Contrasting liturgies. Eastern Avenue CRC, top (1958) and Mayfair CRC (1986).

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1958

Morning Worship — 9:30 o'clock

Organ Prelude
Silent Prayer (announced)
Votum and Salutation
Psalter Hymnal No. 336
Reading of the law
Response to the law: Psalter Hymnal No. 102 (congregation seated)
Baptism
Prayer
Offertory
1. General Fund
2. Christian Benevolence
Psalter Hymnal No. 390
Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 3:1-9
Text: I Corinthians 3: 7 and 9
Sermon: PAUL'S EVALUATION OF A MINISTER.
Closing Prayer
Psalter Hymnal No. 215
Doxology: No. 468
Benediction
Organ Postlude

Evening Worship — 7 o'clock

Organ Prelude
Silent Prayer (announced)
Votum and Salutation
Psalter Hymnal No. 248
Apostles' Creed
Response to Creed No. 334:4
Praise Selection: Psalm 48
Psalter Hymnal No. 95
Prayer
Offertory
Offering for Christian Schools
Psalter Hymnal No. 392
Scripture Reading:
Text: Psalm 87
Sermon: THE CITY OF GOD.
Closing Prayer
Psalter Hymnal No. 176
Doxology No. 338:2, 3
Benediction
Organ Postlude

Sunday, August 31, 1986

MORNING WORSHIP - 9:30 A.M.

Prelude - God Himself is With Us (P.H. No. 324) M. Reger

THE OPENING

*The Invocation
Minister: Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
People: My heart says of You, Seek His face! Your face, Lord, I will seek.
*Psalm - No. 118:1,3-6
*The Greeting
Minister: Grace be with you and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Through the workings of the Holy Spirit.
People: Amen.

THE CONFESSION AND WILL OF GOD

The Confession
The Assurance
The Will of God
Psalm - No. 248

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

Reading of Scripture: Colossians 3:18-4:6
Sermon: WORKING FOR THE LORD
I. Alternatives
II. Attitude
III. Award

THE RESPONSE

Prayer
*Hymn - No. 449
Pastoral Prayer
Offertory - Fill Thou My Life (P.H. No. 449)
Offering of the Gifts
Offertory Prayer
*Hymn - No. 486

THE DISMISSAL

*The Benediction
Minister: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.
People: Amen.
*Doxology - No. 472:7
Postlude
*denotes congregation stands
Organist: Linda Fridsma

Psalm
Law
Scripture Reading
Psalm
General Prayer
Psalm and Offering
Sermon
Closing Prayer
Psalm (and Doxology)
Benediction

Let me add a few details to that bare outline. The churches retained the tradition of the Reformed churches and sang only versified psalms. Initially the singing was without musical accompaniment, usually with a song leader (*voorzanger*) prompting the people. However, as financial resources increased, the purchase of organs increased. (Bert Polman's essay discusses music in detail.) The morning and afternoon/evening service were nearly identical except that in the morning the Ten Commandments were read and in the evening the Apostles' Creed. Normally one of the sermons was based on the Heidelberg Catechism (usually the second service). The service took approximately an hour and a half, the sermon lasting about an hour. Until 1900 nearly all the services (except for those in the German churches and the churches of Classis Hackensack) were conducted in Dutch. The pastor led all of the service, including a solo reading of the creed.

The Sunday worship services were extremely important to the immigrant community. The social dimension was obviously of great import, since Sunday was often the only time that parishioners could meet and socialize. More significantly, the times of worship served to build the community spiritually and theologically. Good sermons were treasured, the psalms were a source of comfort, and the prayers were an indispensable part of their spiritual lives. Still, the

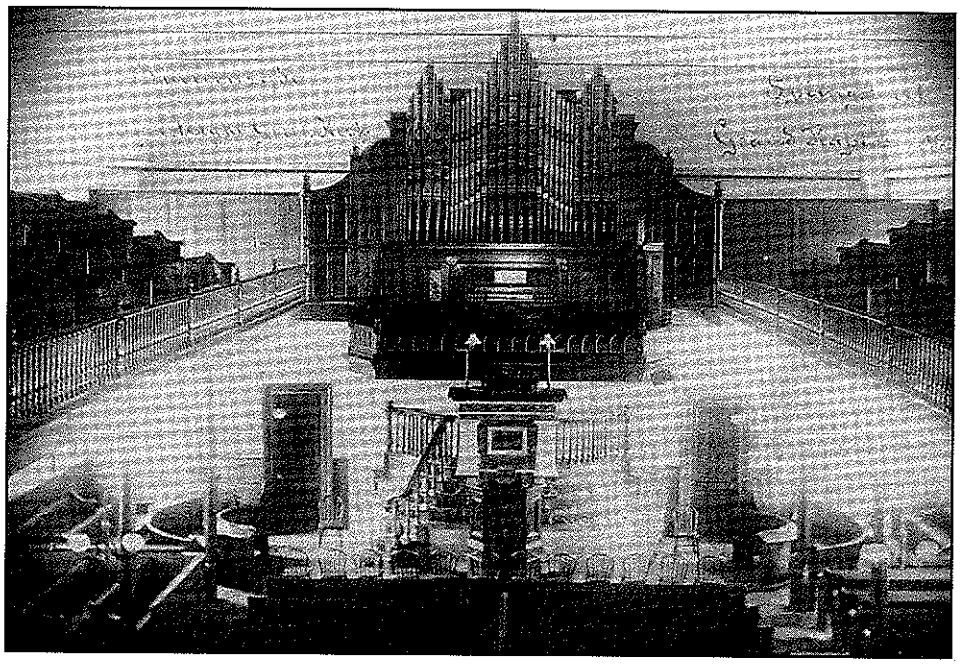
worship life of the immigrant community was also a source of lively controversy, and to those differences we now turn.

Feast Days

The Church Order of Dordrecht had mandated the observance of Christmas, the Circumcision of Jesus, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, and the Ascension. Although the Day of the Circumcision soon dropped out of the Reformed calendar, the other feast days were generally observed in the Reformed churches of the Netherlands. But not without question. The Secessionist churches were not of one mind on feast-day observance, and the immigrant churches inherited this ambivalence. Already at the first meeting of Classis Holland (Apr. 23, 1848) the issue was discussed at length (*Minutes of Classis Holland,* p. 21). Some attested to the great blessings such observance produced; others felt that the church should not fix dates to commemorate these events since the Lord in his Word has left us in ignorance as to the exact time.

The question rose again in 1851. Two additional objections were adduced. The churches should not appear to take our stand with the Roman Catholics and Episcopalians and thus offend other American Protestants who might not observe these days. A more practical objection was voiced by an elder from Grand Haven: . . . if the Hollanders withdrew on such days, the operation of the saw mills would be stopped (*Classis Holland Minutes 1848-1858,* p. 59).

Even though Classis Holland generally ruled that observance of feast days was to be a matter for each congregation to decide, controversies apparently continued. The meeting of April 28, 1853, dealt with a nasty quarrel between the brethren resident at Drenthe, against the minister of the church, Rev. R. Smit (*Classis Holland Minutes 1848-1858,* p. 117). A major cause for the quarrel was disagreement about feast days.



Interior — Spring Street CRC, Grand Rapids. Note the raised podium (preek stoel) and spindle-back chairs for elders.

The issue continued to be problematic in the separated Christian Reformed Church. A pro and con pair of articles in 1876 dealt in some detail with the principles involved. Rev. A.H. Brink pointed to the Old Testament examples of religious feast days and saw the Christian Pentecost as a continuation of such tradition. Even though there is no explicit commandment in the New Testament to observe holy days, he discerned great spiritual benefit in the keeping of those days. Yet he warned that to bring Christmas trees and candies into the church celebration was totally inappropriate (*De Wachter,* Jan. 6, 1876, p. 3). A response by J. van der Hil, followed by a second response by both, indicates the importance ascribed to the question. Van der Hil cited the usual objection that observance of the days is not explicitly taught in Scripture and that he and others should feel free to ignore the Church Order.

Another reason for the observance of feast days dealt with the potential misuse of such days. Since Christmas, for example, was a civic holiday, it would be wise for churches to plan a worship service on that day—to keep their members decently occupied. Otherwise, they might do nothing, walk the streets, or drink liquor in the saloons. The author [Rev. Hemkes?] further argued that people (both heathen and Israelites) always wanted and needed days of celebration. Then it is certainly appropriate for Christians to celebrate the great events of their faith (*De Wachter,* Feb. 13, 1879, pp. 2-3).

The tradition of a limited observance of the Church Year carried the day, and the celebration of the principal feast days continued in virtually all congregations. Interestingly, disagreement later focused on the second day of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Although these days were usually observed in European churches (and legislated by the Synod of Dordt), they were not observed in American life. As late as 1886, a Mr. H. Marling brought a protest to synod that his church

(Zeeland) had not observed the second Christmas Day.

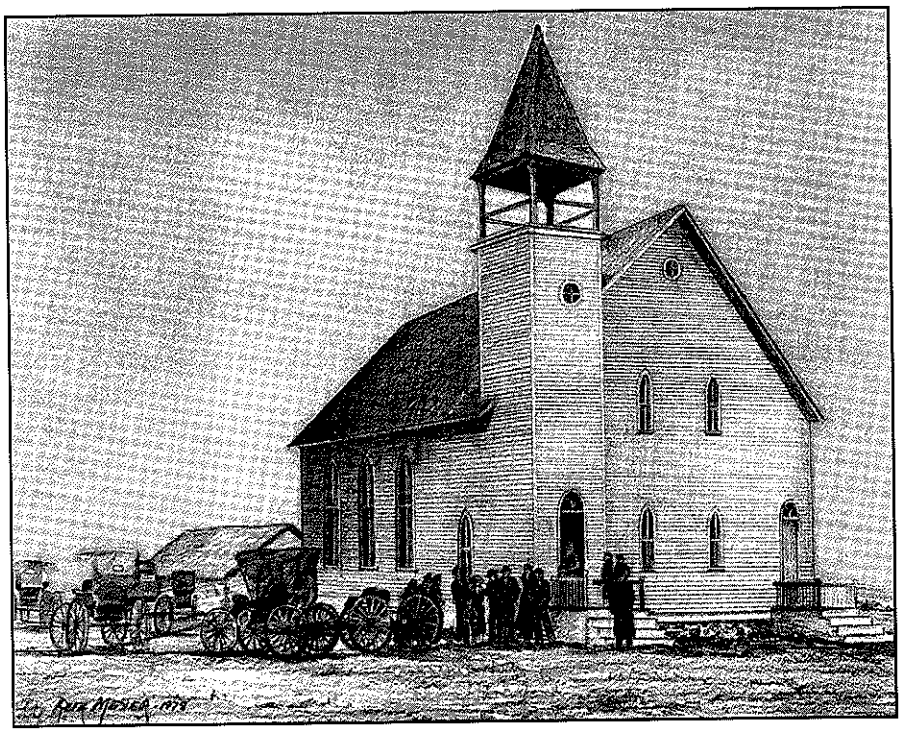
Lord's Supper

Questions about the Lord's Supper involved several issues—admission to and supervision of Communion, the use of individual cups, the choice between wine and grape juice, and the manner of distribution.

Reformed churches had always practiced restricted admission to the Lord's Supper—fencing the table. Depending on the mesh of the fence, this restriction at various times ranged from close to closed. The Secession of 1834 reiterated the importance of this practice, and the immigrant churches abided by the tradition. The issue became more pointed in an immigrant community with the presence of strangers —no doubt a much more frequent occurrence in America than in the old country. In 1849 and 1852 Classis Holland judged that strangers should be allowed to participate if they exhibited remorse for sin and intended to join the congregation (*Classis Holland Minutes 1848-1858*, pp. 31, 86).

A more contentious question was a particular practice of the denomination in which they found themselves. In 1855 Gijsbert Haan reported to Classis Holland that at the recent General Synod the invitation to the Lord's Supper had been a general invitation to all Christians (*Classis Holland Minutes 1848-1858*, pp. 180-81). Even though Van Raalte contested that observation (*Classis Holland Minutes 1848-1858*, p. 203), this admissions policy of the RCA continued to be questioned by the new immigrants. One of the objections presented by the seceding Graafschap congregation in 1857 was that the RCA was guilty of "inviting (men of) all religious views to the Lord's Supper, excepting Roman Catholics (*Classis Holland Minutes 1848-1858*, p. 242). Henry Beets repeated the allegation in his *De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord Amerika* (p. 109).

The CRC retained its close-communion practice by insisting that the table is open only to members (in good standing) of the local congregation and to guests from other CRC congregations—after they have received permission from the elders. As W. Heyns summarizes, The elders are seated at the table to watch that things are done in an orderly fashion—to make sure that everyone receives the bread and wine, and that no stranger or person under censure is seated (*Liturgiek*, p. 244). The practice received brief challenge during World War II, when chaplains in the armed services were under pressure to administer the sacrament not just to our boys from the CRC but to all servicemen and women who wished to participate. H.J. Kuiper demurred to patriotism at the expense of Church Order (*The Banner*, Oct. 2, 1942, pp. 876-77). With increased mobility of both members and visitors and the increased openness to other Christian denominations, CRC practices increasingly moved away from close supervision. Synod 1976 in effect allowed each congregation to do what was right in its eyes with regard to visitors at the Lord's Supper.

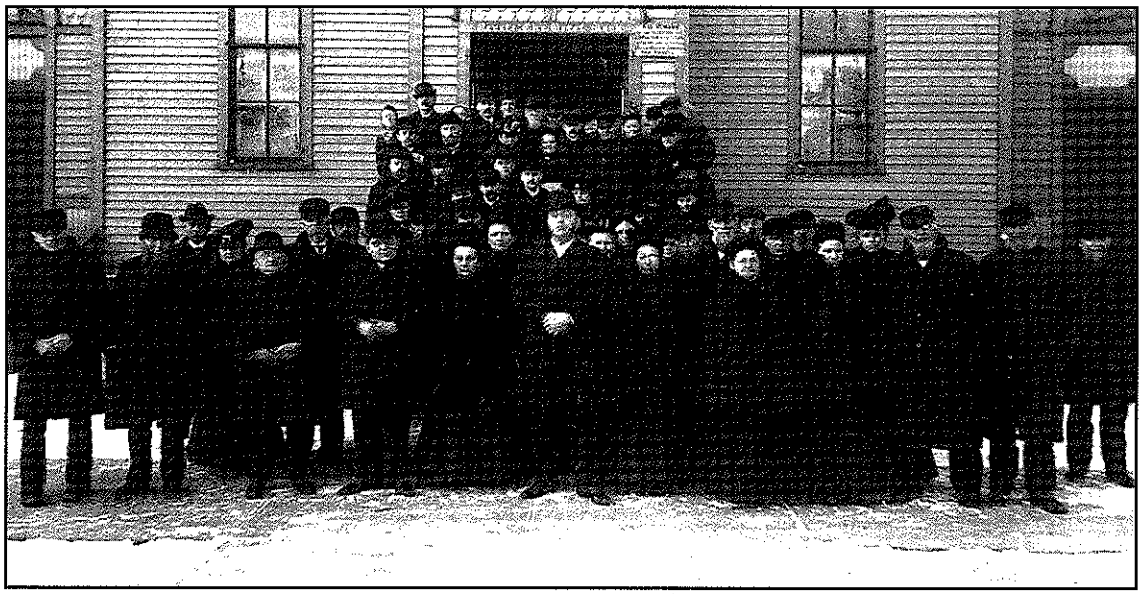


Ruth Meyers 1978 drawing of the Volga, South Dakota CRC at about 1900.

A more emotional issue concerned the change from the common cup to individual cups. *The Banner* editor Henry Beets left no doubt about the need for change:

> Now, what does science say as to bacteria that may be involved in the use of the common cup?. . .The communion cup of the Fourth Baptist Church of Rochester, New York, had numerous pus-cells in the dregs . . . . Diseases transmissible from mouth to mouth by using one drinking vessel are syphilis, cancer, tuberculosis, diphtheria, scarlatina, influenza, tonsillitis, whooping cough and others; many mouths are unclean by neglect of teeth, which in turn means breeding-grounds for many germs.
>
> (*The Banner*, Oct. 11, 1917, p. 645)

The editor was also solicitous on the ground of tenderness in sparing the feelings of those who are



First CRC in Roseland, Illinois about 1907. Entire congregation, with pastors in bowler hats — l to r, Revs. Broene, Robbert, and Einink.

brought up delicately and refined:

> They have revulsion of feelings creep over them involuntarily when they see someone immerse a portion of his mustache into the cup, until it is lifted out drippingly. . . . Or when they know of those whose lips are cracked with repulsive sores or have suspicious-looking spots, or of whom they know that a toothbrush never was guilty of causing the blackness and decay manifested by their teeth whenever they open their mouth.
>
> (*The Banner,* Oct. 11, 1917, p. 645)

But the change did not come without a challenge. Heated articles, editorials, and letters made a case for the continuation of the common cup. Some thought the medical reason less than convincing. In a response to the editor, Simon Lieffer wrote,

> A great many of so-called cultured people are evolutionists and believe the ape to be their forefather. I have been wondering ever since I read your first article whether it would be safe to kiss my wife. . . . If the Master meant the individual cup, let us have it, but if He meant the cup of communion, don't let us deviate from it because some nice cultured people and some great M.D.'s say so. The point is, what did the Master say and what did He mean when He said, Drink ye all of it? Namely the cup.
>
> (*The Banner,* Nov. 1, 1917, p. 706)

Synod again ruled for congregational option (*Acts of Synod 1918,* p. 44). The change was prompt in some congregations (especially because of the danger of influenza), others kept the common cup for decades, but eventually virtually all churches made the change. However, as late as 1934 a protest about individual cups was lodged with synod.

The discussion about the use of wine or grape juice was also a spirited one. In his *Liturgiek,* Heyns espoused the traditional use of wine but was willing to make an exception for converted drunkards, who could be served a special glass "with something that looks like wine (p. 243). Others expressed their views more vigorously. *De Wachter* of April 5, 1916, carried a report of Classis Pacific, strongly condemning the use of grape juice. Buttressing their views by quoting Scripture, Abraham Kuyper, and Charles Hodge, the authors concluded,

> Respect for Jesus' institution and the practice of the apostles must keep us from all arbitrary actions about holy things; and that is what will happen if we no longer use wine in our celebration of the Lord's Supper, and substitute grape juice, which is not wine. This arbitrary action becomes worse if it is prompted by misplaced prohibition fervor.

The report closes with a ringing declaration that even if a prohibitionist state would forbid the use of wine, Classis Pacific would stand firm:

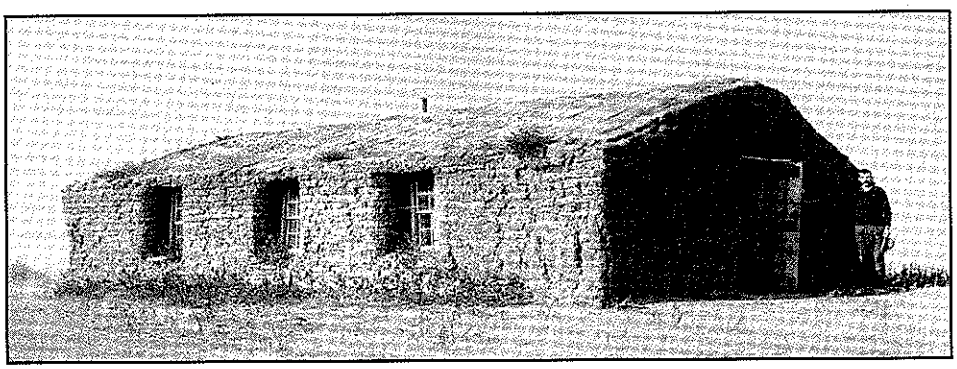
> Here it is also true, "One must obey God rather than man," and we must have complete freedom to serve God according to our conscience, especially in our country, where we, in God's grace, have freedom of religion.
>
> (*De Wachter,* Apr. 5, 1916, p. 7)

But Brother C. Van Loo was not convinced, as he took on both Abraham Kuyper and Classis Pacific:

> Kuyper calls wine exaltio *vitae*? He could have better called it "exaltatio *mortis*." This idea of making the exaltation, produced by fermented liquor, by alcohol, which instead of strength and life produces just the opposite, typical of spiritual life, is so abhorrent that my whole being revolts against it. To me it is blasphemy. [If theological reasons will not persuade the erring brethren, perhaps medical reasons will.] Alcohol, which is always and everywhere not a food but a poison, which is never assimilated when taken in the stomach, but passes in breath, respiration, urine and evacuation out of the body. . . to make this product of death and

> dissolution typical of the spiritual life imparted by our Savior is, to my mind, unutterably horrible.
>
> (*The Banner*, June 1, 1916, p. 354)

Another very practical question was the mode of distribution. The predominant method in Reformed churches in the Netherlands had been distribution to communicants seated at tables set up for the Communion service. In large churches communicants would come forward in groups, receive the elements, and return to their pews as more groups replaced them at the tables. The immigrant churches all began with this practice, but eventually changed to the American method—the distribution of the elements in the pews. The main (only?) reason seems to have been one of logistics: As congregations became larger, the number of servings increased and so did the length of the service. Logistics apparently won out over symbolism, and little controversy is recorded about this change.



Sod church in Thule, South Dakota. Undated but late nineteenth century.

The Major Battle

One of the most interesting episodes in the course of CRC worship took place between 1916 and 1930. The episode dealt with some major issues and demonstrated a conservatism that was more interested in maintaining the status quo than in theological argument or historic Calvinism. Let me first sketch a brief time line of the episode:

1916—In response to an overture to encourage greater uniformity of worship practices, synod appointed a Committee to Promote Unity in Our Worship Services.

1918—The committee presented a report which dealt largely with Reformed liturgical principles and suggested that the churches were generally remiss in living out those principles. Synod dutifully appointed a larger committee to develop proposals to improve congregational worship practices. (H.J. Kuiper and Y.P. De Jong are probably the best-remembered names on the committee.)

1920—The committee delivered a thorough report, including a number of major changes in the customary worship practices. Some suggestions were minor (congregations should stand while singing, since it prevents drowsiness . . . and provides better chest expansion); others were major changes, especially the introduction of the service of reconciliation. (The acknowledgment that the new order of worship will meet with some opposition of course turned out to be a major understatement.) The report was recommended to the churches for study and reaction.

1922—The reaction of the churches was prompt—and nearly all negative. Suspicion of novel worship elements, fear of ritual, and resistance to change all come to expression in the various overtures. However, the committee was asked to continue its work.

1926—The committee asked whether a synod's decision about worship had binding authority on all congregations. Synod did not give a clear yes or no but did suggest that a uniform but flexible order of worship should be adhered to by all churches.

1928—The committee presented a twenty-six-page report, which contained much of the earlier material, modified somewhat in response to previous objections. The principal explanatory section again concerned the absolution. Synod spent many sessions discussing the report. The two most contentious issues were the introduction of the absolution and the use of church choirs (not favored by the committee). The main thrust of the report was adopted, and synod impressed upon consistories that all the churches shall conform to whatever decisions touching this matter have been taken, unless they shall be proved to be contrary to God's Word."

1930—The earlier winds of protest had by now become a storm. Classes, consistories, and individuals registered disapproval and objections. Some called for partial changes of the 1928 decision, others for wholesale rescindment. Synod did not exactly rescind all of 1928, but in its substitute order of worship, its rejection of the absolution, and its emphasis on local prerogative, it in effect nullified the work of the committee and the decision of 1928.

1932—The committee sent a brief report to synod, expressing its disappointment in harsh language, as seen in the following expressions: . . . reactionary procedure of the Synod of 1930; this catastrophe; the wreck that remained; reminded us only too painfully of the steamroller in general use at political gatherings; appeal to prejudice undid the good work of the

Synod of 1928. By the adoption of this report, Synod has at least tacitly declared that our work savored of Romanism and formalism; worse than that, our work has been condemned as being in conflict with our Reformed principles of liturgy. This we desire to deny, emphatically and indignantly.

As the outline of the synodical events makes clear, the worship issues touched sensitive nerves in the CRC psyche. Some issues were clearly liturgical or theological, but others involved church polity and history, and, no doubt, resistance to change and deep-seated conservatism also played a strong role. By 1930 the opposition and unrest in the churches had reached such a point that the opponents could claim that further support of the liturgical changes would cause only more strife.



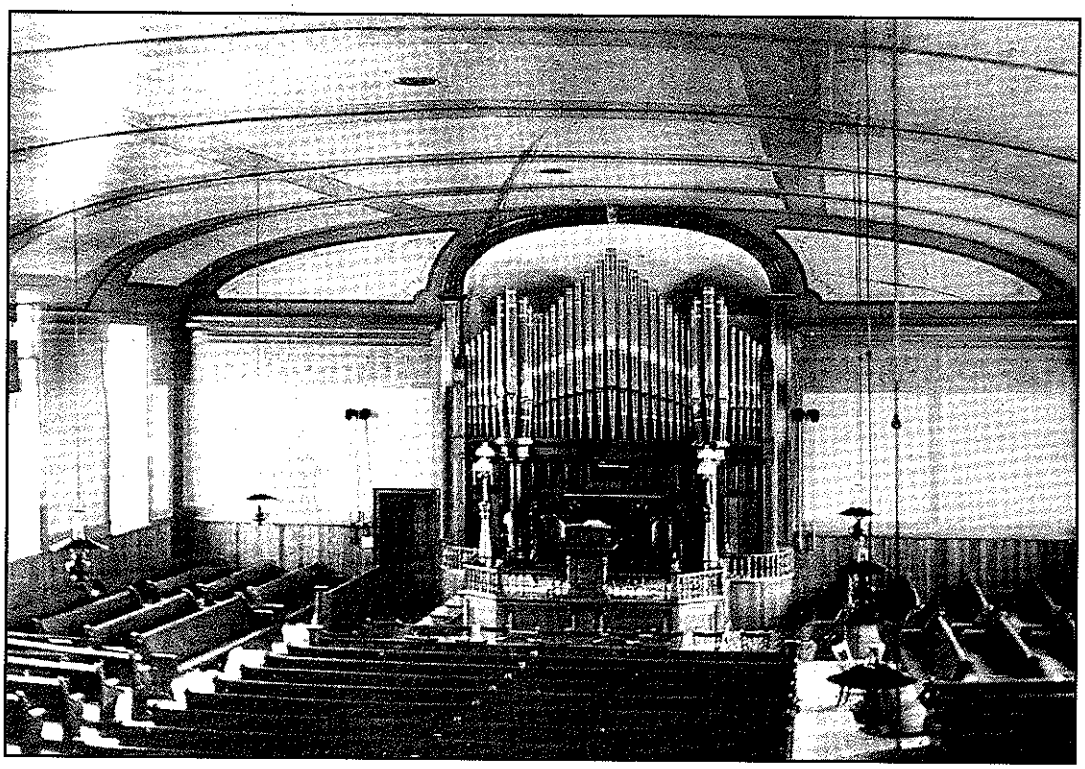
Common cup Communion vessels.

Let me briefly summarize the two main areas of disagreement. Probably the most contentious question in the controversy was the proposed introduction of the absolution. The committee found solid historical precedent in the liturgies of Calvin and other Reformers. The prayer of confession was to be followed by the declaration of the pastor (taken from Calvin's liturgy): Unto all who thus repent and seek in Jesus Christ their salvation, I proclaim, on the ground of God's promise, that all their sins are forgiven them for the sake of the merits of Jesus Christ.

However, no matter how frequently the committee cited Calvin (and they did so very frequently), the critics were not persuaded (or, more often, they simply ignored Calvin's voice). Two counter arguments were used most frequently. First, a service of confession was not needed, since the complete service, including prayers and preaching was really sufficient testimony that God's people confessed their sins and were forgiven. Second, the notion of absolution was basically a Roman Catholic concept and therefore to be shunned in Reformed worship.

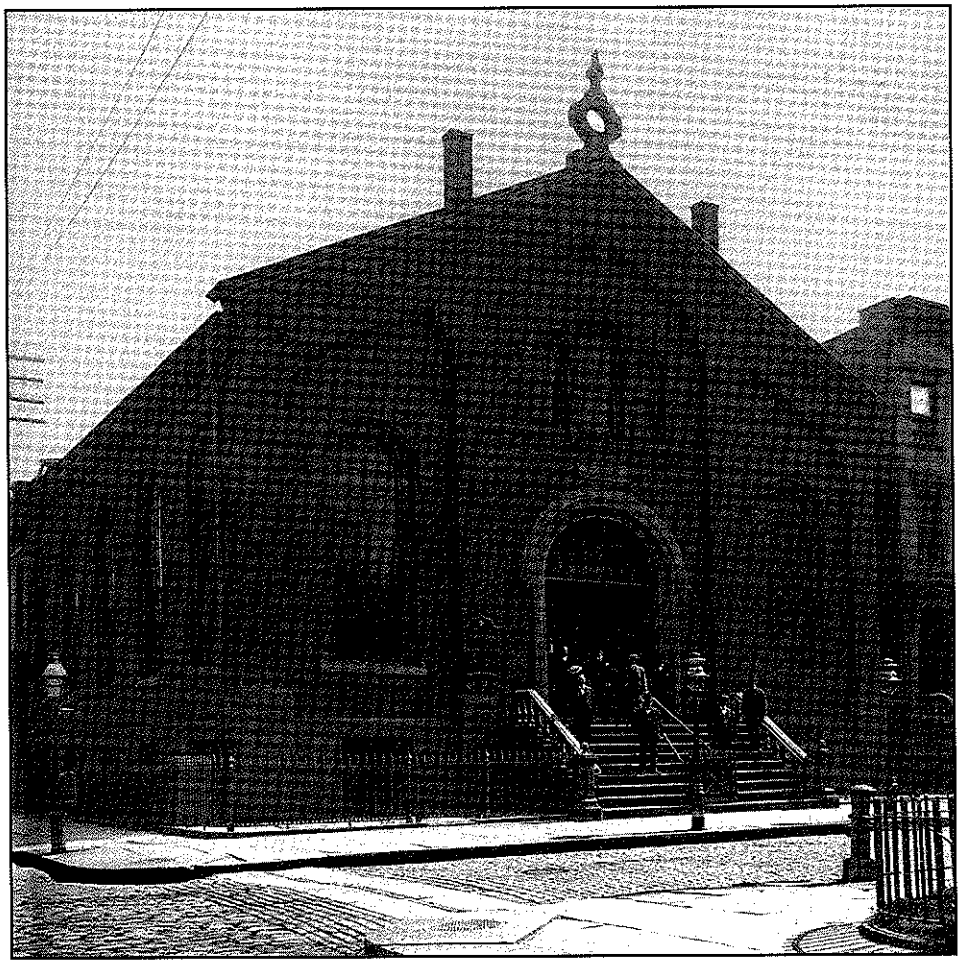
The other major objection was against synodical control. Interestingly, the main motivation for beginning this study in the first place had been alarm about increasing congregational diversity in worship practices (a sign of both Congregationalism and Americanization). A study of the principles of Reformed worship was expected to bring greater uniformity in worship. The committee took this mandate seriously: Their study had revealed (at least to them) what constituted Reformed worship, and now they expected the churches to adopt uniform worship practices. The decisions adopted by synod were assumed to be binding on all congregations.

That synod had the right to prescribe uniform worship *principles* was agreed upon by all. Said the editor of *The Banner*, ". . . measures should be taken to have all of our congregations fall in line" (May 13, 1920, p. 296).



Interior of Ninth Street CRC, Holland, Michigan. Note long pole collection pouches alongside the organ pipes and kerosene lamps suspended from ceilings.

However, the issue became much more clouded when synod specified certain *practices* for all congregations. Here there were vigorous (and vigorously expressed) disagreements—on issues ranging from the pastor shaking hands with worshipers after the service, to the use of the common cup, to the pronouncement of the absolution. We cannot enter into a discussion here about Reformed church polity and the relative authority of synods versus that of congregations. But that issue became one of the major stumbling blocks in the reaction to the proposed liturgy.



New York City's Bank Street CRC on the corner of Perry and Fourth Streets. This congregation merged with the CRC in 1892 and brought English hymns into the denomination's liturgy. Photo from 1880s. It was then part of the True Reformed Protestant Dutch Church which split from the RCA in 1822.

Let me quote from just one protest to the Synod of 1930:

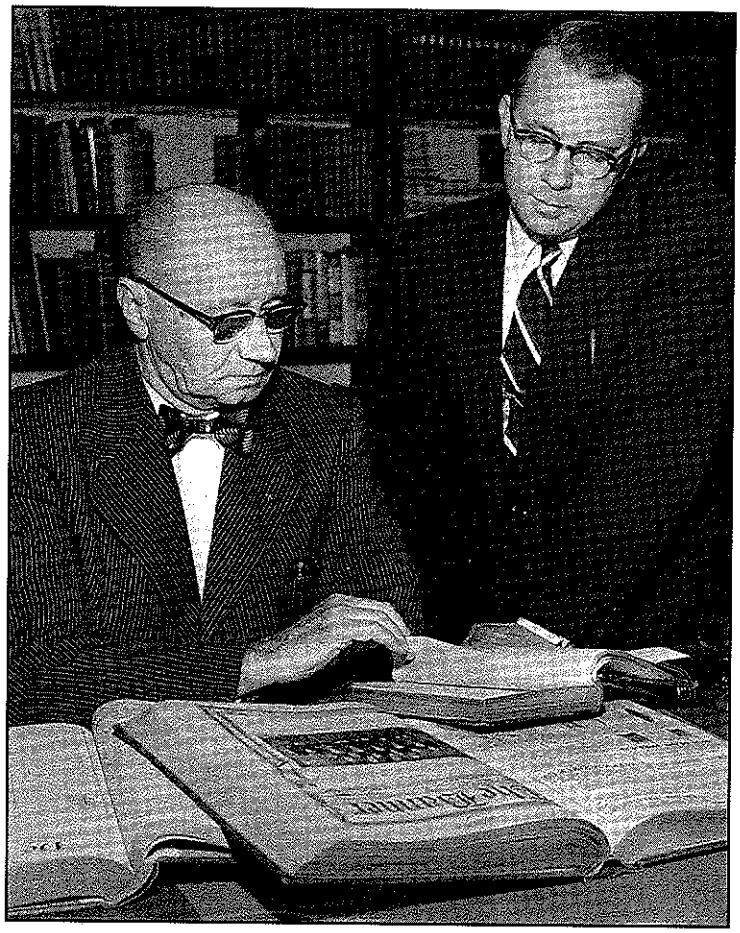
> The principles which are foundational to all pure worship are expressed in God's Word. We rejoice that Synod seeks to instruct our people about these principles. . . . However, Synod took a whole other step to establish a certain order of worship, and to make this binding on the churches. . . . It is in complete violation of the spirit of Calvin to thrust the same form of worship on all the churches.
>
> (*Agenda 1930,* Part II, pp. 39-41)

The bitter postlude written by the Liturgical Committee in 1932 looks upon the long struggle as an unmitigated disaster. One can understand that reaction, since suspicion and traditionalism seemed to prevail, no significant changes took place, and meaningful discussions on liturgy did not reoccur until the 1960s. But that evaluation is too limited. In some ways the work of the committee was vindicated. The committee's insistence that worship is dialogue (although still an incomplete conception of worship) helped to give better recognition to the voice of the congregation. The 1968 report on church liturgy used the principle of dialogue as its main definition of worship. The 1968 report also returned the absolution, now called assurance of pardon, and the overall shape of the Model Service is not unlike that of the one proposed in 1920.

Preaching and Worship According to H.J. Kuiper

James A. De Jong

H.J. Kuiper cut an impressive figure in the pulpit during the 1920s. Young, convicted, and fearless, he spoke forthrightly. His statesmanlike bearing, enhanced by the flowing tails of his Prince Albert suit and his stiffly starched shirt collar, lent authority to what he said. And he said it effectively, with clarity of thought and command of the language and absence of the brogue that still afflicted most of his peers.



Rev. Henry J. Kuiper and Dr. John H. Kromminga, 1950s.

When he mounted the pulpit of Broadway Christian Reformed Church on Christmas Day 1925, he was only forty by three days. Yet he was already a confident veteran six years into his fourth pastorate. Graduating from seminary at twenty-one, he had been the youngest man ever to be ordained as a Christian Reformed minister. So he spoke from experience. He preached with authority. And people listened.

Kuiper had no lack of grist for his homiletical mill. The 1920s were threatening times. People on the west side of Grand Rapids were now communicating in English. They were buying a wonderful new invention called "the radio," which meant they were imbibing American news and entertainment en masse for the first time in the denomination's history. Kuiper fretted about the roaring twenties and the encroaching worldliness. He said so from the pulpit—often and in no uncertain terms. His doctrinally precise and heavy sermons detailed why Herman Hoeksema was misguided on common grace, Harry Bultema on premillennialism, and Ralph Janssen on Scripture. Increasingly they found solemn application in warnings against compromise with the world, entreaties to support Christian schools for covenant youth, encouragements to keep the Sabbath, and appeals to reach out evangelistically to a misguided generation. The church's purity, even its very identity, was threatened. And H.J. Kuiper was called and compelled by God to sound the alarm.

Four years later Kuiper accepted the call to Neland Avenue CRC. The congregation was only eight miles across town, but, including the likes of Louis Berkhof and D.H. Kromminga and a dozen or so Calvin College professors, it was a world away and at the very center of denominational life and influence. Neland Avenue amplified Kuiper's message as well as his impact. The summer before, H.J. Kuiper had also been named editor of *The Banner*, and he succeeded Henry Beets in that position on January 1, 1929. He held the post for twenty-seven years, fifteen of them concurrently with his Neland Avenue pastorate and another twelve as the magazine's first full-time editor.

Reviewing 1962, the year of Kuiper's death, John H. Kromminga stated, "No man in our time has left a deeper imprint on the Christian Reformed Church than Henry J.

James A. De Jong is president and professor of historical theology at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Kuiper."[1] If so, his views on preaching and worship are certainly worth reviewing.

Preaching

Remarkably, an inventory of Kuiper's *Banner* editorials (he wrote little else in his long career) shows that he produced only 8 on preaching. By contrast, he contributed 106 on all aspects of worship and liturgy. Sabbath observance, on which he wrote 18 columns during his twenty-seven-year career, was on his editorial mind more than twice as often as preaching.

The explanation for this disparity is quite simple. In a reformation tradition that prized "pure preaching of the Word" as the most fundamental of the three marks of the true church, preaching was not in dispute. Worship and liturgy were, sometimes quite heatedly. So were Sunday mores, more by neglect and default than in open debate. Kuiper sounded the bugle where God's troops needed rallying.

He made a number of points about preaching. He dismissed those who made too sharp a distinction between preaching and teaching. Preaching that lacks instruction "is not the kind that edifies, builds up," but preaching devoid of expository substance cannot "impart inspiration to the hearts of truth-hungry men." According to Kuiper, a sermon needs to address both intellect and emotions, conscience and will.[2] Kuiper believed in passion and emotion in preaching, especially when appealing to the unsaved.

Not until the last year of his tenure as *Banner* editor did Kuiper contribute an editorial on "The Minister's Foremost Task." Then he said, "Leading the congregation in public worship is the high point of a minister's divinely appointed task. The center and core of this ministerial activity is the exposition and application of the Word of God. The first and foremost duty of the minister is to be a preacher."[3]

Preparing sermons, he stated in the same editorial, "requires *at least* two full days of *undisturbed* study" a week (emphasis Kuiper's). This is the minimal requirement. Churches, he believed, expected too much from their ministers, and this distracted them from the work of preparing sermons. The heart of this study must be a systematic reading and reflection on the entire Bible. Wider, general reading was important but secondary for ministers, in Kuiper's opinion.

Six years earlier Kuiper broke his editorial golden rule of not relying on or summarizing the work of others on his page. Perhaps because Calvin Seminary was in tumult at the time or perhaps because he simply thought it was a fine contribution, he summarized advice to seminarians from the *Gereformeerd Weekblad,* a widely-read and respected Dutch paper. Entitled "Pointers for Preachers," it listed and amplified twelve practical hints for successful preaching. Some of these were obvious, like "be original," "don't be conceited," and "learn to read properly." Some of them were salted with humor: "guard against blowing or bluffing" and "guard against pointing the finger or threatening." All of them were wise and practical.

Half of Kuiper's writing on preaching was devoted to comments about preaching the Heidelberg Catechism, a practice that some were neglecting in the 1930s, according to a writer in *De Wachter,* the Dutch-language sister paper. He counseled that the speculation about rampant omission of Catechism preaching was unfair and unfounded gossip. He did acknowledge that "less aversion to doctrinal preaching" existed a generation before than in his day.[4] The tastes of the listener may be just as threatening to the practice as the habits of the preacher, wrote Kuiper. Ministers should do all in their power to make Catechism preaching plain, interesting, and fresh.

Several issues later the editor responded to a keen layman who observed that ministers are called to preach "the sum of Christian doctrine" contained in each Lord's Day. Some ministers, he asserted, select a text related to the Catechism, read it, and omit attention to the Catechism itself. Drawing himself up to full editorial flair, Kuiper categorically rejected such "disguised Catechism preaching" as robbing the congregation! "The right kind of Catechism sermons have more of Scripture in them than the large majority of sermons on free texts," he sniffed.[5]

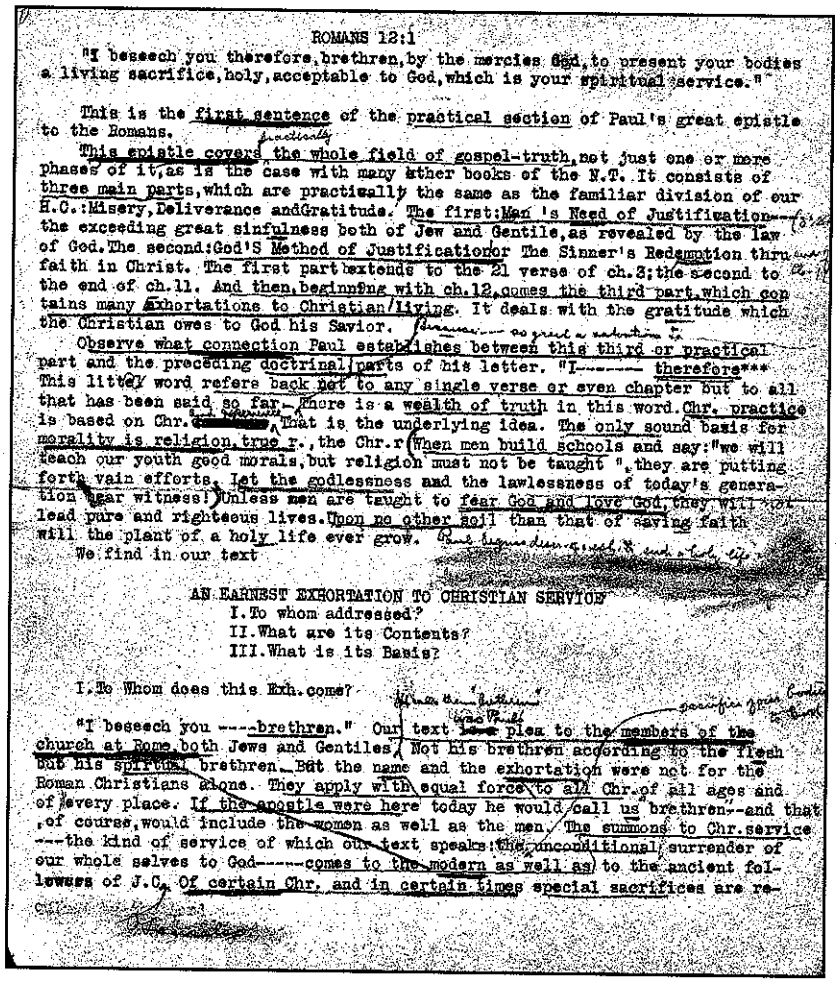
A young theology student in graduate studies at Harvard was not convinced. He wrote the esteemed editor a long, carefully framed letter. Because it is impossible to do justice to "the sum" of a Lord's Day in one sermon, why not pick a text that accents one angle of the doctrine, he asked. Furthermore, he asserted, the editor's approach diminishes the historical-redemptive setting of biblical passages. It also allows less serious and in-depth treatment of the Bible since many passages must be covered. A fair-minded man who also wanted to drive his point home definitively, the editor printed the entire letter of John H. Bratt, who went on to become chairperson of the Calvin College Bible Department and an esteemed Banner columnist in his own right. Preaching "the sum" means just that, pointed out the editor. Preaching only "angles" produces doctrinal disjointedness. Besides, passages referred to in the Catechism have an "inner relation" to one another because there is in Scripture "an implied system of doctrine" that our people need to hear and to grasp. "If our brother's position is correct," said H.J., "systematic theology can never be as scriptural as biblical theology."

By now Kuiper was rowing in heavy seas. Not only was the debate getting technical, but Samuel Volbeda, professor of preaching at Calvin Seminary, had schooled Bratt and others in the position the young graduate student was taking. Kuiper knew it. He merely seized the occasion to exercise an important editorial correction on the direction of the seminary. His point made, Kuiper dropped the topic.

Worship and Liturgy

If Kuiper wrote sparsely on preaching, he contributed amply to the discussions on worship. His opinions were shaped by his considerable liturgical interest and experiences.

In 1916 synod approved an overture asking that a uniform order of worship for English-speaking congregations be adopted. Kuiper, a 32-year-old fledgling with nine years of ministerial experience, was not only appointed to the committee of seven charged with this important task; he was named secretary of it. An illustrious group, the committee worked thoroughly, creatively, and unitedly. They diverged on only one point. Kuiper joined a minority of three, led by chairperson and professor of practical theology William Heyns, in rejecting the "votum" as the official beginning of the service. The final report was considered in 1920. Synod decided to refer the report to the churches for study, discussion, and response. It continued the committee in order to receive and to consider communications from the churches. And it referred three specific recommendations to new, separate committees for review. These decisions began a twelve-year debate about liturgy and worship in the Christian Reformed Church. H.J. Kuiper was at the center of the fray.



ROMANS 12:1

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service."

This is the first sentence of the practical section of Paul's great epistle to the Romans.

This epistle covers the whole field of gospel-truth, not just one or more phases of it, as is the case with many other books of the N.T. It consists of three main parts, which are practically the same as the familiar division of our H.C.: Misery, Deliverance and Gratitude. The first: Man 's Need of Justification--the exceeding great sinfulness both of Jew and Gentile, as revealed by the law of God. The second: God'S Method of Justification or The Sinner's Redemption thru faith in Christ. The first part extends to the 21 verse of ch.3; the second to the end of ch.11. And then, beginning with ch.12, comes the third part, which contains many exhortations to Christian living. It deals with the gratitude which the Christian owes to God his Savior.

Observe what connection Paul establishes between this third or practical part and the preceding doctrinal parts of his letter. "I------ therefore*** This little word refers back not to any single verse or even chapter but to all that has been said so far. There is a wealth of truth in this word. Chr. practice is based on Chr. [redacted]. That is the underlying idea. The only sound basis for morality is religion, true r., the Chr.r When men build schools and say: "we will teach our youth good morals, but religion must not be taught ", they are putting forth vain efforts. Let the godlessness and the lawlessness of today's generation bear witness! Unless men are taught to fear God and love God, they will not lead pure and righteous lives. Upon no other soil than that of saving faith will the plant of a holy life ever grow.

We find in our text

AN EARNEST EXHORTATION TO CHRISTIAN SERVICE

I. To whom addressed?
II. What are its Contents?
III. What is its Basis?

I. To Whom does this Exh. come?

"I beseech you ----brethren." Our text [redacted] plea to the members of the church at Rome, both Jews and Gentiles, Not his brethren according to the flesh but his spiritual brethren. But the name and the exhortation were not for the Roman Christians alone. They apply with equal force to all Chr. of all ages and of every place. If the apostle were here today he would call us brethren--and that, of course, would include the women as well as the men. The summons to Chr. service ---the kind of service of which our text speaks: the unconditional surrender of our whole selves to God------comes to the modern as well as to the ancient followers of J.C. Of certain Chr. and in certain times special sacrifices are re-

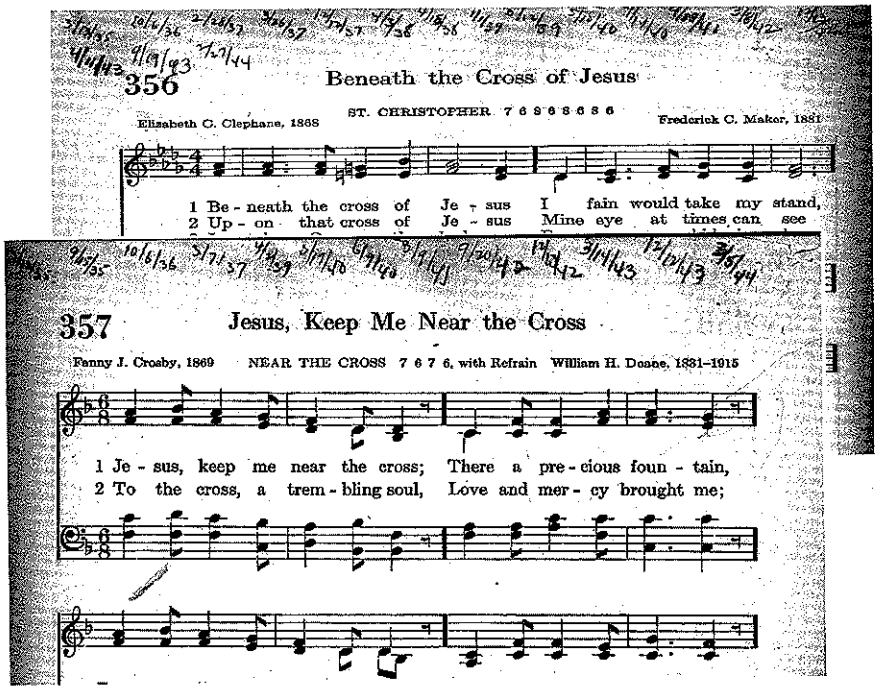
Sermon notes for Romans 12:1. Preached at Broadway CRC, morning of Aug. 1, 1926.

Synodical discussions on a uniform order of worship languished for eight years.

Meanwhile Kuiper became increasingly anxious that Christian Reformed people were making indiscriminate use of readily available English-language hymns. Many of these were of questionable or mistaken theological quality. When Mr. William B. Eerdmans invited him and several others to join a committee that would compile a hymnal for those "who love the orthodox, evangelical faith,"[6] Kuiper enthusiastically accepted. The project fell on Kuiper's shoulders because the committee could not convene as often as necessary to complete the work in the two-year time frame. His preface stated five criteria for selecting hymns to be included. The most prominent was "theological soundness." "Those who love sound doctrine and realize what a vast influence for good or evil religious song may exert upon the thought and life of the members of the church of Christ will appreciate the effort, we believe, to provide a collection of hymns which are fully Scriptural in their teaching and spirit," he wrote.[7] He amplified the point, noting that the committee had freely excised or amended offending stanzas. A second criterion was "general use." The committee wanted a collection that was suitable for Christian schools, church societies, Sunday school, evangelistic settings, and family gatherings. The numbers also had to be singable. Fourth, the committee included a collection of hymns whose tunes and texts were especially designed for children. It concluded with a section of chorales, which attempted to give direction to the revived interest in that musical form. The entire collection of 451 numbers was arranged topically.

Preparing *The New Christian*

Hymnal for press was a "gigantic task," admitted Kuiper. But the conviction that the effort would not be futile was his "sufficient reward." The editor could not have known how important the impact of his publication was to be. For two subsequent generations it shaped the Christian musical idiom, expressed the devotional experience, and molded the theology of the Christian Reformed Church and related denominations. It was produced at a time when the Dutch subculture was moving into the evangelical mainstream and when the church was ready to augment its exclusively psalm-singing tradition with the best in Christian hymnody. The hymnal is, perhaps, the greatest achievement of H.J. Kuiper's life.


356 Beneath the Cross of Jesus
ST. CHRISTOPHER 7 6 8 6 8 6 8 6
Elisabeth C. Clephane, 1868
Frederick C. Maker, 1881
1 Be - neath the cross of Je - sus I fain would take my stand,
2 Up - on that cross of Je - sus Mine eye at times can see
357 Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross
Fanny J. Crosby, 1869
NEAR THE CROSS 7 6 7 6, with Refrain
William H. Doane, 1831–1915
1 Je - sus, keep me near the cross; There a pre - cious foun - tain,
2 To the cross, a trem - bling soul, Love and mer - cy brought me;

Pages from Rev. H.J. Kuiper's personal Psalter Hymnal. *The dates indicate frequency of each selection's use. Only twelve of the 468 numbers were not used.*

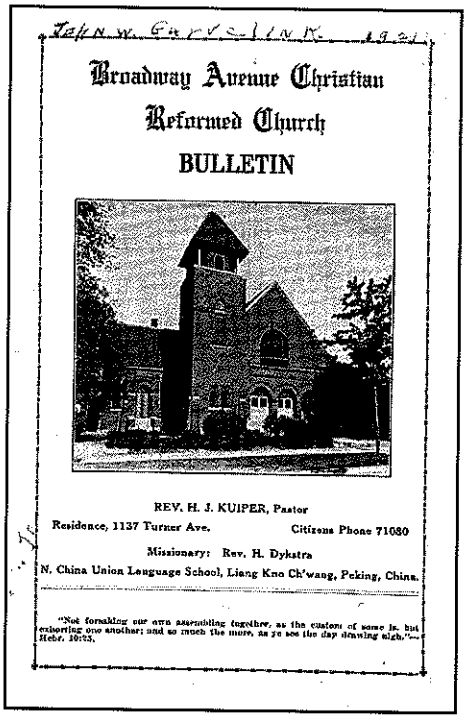
By the time the hymnal was well along in production and had been widely advertised, the synod of 1928 was held. Kuiper's fingerprints mark the assembly. The first morning he was elected vice president. The synod highly commended the excellent report of the "Committee on the Improvement of Our Public Worship," as it was by then being called. The delegates knew Kuiper had drafted it. Synod adopted the committee's recommendation to adopt a uniform order of worship, but despite a fine, supportive overture from Classis Grand Rapids East, it stalled the adoption of its proposal to allow the use of approved hymns in worship services until 1930. Instead, it appointed a committee to investigate whether such hymns could be found. Kuiper was named to it, but to his dismay and that of others on the committee for the improvement of public worship, Synod refused to roll back the 1926 decision against allowing church choirs. The committee's argument that "flexibility within uniformity" should also extend as far as choirs did not persuade the majority of the delegates. Kuiper recorded his negative vote.

Synod also had on its table an overture from Kuiper's consistory. The Broadway CRC was asking synod "to appoint a committee to study the proposed *New Christian Hymnal* and authorize them, if they can conscientiously do so, to recommend this hymnal" for use by our members and organizations.[8] It argued that many hymnals currently used "among us" are doctrinally unsound and are a "menace to the purity of our churches." Furthermore, the men behind the project are "doctrinally sound," and Synod's endorsement would help sales! Synod refused to endorse Kuiper's hymnal sight unseen, because it did not trust a delegated committee to make a decision for Synod.

In one of its final actions, the synod of 1928 elected H.J. Kuiper as editor of *The Banner*. Early in the sessions it had chosen Dr. D.H. Kromminga for the position, and subsequently also appointed Kromminga as professor of church history. Consulting with his consistory, Kromminga felt he could not assume both positions so declined the editorship. Chosen from a later nomination of three, H.J. Kuiper accepted and found himself catapulted into denominational prominence. Though synod had refused a direct endorsement of his forthcoming hymnal, it accorded the hymnal indirect endorsement by entrusting Kuiper with the most visible position in the denomination.

Kuiper returned as a synodical delegate in 1930, now representing Classis Grand Rapids East. He led devotions at the third session and selected number 415 from *The New Christian Hymnal*, a chorale based on Psalm 42, "As the Hart When Noon Is Burning." In all, six of synod's twenty-three sessions were opened with selections from the new hymnal. But the tide had turned against the uniform order of worship endorsed by Kuiper, and Kuiper was not elected as an officer. In the face of fourteen overtures, most of them negative, and

twelve protests against the 1928 decision, this synod rescinded the action of two years earlier. Kuiper, who had given so much thought and energy to liturgical matters and who by this time was one of the most conversant Christian Reformed leaders on the subject, was one of only four delegates to record their opposition. "Synod rescinded the decisions of 1928 . . . without showing that said order of worship was contrary to the Word of God, our confession, or the church order," they logged in the official *Acts of Synod.* It has "utterly failed . . . to safeguard the peace and welfare of the churches."[9] Despite his



Broadway Avenue Christian Reformed Church

BULLETIN

REV. H. J. KUIPER, Pastor

Residence, 1137 Turner Ave. Citizens Phone 71080

Missionary: Rev. H. Dykstra

N. China Union Language School, Liang Kno Ch'wang, Peking, China.

"Not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh."—Hebr. 10:25.

Bulletin, Nov. 6, 1921.

disappointment, the editor continued his service on both synod's committee for hymns and Psalter chorales and its committee on the order of worship.

By 1932 the latter had been disbanded, Kuiper was again elected vice president of synod, and he found himself on the newly constituted committee to produce the first *Psalter Hymnal.* By 1934 he was chairing the committee which produced a report to synod detailing the immense effort that had gone into coordinating and producing the denomination's first worship book combining both psalm versifications and hymns. All the liturgical forms had been reviewed and augmented or replaced. Indexes had been prepared. The confessions, forms, and prayers had been reviewed for consistent use of the American Standard Version of Scripture. And the business details had been attended to, so that the publication committee was legally incorporated to own and control the copyright on behalf of the denomination. H.J. Kuiper had orchestrated the event down to reviewing the galleys sent from the printer for review and setting the price of the shortly anticipated book.

In six years Kuiper saw two major liturgical resources through production. That he did so while an active, effective pastor of large congregations is remarkable. That the second project coincided as well with his earliest years as editor of the denomination's weekly magazine makes his achievement nearly unbelievable.

H.J. Kuiper's more than one hundred editorials on worship and liturgy run the gamut. Early on he visited frequently the burning issues of hymns, a uniform order of worship, the absolution of sin as part of the service, and the legitimacy of choirs. During the 1930s he understandably kept the church informed on progress being made in selecting suitable hymns and in producing the *Psalter Hymnal.* During the last twenty years of his editorship his focus often turned to the meaning and importance of corporate public worship. Motive in worship was important to him. So were worshiping as families, the sacraments, and conferences for church musicians. Periodically he revisited the subject of Lent, commending certain aspects of its observance but warning against others. But most prominent in his writing was church music. He did a whole series in 1948 on the kinds of congregational singing and their legitimate use. He was a friend and encourager of church organists. And near the end of his career he raised the unthinkable in an editorial entitled, "Suppose There Were No Music in Church"![10]

Given the church's preoccupation with matters of worship and liturgy, it is not surprising that Kuiper gave them the attention he did in his editorials. And his attention was usually solid and sensible. He had studied worship thoroughly and had contemplated it seriously. Contrary to those who think that the 1920s through the 1940s were years when Christian Reformed people were uninformed and indifferent concerning the subject, the church got full, regular instruction on worship and liturgy. In an era when people read *The Banner* religiously and respected the editor highly, Kuiper's influence was substantial. It is doubtful that anyone before or since has had as great an impact on Christian Reformed worship. ❧

Endnotes

1. *Yearbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1963) 338.
2. *The Banner,* 14 Mar. 1939: 820 number 2209), p. 820.
3. *The Banner,* 1956 (volume 91, number 3046), p. 100.
4. *The Banner,* 1938 (volume 73, number 2167), p. 1036.
5. *The Banner,* 1939 (volume 74, number 2176), p. 28.
6. Preface, *The New Christian Hymnal,* edited by H.J. Kuiper. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1929.
7. Ibid.
8. *Acta der Synode 1928,* p. 63.
9. *Acta der Synode 1930,* p. 186.
10. *The Banner,* 1954 (volume 89, number 2972), p. 965.

Accompanist of the Gospel

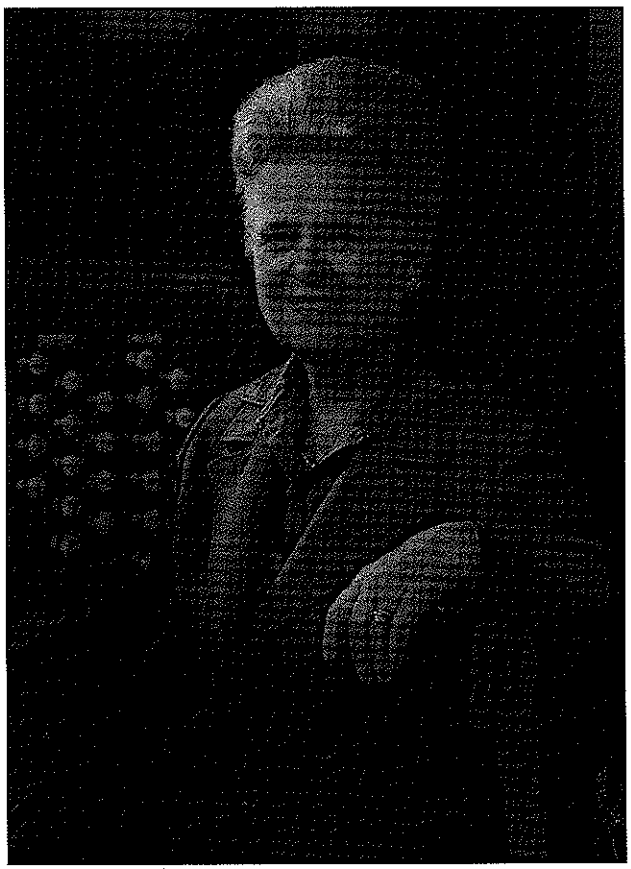
Johanna Oranje

The year was 1921; American soldiers had returned from the battlefields of World War I in Europe. Burton Heights Christian Reformed Church, on the corner of Horton and Andre, was hosting a celebration. At the pipe organ, enjoying an opportunity to welcome the boys home, was 14-year-old Anne Heyboer, playing such favorites as "Over There" and "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." What a way to begin a career of some sixty years as church organist! At first Anne took her turn with three other players, at $2.00 a service. But she loved playing the organ so much, she probably would have done it for nothing.

The Heyboer home was filled with music: Her mother was a pianist; her father, G. Adrian Heyboer, played baritone horn and was an enthusiastic member of a male quartet. Of course, there was a phonograph. Anne busied herself with schoolwork, piano lessons, and, later, organ lessons. Soon she accompanied her father's quartet and joined the Junior St. Cecilia Music Society in downtown Grand Rapids.

After graduating from high school at age sixteen, she went to Calvin College rather than the University of Michigan because her father had no intention of allowing her to leave home at that age. She majored in English and math and became accompanist for Calvin's first Girls' Glee Club. Meanwhile, she met tall, handsome Jan Vander Heide, and they began to date.

After graduating with a teacher's certificate, Miss Heyboer taught at West Side Christian School for three years and gained a permanent certificate, but her formal teaching career ended when she married Jan Vander Heide in 1930. Early in their marriage John Jr. and Joan were born; then, after an interval, Stuart and Barbara. But while raising this busy family, Anne continued to develop her interest in music.



Anne Vander Heide

About 1940, Burton Heights CRC, having moved to its present location on Burton at Jefferson, installed a new Moeller organ, which Anne loved. Under her spirited leadership the

Johanna Oranje is a retired music teacher who taught at Kalamazoo Christian High School and South Christian High School in Cutlerville, Michigan.

church became known for its enthusiastic singing. A 1971 issue of *Contact*, the church newsletter, reports about Anne's fifty years at the organ:

> Much of the credit for the enthusiastic singing can certainly be attributed to the sensitive leadership of our organist. We've all noticed the pick-up of pitch or tempo when the singing is sluggish, and the pointing up of the melody when the song is unfamiliar. . . refinements that come from years of experience . . . . Functioning as church organist is a taxing job. Practice and more practice is certainly called for . . . the choir must also practice, which means the organist must be there. The members of our choir are very much aware of and appreciative of Anne's talents: reading music, following the director, changing keys and improvising are all part of the day's (or night's) work. Picking out suitable music for the sermon and the season, responding to a visiting minister's theme . . . we seldom think about it, but we really enjoy the results.

Thus her talents of leading inspired group singing and providing sensitive accompaniments for soloists were recognized by her own church and also shared with other organizations. For many years Anne played for the semi-annual meetings of the Women's Missionary Union. The Calvin College Archives has a copy of the 1988 program at which she played—then 81 years old!

Always, service was her motto. She remembered her mother saying repeatedly, "God placed us here on earth to help others." This certainly was her aim, in family, church, and community. She was a lifelong member of the St. Cecilia Society, serving as president for four years and chairing numerous committees. The Western Michigan Chapter of the American Guild of Organists also welcomed her services. Governor G. Mennen Williams appointed her to the Michigan Cultural Commission, where she served for five years. She was also president of the Michigan Federation of Music Clubs, and in the seventies chairman of Music in Hospitals for the National Federation of Music Clubs. This whetted her interest in music therapy, and she was instrumental in sending Herbert Start, choir director at Burton Heights CRC, to a workshop, after which he organized the Music Therapy Department at Pine Rest Christian Hospital. She is listed in *Who's Who of the Midwest* and *International Who's Who of Women.*

God gave great gifts to Anne Vander Heide, which she used generously in his service. ❧

The Hymn Question in the Christian Reformed Church

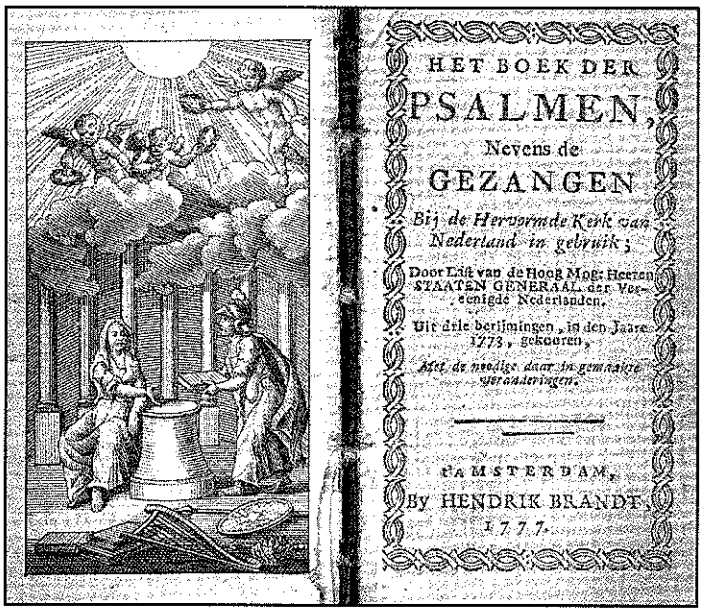
Bert Polman

Ever since congregational singing was instituted as a prime element of Protestant worship during the time of the Reformation, there have been discussions and major debates in various segments of the church about the role of hymns. Psalmody and hymnody became complementary partners in early Lutheranism; psalmody alone became a hallmark of early Calvinists; hymnody became customary in Anabaptist communities. As time passed, denominations which adopted psalmody primarily or exclusively were often faced with the question of what to do with hymns. Were they suitable for use only at home, or could they be incorporated into Sunday worship?

The founders of the Christian Reformed Church in North America were primarily psalm singers, in accord with their Calvinist tradition. But, unlike a few denominations which sprang from this same heritage and limited themselves strictly to psalmody, the Christian Reformed people traditionally included in their services the singing of a few hymns and liturgical texts in addition to metrical psalms.

This same mixture of psalms and hymns was true already when the Calvinist Reformation was first established in the Netherlands. In 1566, Peter Datheen included the Decalogue, the three Lukan canticles, two settings of the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and five prayer hymns in his De CL Psalmen Davids. The Church Order emerging from the Synod of Dordt in 1619 specified that beyond

Bert Polman is a professor of music at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario. His Ph.D. dissertation was entitled Church Music and Liturgy in the Christian Reformed Church of North America (1981).


HET BOEK DER
PSALMEN,
Nevens de
GEZANGEN
Bij de Hervormde Kerk van Nederland in gebruik;
Door Last van de Hoog Mog: Heeren STAATEN GENERAAL der Verenigde Nederlanden.
Uit drie berijmingen, in den Jaare 1773, gekoeren,
Met de noodige daar in gemaakte veranderingen.
t'AMSTERDAM,
By HENDRIK BRANDT.
1777.

1777 official book of Psalms used by the Reformed Church of the Netherlands.

the psalms only the Decalogue, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and the three Lukan canticles should be sung; all other hymns should be abolished. In actual practice, however, a few Lutheran chorales remained in popular use in the northern and eastern Dutch provinces. Thus, "O Lam Godes Unschuldich"[1] was used during the Lord's Supper in Drenthe and Groningen, and during the eighteenth century, the great Easter *leise* "Christus is opgestanden"[2] and was still known in Holland.[3] The Dutch *Psalter* of 1773 also included the Decalogue, the Lukan canticles, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and five prayer hymns.

Reformed people in Holland witnessed the introduction of a collection of 192 hymns, the *Evangelische Gezangen*, in 1806. The Reville, or "Great Awakening" movement, also began to take root in the Netherlands around this time, and its followers opposed both the reorganization of the Dutch Reformed Church into a state church in 1816 and the liberal theology of its church leaders. A formal secession, or *Afscheiding*, occurred in 1834, for which the singing of hymns was cited as one reason. In the next decade a number of these Dutch seceders immigrated to Michigan and Iowa, where they initially joined the Reformed Church in America. However, in 1857 they separated again and formed the Christian Reformed denomination, citing as one of the reasons for separation the fact that the Reformed Church in America sang hymns.

Thus the early Christian Reformed settlers in North America brought with them a psalmodic tradition which did permit a few hymns to be sung. But popular opinion among these pioneers ran against hymnody. The founders of the Christian Reformed Church could not easily forget that the Secession of 1834 in the Netherlands and the break with the Reformed Church in America in 1857 were, in part at least, the result of opposition to hymns. The anti-hymn sentiments of these pioneers became a constituent feature of their ethnic and cultural isolation in the new world.

By the late 1870s, voices were raised in support of hymns. In a Dutch Reformed journal, A. Brummelkamp Jr. had penned "Fourteen Reasons" in favor of hymns.[4] A son of one of the fathers of the Secession of 1834, Brummelkamp adduced the following arguments:

(a) that the Scriptures speak of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as separate genre.

(b) that a healthy spiritual life warrants the use of hymns both in and out of the church.

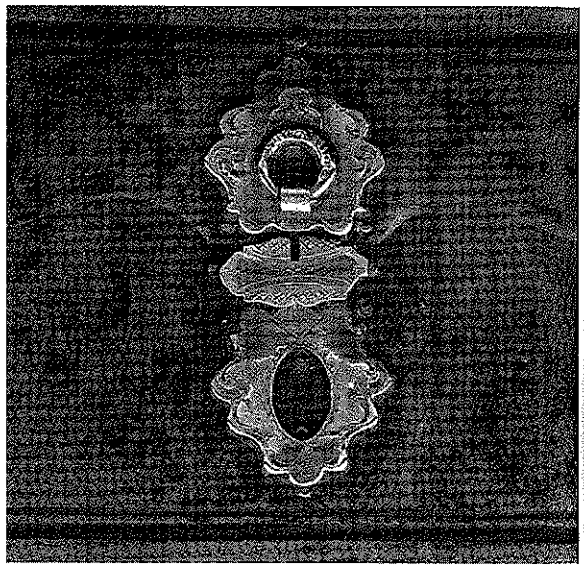
(c) that hymns are essential to the celebrative character of festival Sundays.

(d) that those who oppose hymns on the grounds of the Secession do not rightly understand the Secession.

(e) that an improved volume of hymns would demonstrate that the criticisms of the *Evangelische Gezangen* are not valid.

(f) that a new volume of hymns could be artistically superior to the *Evangelische Gezangen.*

(g) that the few good hymns in the *Gezangen* should be rescued from their "evil company" and put into a new volume with other classic hymns.



Psalm book (detail) with New Testament, leather bound with gold clasp, 1884.

(h) that the understandable desire for hymns in Sunday schools, day schools, and young people's societies be satisfied with a collection of quality hymns rather than with just whatever appears on the market.

(i) that there are many hymns, both old and new, which congregations should not ignore.

(j) that in the absence of a good hymnal, new hymns of poor quality might be prepared, as the classic hymnody would be unknown.

(k) that the hymnic testimony of the apostles, church fathers, reformers, and martyrs should not be stopped in the church now.

(l) that many other denominations use hymns.

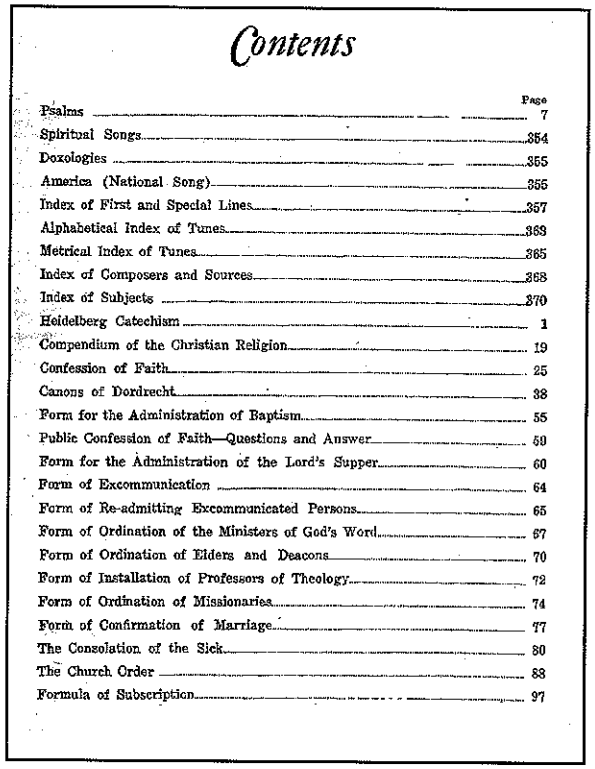
(m) that the Synod of Utrecht in 1877 agreed in principle to the singing of hymns.

(n) that the above reasons can be easily expanded but not reduced.

In contrast to similar discussions in previous centuries about the use of hymns in other denominations, Brummelkamp's discussion does not refer to the time-honored use of hymns during the Lord's Supper.

As the Dutch church papers were read with keen interest by the immigrant settlers, Brummelkamp's article aroused several responses. G. Arnsing commented favorably on the "Fourteen Reasons" and stated that hymns were already being sung in Sunday schools, societies, and the homes of Christian Reformed people.[5] K. Van Leeuwen favored the proper use of hymns along with the continued use of psalms.[6] In return, Christian Reformed *De Wachter* editor G. Hemkes condemned hymns, claimed hymns were not inspired—as were the psalms—and that hymns were associated with liberal theology in the Netherlands.[7]

This initial discussion of hymns in the Christian Reformed press centered on hymns in the Dutch language. In the next decade, however, two bodies of hymnody were approved for limited, regional use in Christian Reformed congregations. German-speaking



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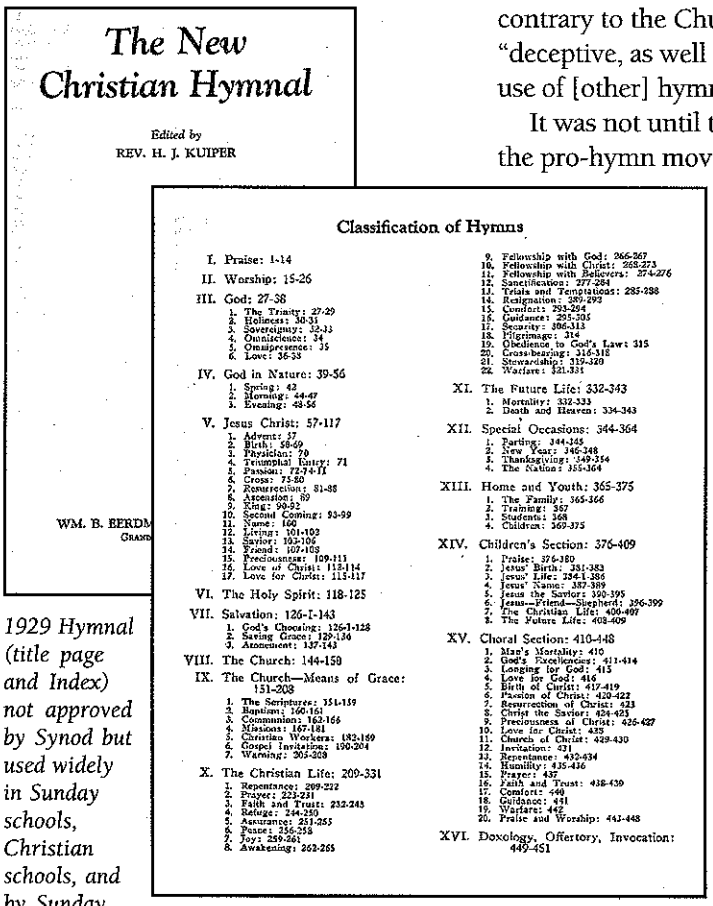
Index to 1927 Psalter.

Reformed congregations had joined the denomination, and their collection of 355 *Gesangen* were allowed "for the present" only in what became known as Classis Ostfriesland.[8] English-speaking congregations of the True Reformed Protestant Dutch Church joined the Christian Reformed Church in 1890, and their collection of 192 hymns for the Heidelberg Catechism, derived from the Reformed Church in America, were approved for use only in the new Classis Hackensack. It is one of the ironies of Christian Reformed history that the denomination was born as a result of several schisms caused in part because of hymn singing but that the use of hymns increased in the denomination due to church mergers!

The focus soon shifted to English-language hymns for the entire denomination. A report on a Christian-school convention introduced another discussion on hymns in schools, homes, and churches.[9] The English-language hymnals associated with the American Sunday-school movement quickly gained popularity in the Christian Reformed church. As the denomination gradually shed its blanket of isolation and became more Americanized, the commercially available American hymnals filled a void.

The American gospel hymns and Sunday-school hymnody were so popular in the denomination that the Christian Reformed Synod of 1898 "deplored" the use of non-approved hymns in Sunday schools and church societies and recommended "Bible" songs, a small collection of biblical paraphrases published by the United Presbyterian Church.[10] In 1904, synod reaffirmed its opposition to the use of any nonapproved hymns in Sunday schools and services of worship.[11] The approved hymns then referred to the few hymns in the Dutch *Psalter,* the German hymns approved in 1883 only for singing in Classis Ostfriesland, and the English Catechism hymns approved in 1890 only for use in Classis Hackensack. No significant body of English-language hymnody was approved at that time for the denomination as a whole.

In spite of these synodical rulings, English hymns were commonly used in Catechism classes, Sunday schools, singing schools, youth societies, and also in some church services—in hymn sings associated with evening services in some congregations. The synodical Committee on Uniformity in Public Praise surveyed the practices of the various congregations in 1908 and compiled an astounding list of hymnals then in use in the denomination. In addition to some Dutch and Dutch-American hymnals, many titles such as *Gospel Hymns, Sunday-School Hymns, Church Hymns and Gospel Songs, Gospel*



The New Christian Hymnal

Edited by
REV. H. J. KUIPER

WM. B. EERDM
GRAND

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1929 Hymnal (title page and Index) not approved by Synod but used widely in Sunday schools, Christian schools, and by Sunday evening hymn sings.

Choir, and *Pentecostal Hymns* are to be found in this list.[12]

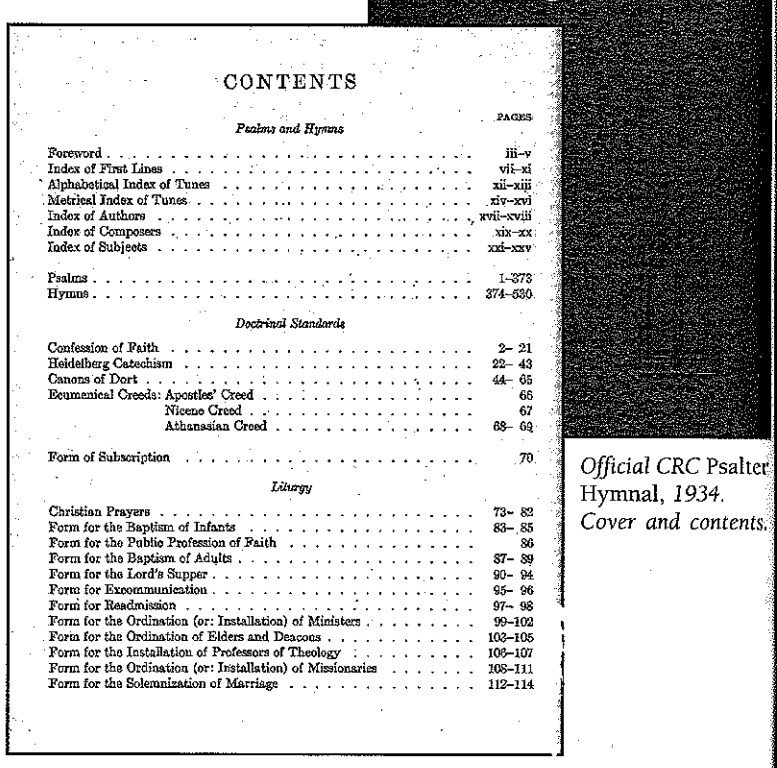
Those who favored the use of hymns found strong support from some leaders in the Christian Reformed denomination. Calvin Seminary professor William Heyns argued for hymns on biblical, pastoral, and liturgical grounds in his teaching of future ministers for the church.[13] William Bode read an essay favoring hymns for a conference of Christian Reformed ministers; expanded for publication, this paper became widely known at the time.[14] Still, the officials of the denomination were slow to change, and even in 1918, synod declined to provide a "suitable volume of hymns for Sunday school use."[15] As late as 1926, synod decreed that the 1914 *Psalter* be republished without the Catechism hymns because the inclusion of these hymns was contrary to the Church Order and "deceptive, as well as promoting the use of [other] hymns."[16]

It was not until the late 1920s that the pro-hymn movement really gained momentum. In four reasonable and cautious *Banner* editorials, Dr. Henry Beets reviewed the history of hymns in the Dutch tradition and in the Christian Reformed Church to date.[17] Warning that hymnody should not replace psalmody, Beets suggested that a synodical committee be appointed to make a careful study of hymns and their potential use in the worship of the church.

That kind of study came to Synod 1928 in the form of an overture from Classis Grand Rapids East. Appealing first to Scripture, the overture claimed that hymns were not forbidden. Then the Church Order was quoted to prove that a few hymns had always been approved and to argue that adding more hymns was merely a "broadening of the principle." Dutch church leaders such as the pietist Gijsbertus Voetius and the popular Abraham Kuyper were cited in support of hymns.[18] However, the same synod received another study on the hymn question from Classis Zeeland. This overture claimed that the introduction of more hymns would eventually lead to the total neglect of the psalms and that "the leaven of Arminianism" in English hymnody would lead to the corruption of Calvinist doctrine in the denomination.[19]

After the advisory committee assigned to the psalm-hymn issue of that year's synod reviewed the various overtures on the question, it made the following classic understatement:

> There is need for definite action. Our people are using hymns. Our churches in some localities sing hymns in song services held immediately before the public worship.



Psalter Hymnal

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Official CRC Psalter Hymnal, *1934. Cover and contents.*

> The demand for hymns has gained great momentum. Your Committee feels that Synod should exercise a guiding hand before this demand can no longer be controlled.[20]

After much discussion, synod agreed that there were no principial objections to the singing of hymns but that a committee should study this matter thoroughly "because of objections which are of a historical nature" and submit a sufficient number of suitable hymns for examination at the following synod.[21] Though several more years would go by before the implications of this principial decision were completely realized, this decision in 1928 stands as a great landmark in the history of church music in the Christian Reformed Church.

The study report requested by Synod 1928 was written by Professor William Heyns of Calvin Seminary; it was submitted to Synod 1930 along with the texts of 197 hymns.[22] Heyns repeated the arguments which had previously been advanced in favor of hymns and reviewed the recent discussions on hymns in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. Then he treated the various objections to hymns which had been raised at the previous Christian Reformed synod, pointing out that most of these objections were not against hymns as such but should serve as admonitions to the church to be careful and selective in its use of hymnody. The various arguments were further discussed, and a final agreement was reached to amend the Church Order to permit the use of hymns.[23] In 1932 the following revision of Article 69 of the Church Order was adopted:

> In the churches only the 150 psalms of David and the collection of hymns for church approved and adopted by Synod, shall be sung. However, while singing the psalms in divine worship is a requirement, the use of the approved hymns is left to the freedom of the churches.[24]

Having heard clearly the warnings that the use of hymns may lead to the neglect of the psalms, synod urged local consistories "to see to it" that *Psalter* verses be memorized in Catechism classes and Sunday schools.[25] The following synod authorized the Dutch-speaking congregations in the denomination to use the hymns recently adopted by the *Gereformeerde Kerk en Nederland.*[26]

Thus the hymn question was officially settled: The entire Christian Reformed Church was now permitted to sing hymns. The inconsistency of the earlier decision—which permitted some hymns only in Classis Hackensack and in Classis Ostfriesland—was now finally resolved. The change in the Church Order to permit "approved" hymns was, in effect, a de jure sanction of the de facto practice in many congregations. By the time this change was ratified in 1934, the denomination's first *Psalter Hymnal* was in its final stages of preparation.[27]

Endnotes

1. A Dutch translation of Nicolaus Decius's German version of the "Agnus Dei" from the mass, *O Lamm Gottes, Unschuldig* (1531).

2. A Dutch translation of the German "Christ ist erstanden," which dates from the twelfth century and which was derived originally from the Latin sequence "Victimae paschali laudes." *Leisen* were pre-Reformation chorales which contained a refrain line borrowed from the "Kyrie eleison" of the mass.

3. Cornelis P. Van Andel, *Tussen de Regels, De Samenhang van Kerkgeschiedenis en Kerklied* (The Hague, 1968) 155, and A.G. Soeting, "Kerkgezang in de Lage Landen" in *Compendium bij het Liedboek* (Amsterdam, 1977) 27-28.

4. "Veertien Redenen Waarom de Ivoering van een Bundel Gezangen in onze Kerk Wenschelijk Schijnt," in *De Vrije Kerk* Feb. 1878: 56-59.

5. "Letters," *De Wachter* 25 Apr. 1878: 1.

6. "Reflectie," *De Wachter* 23 May 1878: 3.

7. Editorial in De Wachter (September 26, 1878), 2-3.

8. *Acts of Synod 1883*, 10, and *Acts of Synod 1884*, 8.

9. In *De Wachter* (September 12, 1888), 2-3.

10. *Acts of Synod 1898*, 68.

11. *Acts of Synod 1904*, 41.

12. *Acts of Synod 1908*, 47-49.

13. *Liturgiek* (Holland, MI, 1903), 126-28.

14. *Praise Service and the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1911).

15. *Acts of Synod 1918*, 44.

16. *Acts of Synod 1926*, 45. When the denomination approved its first English-language *Psalter* in 1914, the Catechism hymns in English previously approved for use only in Classis Hackensack were bound into the same volume and thus available to all the congregations that began to use the 1914 *Psalter*. Following the 1926 decision, the 1914 *Psalter* was reprinted in 1927 without these Catechism hymns.

17. *The Banner* 14, 21, and 28 Oct. and 4 Nov. 1927.

18. *Agenda for Synod 1928*, xxviii-xxxi.

19. *Agenda for Synod 1928*, xxxiii.

20. *Acts of Synod 1928*, 46-47.

21. *Acts of Synod 1928*, 48.

22. "Report on the Hymn Question and the Text of Approved Hymns," *Agenda for Synod 1930* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1930).

23. *Acts of Synod 1930*, 97.

24. *Acts of Synod 1932*, 135.

25. *Acts of Synod 1932*, 136.

26. *Acts of Synod 1934*, 147-48.

27. The history of the *Psalter Hymnal* is recounted in my article "*The Psalter Hymnal* from Its Dutch Roots to the 1987 Edition," in *Origins* 7.1 (1989), 39-42.

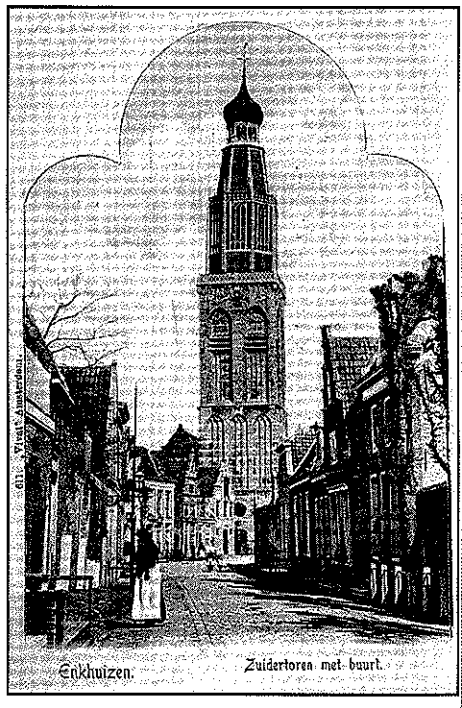
Peter Spoelstra — Organist Extraordinaire

Carla Wikkerink

Music is Peter Spoelstra's language. That is how I have learned to understand him. If he plays at a wedding, it will be joyful. He can make the church sing. At a funeral he can lift our spirits. You will never understand him if you wait to hear the answers to your questions through something he says. Instead, go to the First Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario, and if you hear Peter Spoelstra play the organ, you will hear his heart before you even walk into the building. And then, when you walk into the sanctuary, close your eyes and feel the music—it is everywhere, speaking to you.

Peter Spoelstra is my opa. He was born in Enkhuizen, the Netherlands, in 1914. He was born into a musical family. Each of his siblings played an instrument, and together they had a quartet of musicians in the house. They all played brass instruments, but Peter wanted to play the organ. His father played the organ in Enkhuizen, and at that time everyone who could afford one owned a house organ. Peter began to play little tunes and became very interested in learning how to master the keyboard. When he was nine years old, he took lessons from his uncle who was taking lessons himself from a professional organist. When he was fourteen, Peter was given lessons by R.J. Crevecoeur on a large pipe organ in Enkhuizen. Peter studied under Crevecoeur—a man who influenced him the most—for three years and then began playing for church services and had eight of his own pupils. He soon became the organist at his own church and gave his first concert in 1933, at the age of nineteen.

His father sold a piano that they had in the house for a two-manual pump organ. Peter remembers that his brother Dick, who was not really interested in music, pumped the organ with one hand and read a book with the other while his brother played. Dick would often leave the pump without his brother knowing until the organ wheezed and groaned like a bagpipe out of air. To replace Dick, Peter's father made a crude but functional contraption whereby the pump was attached to a motor which kept the music playing—until the belt on one of the wheels would fall off. This would not be so bad, except that the motor was upstairs, attached to a long pipe that had been fixed to the pump of the organ. On a lazy day, having the belt fall off was a good excuse for Peter to walk away and practice more important skills, like his soccer techniques.

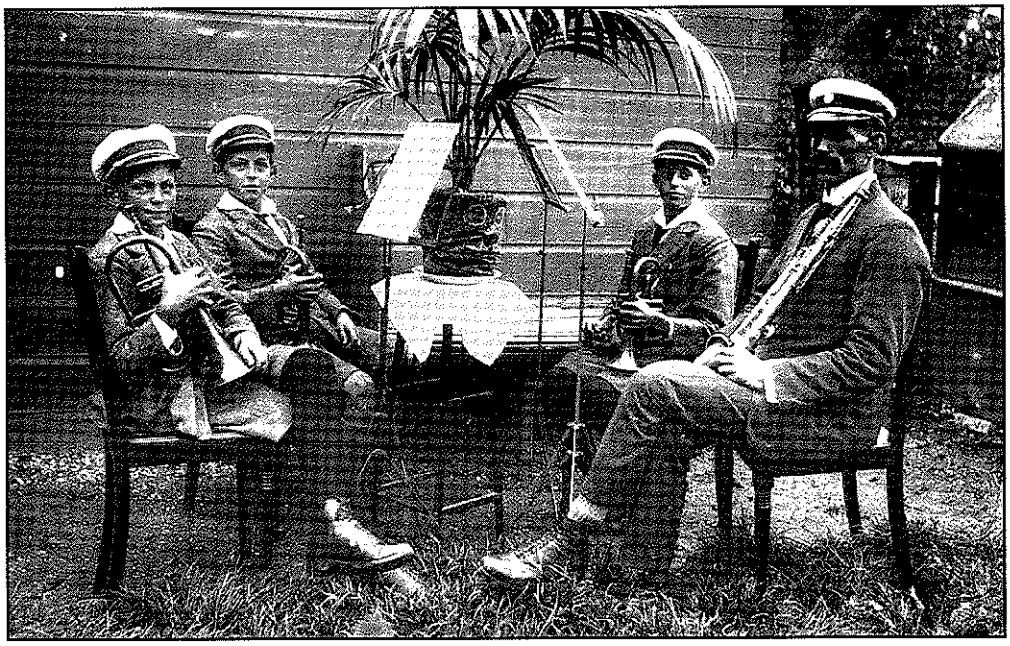


Enkhuizen city center and home of Spoelstra family.

Peter married Claire (Klaaske)

Carla Wikkerink is a recent graduate of Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario. Her article is drawn from a longer study she wrote for Dr. Bert Polman.

Elgersma on March 23, 1939. The wedding was one of pomp and ceremony, as the city band played and paraded down the cobblestone streets of Enkhuizen. The day after their wedding, Peter and Claire emigrated to Canada with all of Claire's family. For most of their married life they lived in Stoney Creek, Ontario.



Spoelstra family brass quartet. L to R, Peter, Dirk, Matthuis and father Sjuart.

The first organ Peter played in Canada could hardly be called an organ at all. His father called it a harmonica. It was a two-manual harmonium, or reed organ, with no pipes—except a few fake ones—and no pedals. He played it for fifteen years, before his pipe dream came true and he got a new organ. Peter did become very frustrated with his home church (First CRC of Hamilton) for not putting funds aside for a new organ; he even took up the violin for a while, thinking he would never again be a church organist. But he did see the day that First Church had enough money for a new organ, and he has not moved from the organ bench ever since.

Of the three loves in Peter's life—hockey, gardening, and music—music is his obsession. At the advice of his father, he worked toward and received his ARCT degree in music in 1955. He did well on the exams he had to do: theory, harmony, counterpoint, and form. The history exam, however, he failed. "I knew everything there was to know but found it difficult to express myself," Opa explained to me. He took the history exam the following year and passed, but then he still had to do the practical examination. Peter's examiner was Charlie Peaker, a well-known musician and performer. Peter was to play Fantasia in G Minor. The fantasia was followed by a fugue, and Charlie told him to forget the fantasia and start right at the fugue. Peter obliged, but before he had finished a page, Charlie stopped him, yelling out, That's enough! So he closed his book and walked away, having passed.

On September 1, 1981, Opa recorded his first and only record, *Organ Forth His Excellence.* The recording was a present from his children, given to him in order to preserve his music after he passes on. Some time after the release of his record, a colleague of Peter sent the record to Bob Kerr, who had his own radio show on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). Bob Kerr enjoyed the record and featured it on his program over a two-week period.

Peter still plays an average of five weddings and five funerals a year. Multiply that by fifty years, and he has played at five hundred ceremonies in his life. Of course, unusual things happened at times. There was the time the bride and groom said I do and then ran out of church, thinking the ceremony was over—only to be called back and forced to sit through two songs, a message, and speeches by the mothers-in-law. At another wedding, for which Peter was asked to play Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony,* the groom scooped up his bride into his arms and walked her out to the car.

The music most cherished by Peter—and by the church congregation—is the music he plays for funerals. For my grandfather, funerals are celebrations of the life of the deceased. Opa will always use this opportunity to express emotion—his grief, his condolences, and love to the family—by playing special pieces which were meaningful to the person who has passed away. He also plays pieces which are comforting to the family. I have been approached many times by family members whose loved ones have passed away but whose pain was lessened by the compassion Peter showed them through his playing.

I asked him if he had accomplished all that he wanted to in this lifetime. I think there is still much more to do, he said. There are still pieces of music I would like to study. I'm not a giver-upper, you know. I know he is not. This is a man who for seventy-four years has sat himself behind a



Peter Spoelstra at the organ.

keyboard and has played his scales, practiced his pieces, and memorized his fugues.

Retire?! I get a great kick out of this. I plan to do this until I drop! exclaims Peter as he tries, unsuccessfully, for the five thousandth time, to make a proper knot in one more tie on his way out to one more funeral; all the while, the phone is ringing with Rev. Fred Heslinga saying, Peter, we're stuck. Will you play for one more service?

Peter Spoelstra officially retired as principal organist at First Christian Reformed Church on September 1, 1996. But he will never really retire. He still plays for First Church, for weddings, for funerals—and he will continue to do so until the Lord takes him home.

Peter Spoelstra has been given a unique gift that not all musicians have or cherish. He does not just read the music in front of him—he feels it. And he loves to improvise. I have never seen my grandfather play in church with a *Psalter Hymnal* in front of him. (This was not always a good thing. He has stopped short of the required number of stanzas or, worse yet, played stanzas that were not there!) His improvisation is an important part of what distinguishes Peter Spoelstra from other organists, and it can be heard in every piece he plays.

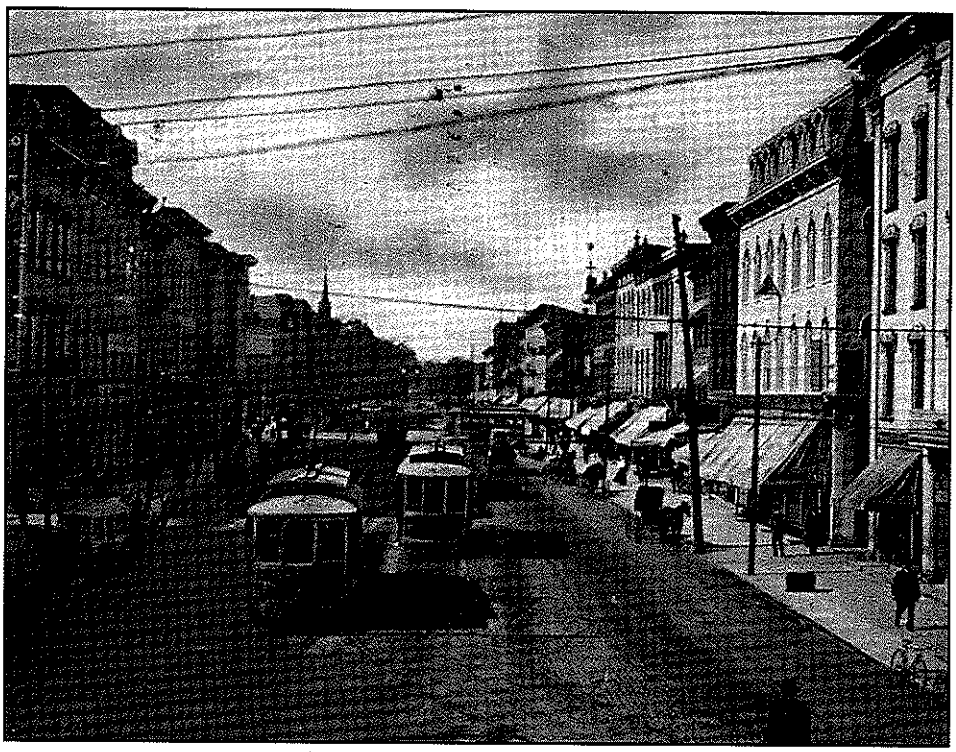
But will you ever stop playing? I asked him. There comes a time, my grandfather said to me. Just that: There comes a time. He has played in churches, in both the Netherlands and Canada, for sixty-four years. The Lord gave me the gift of music. It has been a constant joy to organ forth his excellence.

Kalamazoo

Mail from Kalamazoo, 1886 – 1911

H.J. Brinks

Immigrant letters and memoirs provide exceptional sources for discovering the impressions and experiences of daily life in Dutch-American communities. The following, by George Bos, William Lucasse, Harm Zuiderveen, and B.A. Hendriksen, span the years when Kalamazoo attracted an increasing number of Netherlanders.



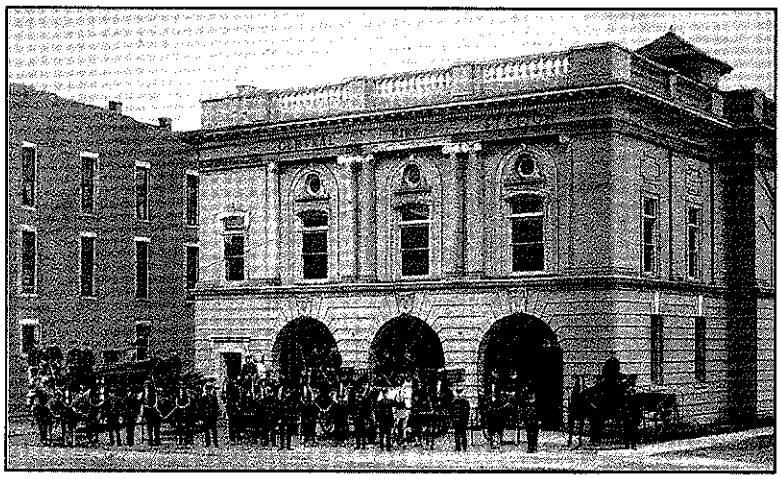
Main Street, Kalamazoo.

In 1886, after a two-day train ride from New York's Ellis Island, George Bos's family arrived in Kalamazoo. "The conductor," George wrote,

> shouted, Kalamazoo! and touched my father's arm. We left the train and soon spied our brothers John and Henry. What a happy reunion! The boys had rented a house and had bought some furniture. A kindly neighbor had breakfast ready for us, and we also went there for dinner. During the following days many old friends of our folks visited us—some belonging to the Reformed church and others to the Christian Reformed—both sides trying hard to make Father join their respective churches. They even brought books for us to read regarding their churches. One Sunday we would go to the Reformed church and perhaps the next Sunday to another one. In the meantime brother Gerhardus perused the books carefully and came to the conclusion that the Christian Reformed church was closest to the one we'd left in Holland, and Father and his family joined it.
>
> Kalamazoo was called the Celery City at that time and kept that name for many years. Most of the members of our church were celery farmers, although some worked in factories. We lived in the midst of a Holland community and had our own grocery stores and bakeries. All the large stores in town had at least one clerk that spoke Dutch. The services in our church were conducted in the Dutch language as were all its activities such as Sunday school, catechism, societies, and even the Christian school. Everything was carried on in the language of their fathers. Every Dutch community was a miniature Holland, and English was frowned on, especially if religion was being discussed. It seems that many of the old pioneers thought our glorious heritage—the doctrines of Calvin—could only be interpreted and preached properly in the Dutch language.
>
> Although the language was no barrier in our community, Mother didn't like it in America. If we had had the money, I think she would have nagged Father to return. It also

happened to be a very hot summer—the temperature sometimes reached the 100-degree mark. We were not used to that, and Mother spent most of the day in the cellar and even slept there.

We boys didn't like it here either. The other children all spoke English, and we couldn't understand them. They often poked fun at us and said, "Dutchman, Dutchman, belly full of straw, can't say nothing but ya, ya, ya." And who were these youngsters? Sad to say, they usually were of our own kind who had been here somewhat longer and had a smattering of the native tongue. To the best of my knowledge we never experienced this painful and humiliating feeling at the hands of the American boys and girls. They may have smiled at our attempts to make them understand, but ridiculing us, no.

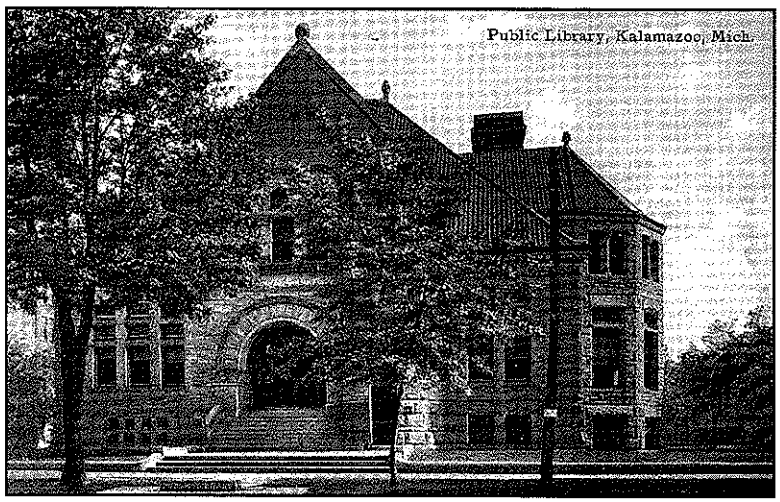


Fire station

September came around, and we had to go to school. How we dreaded it because we didn't understand the language! Brother Gerhardus took us, and by means of an interpreter (the janitor) he asked to be enrolled also. The principal was at a loss as to what to do. She called the superintendent, and he gave his permission. Much against our will we were placed in the first grade at my brother's request in order to learn the various phonetic sounds. Later on we saw the wisdom of this plan and were glad that we went through the grades, staying two or three months in a grade until we caught up to those of our age.

To our great surprise, all the teachers including the principal were ladies, and they kept order as well as the men teachers in the Netherlands. But they ruled more by love than fear.

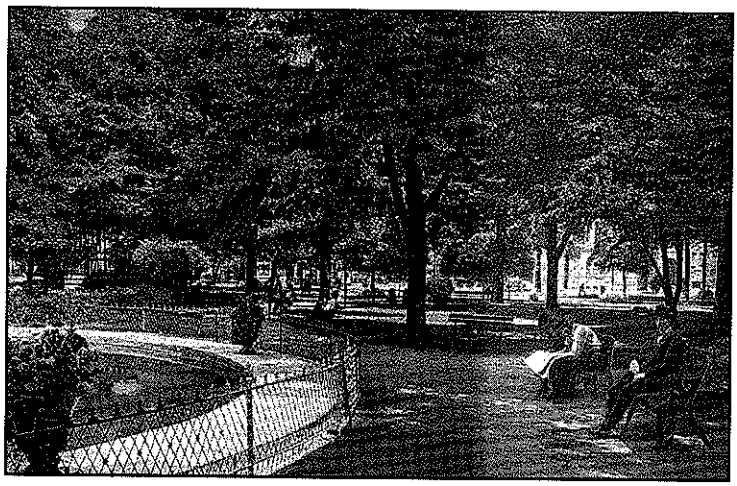
The school itself was a much nicer building than the one we attended in Holland and was heated by a furnace. The rooms and halls were very clean—swept every day and often mopped. In comparison, they were much cleaner than in the old country. True, once a year the floors of our Dutch schools were scrubbed and the building cleaned inside and out, but during the year the floors were swept only once or twice a week. The teachers had to take care of the stoves.



Kalamazoo Public Library.

It didn't take too long before we could read somewhat. I give all the credit to the teachers of that public school who simply outdid themselves to help us. The teachers admired our handwriting, and sometimes our papers were sent to various rooms for exhibition. The schools in Holland are more thorough, especially in writing and arithmetic. Let me give you an example. When I left Holland, I was in the beginning of the sixth year—I'll call it the sixth grade. When I passed into the sixth grade, the lower class was studying fractions (denominators up to 100), and the upper class had decimals. One morning both classes had a test. I quickly did our test and then turned over my slate and worked out the test of the higher class. Not one in either class was finished. I raised my finger as the teacher had requested if we were finished. She came to my seat, looked over the problems, and marked them all right. As she was leaving, I turned my slate over and showed her the work of the other class. They also were right. She was so surprised that for a moment she was speechless. Then she took my slate and showed it to the principal, who made a few remarks to the class praising my work, and my prestige rose by leaps and bounds. The class began to respect the "green" Dutchman.

Of course, history and geography were different entirely. We liked US history very much and Washington and Lincoln became our heroes too. We had seen a map of the United States but had never studied it. How surprised we were to learn that the US was almost the size of Europe and that more than twenty countries the size of the Netherlands could be carved from the state of Texas, and Texas was only one of the forty-five states—Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Alaska, and Hawaii still being territories at that time. We found English and spelling to be the hardest subjects, but we did our best, and the teachers were satisfied.



Bronson Park.

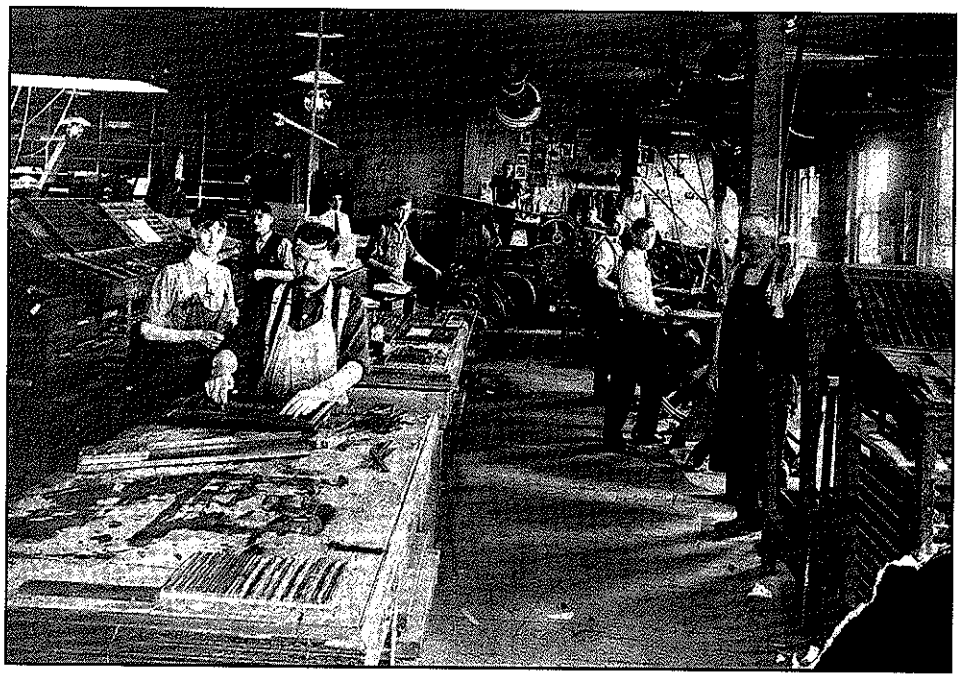
William J. Lucasse, a Kalamazoo attorney who was dying of consumption in 1885, wrote a lengthy letter to his uncle and aunt in the Netherlands.* With time on his hands and too little strength to pursue professional activity in his Main Street office, Lucasse filled ten handwritten pages with details about the founding of Kalamazoo's first English-language Dutch Reformed Church and a wide spectrum of community news.

"As for the new English congregation," he wrote,

> it is prospering. Last Sunday we accepted seven new members, among others, Susie Hoedemaaker. We began with about twenty-six members, most of them single young men and women and the following married persons: J.J. Van Kersen, Jim Lucasse, F. Van Zee, G. Rabbis, A. Schrier, J. Kools Jr., and perhaps one or two more. Since that short time (three months) the membership has doubled I think, and we have managed to collect between four and five hundred dollars—which is a sign of sacrifice. it is pleasant to behold—each member is actively involved. The prayer services are well attended. Our Sunday school has approximately seventy-five members including the teachers. Sunday mornings we have worship services in a hall on Main Street above Bruin and Skinner's Store, in the evening in the church building of the First Church. Our attendance is very good. Last Sunday evening the church was full. Our hall is almost getting too small. Frank and Jake Lucasse, and Jary and Jan Kools Jr. and Wife, and Jan Van de Laare and Wife are also members.
>
> The First Reformed Church has a new tower costing $300 and the building has been completely spruced up and painted. They are well situated. there had been some grumbling about the new English congregation, but that has died down recently and things are going well although one would wish for a little more peace, love, and unity.

Illness inhibited Lucasse's participation in Kalamazoo's growth, but he retained a lively interest in Main Street's activities. Surveying the city's major changes, he wrote,

> Kalamazoo has really changed the past couple of years. We now have streetcars on Main, Burdick, Lavel, Rose and West streets. Last winter this was very convenient for me. I just had to walk a little ways from our house to the West streetcar and could ride very close to my office.
>
> The old cemetery where father's first wife and two children are buried has been made into a park.
>
> The Presbyterians built a large brick building on the old property. it is a spacious building with seating capacity for 1,200, as well as rooms for prayer services, consistory meetings, etc., and what I can't appreciate too much—large kitchen with cook stoves so that they can serve "oysters suppers." The building cost $30,000.
>
> The Episcopalians also built a large church on the property of the old St. John's Church on Lavel Street. St Luke's Church on Main Street is no longer being used and maybe our little congregation can buy it if we can raise the necessary funds.
>
> North and next to Trask is the Academy of Music, one of the most



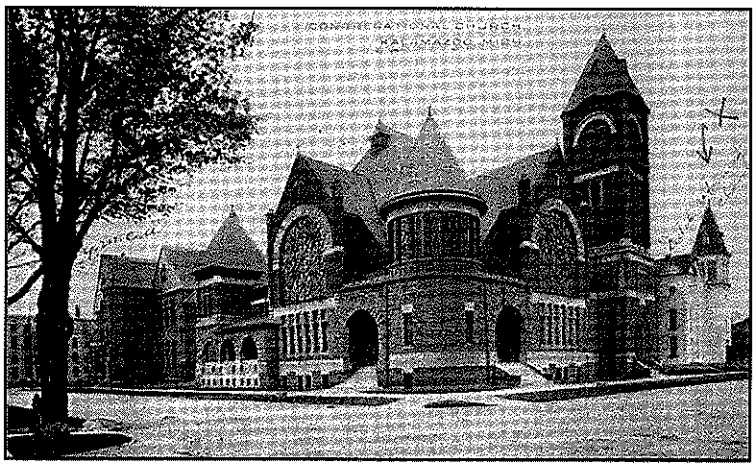
Doubleday Printing.

*Translation by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres.

beautiful and well designed buildings west of New York.

A couple of blocks north of the old cemetery is the Children's Home—a good-sized building where neglected children are being cared for. The old Dewing did much for this organization as did his son after him. It is a sizable organization.

The Baptists raised a building in which the young lady students of Kalamazoo College are housed. Mrs. Israel left the college $3,000 in her will in memory of her son who perished in the Greely expedition to the North Pole.



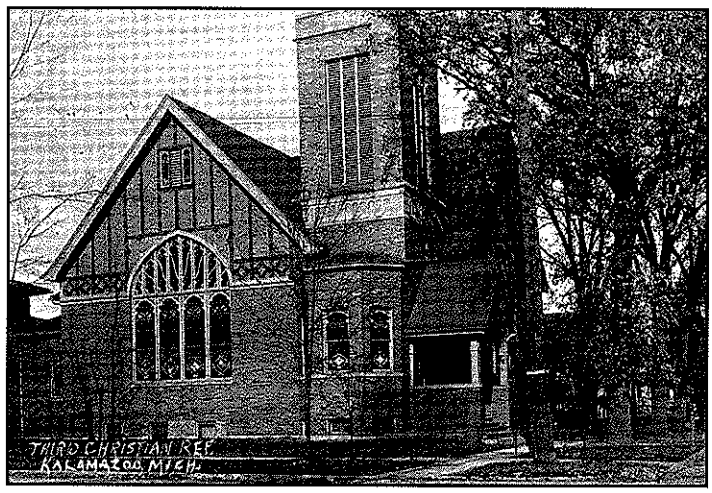
Kalamazoo churches, 1910: center — Congregational; right — Reformed Church in America; left YMCA

The Old Union School building is gone and in its place are two new buildings. One, where [sister] Katie goes, which is called the High School, is a poorly constructed building and does not have a good heating system. In the winter the children have to keep their coats on in the morning and in the afternoon they suffocate from the heat. The other building, the Vine Street School, is somewhat better, but it looks more like a factory than a school.

A new school is going up on Burdick Street, on the way to A. Pijl, which Uncle Jan is going to roof.

The new courthouse is a beautiful building with offices for all the county officers—clerk, treasurer, register of deeds, and judge of probate—also offices for the circuit judge, and the board of supervisors, and a large chamber for the Circuit Court. It is finished in hardwood. The doors and windows (supplied by DeGraaf, Vrieling and Co.) are also of hardwood. The old court house has been removed. It would take me a week to describe in detail the new building, but I don't think you are that interested in it.

Even though he knew that he would never practice his profession in the new Court House, William's admiration for the building and its appointments was undiminished. Meanwhile he faced his final days with astonishing equanimity and reported,



Kalamazoo Third Christian Reformed Church, 1915.

> About four weeks ago I called another doctor, Dr. Osborn, for a second opinion. He said the same as Dr. Snook, that there was no hope for full recovery, but that perhaps I might have a time where I could possibly be up and around and even do some business. They declared that the left lung has an abscess which is practically incurable and they have no hope for healing. Besides that, my air passages and both lungs are inflamed so that they constantly produce phlegm, much of what I cough up is pure matter.
>
> Because of this coughing I have lost much of my strength. as long as I can eat and sleep I can keep the infection at bay. But when my appetite is gone, then I will not be able to last long. It is not easy to form an opinion about how long I can last this way, perhaps a month, or possibly even a year or two. Personally I don't think I will make it through another summer. I do feel much better now and if the winter is consistently cold, then I may be able to make it to March, but the disagreeable spring and summer weather will probably finish me.
>
> Two weeks ago Dr. Snook advised me to put all my business in order. He said that with the cold weather I had improved somewhat but not enough and he gave me little hope. Yesterday there was a remarkable change and the doctor said that if I could keep the infection down, I might be able to get on my feet again for a short while.
>
> So, this is how the matter stands, I will soon be in my grave, but how long neither I nor the doctor can say. The disease is consumption of the tissue of the lung.
>
> Be it long or short, death does not frighten me because I know that my Redeemer lives, and that a Heavenly Father rules everything and He does all things well. He holds my hand and leads me in green pastures of perfect rest, submission, and trust. He anoints me with joy. He heaps blessings on me. I have the best care in the world. All my desires are met—many visitors come and always take along some kind of treat—my neighbors

offer me the use of their horse and buggy for a ride, and over and above all of that I delight in the joy of God which exceeds far beyond our understanding and which Jesus gives to his own.



Kalamazoo Biscuit Company, 1910.

Writing on his "day off," July 4, 1903, Harm Zuiderveen offered a widely ranging but quite different description of his Kalamazoo experience. "We have rented another home," he explained,

> and we have enough land with this new property to raise beans, lettuce, beets, carrots and other vegetables. The land is rather low and

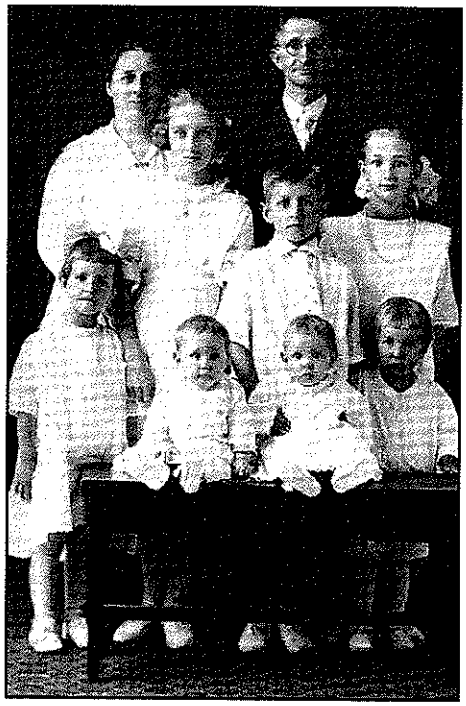

Kalamazoo First Christian Reformed Church.

> wet, so we do not raise potatoes. . . . The climate is different—warmer than the Netherlands. It makes us realize that we are closer to the sun. You sometimes have temperatures of 80 to 85 degrees, but it is presently 90 to 95 degrees here, and it is warm all the time. If we cut hay in the morning, it can be windrowed by evening. If it rains, the warmth continues without a cooling period as in the Netherlands. That never happens here at this time of the year.
>
> We have bean plants blooming beautifully, and the early plants are already done blooming. Things develop faster here than in Holland.
>
> The celery farmers are busy too now and are beginning to see their harvest. Celery is eaten a great deal here, and it is also used for medicine. A celery stalk is about six inches long. People eat it raw.
>
> Vander Veen, the farmer I wrote about earlier, has one hundred acres, but there are people with only four or five acres who can make a decent living.
>
> Betje, my wife, can bake all of our bread, but we buy bread too. However, I prefer Betje's bread, and it's also healthier. We can buy rye [Dutch rye] bread, but we use little of it—not even four pounds since we arrived here. It tastes just like your sweet rye bread.
>
> I . . . already have worked for a long time paving the streets here with black people. We make asphalt roads here—like you have never seen. There is work enough here both for winter and summer—more than I can handle.
>
> *H. Zuiderveen wife and children*
> *North West Street*
> *Kalamazoo, Michigan*
>
> P.S. Our children grow well here.

Kalamazoo's First Christian Reformed Church, home to most of the area's immigrants from Groningen, acquired its eighth pastor, Samuel Eldersveld, in 1911. B.A. Hendriksen wrote about their new "dominie" with admiration and enthusiasm.


Rev. Samuel Eldersveld

"Church life seems better here than in the Netherlands," he asserted to H. Den Uyl, there are about 15,000 Netherlanders here and most go to English


Rev. Samuel Eldersveld Family.

> churches. But there are still four Dutch churches here—two Christian Reformed and two Reformed—which have services three times each Sunday, and in good weather all the services are nearly full. Our preacher is Eldersveld, a faithful messenger of the Lord.
>
> Our church has become too small so that next spring we will begin to build a new church—a brick

church this time. The present structure is of wood. One of our deacons gave $1,000 for the new building and promised an equal amount in the future. So that helps a great deal. Furthermore, all the members will contribute according to their abilities.

Our minister came from the Netherlands when he was fifteen years old and was employed as an ordinary workman in a factory. He saved until he acquired a little nest egg. But when he was twenty-five years old, he became convinced that the Lord was calling him into the ministry. He didn't dare turn his back on that call, and he has not regretted that decision.

He requested and received financial support for his studies and after six years was ordained into the ministry. Thereafter he married, and now he and his wife have three children. His wife is also an openly friendly person, an American who speaks Dutch well. Pastor Eldersveld revealed his life's story and praised the Lord for leading and blessing him along life's path.

So you can easily see that we do not find ourselves among strangers here.

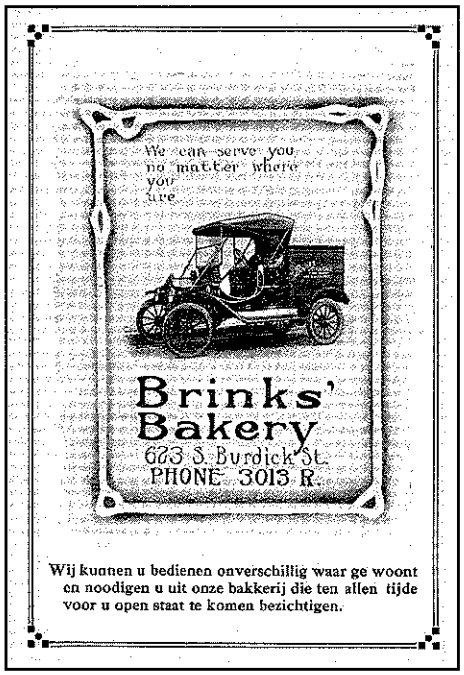
We also have a Christian school (literally, a school with the Bible). Our son William goes there and is well along in learning English . . . . the school's principal is Mr. Blystra.

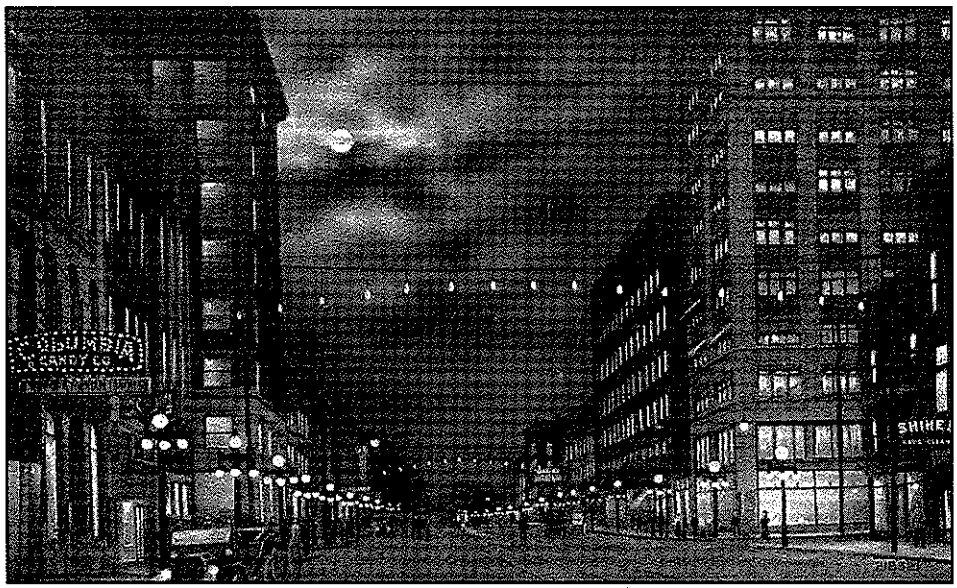
Taverns, bars, and all other stores are closed here on Sunday. And women are never admitted to bars. One seldom sees anyone drunk on the streets.

The main street's brick buildings stand in rows next to each other, but the houses nearby are separated by yards of ten to twenty meters. We live about thirty minutes from the main street, the church, and the school, but now we have purchased a rather large house close to the city center. We hope to move within two weeks. It has seven nice rooms and a roomy basement under the whole house. We bought it from a Hollander. This place is crawling with Hollanders. In most of the stores you can speak Dutch, and even the large stores have one or two clerks who know the language. In addition, Dutch tradesmen come down the streets with horses and wagons to offer every possible service, and some sell groceries too. We have had little difficulty with the language.

There are more automobiles here than there are bicycles in the Netherlands. You can't walk for a minute without one or more passing you. But they don't drive so wildly as in the Netherlands. They stop politely, allowing people to cross in front of them.

Now, for this time, we have reported enough. ❧



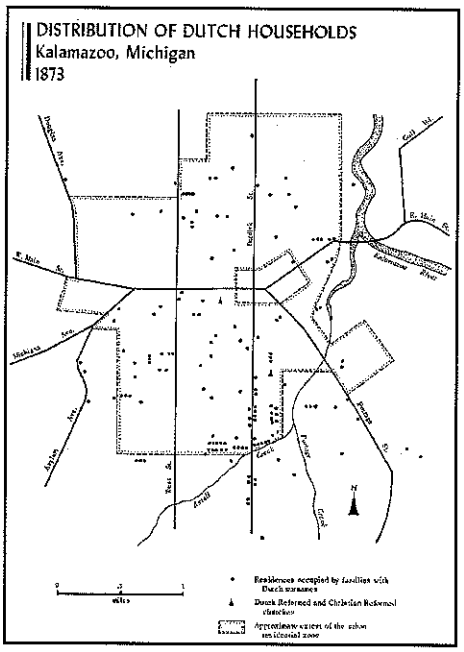


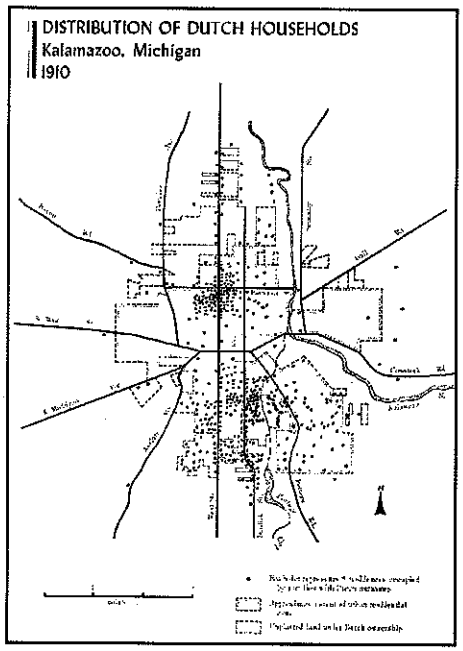
(top) Brinks Bakery ad.

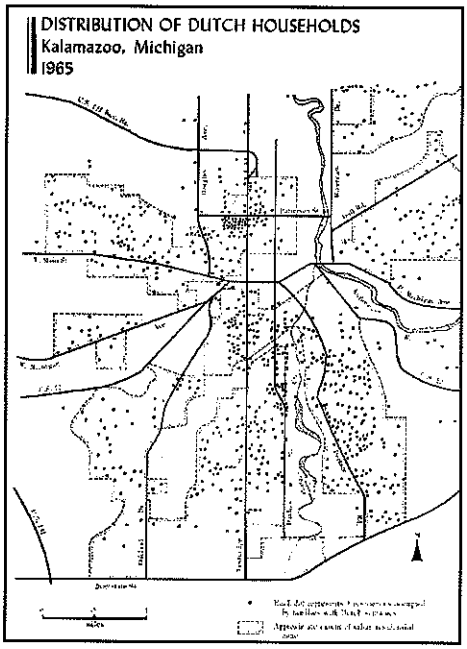
(below) Kalamazoo Main Street at night, 1920s.

Celery

H.J. Brinks







Kalamazoo Street maps. (top) 1873, p. 449; (above) 1910, p. 450; (right) 1965, p. 455. Courtesy of the authors, John Jakle and James Wheeler, in "The Changing Residential Structure of the Dutch Population in Kalamazoo, Michigan," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, V. 59, no. 3, 441-460.

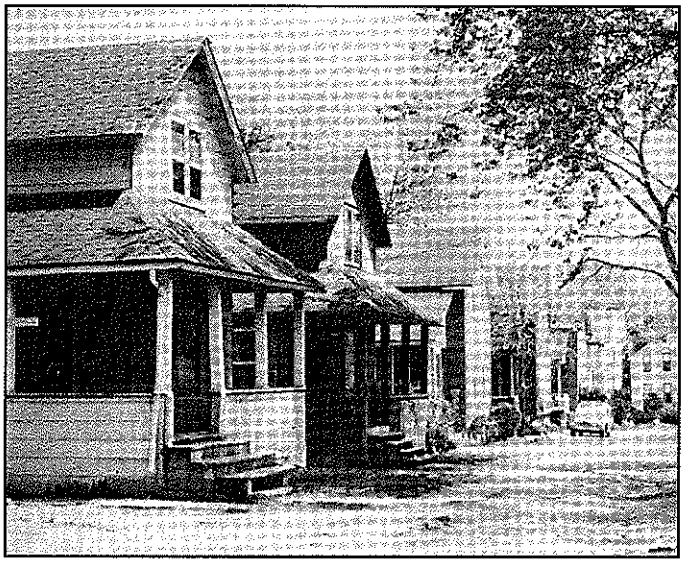
In their analysis of Kalamazoo's Dutch populace, geographers John Jakle and James Wheeler trace the history of that subculture from the 1850 arrival of Paulus Den Bleyker to the 1960s, with a special focus on Dutch residential patterns. Until the 1870s, Dutch immigrants were scattered throughout the city with only a slight degree of concentration on the south side where Burdick Street intersects with Axtell Creek, an area which later featured a heavy concentration of celery farms. However, by 1910, Dutch immigrants were clustered in two districts. To the south, along Burdick, a large cluster of Zeelanders had expanded their holdings of garden farms; northward a cluster of Frisians gathered around the intersection of Paterson and West streets. There the Raven Creek lowlands also provided opportunities for garden farming.

Describing these two regions Jakle and Wheeler wrote,

> The two Dutch residential concentrations represented distinct communities differentiated not only by geographical location, but by cultural differences, particularly language, reflecting immigrant provincial origins. To the north side came settlers from Frisia [and Groningen who spoke dialects] all but incomprehensible to the Zeelanders assembled in the Axtell Valley. . . . Very little mixing of the two groups occurred initially, except at the large First Christian Reformed Church and at the social clubs located in the seemingly neutral ground of the central business district. Where such intergroup contact occurred, the need for a common language was immediately felt with a resultant recourse to English on an increasing scale.

Celery cultivation flourished on the reclaimed wastelands which mainline agriculture had bypassed. These low-cost soils sustained dozens of two- and three-acre garden farms, which provided adequate livelihoods for large families of eight and even ten. Already in 1903, agricultural analysts noted that

> the competition of the Hollanders around Kalamazoo, Michigan is so ruinous that the business of early celery elsewhere holds no further promise of financial success. True the methods adopted by these people and their success—if such it is—are based on a system of drudgery to which the American vegetable grower will not readily submit, on the employment of the whole family, father, mother, grandparents and children of all ages and sizes, on keeping all of them at work every minute of long working days. . . . If they were forced to employ able-bodied working men for various operations, and then sell their crops to shippers . . . it is doubtful whether the industry would long survive.



Residential Dutch crowding.

John Gernaat described the complicated labor-intensive process of raising celery in the following recollection:

> My father, John Gernaat, Sr., came to Kalamazoo from the Netherlands in 1902 and my mother, Helen Steinhaus, came in 1904. They were married shortly afterwards and rented a house on the north side of Kalamazoo. My dad got a job in a spring shop about four miles away. (This spring shop later became known as Ingersol's.) In 1917 they purchased a house on five acres of muck land. By this time they had a family of six children and decided to supplement their income by raising celery.
>
> To begin, the crop seeds were placed in a large enamel dishpan filled with moist soil and placed over a floor heat register in the house. After the seed germinated we would broadcast (throw it by hand) the sprouted seeds over a bed of soil in the greenhouse. Heat was generated by free-standing coal stoves.
>
> When plants reached about two inches high they were transplanted in one-inch squares into seedbeds. The planters sat on a board stretched across the bed, resting on cement blocks. Another board was placed ahead of the planters on which they could rest their feet. An eighteen-inch roller with pegs one inch apart was used to make marks for the plants. The beds were about eight feet across. Two planters could reach half way. After filling the eighteen-inch span the planters had to move the two boards and blocks, make another pattern of holes and repeat the procedure.
>
> When the threat of frost was gone the celery was planted outside in forty-rod rows. We made straight rows with wire pulled tight on both ends of the row. One of us walked along this row with a ski to compress the soil and the planters crawled on their hands and knees and planted the celery plants 4 1/2 inches apart.
>
> If the temperature dropped to 35 degrees, water was applied during the night to prevent the plants from freezing. Water was applied through above-ground sprinkling lines, with nozzles spaced thirty inches apart. Water was generated from four-inch wells with pumps hooked up to 44-volt electrical power. These pumps were a frequent target for lightning strikes A commercial fertilizer was used in addition to natural fertilizers available from the family cow, pig, and the ever-present outhouse. A crop of turnips was sown into the ground after the celery was harvested. This was later plowed under to enrich the soil.
>
> When the celery matured to approximately twenty inches (about two weeks prior to harvest), boards were placed on both sides of each row of celery. These boards measured 1 inch x 12 inches x 14 feet long. The purpose of this was to bleach the celery. It also sweetened and tenderized the stalk.
>
> When ready to ship, the boards were first removed and each stalk was cut with a knife just above the root. This was always done very



Celery fields circa 1905.

early (2:00-3:00 AM) to avoid wilting. The stalks were placed on piles of one dozen each. After a row was trimmed, someone would count the dozens to keep track of how much was done. The orders could vary from 100 to 200 dozen. The trimming needed to be done by 6:00 AM before the sun shone.



Celery fields circa 1926.

The celery was loaded on a wagon and pulled into a shed by horses, and later a tractor. The celery was immersed into a tank of water and each stalk was washed by hand with a brush. The stalks were placed between two pegs and stacked into bunches of one dozen. They were then tied at the top and bottom with red twine which came on a cone that turned as it was used. The person tying wore a ring with a curved knife blade that cut the twine.

The celery from our family business was sold to a broker who ordered what he needed. If the orders didn't come through we had to sell on consignment to the South Water Street Market in Chicago. This of course meant lower prices and sometimes nothing at all.

Until 1937 all of this work was considered a part-time job for my dad as he was still riding his bike every day to work at the spring shop. By 1928 we had grown to a family of eleven children and each one of us was expected to do our part before going to school or work. Being the youngest, one of my jobs was to milk the cow before going to school. My mother would have breakfast prepared for all of us at 6:00 AM after the celery was harvested. You can imagine the large amount of food that was consumed by a hungry crew. She once told me they had a potato bin in the basement the same size as their coal bin which held several tons of coal. They also had a standing order with the owner of an apple orchard to deliver one bushel of apples each week.

In 1937 after several of the family members had married, Dad was able to quit his job at the spring shop and things were a little easier. The work was less labor intensive when we started using weed control and bought our first planting machine. This was built by Holland Transplant Company of Holland, Michigan. It was a two-row, two-person planter and did a better job than by hand. The first furrow was made with a tool. The tongue of the machine fit into this groove which kept the machine moving in a straight line. This was not only considerably faster but the planters could sit comfortably instead of crawling on their hands and knees. We were also able to start earlier in the spring because someone came up with the idea of covering the early crop with paper. This paper came on a roll and was about 20 inches wide. We put wire hoops about two feet apart, draped them with the paper and shoveled dirt along the edges to keep it down. This gave a greenhouse effect and enabled us to get our product on the market much earlier.

During the 1940s the market was very good. My dad and two brothers bought five more farms totaling about thirty-five acres. We also rented some land in Comstock, about eight miles away. This was a relatively small amount of acreage but four families were able to make a living. We eventually built a cold storage for the celery and in 1947 bought a 11/4 ton truck and established a route as far west as Iowa.

In the late 1940s California Pascal celery came on the market. The stalks were less stringy and because they did not bleach the celery it stayed green. California had the advantage of a year-round growing season and transportation by rail was cheap. The celery farmers saw the handwriting on the wall and began raising bedding plants for retail and wholesale, along with the celery. Eventually the bedding plants replaced the celery crops. Most of the growers already had small greenhouses to raise their celery plants so they were familiar with plant growth. This gradually



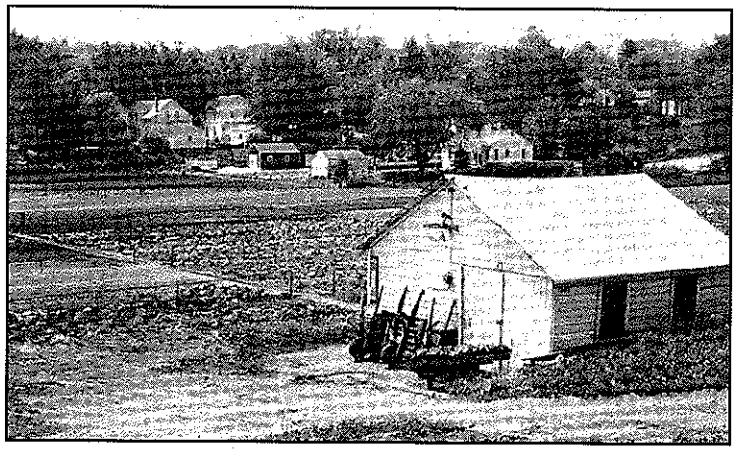
Gernaat Family with load of boxed celery, 1944.

> expanded to the point where Kalamazoo was no longer called the Celery City. It now has become known as one of the largest bedding-plant producers in the world.

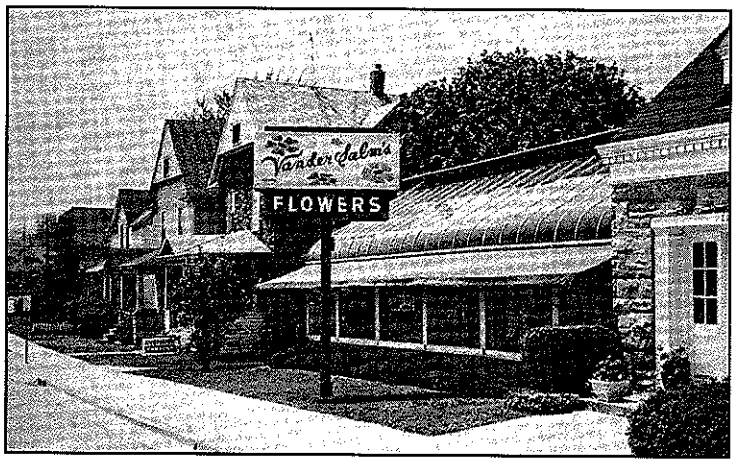
Following World War II Kalamazoo's Dutch Americans moved out of their traditional neighborhoods to purchase homes in all parts of the city, its suburbs and adjacent towns. By 1965 they were widely dispersed in Kalamazoo County. The earlier ghettoization of the pre-war era, which peaked in the 1920s, attracted unfavorable notice in a Kalamazoo Telegraph editorial which complained,

> The Dutchman has contributed to the business of Kalamazoo, oh yes. He has built up one of the industries of the town and extended the fame of the place to distant parts, but he has been all the time working for himself; he has kept to his own circles in the most clannish manner possible, he has learned little English, familiarized himself all too little with our local laws and public movements, and remained a Dutchman, whereas he should have become more an American.

In contrast, Kalamazoo's *Encore* magazine (October 1994) featured the Dutch and lauded their economic achievements together with their vigorous participation in the area's political and cultural activities. Phil Schubert, *Encore's* publisher, introduced his "Dutch Treat" feature by noting that Kalamazoo's telephone directory contains about 1,500 names that start with *Van* and that, although the area's business community is very pluralistic, many Dutch names are featured "on today's marquees of mercantilism—De Nooyer, Hoekstra, Vander Ploeg, Van Dis, Vander Salm, *ad infinitum.*" Kalamazoo, it seems, has embraced its Netherlandic people. In turn, they have rooted themselves deeply in the area's cultural soils. ❦



Pansies.



Flower shop.

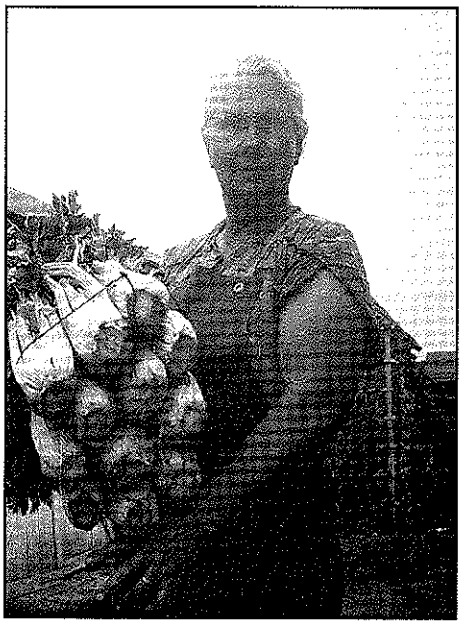
From Celery to Flowers

John Gernaat

After I was married in 1949 I bought one of the family farms from my dad. I intended to raise celery in the summer months and work elsewhere during the winter. However, after the first year, I found it was more profitable to stay working year round for the produce company where I was employed.

I still missed working the land, so in 1957 I moved two large glass greenhouses which my father-in-law owned on the south side to town to our present location. He had been raising hot-house tomatoes and leaf lettuce for many years and wanted to retire.

I kept my full-time job and raised



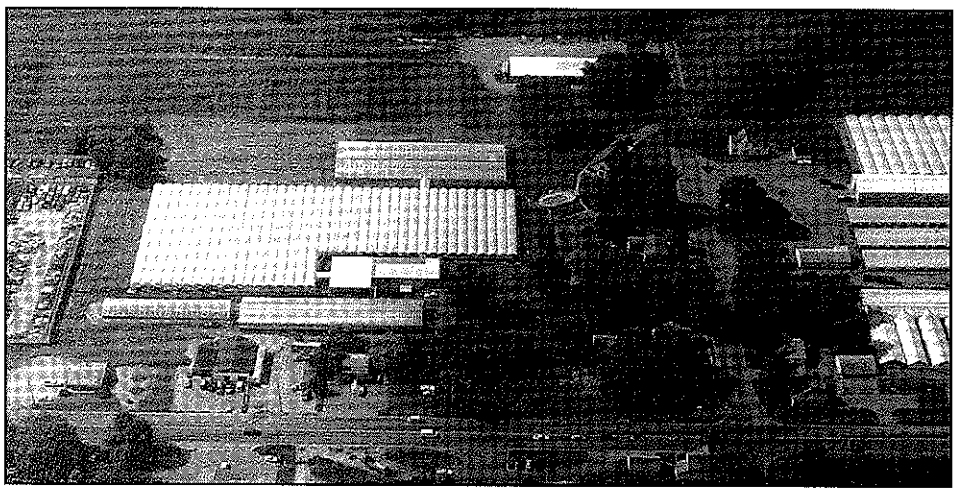
Helen Gernaat, 1939.

tomatoes and lettuce on the side. We added more greenhouses and in 1965 I was able to stay home. We were still raising produce on the land at that time.

By 1974 we realized the market was changing once again. Tomatoes were shipped in from Mexico and our utility bills were rising to the point where it was no longer profitable. Our oldest son was married and he too wanted to establish a family business, so we decided to work together and raise bedding plants. We added greenhouses to the ones we already had and joined the Kalamazoo Valley Cooperative. After some lean years we gradually built the business up to where it could support two families.

Today our greenhouse frames are covered with plastic which is more efficient and cheaper to build. Exhaust fans are used to cool them down when temperatures are too high. We now have three acres under plastic.

We start the plants from seed in late November. The first semi loads are picked up by Kalamazoo Valley Co-op in March and are delivered as far south as Texas. Last year the Co-op sold 4.5 million flats and baskets of bedding plants which were raised by fifty-seven different growers. There are many other growers who market their own plants through brokers or establish their own routes. Today many third-generation farm families are raising bedding plants where their grandparents first raised celery.



Aerial view of Gernaat farm.



Bedding plants in greenhouses, 1991.

Church History via Kalamazoo 1850 – 1860

H.J. Brinks

Kalamazoo is an unlikely place to find revealing details about the very early history of the Christian Reformed Church in Holland and Grand Rapids. But the correspondents who wrote regularly to Kalamazoo's leading Dutch immigrant, Paulus Den Bleyker, do disclose fresh information about the 1850-1860 period during which the CRC took shape.

Almost no one will recognize the names of these letter writers. None of them became prominent leaders in church or elsewhere. Most of them did not trust organized churches. They preferred small-group worship with friends and extended families who also denied the validity of the ordained clergy. Devout laymen could be trusted, they thought, but advanced theological training was always dangerous.



Paulus Den Bleyker, 1804-1872.

Den Bleyker's correspondents, perhaps better described as informers, included his two brothers, one in New Jersey (Jan) and another (Martinus) in Graafschap, Michigan. The most informative was Jacob Duim, a lay preacher, who gathered a conventicle near Noordeloos, Michigan, from where he reported on religious events relating to the 1857 origins of the CRC. Abraham Krabshuis, who first joined but later left the CRC, wrote letters reflecting his original enthusiasm and subsequent disillusionment. In New Jersey, W. Jongste became an enthusiastic supporter of Revs. Jacob De Rooy and Jan Berdan. Berdan, who had left the RCA, testified against that denomination and wrote a letter which circulated through the Michigan settlements prior to the 1857 secession. In a strange way, then, P. Den Bleyker and his associates contributed to the disputes which surrounded the founding of the CRC.

Paulus Den Bleyker was probably the wealthiest Dutch immigrant in western Michigan. And he knew how to increase his wealth. After disposing of his extensive land holdings on the Dutch island of Texel, he reinvested much of his money in the farms, businesses, and banks of Kalamazoo and western Michigan. Den Bleyker's singular economic status drew attention from many other immigrants seeking financial assistance. Even the wealthy Zeelander Jannis Vande Luyster sought loans from Den Bleyker. And Albertus C. Van Raalte persistently urged him to move to Holland, Michigan, where his investments would enrich the colony.

Though he was never persuaded to move from Kalamazoo, Den Bleyker did build a mill and purchase land in the Black Lake region. But he was cautious about committing his resources to Van Raalte's flamboyant plans. Furthermore, Den Bleyker questioned the validity of all organized churches and had no sympathy for Van Raalte's ecclesiastic policies. Thus, Paulus remained aloof from Van Raalte's church and his colony, maintaining instead a lifelong correspondence with spiritually compatible friends in western Michigan and New Jersey.[1]

In 1850, when Den Bleyker arrived in Kalamazoo, he had intended to settle in the Holland area, but his plans were altered after cholera claimed nine of his

twenty-eight companions' lives. One of these nine, Den Bleyker's closest friend and spiritual confidant, Jan Hoek, left a widow with dependent children in Den Bleyker's care. These complications influenced Den Bleyker to remain temporarily in Kalamazoo, and for a short period he enjoyed some spiritual compatibility with Rev. W. Gardenier (1820-1856), who pastored a small group of Dutch Zeelanders in Kalamazoo. But Den Bleyker's distrust of all organized churches soon led him to form a sermon-reading conventicle for his family and several friends. One of these, the widow Maartje Hoek, influenced Den Bleyker to correspond with Jacob Duim, a lay preacher whose religious ideas were much like his own. This correspondence, which began in 1854 and continued for the following two decades, contains a persistent critique of both the Dutch Reformed Church (RCA) and the seceded church (CRC).[2]



Rev. Jacob De Rooy, 1812-1884.

Critical Correspondents

Jacob Duim moved to the northern fringes of Holland, Michigan, in 1855 and soon began conducting worship services for a group of like-minded folk. Before the year was out, Duim had accused Van Raalte of preaching the false doctrines of Jacob Arminius. When Den Bleyker heard of that encounter, he encouraged Duim to "persevere in his fight for the truth."[3]

Duim's ministry ran smoothly until the arrival of Koene Vanden Bosch in 1856. Since Vanden Bosch's church was located just a few miles down the road, he posed a special threat to Duim. Perhaps that's exactly what Classis Holland had in mind when it permitted the soon-to-be Noordeloos church to call Vanden Bosch before Noordeloos had officially organized. Doubtless, the classis was eager to station an ordained minister close to Duim, a leader whose presence caused much disunity.

Although he had been called by the unorganized Noordeloos church, Vanden Bosch received another call almost as soon as he arrived in Michigan. The Graafschap church had been seeking a minister from the very conservative De Cock faction in the Netherlands, and Vanden Bosch fit their expectations. When Vanden Bosch refused the call, Duim reported to Den Bleyker that the call had been conditional and that acceptance would have obliged Vanden Bosch to lead the Graafschap church out of the Dutch Reformed denomination. Duim declared, "Bosch is still a friend of the *Keyzer,*" referring to Rev. A.C. Van Raalte.

Den Bleyker also received letters from many who had settled outside the Holland area. One of the correspondents, W. Jongste, moved frequently (Grand Rapids and Polkton, Michigan, and Paterson, New Jersey). As a result, his reports of apostasy created the impression that virtually no Dutch-American community had remained true to the faith. After hearing several of H.G. Klijn's sermons in Grand Rapids, Jongste reported, "Klijn preaches rather well, but he fails to emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit sufficiently." His descriptions of other ministers and their sermons were equally negative. Finally, in Paterson, New Jersey, Jongste found the man he was looking for. He reported that Jacob De Rooy, the pastor of an independent Holland congregation, was a true prophet of God. But, consistent with his opposition to organized churches, Jongste added, "I don't dare stay home from church, but I will not join it."[4]

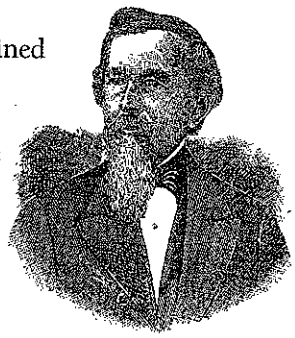
Jongste's impressions were not the only ones Den Bleyker received from the East Coast. He also corresponded with two eastern ministers, Jacob De Rooy and Jan Berdan. Berdan was in some ways an unlikely correspondent for Den Bleyker. Though unquestionably orthodox in doctrine, Berdan's ordination in the formally organized True Reformed Protestant Dutch Church could only tarnish his image with Den Bleyker. But, whatever his misgivings on that score, Den Bleyker was anxious to receive the eastern pastor's justification for the 1822 secession which had spawned Berdan's church. Berdan, in turn, was eager to comply; his first letter to the Den Bleyker clique declared, "I belong to the True Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in the United States of America, which adheres to the confessions of the Synod of Dordt, 1618-19, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Belgic Confession. I cannot associate with doctrines such as universal atonement, man's natural ability to do good works, and with the practice of open communion tables—all of which are practiced in the [RCA] church from which I seceded."[5]



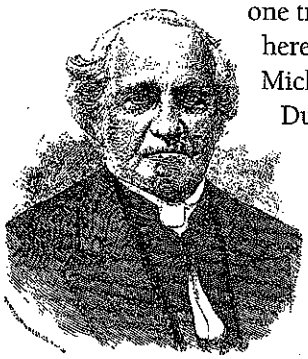
Rev. Jan Berdan.

Deeply impressed by Berdan's letter, Den Bleyker sought to have it translated professionally for circulation in the Dutch-language press. It does not appear that he succeeded in this effort, but his son, Jan, who had attended the American schools of Kalamazoo, did provide a translation which Jacob Duim publicized throughout North Holland, Michigan, and J.R. Schepers read a copy to his Presbyterian congregation

in Graafschap. Meanwhile, Den Bleyker urged Berdan to visit Kalamazoo and western Michigan, even offering the pastor twenty-five dollars in travel expenses and free lodging. Den Bleyker explained that "the Kalamazoo churches have drifted as far from the truth than the church which you have left, for most Kalamazoo Christians believe that they have 'accepted' Christ and not that they have 'received' Him. The fault," he wrote, "is with the learned, not with the unlearned. Still there remains at least one true prophet here in Holland, Michigan, Jacob Duim, who preaches the truth rather than highly learned, errant, and enlightened doctrines." Although Berdan did not accept Den Bleyker's invitation, he did write at least one additional letter which circulated among the Dutch in Grand Rapids, where the secession occurred in 1857.



Rev. A.C. Van Raalte, 1811-1876.



Rev. C. Vander Meulen, 1800-1876.

Some Negative Assessments

The secession of 1857, which had been gathering force simultaneously in several communities, failed to capture Den Bleyker's support. In fact, only one member of his circle, Abraham Krabshuis, actually joined the seceders. During the mid-1850s Den Bleyker received reports of secession from all directions. The letters reveal plainly that the spirit of contention, secession, and separatism were deeply rooted in the immigrant community. On May 14, 1856, J. Duim reported that "the Graafschap church would not call any minister, Dutch or American, who was connected with the Dutch Reformed Church."[6] A letter which Paulus Den Bleyker wrote to his brother Martinus, in Texel summarized these events. "The Hollanders in Kalamazoo," he wrote, "have all joined a regular church with the name Dutch Reformed. This church is very liberal, allowing all sects to join in communion, and their doctrine consists of good works. The Reverends Van Raalte and Vander Meulen are also with them. But some folk, including a number of their elders, have left these churches. The Dutch Reformed Church does not preach unwelcome truths to the people. The preachers always mention God's love, but they never mention His justice, when according to the Bible and the Catechism justice should come first."[7] When news of Rev. H.G. Klijn's secession in Grand Rapids* reached Kalamazoo, Den Bleyker commented, "De Klijn in Grand Rapids has also seceded . . . and secession is also beginning to stir in Kalamazoo. Apparently the 'Pope' in Holland [Van Raalte] has never won the field entirely."[8]

Jacob Duim, who was closer to the scene of secession, reacted with less enthusiasm. "I'm doubtful of Klijn's sincerity," he wrote, "because he has misdirected many souls and has not yet repented of that behavior. I have also heard that Rev. Vander Meulen has confessed publicly to his congregation in Zeeland that he had deviated from the truth, and he believes that the Lord has chastised him with the loss of two of his children. But I also doubt his sincerity, because both Klijn and Vander Meulen may try to turn things to their own advantage." Of his own work in North Holland Duim declared, "I now feel that I have special instructions from the Lord to lead and oversee this flock. Attendance on Sunday has been larger than ever and the spirit is good. I catechize the young people on Sunday after the service, and I have also promised to give religious instruction to a young men's group on Wednesday evenings."[9]

Teunis Den Uyl, another correspondent, informed Den Bleyker that the secession had spread to Graafschap and Noordeloos, where Rev. Koene Vanden Bosch had become the second pastor.



Rev. (1818-1897) and Mrs. Koene Vanden Bosch.

"But," he added, "I can't agree with the preaching of Vanden Bosch."[10] From North Holland, A. Siersma reported that Vanden Bosch had not been able to attract any of Duim's following into the Noordeloos church, and Duim's own lengthy account declared, "I have talked to Bosch and proved to him that he still behaves like those ministers who did not secede—that his preaching has not changed and that he still appoints unworthy men to church offices. When

* Rev. Hendrick Klijn joined with the 1857 seceders in Grand Rapids for only six months before returning to the RCA.



Rev. J. Schepers, 1837-1902.

Bosch boasted that Klijn was also with him and the seceders, I pointed to my experience with Klijn on the prairie [Wisconsin], to show that Klijn was not steadfast in doctrine or practice, and Bosch had to agree with me."[11]

Duim added that both Klijn and Vanden Bosch had been trained at the Kampen Theological School, where Brummelkamp was one of their teachers. While this statement is completely in error, it illustrates a common prejudice against the Brummelkamp-Van Raalte party, which Duim used to vilify those with whom he disagreed. But, when Klijn, after only a six-month separation, rejoined the Dutch Reformed Church, Duim felt vindicated and declared, "For my part, the only joining worth anything is the joining of oneself to God and His word."[12]

The Secession of 1857: A Positive Assessment

Abraham Krabshuis, who did join the seceders, demonstrated less antagonism to the organization of churches than Duim did. As an early 1846 immigrant, Krabshuis had been a charter member of Van Raalte's Holland congregation, but he was always known as a protester. On two occasions he joined with others to complain of Van Raalte's distribution of Richard Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted.* In fact, when Krabshuis was chosen as an elder of the Dutch Reformed congregation of Holland in 1855, the classis received communications suggesting that he was not qualified for that office because he had published anticlerical views in the local press. Apparently Krabshuis left the Holland church shortly after that, chastising Van Raalte a second time for his failure to stop the distribution of Baxter's book. Moving to Graafschap that same year, Krabshuis met regularly with T. Den Uyl and catechized a number of young people whose families opposed formal church affiliation.

When the secession broke out in 1857, Krabshuis was jubilant. He reported that H.G. Klijn had confessed his past errors and sins in the first sermon he delivered as a seceded minister. He added that Klijn had been especially effective in spreading the movement, for he had installed elders in Friesland and had plans to preach in Graafschap. Attempting to blunt the pessimistic views he knew Duim had conveyed, Krabshuis noted that, whatever Duim had said, the secession was growing. But, when H.G. Klijn returned to the Dutch Reformed Church, Den Bleyker asked, "Are you also going to return to the church?"[13] Knowing that Den Bleyker's adherence to house-church worship had become increasingly rigid, Krabshuis could only interpret that question as a rebuke, and thus his acerbic retort, "Although some folk in Graafschap have returned, I will not return like a dog to his vomit. Only the Lord can judge Rev. Klijn." But Krabshuis had little doubt about that judgment. He reported, "Klijn is now more liberal than any of the others, and everyone has lost confidence in him. He is in a bad state of mind and has no peace."[14]

Though Den Bleyker and Krabshuis held similar doctrinal views, they parted company in their views of the institutional church. For Den Bleyker's belief that uneducated and unordained pastors were the most reliable prophets ran counter to the opinion of his friend. Thus, Den Bleyker's suggestion that the Holland, Michigan, seceders should call Jacob De Rooy from Paterson gained no hearing from Krabshuis, who favored the regularly ordained Jan Berdan. Actually Berdan wasn't his first choice either. Krabshuis admired the Netherlander F.A. Kok,* who, he claimed, "had understood Van Raalte's errors long ago when both of the ministers were still in the Netherlands." Without Kok, or a leader with similar views, Krabshuis feared that the secession would founder fatally.

Disagreement over the existence of a true church on earth had always hindered unity between Krabshuis and Den Bleyker, but that issue came to an impasse in 1859. Den Bleyker, who had once promised to lend two hundred dollars to assist the seceded church in Graafschap, became reluctant and finally unwilling to provide the loan because he doubted that the church was indeed a true church. Krabshuis responded to Den Bleyker's seeming duplicity with a lengthy recitation of his own ecclesiastical views and declared that Den Bleyker and his friends were treading the dangerous terrain "of condemning the just while putting themselves on pedestals of infallibility."[15]

Krabshuis used his religious experience in the Netherlands to evaluate the 1857 secession in Michigan. "By the Lord's grace," he wrote, "we were led out of the Reformed Church hierarchy in the Netherlands when it became known that after 1816 the church was no longer of God—and the movement out of that church [the 1834 secession] has been acknowledged by both friend and foe as the work of God . . . . Yes, I was allowed to participate in that sweet and harmonious fellowship, and the remembrance of those days lingers as the taste of honey on my lips.

"Shamefully, though, both the

* A leading member of conservative seceded pastors in the province of Drenthe.

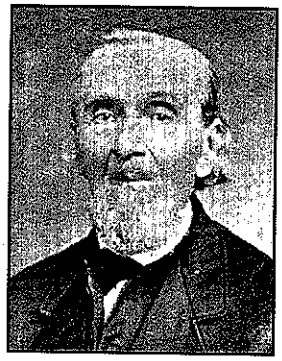
leaders and followers spoiled that harmony. For when they made other gods and laws, the Lord was angry and his spirit left them. Argumentation and division took the place of unity and peace. Still a remnant has remained in the Netherlands to witness publicly for the truth, and that same spirit was evident here in 1857. It was a sin for us to unite here with a people we did not know. Yet, from the beginning, the Lord who first led us in the Netherlands has also done memorable deeds among us here."[16]

Despite this vigorous defense of the 1857 separation, Krabshuis soon lost patience with the movement. In 1863, he, like Den Bleyker, decided that the Graafschap church was not a true church. Moreover he had long been dissatisfied with the fledgling denomination's only ordained minister, K. Vanden Bosch, whom he judged a failure.

Like Gijsbert Haan,* Abraham Krabshuis was probably too independent for any institutional restraints. Haan, who spearheaded the secession in Grand Rapids, left the movement twice and returned to the Dutch Reformed Church; he seems to have spent his last years in religious isolation. Although Krabshuis did not return to the Dutch Reformed Church, he also deserted the seceders on two occasions prior to his last years of independence.

Conventicles, or House Churches

Paulus Den Bleyker was more consistent. Finding spiritual sustenance solely from fellowship and correspondence with his family and friends, he joined no church. When his brother Martinus emigrated from Texel and settled on one of Paulus Den Bleyker's farms near Graafschap, the Den Bleyker clan stretched from Paterson, New Jersey, to Kalamazoo and Holland, Michigan. Although Martinus quickly established links with Krabshuis, Duim, and Den Uyl, he also visited the local churches. But his church attendance only confirmed what he had been told prior to his arrival. "I have heard Van Raalte and the 'Scholte' pastor," he reported in 1859, "and they both preach human capacity. For them Christ is not all and the sinner nothing."[17] With that Martin declared his independence and joined the local conventicle.



Rev. H.G. Klijn, 1793-1883.

The correspondence, with which the Den Bleyker group maintained a kind of ecclesiastical fellowship, contains bits and pieces of local history available in no other sources. For example, information about a forgotten wave of religious emotionalism which swept through the Dutch churches of western Michigan in 1858 has been preserved in Den Bleyker's description of that phenomenon in Kalamazoo. "They are having daily prayer meetings," he wrote, "and there is much crying and claims of miracles. I can't comprehend such behavior."[18]

J. Duim reported that a similar movement was afoot in the Holland area, but he judged that it was not so excessive as that in Kalamazoo. Then he explained, "Van Raalte learned about these prayer meetings in the East, and now he imitates them here. These loud prayers and conversions are useless. Real conversions occur in quiet places, where tears, if they come, are not seen."[19] Duim then counseled sternly, "Don't join these people." Such advice was hardly necessary, for Den Bleyker had no inclination to associate with "all that crying which sounded just like the American churches."[20]

Among Den Bleyker's religious cohorts, only the New Jersey contingent seemed to discover a satisfying Christian church. With Jacob De Rooy as its pastor, the independent Holland church of Paterson attracted the loyalty of Jan Den Bleyker and W. Jongste. But Paulus found no church home in Kalamazoo. Instead, he read the sermons and meditations of the German pastor F.W. Krummacker, who was an international leader of the Evangelical Alliance. Duim continued to lead a small following in North Holland, while near Graafschap Mr. and Mrs. P. Van Vulpen became highly regarded lay leaders for a number of Den Bleyker's friends. Thus neither the newly organized Christian Reformed Church nor the Dutch Reformed Church was able to attract the abiding loyalty of the Den Bleyker clique.

Although these segments in the Dutch-American church community have generally disappeared, the dyspeptic observations of their adherents do contain useful insights and information pertaining to the origins of the Christian Reformed Church. And in some ways they foreshadow periods of ecclesiastical turmoil extending to the present.



Gysbert Haan, 1801-1874.

* The leading elder of the secession in Grand Rapids. See page 41 for a statement of his religiousity.

Documentary Sources

John Berdan to
Paulus Den Bleyker*
Acquackanonk, November 21, 1856

Dear Friend,

You wish me to write why we seceded or separated from the Dutch Reformed Church. We have never separated from the standards or doctrines of the Dutch Reformed Church, but separated from those who would not separate from their dangerous errors, and [we] style our Church, the true Reformed Dutch in the United States of America. We do heartily believe the doctrine of the confession of faith revised in the national Synod held at Dordtrecht in the years 1618-1619. We hold the Heidelberg Catechism and compendium—also the five points of doctrine against the enemies of truth established in that Synod. We believe them and we preach them. We believe in the Holy Trinity, divine predestination, including election and reprobation, the Fall of man, his total corruption and total inability, the death of the Son of God for the elect only, regeneration by the Holy Ghost, faith and repentance the gifts and the works of God, and the final perseverance of the Saints.

We cannot unite with those who preach or hold forth that Christ has made a general atonement, and that the merits and designs of his death are unlimited, that he has died as much for the reprobate as for the elect; that man has natural ability and power to perform spiritual good and all that he wants is a proper disposition of heart or will to use his natural ability aright; that the conversion of a sinner is now in these enlightened days no more a miracle of grace, [and] all that we have to do is to believe. Such doctrines are preached and held in that company which we have left and they can join with Methodists and others in preaching and praying and communion at the same table. These are some leading points of error amongst them and when you write to me again please to let me know what doctrines are preached and held in the Reformed Dutch Church (so called) in your section of the county. I cannot write to you in the Dutch language but I can read your Dutch letter very well, write to me again as soon as convenient. I continue to preach Dutch every Sabbath afternoon when I am home but the Dutch company at present is small.

John Berdan

* This letter was passed around through the Colonies from Holland, Michigan to Grand Rapids and probably contributed to the 1857 founding of the Christian Reformed Church.

Gijsbert Haan to Paulus Den Bleyker*
Grand Rapids, January 20, 1857

I believe that you are right about our not having a prior acquaintance. I am not ashamed to acknowledge that you have probably heard many controversial things about me, at the same time such a reputation also frees me from the fear of God's judgment against those who seek only to please and acquire the praise of men. The indwelling of the Spirit protects me from human judgment. Knowing that I have a witness in heaven whose judgment is truthful gives me free access to the throne of God, even though many indescribably sins continue to cling to me. This is far better than the praise or contempt of men. Not that this is always easy, oh no, the old Adam in me would like to pray for a heaven descended fire to consume the adversaries of the truth and of my person, but this is the spirit of Satan, and this reminds us that we are still absent from the Lord.

I can also testify, yes testify before the Lord, that by His grace I have come to know the Lord and His virtues and perfections and also myself as a reprobate. I do not deserve anything but eternal damnation, which I freely admit and even desire.

But in the depth to which I sank, Christ revealed His light unto my soul. Afterwards I left the burden of my sins at the foot of the cross. I received Him through Christ. Since that time when I was delivered and received by Him and made righteous before God, I have had an ardent love for the truth, while before that time I fought against it as much as possible. Now I find it unbearable to see the crown designed for the head of Zion's King, worn by the children of Satan, no matter how craftily it is done.

Consequently I have experienced opposition, particularly from the Pharisees of our day. They reveal that men's thoughts are at enmity with God and His truth, regardless of the varnish which covers their preaching and discussions.

May the Lord grant us to do battle for that faith which was once delivered to the Saints. This is my wish, for you and me and all His people. May He guard us against building a bridge of lies over which our offspring would walk into perdition. In these dark days may He give us grace to plead on His promise, that when the enemy rises as a stream, the Spirit of the Lord will lift the banners against them.

By which I am, after affable greetings, your friend,

G. Haan

* Haan, the founding elder of the First CRC in Grand Rapids reveals his theological perceptions here in the only surviving written source of this sort.

Endnotes

1. Albertus C. Van Raalte to Paulus Den Bleyker, Jan. 9, 1851.

2. Effa Zwier, "A Short Biography of Paulus Den Bleyker" in Effa Zwier Papers.

3. Paulus Den Bleyker to Jacob Duim, Jan. 10, 1856.

4. W. Jongste to Paulus Den Bleyker, Oct. 10, 1856.

5. Jan Berdan to Paulus Den Bleyker, Nov. 21, 1856. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

6. Duim to Paulus Den Bleyker, July 1, 1856. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

7. Paulus Den Bleyker to Martin Den Bleyker, July 29, 1856. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

8. Paulus Den Bleyker to Martin Den Bleyker, Feb. 7, 1857. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

9. J. Duim to Paulus Den Bleyker, Feb. 23, 1857. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

10. T. Van Uyl to Paulus Den Bleyker, Apr. 1, 1857. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

11. J. Duim to Paulus Den Bleyker, May 19, 1857. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

12. J. Duim to paulus Den Bleyker, Sept. 8, 1857. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

13. Den Bleyker to Krabshuis, Aug. 22, 1857. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

14. A. Krabshuis to Paulus Den Bleyker, Sept. 30, 1857. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

15. A. Krabshuis to Paulus Den Bleyker, May 24, 1858. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

16. A. Krabshuis to Paulus Den Bleyker, Oct. 1, 1859. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

17. Martin Den Bleyker to Paulus Den Bleyker, Aug. 6, 1859. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

18. Paulus Den Bleyker to T. Den Uyl. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

19. J. Duim to Paulus Den Bleyker, June 22, 1958. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

20. Paulus Den Bleyker to T. Den Uyl, May 11, 1858. Paulus Den Bleyker Papers.

profiles

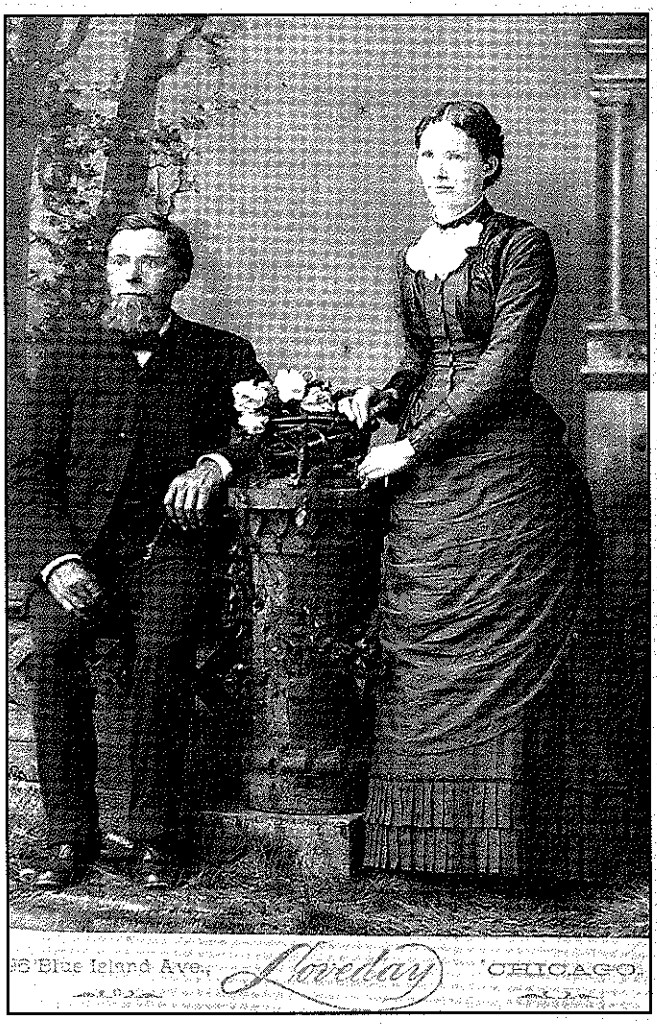
Meet Mr. Meeter

Clarence Boomsma

It was not uncommon in the early years of our Dutch settlements that someone rose to become the unofficial leader, spokesman, and contact man for the clan. These were men from the immigrant group who achieved a measure of financial success and respectability, which gave them acceptance and influence in the larger American community. In Grand Rapids it was Edsko Hekman; in Holland, Michigan, it was Abraham Peters; and in the Illiana area it was John Meeter. The story of John Meeter I learned from his son, Dr. H. Henry Meeter, the first full-time professor of Bible at Calvin College, who taught from 1926 until his retirement in 1956.

In the later 1930s, as a student in the college, I assisted Professor Meeter, grading bluebooks, book reports, and term papers. I kept my work for Dr. Meeter as discreetly private as possible since I was grading the work of fellow students. When I had finished grading a batch of papers, I would leave the dormitory after dark to return them to Professor Meeter.

He and I shared an interest in the Illiana area, where we had both spent our childhood. My mother was a contemporary of Dr. Meeter in the Lansing, Illinois/Munster, Indiana region. I had early recollections of his father when as a little boy I would walk to the Munster Christian School on Ridge Road. Frequently I would see his father as he was returning to his home carrying a small can of milk he had picked up from some neighbor who must have kept a cow or two. Mr. Meeter was then what seemed to me to be a very old but dignified man, always in a black suit with a white goatee beard. I knew somehow that he was a person of distinction in our church and community. I remembered him because, when we would pass him on the sidewalk, he would usually stop a moment to greet my sister and me with a few friendly and kind words.



Mr. John and wife Mary Meeter.

Often after Professor Meeter and I had discussed my grading of the tests and he had provided me with another set to be graded, he would invite me to join him in the easy chairs of his study for a late-evening chat. Mrs. Meeter would graciously bring us a cup of hot chocolate with cookies, and he would reminisce about his early years in Illiana. He told me many interesting stories about his father's life and career, as well as some tales about relatives of mine who lived in the Munster/Lansing area. Some of these stories are indelibly imprinted on my memory, not only because of my interest in them at the time but also because I have frequently refreshed my memory enjoying the retelling of them over the years. I'm not sure anyone else is still living who knows them, and so I have decided to share them in Origins before I too am no longer able to recount them and they will be lost.

Clarence Boomsma is pastor emeritus of Calvin CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Dr. Meeter had a very high regard for his father and enjoyed telling me fascinating incidents that revealed what a remarkable man his father was: a man who possessed intelligence and judgment, a courageous man of strong character and convictions, who lived by his principles and manifested a true Christian spirit. Here are a few of the stories Dr. Meeter told me.

Marshall Field and John Meeter

In the late nineteenth century, Mr. Meeter farmed a plot of land west of what is now downtown Chicago on Roosevelt Road. He raised hay that he sold to the Marshall Field Department Store for their dray horses used to transport goods to the store and make deliveries to customers.

According to Dr. Meeter, Marshall Field was a very devout Presbyterian who loved to talk theology. So when Mr. Meeter would deliver his load of hay and go to the office for his payment, Mr. Field would invite Mr. Meeter in for a cup of tea, and the two men would discuss theology. I was pleased to read a few years ago, in a recent book on the unique architecture of Chicago and its developers, that Mr. Field was known as a devout man, so observant of the Sabbath that shades were drawn on all the display windows of his store on Sunday, thus confirming Dr. Meeter's story.

I find so interesting the friendship between Mr. Meeter and the first Mr. Marshall Field, and their Christian fellowship, that I think of it every time I visit what is still the flagship department store of Chicago.

George Mortimer Pullman and John Meeter

As Chicago expanded westward, Mr. Meeter was forced to give up his farm to the encroaching city. He found another farm south of Chicago, on which he obtained a long-term lease. The property was located in the area now known as Pullman, Illinois. Here he engaged in truck farming, specializing in the raising of cabbage. One summer when farmers were afflicted with a terrible drought, Mr. Meeter had the foresight to see that the price of cabbage would skyrocket. So he hired the children of nearby immigrants from Hungary and Poland who were glad to earn a little money. During the long dry spell he had the children go up and down the rows giving each cabbage plant a cup of water every day. As a result, Mr. Meeter was about the only farmer to have cabbage for sale. If my memory is correct, Dr. Meeter said the price of cabbage went to forty dollars a ton that year, a fabulous price in those days. So began the financial resources Mr. Meeter was to accumulate. But there was more to come.

About this time George Mortimer Pullman, the inventor of the Pullman railway car, chose the south-Chicago area to build what came to be known as the Pullman factories, where he built the Pullman cars. The property of Mr. Meeter's farm was essential to the development. Although he did not own the land, his long-term lease entitled him to compensation for surrendering the lease. Mr. Meeter showed his shrewd business acumen by holding out for a price Mr. Pullman was unwilling to pay.

As Dr. Meeter told me the story, there was at the time an ordinance that gave the right-of-way to a railroad if a hundred feet of track had been laid on a property. I had often wondered about the existence of such an ordinance, until recently I was given a copy of the centennial booklet of Lansing, Illinois, in which, to my surprise, reference is made to such an ordinance, thereby confirming this Meeter story.

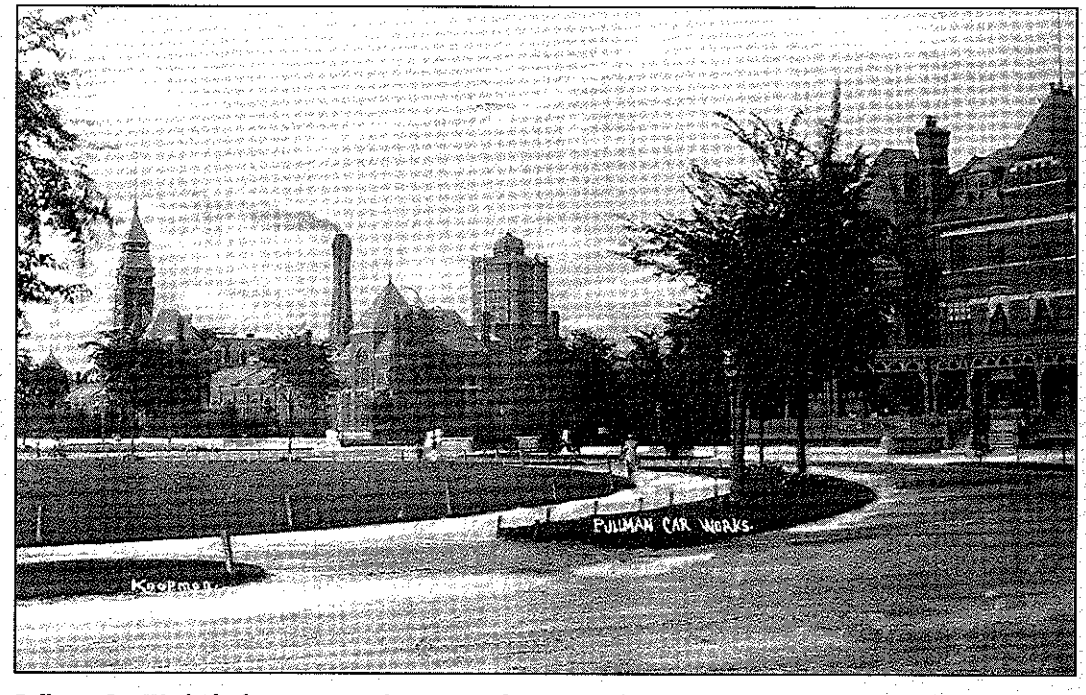
As the Pullman project proceeded, the railroad track that was to cross Mr. Meeter's farm was laid up to the edge of his field, but no settlement had yet been reached with Mr. Meeter. Negotiations were getting nowhere. Somehow the Pullman people knew that John Meeter was a devout churchman who always attended worship services on Sunday. So early one Sunday morning the railway crew appeared to lay the required hundred feet of track, assuming Mr. Meeter would be in church. But Mr. Meeter was suspicious of their tactics, and that morning, instead of going to church, he took his shotgun and walked around his farm. When the crew saw Mr. Meeter, the foreman asked him why he wasn't in church, where he was supposed to be, to which Mr. Meeter replied that he had decided to shoot crows that morning. Frustrated, the foreman ordered the men to go to work to lay the track. Mr. Meeter lowered his gun and informed the crew that the first man to place a shovel on his property he would be forced to shoot. The standoff didn't last long. They knew Mr. Meeter was not bluffing. So the foreman ordered the crew to go home, and the next morning Mr. Meeter's demands were met.

With his substantial profits from the Pullman Company, Mr. Meeter moved to Lansing, Illinois, to build the Meeter Sauerkraut Factory. It was still in existence when Professor Meeter told me the story. Later, the sons (or grandsons) moved the plant to Wisconsin. Whether it is still operating after all these years I do not know.

John Meeter, Patron of the Dutch Clan

John Meeter was probably the best

known and one of the most affluent members of the Dutch community in the Illiana area in those early days. Highly respected, he served as elder in the Munster Christian Reformed Church for many years and in his later years was so esteemed he was made an honorary elder. He was indeed the titular head of the Dutch settlement. When people had unsolvable trouble of one kind or another, they would appeal to Mr. Meeter for whatever help he could give them, and he often did—especially if it involved matters with the world outside the Dutch community. One such incident stands out in my memory.



Pullman Car Works built in part on John Meeter's farm in Roseland, IL.

In the first decade of the twentieth century immigration reached great numbers. It was during these years that a large family with eight or nine children emigrated from the Netherlands to join relatives in the Illiana area. Unfortunately, the mother of the family was detained in Ellis Island for health reasons and apparently would be refused entry. The father and children had to go on, feeling very distraught that the wife and mother could not come with them. When the family arrived and the waiting relatives learned of the tragic difficulty, they naturally turned to Mr. Meeter in their desperation.

Hearing the tragic plight of this large family, he immediately entrained for Washington, DC, to do what he could on the family's behalf. He arranged for a meeting with the Secretary of Commerce, under which the immigration department functioned, and presented the sad story of the family. The secretary was sympathetic but protested that the regulations under which this woman was not given entrance to the United States were the law of the land, which he was bound to uphold. Mr. Meeter countered, saying there was a law higher than the law of the land: the law of God that forbids a mother's being torn from her children. He made his case so persuasively that the secretary relented and quickly made arrangements for the woman to be released from Ellis Island.

Mr. Meeter, however, had made such an impression on the secretary that the latter suggested making arrangements for Mr. Meeter to breakfast with President William McKinley the following morning. Mr. Meeter replied he would be deeply honored to meet the President and enjoy the privilege of dining with him, but knowing the anguish of the distressed mother and her family, he must hasten to New York to escort her as soon as possible to her family. Thus Mr. Meeter declined the rare opportunity to meet with President McKinley.

John Meeter, the Christian Peacemaker

The following story has to do with my mother's Uncle Hubert and her cousin John, both members of the Munster church. Uncle Hubert was married to John's sister, and so Hubert and John were brothers-in-law. When Grandma De Vries (John's mother and Hubert's wife's mother) died in 1918, a dispute arose between the wives of the two men, believe it or not, over the inheritance of a dress. The quarrel became ugly and soon involved the husbands. It resulted in the two men no longer talking to each other though they lived only a hundred yards apart along the Little Calumet River. That these two communicant members were not on speaking terms came to the attention of the elders. But the elders were very hesitant to get involved. They knew

Hubert, a mild-mannered man, would be ready to resolve the difficulty, but they feared John, who was known for his violent temper and physical prowess. No elder wanted to serve on a committee to seek to reconcile the two.

I do not know whether Mr. Meeter was serving as an elder at the time or had already become an honorary elder. Somehow he learned of the estrangement, the offense it was creating in the church, and the elders' reluctance to get involved. So he volunteered to see the adversaries. He first approached John, telling him what he had heard about John's feud with his brother-in-law Hubert. As expected, John started to denounce Hubert with angry words in his heated fury. Then Mr. Meeter interrupted, asking the simple question whether he, John, was a Christian and whether he believed Hubert was also a Christian. After a bit of hesitation John had to acknowledge they both meant to be Christians. Mr. Meeter responded immediately, saying the problem would be solved because Christians were duty bound to find a solution to their differences. He insisted John go directly with him to Hubert, and within a couple of minutes the two men, with tears in their eyes, embraced each other, relieved that the ridiculous issue was over and they could resume their good friendship. Such was the courage, common sense, and Christian sensitivity that marked John Meeter. In my own ministry I have on more than one occasion recalled this story and used Mr. Meeter's tactic effectively.

I understood why Dr. H. Henry Meeter was proud of his father and savored the legacy of his life. It could be said of John Meeter what the Scriptures say of David: "[He] served God's purpose in his generation" (Acts 13:36).

profiles

Burum's Claims to Fame

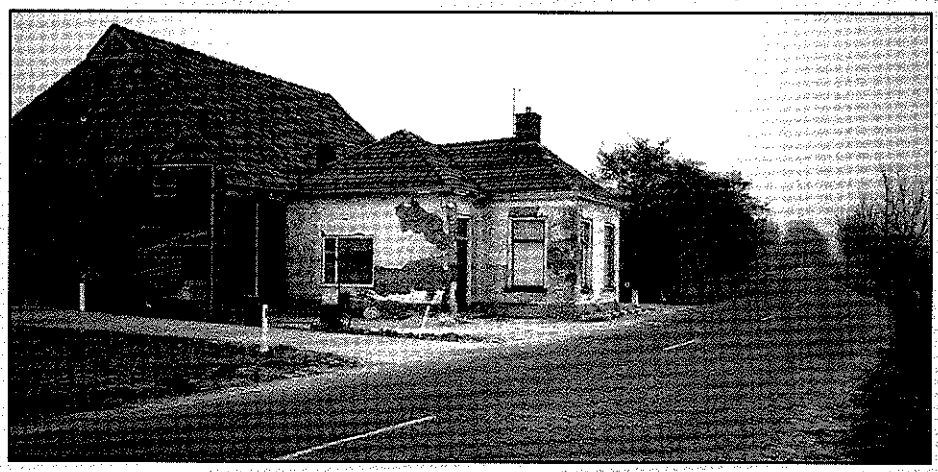
Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

Mention the names De Cock and Ulrum and many in the Christian Reformed community will recognize those names as belonging to the person and the place of the Afscheiding.[1] Mention the name Burum and only those with roots in that little town will be able to tell you where it is. During the next few years, however, people in western Michigan will be hearing and reading the name Burum more often because one of the new acquisitions of Holland, Michigan's Windmill Island is a small house which for the past century and a half stood just outside of Burum.

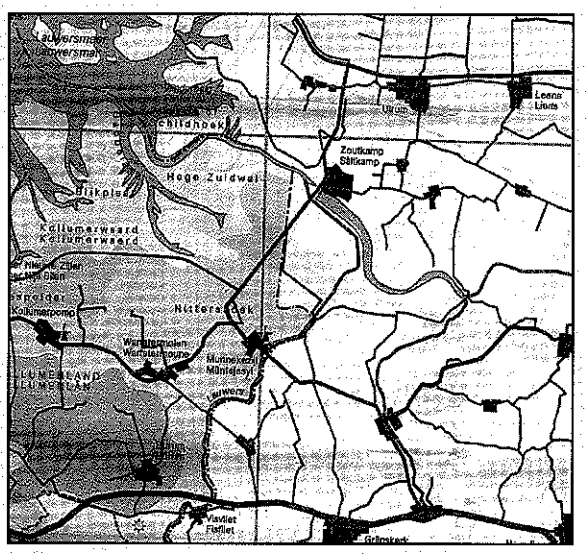
Janet Sheeres is a family historian, genealogist and a Frisian language enthusiast.

This tolhuis, or tollhouse, built in early 1849, was a common sight for many of our ancestors hailing from Kollumerland, the county in which Burum is situated. It stood on the Friese Straatweg, or Frisian highway, placed strategically just inside the border from the province of Groningen to collect toll from those using this highway. The locals, not pleased with this new tax collector in their midst, soon found a way around it to avoid paying the fees. In 1903 the tollhouse ceased to function as such and was sold to Jelte Bakker.

The little house has been a silent witness to many changes during its almost 150 years of existence. In the early years it saw bicycle riders



Burum tollhouse on the Frisian highway.

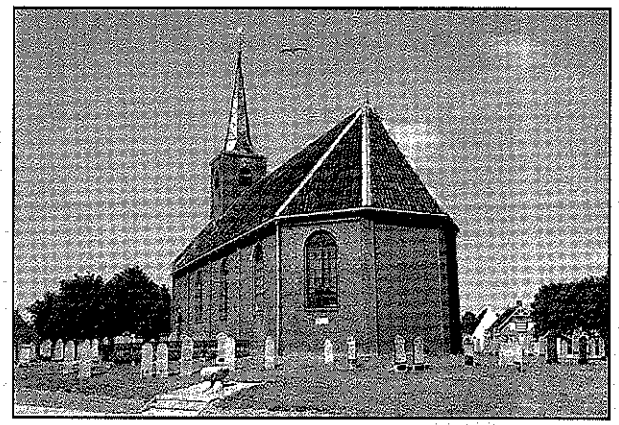


Map including Burum Friesland and Ulrum Groningen.

replacing pedestrians and cars succeeding horses and buggies. During the latter half of the nineteenth century it watched as many emigrants, poorly clad and underfed, left to seek new opportunities in North America. Later it watched as the descendants of these emigrants came back as tourists, well fed and clothed. It stood by as German soldiers marched past on their way through Friesland to dominate a people, and it stood by as Canadian tanks rumbled through five years later to liberate the same people. It grew used to the sonic booms of the military jets from the Leeuwarden air base shattering the stillness of the skies where for centuries only the sound of the lapwing was heard.

Unlike the nineteenth century, when the view of Burum was not much different from a hundred other little Frisian towns, Burum's skyline now is unmistakable. Driving on the major route between the cities of Leeuwarden and Groningen, today's traveler cannot miss it. Rising from the flat fields surrounding the village are huge satellite dishes which handle all the international telephone activity of the entire country. Burum has been dubbed "the great ear" of the Netherlands. If the little tollhouse on the straatweg acted as the eyes to history marching by, its services are no longer needed. It has been replaced by a modern telecommunication system monitoring all incoming and outgoing calls for the Netherlands.

When the last owner of the house, 70-year-old Aaltje Bakker, moved to a care center in nearby Visvliet recently, the house was sold and scheduled for demolition. The papers had been signed and the wrecking crew was hired. Then, like a made-for-television story, a representative of the Dutch Heritage Foundation, Anne de Vries, came calling with a plan to save it. He and his business partners had previously



Burum's original village church.

presented a plan to the Holland Chamber of Commerce to expand Windmill Island by importing a number of authentic Dutch buildings. After a series of negotiations the project was approved this past summer. The house, the first in the 15-year project, will be transported piece by piece and rebuilt on Windmill Island in Holland, Michigan.

But Burum enjoys another claim to fame which few people know about. The people of Burum established the first Afgescheiden congregation in the province of Friesland. On June 21, 1835, just eight months after the Afscheiding officially began in Ulrum, a congregation was organized in Burum. That Burum was one of the first is not too surprising. Its geographical location, close to the Groningen border, meant people were within walking distance of the church at Ulrum to listen to Dominee De Cock.

Of course a new denomination does not just happen. Some of the grievances had begun already in 1809 when hymns were introduced into the worship service. Before this only psalms were sung. There were irregularities in the administration of the sacrament of baptism. The preaching had become increasingly secular to the point where some of the fundamentals of the faith were denied. Since the state paid the ministers' salaries, the people had no voice in how the church should be run. Also, the pulpit was often used as a means to keep the people in line politically.[2] Many people, dissatisfied with the situation, began meeting in small groups called conventicles.

Those who could walked to hear such preachers as De Cock.[3] Among them were many Burumers who repeatedly made the demanding, three-hour journey on foot to Ulrum. The journey, difficult in the best of circumstances, became even more arduous when it rained and the dirt roads turned into muddy quagmires. At Zoutkamp they had to be ferried across the Reitdiep, a large body of water which separated the provinces of Friesland and Groningen. In winter this could be especially

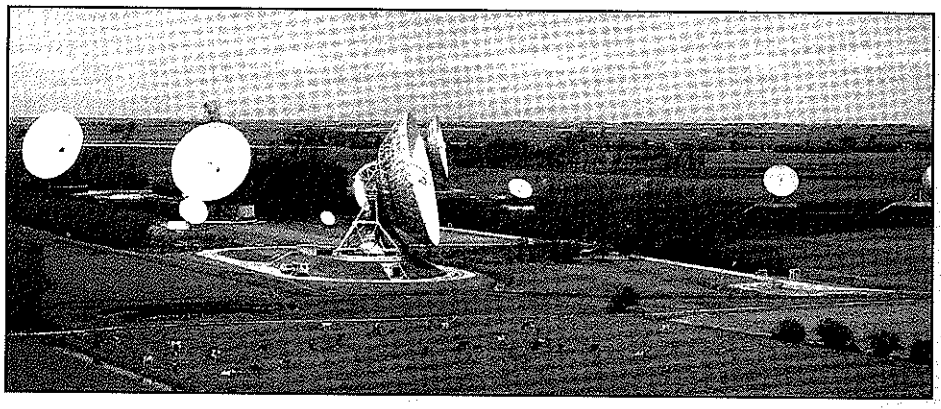


Views of Burum from the northeast on the route between Ulrum and Burum.

dangerous when the waters of the Reitdiep tended to be rough. Because of the distance and travel conditions to Ulrum, people in Burum often held their own clandestine gatherings. Clandestine because an obscure law, left on the books from the time of Napoleon, stated that no more than twenty people were allowed to gather at any one time.[4] The Reformed Church used this law to prohibit concerned Christians from meeting legally anywhere other than in the state church. On two Sundays, the 7th and the 14th of June, 1835, covert meetings were held at the homes of a shoemaker, named Boersma, and a miller, named Hamming, with up to sixty people in attendance. On Sunday the 21st of June, the Christelijke Afgescheiden Kerk of Burum was organized.

The organizational meeting took place on the farm of Jan Paulus Ellens with Rev. De Cock leading the meeting. His text that first day of summer was taken from II Corinthians 6:17 and 18. After the sermon there was a call for membership. Thirty-nine came forward and signed the charter of subscription.[5] Of these, two elders and two deacons were elected and installed. After their installation Rev. De Cock preached on Ephesians 2:8 and 9. Three children were baptized at this service. Pieter Kornelis Radema, a lay preacher, was chosen to shepherd the flock until a pastor could be called. The Burum congregation was said to be one of the most loving, caring, and peaceful congregations in this new denomination.

In 1841 the new congregation built its first little church and called its first pastor, Rev. F. Strik. He was followed in 1861 by Rev. Douwe J. Vander Werp who later emigrated from Burum to Graafschap, Michigan. He was not the first to leave Burum for America. In April 1853 Frans Kornelis Sjaarda was the first recorded person to leave Burum to, as he put it, "better his lot in America." Frans and his cousin Dirk Goudberg remained the only two emigrants from Burum for over a decade until Rev. Vander Werp emigrated in 1864. Shortly after Rev. Vander Werp left, their next pastor, Rev. William H. Frieling, emigrated as well. He went to Vriesland, Michigan in 1866. Besides the ones mentioned, only thirty other families left Kollumerland between 1847 and 1877.[6] However, during the second great immigration period of 1890 and 1910 there was a regular exodus from Kollumerland for America.



Burum's "great ears."

And now, as a Johnny-come-lately, the little tollhouse from Burum has joined the many to "better its lot in America" as well.

Endnotes

1. Secession from the state church. On October 13, 1834 the Afscheiding began under the direction of the deposed minister of Ulrum, Groningen, Rev. Hendrik de Cock.

2. Algra, H. (1976) *Het Wonder van de Negentiende Eeuw,* 4th ed. (Franeker, the Netherlands: T. Wever BV) p. 7.

3. The rental fee of the chairs in the Reformed Church of Burum dropped dramatically between 1833 and 1835, a sign that church attendance was way down.

4. The Napoleonic Penal Code, Articles 291 to 294 stated "no association or groups of more than twenty may be formed without the permission of the government." Many seceders suffered heavy fines until the ban was finally lifted in 1848. See: Van Hinte, Jacob, *Netherlanders in America* (1985), pp. 91-93.

5. For a list of people attending see Wesseling, J., *De Afscheiding Van 1834 in Friesland,* Vol. I (Groningen, the Netherlands: De Vuurbaak BV, 1980), pp. 38-39.

6. For a list of names of those early immigrants see: De Staat der Landverhuizing 1847-1877, Friesland, Netherland Rijksarchief. Copy on file in Heritage Hall, Hekman Library, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

book notes

Letters Written in Good Faith

The Early Years of the Dutch Norbertines in Wisconsin

Translated and edited by
Dr. Walter Lagerwey

Green Bay, WI: Alt Publishing Company, 1996. 547 pages.

The letters in this collection were written during the years 1893-1902. Included in the correspondence are documents written by Catholic priests and brothers working in Wisconsin's Green Bay area to their colleagues in the Abbey of Berne, Heeswijk, the Netherlands. Replies from fellow brothers and priests in the Berne Abbey are present also. Heeswijk is located a few miles north of Eindhoven.

We conclude with Lagerwey's comments concerning the significance of the materials he discovered:

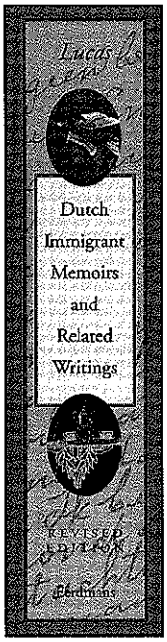
It is an extraordinary tale which these letters tell, of deprivation and self-denial, of sacrifice and service, of adaptation and Americanization, of faith and vision. It is a very human story, of disappointments but also of successes. It is above all an important story, from a uniquely Dutch and Catholic perspective, one which takes us back to American origins which are as interesting to scholars as they are to the spiritual sons and daughters of those immigrants.

Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings

Selected and arranged by
Henry S. Lucas

Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Revised edition, 1997. 611 pages. $45.00

This 1997 reprint of the original 1955 edition contains an extensively revised index and an appendix with English translations of several items which



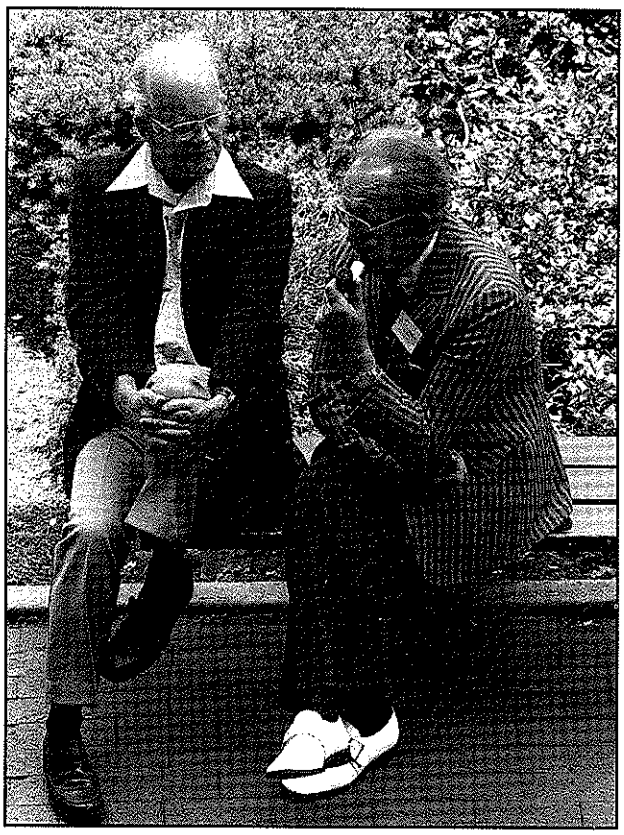
appeared in Dutch in the 1955 volume. Found in the index are personal names and entries such as Kolonie, fourth of July celebrations, food prices, Iowa, and Indians. Regrettably, the 1997 book does not include the many maps and illustrations found in the 1955 edition.

Here, in more than six hundred pages, is a portable archive of Dutch immigrant life in the United States during the years 1840-1920. Long out of print and virtually unobtainable on the used book market, this monumental work containing 114 first-person accounts is once again available for those who cherish their immigrant heritage. Henry S. Lucas, author of the encyclopedic work *Netherlanders in America,* deserves much credit for the collecting and assembling of the material published in the original 1955 *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings.*

Without the joint efforts of the Dutch-American Historical Commission and Eerdmans Publishing Company, this 1997 revision would not have become a reality. The Dutch-American Historical Commission includes members from Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, Hope College, Western Theological Seminary, the Joint Archives of Holland, and the A.C. Van Raalte Institute for Historical Studies.

for the future

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



Worship Reminiscences *by Harry Boonstra*

Klaas and Claude: A Frisian Boy Becomes an American Citizen, 1912-1932 *by Leonard Sweetman*

Profile of Rev. William Haverkamp *by William Buursma*

Americanization and Language Conflict *by Walter Lagerwey*

R.E. Werkman: An Entrepreneur from Holland, MI *by Donald Van Reken*

"Wrong Side Up"—selections from William Recker's autobiography, Chicago to Montana (1894-1953)

Recollections of Janet Hyser Hoekstra—Winnie, TX and Chicago

Reformed Worldviews of Farming: German and Dutch *by Janel Curry-Roper*

Van Raalte and Holland, Michigan Revisited—*articles by Donald Van Reken, Hero Bratt, Robert Swierenga, with selected documents from the A.C. Van Raalte Papers*

Van Raalte and Scholte, A Soured Relationship and Personal Rivalry *by Robert Swierenga*

The Dutch of Highland, Indiana *by David Zandstra*

The Colsman Family—Gold Mining Near Denver *by Helen Vander Meulen*

Gerrit Siereveld Profile *by Paul Zylstra*

For the Humblest Worshiper: Architectural Styles *by Richard Harms*

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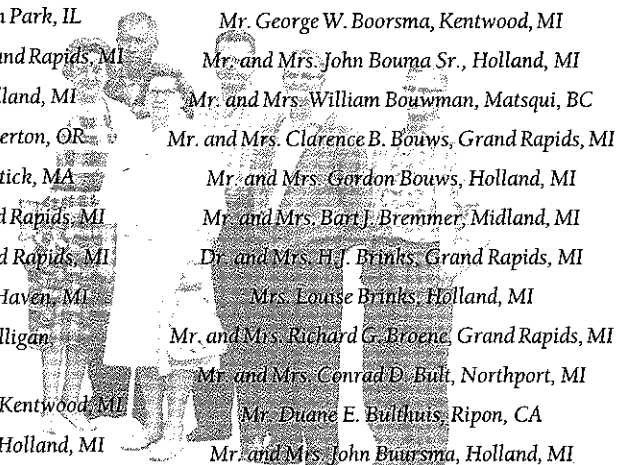
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