

Origins

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H.J. Brinks
Harry Boonstra
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Janet Sheeres
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James C. Schaap
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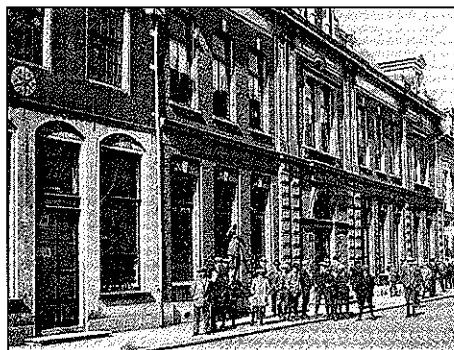
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*Aerial shot of Halifax, Nova Scotia;
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The One-Way Journey of Dutch Emigrants on the Castel Bianco

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

April 26 to May 6, 1951

Much has been written about the plight and perils of early emigrant voyages in the 1800s and before. Although conditions had vastly improved by the mid 1900s, there were a few journeys, now and again, which required a good bit of stamina and self-denial by the passengers in order to endure conditions onboard.

To accommodate the large numbers of emigrants leaving the Netherlands

Bianco has just arrived in Rotterdam with Dutch soldiers returning home from Java. Disembarking will begin immediately. Thursday the boat is set to depart for Canada carrying emigrants.

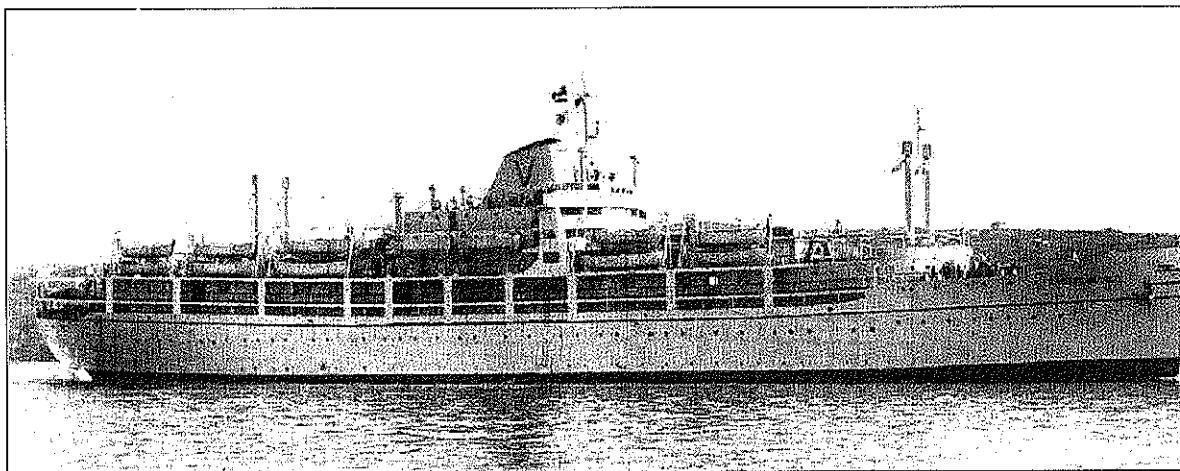
Eighteen-year-old Jeanne Sjaarda² stopped in her tracks when she heard the radio announcement. The *Castel Bianco*? That was the ship that would take her family to Canada the next day—a trip she was very much looking forward to. She had read

stories of people traveling to and from Indonesia. The trips were described as pleasure cruises with games, books, entertainment, and food served without the necessity of cooking or cleaning up. A glorious holiday! And now her dream ship had just arrived in the Rotterdam harbor as a troopship. How

could a troopship be transformed into a luxury ocean liner in such a short time, she wondered. She got her answer the next day. It couldn't be done—it remained a troopship. Not only that, but there had been no time to clean it properly—at least not by Dutch standards. In some quarters the bed linens were still soiled.

Farewells and Boarding

On Thursday, April 26, people were boarding buses and trains all over the Netherlands to take them to the



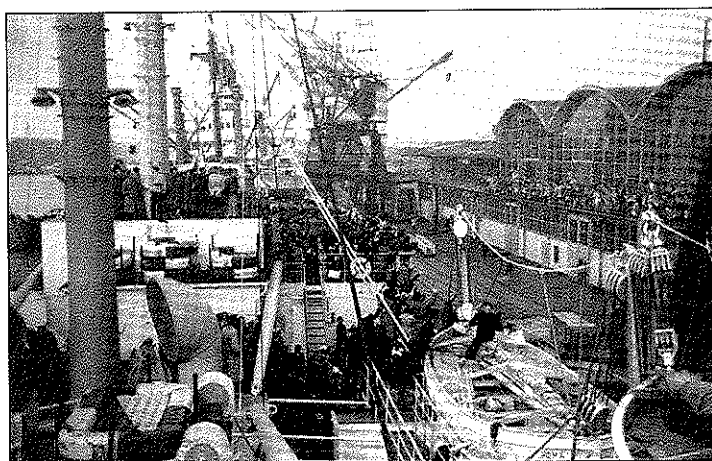
Castel Bianco. Like many Victory ships, she was named after an American college or university. Image courtesy of Jim Vandermei.

in the decade between 1945 and 1955, the Dutch government put into service three dormitory-type troopships which it owned, and chartered others as the need arose.¹ This is the story one of those chartered ships—the one-time, one-way journey of the *Castel Bianco* with her load of Dutch emigrants to Canada.

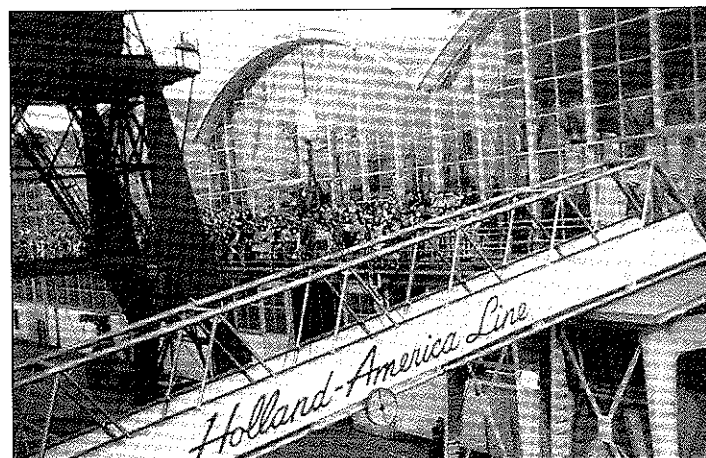
The Netherlands, Wednesday, April 25, 1951

We interrupt this broadcast to bring you the following bulletin: The SS Castel

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres sailed with her family on the *Castel Bianco*, as the account relates, anticipating an exciting journey. Not all of her older siblings were as eager to leave home, friends and school. A prodigious writer, she is the administrative assistant in the Psychology Department at Calvin College.



Boarding at the Holland-America Line dock in Rotterdam harbor. Image courtesy of the author.



Castel Bianco leaving the dock in Rotterdam. Image courtesy of the author.

Rotterdam harbor and the *Castel Bianco* bound for Canada. In Burum, Friesland, one of the farthest points from Rotterdam, the Sjaardas got up early. Because their own home had been emptied out, the family of nine stayed overnight with various relatives and friends and gathered at Grandmother Sjaarda's home from where, amid tearful farewells, they boarded the bus. As it swung out of town with the village church spire fading from view, the reality of never seeing it again hit home. Tears flowed freely. Soon the bus filled as family after family of emigrants boarded. By two in the afternoon they arrived in Rotterdam. Between four and six o'clock boarding took place.

Those boarding the *Castel Bianco* had little in common—they came from different regions and provinces and spoke different dialects. They held different occupations, affirmed different beliefs and harbored different dreams about their future in Canada. Still, they had some things in common—they had all experienced the devastation of World War II and were now leaving everything behind to face an unknown future. They had agonized over the decision whether or not to emigrate and where to settle in that vast country called Canada. What they

shared was considerably more than what set them apart; not the least of which was their classification—Dutch emigrant. Between April 26 and May 6, 1951 these people would be forever bound together by the fact that they traveled together to Canada on the *Castel Bianco*.

Jeanne Sjaarda had not been the only person harboring idyllic expectations of the trip. Audrey Zevenbergen³ of Zuidland, South Holland, thirteen years old at the time, remembers, "What a disappointment when we realized this was a troopship. Instead of each family having a stateroom, all the women would be in a couple of huge rooms on one end of the ship and the men on the other end." For some large families this amounted to an unbalanced division of labor. Said Laura Heeringa from Aalsum, Friesland,⁴ "... that left my mother with nine children (girls) to look after, and my father with only two (boys)." Since infants and young boys were also kept with their mothers, it was the mothers who bore the burden of childcare. Dutch culture put a high premium on *het gezin*, the family unit, being together. Now, however, during one of their most life-changing experiences, the first harsh reality facing them was the separation of *het gezin*.

This coming on the heels of the already traumatic and highly emotional farewells of close relatives earlier the same day, did little to help the grief of parting. Soon another disappointment followed—the large dormitory rooms provided no privacy. Privacy had not been a priority in designing space for troops, but the lack of it furthered the already sagging spirits of the modest Dutch women.

Reasons for Leaving

The separation of men and women also disappointed the newlywed couples onboard. Because of the acute housing shortage in the Netherlands most married couples had no choice but to move in with either bride's or groom's parents. Many chose emigration as an alternative.

After WWII the Dutch government had several crises on its hands, not the least of which was a severe housing shortage and no employment for its young people. Across the ocean Canada had a problem as well. Many of Canada's young men who had gone off to war no longer wanted to go back to farm work. The governments of both countries worked together to find a solution. Canada would accept a large number of Dutch emigrants if they were willing to work on farms.

The Dutch government, in turn, would subsidize the passage for those too poor to pay their own way. The Sjaarda family qualified on all counts. They had a farming background, a large family with teenage children who could find no meaningful work, and no means to pay the fare for the entire family. They passed the rigorous Canadian Health inspection and were given the blessing of the Dutch government to try their fortune in Canada.

The Ship

While it was not quite the luxury liner the passengers had expected, the *Castel Bianco* was not disappointed in the cargo she was taking on that April afternoon. She was used to carrying the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

Built in 1945 by the Bethlehem Fairfield Shipyard in Baltimore, the ship measured 455 by 62 feet and weighed 7,604 tons. She was one of a mass produced series of Victory ships and was first named the *SS Vassar Victory*. Launched on May 3, 1945 she had been outfitted as a troopship along with about a hundred other Victory ships. Multi-tiered bunks for some 1600 men were fitted in cargo holds, and between decks shower and toilet blocks were installed along with galleys and messes, hospital facilities and a few public lounge areas. In 1947, *Vassar Victory* was assigned to the Italian Sitmar Line and renamed *Castel Bianco*. In Geneva, on July 21, 1947 the Mass Resettlement Program began with the signing of a contract by the International Refugee Organization for a number of ships to transport displaced persons from Europe to countries that would accept them. Among the ships included in this original contract was the *Castel Bianco*; she was refitted for the job. The troop quarters were upgraded to allow for approximately 900 persons

Reasons for Postwar Emigration from the Netherlands, 1946-1963

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

Economic Pressures

During World War II, the Dutch infrastructure—factories, railroads, highways—was destroyed. One-tenth of all agricultural land had been flooded and had to be reclaimed before it could be productive again. The once thriving markets in neighboring countries, especially Germany, had been lost. The nearly one-sixth of the total income of the Netherlands generated by their Indonesian colonies was gone, while the repatriates returning from the colonies added to the overpopulation and unemployment.

Population Pressures

Between 1900 and 1950 the population of the Netherlands nearly doubled in size, but housing had not kept up with the demand. During the war nearly 150,000 private homes had been destroyed or severely damaged with no new ones built, resulting in a situation in which a quarter million families of two or more persons had to live with relatives.

Fear of a Third World War

With Russia claiming a part of Berlin, many Dutch felt it was only a matter of time before Russia would invade the Netherlands. A survey taken in 1947 indicated that nearly 70 percent of the population was convinced a third world war was imminent. With the economy and infrastructure in shambles they felt they were in no position to defend themselves.

General Discontent

A decade of economic depression after the crash of 1929 and five years of economic stagnation during the war had given rise to strong feelings of dissatisfaction and a feeling that it was impossible to build a normal life again out of the chaos. There was also a feeling of frustration about life continuing as usual after the war. During the war the different factions and social classes had been united against a common enemy; after the war all the old religious, social, and educational distinctions resurfaced, turning many people against the system entirely. It seemed better to start fresh elsewhere.

Greater Awareness of Overseas Countries

Contact with Allied armies resulted in greater knowledge of countries overseas. The Canadians, especially, were much beloved by the Dutch. In contrast to the Germans who had heavy-handed them, the Canadians were polite and helpful.

Dutch Emigration Policy

Thinking they would need every able body to help in the reconstruction, the Dutch government was at first hesitant to promote emigration as a solution. Added to that was the fact that, even if people wanted to emigrate, and many did, there was no system in place to transport massive numbers of people. Rails and roads were in disrepair. The Rotterdam harbor had been bombed out. The first ship, the *Waterman*, leaving the harbor in 1947 for Canada, had to ferry the passengers out to sea where the ship was anchored.

By this time however the possibilities of emigration were widely discussed in the Netherlands amongst the public and in the press, and the Dutch authorities began organizing emigration policies.



The Talsma family from Aalsum with 11 children ready to board a bus for Rotterdam. Also pictured are two bus drivers. Image courtesy of the Laura Heeringa.



The Talsma siblings in a recent photo. Image courtesy of Laura Heeringa.

to be carried in segregated areas.⁵

After several voyages to Australia as well as transatlantic destinations carrying troops and displaced persons, the *Castel Bianco* arrived in April, 1951 in Rotterdam. Because she was by then running on only one engine, she was heading to New York for repairs. The Dutch government, however,

quickly chartered her to transport some 800 emigrants. Since many had their fare subsidized by the government they had little say over their accommodations. All were going one way anyway.

Open Water

Jeanne's initial disappointment at the *Castel Bianco* gave way to resignation. At least getting onboard and settling in had been relatively easy. Satisfied with getting an upper bunk, she stowed her belongings and decided to explore her surroundings. She had worried about getting seasick but was sure it would be only for a day or two. Getting out of the harbor into the waterway posed no problem. Happy that so far she was experiencing no seasickness at all, she went below just as the ship rounded Hook of Holland and broke through the breakers into open sea. Although

she didn't know what hit her, her stomach did, and promptly responded in the usual manner. This situation lasted until the entrance into the Saint Lawrence Seaway. There were variations though—like bad, miserable and absolutely wretched days.

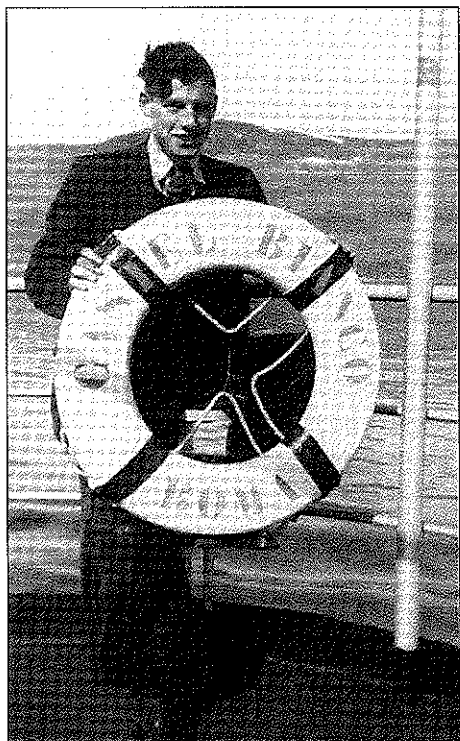
When feeling up to it she'd doze on the deck and watch fish jump about. She consoled herself by the fact that she wasn't missing the grand entertainment she had envisioned because there was no entertainment. One calm day she thought she'd try to take a shower, but found that, just like the water in the sinks, the shower water also was cold seawater. No wonder people were not standing in line for the daily shower, she thought. Even the hardy Dutch people who had suffered much deprivation during the war found bathing in cold seawater unpleasant and kept it to a minimum.

Five toilets, sinks and showers per eighty persons in one compartment with little ventilation were hardly adequate. These few facilities also had to handle the many that were seasick, as well as the soiled diapers. Many complained of being sick just from the smell in those rooms. Corry Greidanus⁶ from Tzum, Friesland, remembers how her sister's slacks had slid from its hook during the first night. She found them thoroughly soiled by someone's seasickness the next morning. Said Laura Heeringa: "On stormy days everyone had to stay below and the smell down there was not too good on account of the many people who were sick." Others blamed the smell on the foreign cooking odors, which, unfamiliar to their Dutch noses, permeated the entire ship. Besides that, the cramped quarters, the lack of privacy, the crying of infants, and moaning of sick adults interfered with restful sleep.

Some blamed the excessive seasickness on the fact that the ship was not carrying enough freight and therefore

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riding too high on the water. According to one person, "It was like riding a bucking bronco." For others their sickness had different origins. Audrey Neerhof writes, "Our poor mom was sick the whole trip. What we did not know was that she was in the early



Siebe Kloosterman on Castel Bianco. Photo courtesy of S. Kloosterman.

stages of pregnancy with her tenth child, a daughter who was born in December of 1951." Also the family had been vaccinated against smallpox a few days before the trip so they were suffering from that ordeal as well. Audrey remembers taking her little two-and-one-half-year-old sister daily to the doctors' station as her arm was really sore and needed clean dressings.

Foreign Food

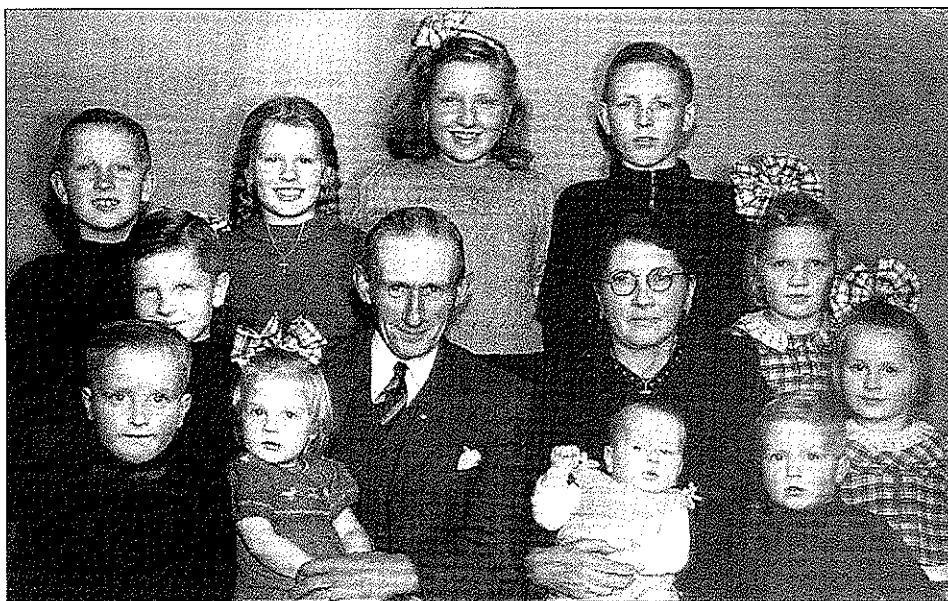
The food served onboard also posed a problem. While there was plenty of it, the Dutch were not used to the spicy foods being served by the crew. Their queasy stomachs rebelled at the sight of jiggling pieces of gelatin puddings and other unknown fare. Toast was sup-

posed to be good for upset stomachs, but the toast they were served was hard and inedible. Lammie Staal from Hoogeveen writes, "The toast was so hard a dog couldn't chew it. Coming from a farm in Drente, we missed our potatoes—the spuds they served looked like rotten pears." Finally, several days into the journey, a Dutch woman managed to persuade the chef to cook a large pot of *rijstepap*, rice porridge. Others decided to skip the dining room experience altogether and lived on canned goods bought from the canteen. Dick Post from Zuidland, father of one-year-old Theresa, remembers, "There was no milk or baby food onboard; my wife and baby survived on just tea for ten days."

The Storm

Halfway through the journey the ship ran into a storm, adding more discomfort to the already sick, irritable and

room, and with the next roll, would slide into the opposite direction. Most were too sick to bother looking where their belongings were traveling. Below, in the storage holds, the top layer of the huge packing crates broke loose and began rolling from side to side. Many broke open, smashing the contents. Ropes were strung crisscross all over for people to hang on to, and all doors to decks were locked. Janny Jaspers Petter from Enschede remembers, "My dad needed fresh air and found a door open which was on the top deck and went outside with my sister, Ali. A big wave came over the ship soaking them both and almost washed my sister overboard. They quickly went inside again." The seriousness of their situation became plain to the passengers when the lifeboats were actually lowered and put into readiness. Fortunately it never came to that, but it must have given



John and Cornelia Vernooy and their children prior to leaving the Netherlands. Image courtesy of William J. Vernooy.

often testy people. For a couple of days as the ship heaved and rolled with the waves, passengers were instructed to stay below, away from the decks. With each roll of the ship the suitcases would slide to one end of the

those witnessing the drill some anxious moments. Fog followed the storm and for nearly 24 hours the baleful blast of the foghorn battered the already frazzled nerves. One man, a youngster at the time, thought for sure



The Vernooy family aboard ship.

Image courtesy of William J. Vernooy.

Transfer of Funds

Ken may have thought he was creative by hiding extra money in his shoes; however, he was not the only one. More than one passenger had extra bills sewed into coat linings or other

places where they hoped it would go undetected. The Dutch government had put a severe restriction on funds leaving the country. Persons over fifteen years of age were allowed to take along \$100 Canadian, and those under fifteen years of age were allowed \$50. Another creative way to get around the money-exporting restrictions was to lend passage fare to those who could not afford it, and have them repay it in Canada. That, of course, only

applied to those who had enough money to do so. Also, since people could take along personal belongings, some bought items that they intended to sell in Canada. Personal belongings, however, had to be used items and the customs agents looked very suspiciously at anything brand new.

Land!

Finally, on Saturday, May 5, Jeanne Sjaarda heard some passengers cry "land!" Along with hundreds of others, she rushed on deck to get the first glimpses of her new homeland. As the ship sailed closer to land, the boat's rocking stilled and the mood onboard improved visibly. Sailing through the majestic Saint Lawrence Seaway, the next morning the immigrants eyed their new country with fascination. By noon the ship had

A Few Happy Sailors

Not all onboard were unhappy or fearful for their lives. Eighteen-year-old Gerrit Jan Wevers from Overijssel enjoyed himself. "Being an apprentice electrician, I got to be in charge of the announcement system. I also liked it that we had wine with our food every day." Corry Greidanus writes, "I have good memories of the *Castel Bianco*. There were about five of us young people who became friends. Because we were not seasick, we enjoyed playing cards and talking about our hopes and dreams for the future." Jeanne's older brother Ken Sjaarda, one of those not seasick, recalls, "Each person was allowed to take along 20 guilders as spending money on the boat. I had six ten-guilder bills hidden in my shoes. The trip was fantastic. Once at sea everything was duty-free. Beer was only 15 cents a bottle, wine 85 cents. We could not eat the food served by the crew, but with all the goodies in the canteen for next to nothing, who needed the dining room?"



J.H. Wevers, his wife Cornelia and their 13 children aboard ship. Image courtesy of Gerry Wevers.

anchored and people debarked to set their first steps on Canadian soil. Herded into a large immigration-receiving hall for processing, each newly arrived immigrant was given the much-coveted "Landed Immigrant" paper. The euphoria of the moment, however, soon gave way to the reality of the next stage—endless hours on dusty trains across Canada, often to find sub-standard housing and

Aan familie, vrienden en bekenden wensen wij een hartelijk vaarwel, bij ons vertrek naar Canada.

Tj. Sjaarda
S. Sjaarda-Poortinga
Kor 1951 Jantje
Matty Ipe
Bettie Heertse
Jantje

Inzonderheid betuigen wij onze hartelijke dank aan Romkema's Reis- en Passagebureau te Franeker en Teitsma's verpakkingdienst te Blija, voor hun voortreffelijke diensten ons bewezen.

A.b. s.s. „Castel Bianco”
Toekomstig adres:
Belmont R. R. 3, Ont. Can.

Notice of the author's family leaving for Canada.

backbreaking working conditions at the end of the journey.

The fact that families were not isolated in their own staterooms did have one positive effect on the passengers during the journey—they were forced to interact with one another. Those who had previously eyed people from different regions with suspicion

(CABIN CLASS) 825 Imm. 181

IMMIGRATION IDENTIFICATION CARD

THIS CARD MUST BE SHOWN TO THE EXAMINING OFFICER AT PORT OF ARRIVAL

Name of passenger: Miss J. Sjaarda
Name of ship: Sjaarda
Name appears on Return sheet: Sjaarda line 22

Medical Examination Stamp: [Stamp]
Civil Examination Stamp: [Stamp]

(See back)

Author's immigration identification card.

soon realized they would have to work together in the new country. One weary traveler summed it up this way, "The whole boat trip was a good test for what lay ahead for us immigrants in a new and strange country."

For Jeanne Sjaarda, in spite of the fact she had not traveled on a luxury liner and had been sick the entire time onboard, Canada had been worth the trip. Reflecting on the immigration experience, she says, "I knew I would have to work hard, but I was ready for that. Besides, I loved working outdoors. And there is no more beautiful outdoors than a warm day in May in Southern Ontario, when the grass is green, the apricot trees in bloom, and the sun shining in a clear blue sky. On my first day I fell in love with the country. I've never been disappointed."❧

Endnotes

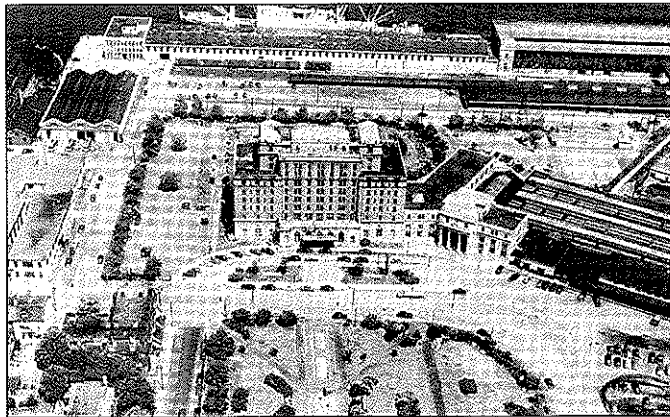
1. Government emigration ships, when traversing the North Atlantic, were operated by the Holland-America Line. These ships were the *Zuiderkruis*, *Groote Beer*, and *Waterman* of 9,100 tons; *Sibajak*, 12,300 tons; and *Johan Van Oldenbarnevelt*, 20,000 tons.
2. Now Jeanne Sjaarda Baker, Clinton, Ontario, sister of the author.
3. Now Audrey Zevenbergen Neerhof, Chatsworth, Ontario.
4. Now Laura Tolsma Heeringa, Blackstock, Ontario.
5. History of the *Castel Bianco* courtesy of Jim Vandermei, Australia.
6. Now Corry Haak Greidanus, Clinton, Ontario.

Pier 21

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

Although the immigrants on the *Castel Bianco* disembarked in Quebec City, Quebec, most immigrants coming into Canada arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Pier 21 is to the Canadian immigration experience what Ellis Island is to the American. From 1928 when it first opened until 1971 when it closed, Pier 21 was Canada's gateway to over one million immigrants, one hundred thousand displaced persons and refugees, fifty thousand war brides and their

twenty-two thousand children, and three thousand British evacuee children escaping the ravages of war at home. And just as the United States had Castle Gardens before Ellis Island, Pier 2 in the North End of Halifax opened as the Ocean Terminal



Pier 21 and railroad station in Halifax from *To All Our Children: The Story of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada*, by Albert VanderMey.

in the late 1800s and functioned as an immigration shed between 1908 and 1928.

According to the recollections of those passing through, the port of Halifax was a dismal and drab looking place. Even Rimmer Tjalsma, the landing agent in Halifax for the Holland-America Line, looked forward to going to Quebec or Montreal now and again to meet incoming ships from the HAL, just to get away from the city. The halls at the Pier 21 shed were huge. Immigrants were instructed to sit and wait on benches until processed by customs agents for departure on trains inland. Security was tight in the halls and the heavy iron bars securing the windows left an unwelcome impression. However, those woes were soon forgotten when faced with the even greater woes of the endless train rides and first homes offered to the new immigrants.

On Canada Day, July 1, 1999, Pier 21 was officially reopened and has become a year-round visitor attraction. Among the photographs and the names of passengers and ships there are actual passports, immigration papers and ships' menus. Two suitcases belonging to Dirk Leegwater, who arrived in 1949, and the story of Willem (Wim) Kreeft, who arrived on the *Groote Beer* on September 30, 1952, bear evidence of Dutch immigrants passing through. The *Nieuw Amsterdam*, Holland's flagship and largest liner from 1938 to 1959 has the distinction of being the first vessel received at Pier 21.

Not So Distant Cousins:

Thoughts at the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Canadian Reformed Church

John Knight

What I recall most of my first night in Fenwick, Ontario, was the sound of crickets as I walked from my uncle's house to "our" house a half mile away. The chirping was one of many new experiences I had processed since our family's arrival in Halifax two days earlier. Others were

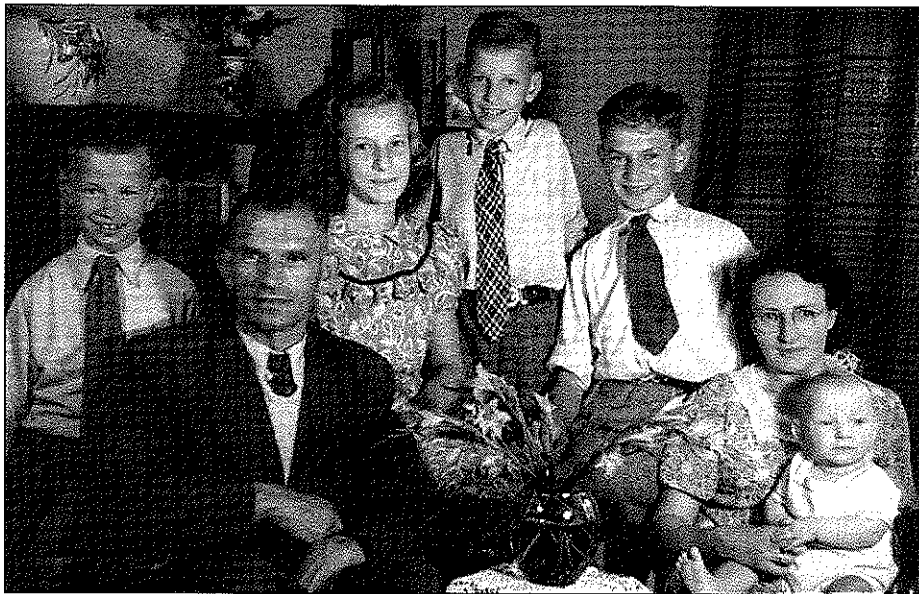
mom and dad will go in our car."

Church was at the Hamilton Labour Temple, almost forty miles away. The trip in the back of a delivery van seemed to take forever. The temperature during the service was uncomfortably warm. The minister was Rev. Herman Veldman,

an American whose Dutch seemed awkwardly old-fashioned. Dad later told me that Veldman had asked him for his *attestatie*, the church membership document most immigrants carried with them. Dad had left his at home with his passport. Veldman said he would come by and pick it up.

The following day, after putting in ten hours in the heat-drenched fields

of a nursery, Dad and my sister and I found ourselves almost too tired to eat. A car pulled into our driveway driven by Rev. Adam Persenaire, a Christian Reformed Church (CRC) Home Missionary who was checking on new arrivals. I was not privy to the discussion he had with my parents, but I do know that after a two-hour conversation he was given our family's *attestatie*. Persenaire had



The John Knight (Knegt) family in the Netherlands. Photo courtesy of the author (pictured third from the right).

the long ride on an immigrant train, and the final twenty miles wedged between suitcases in an old Buick driven by my cousin Joop. On that hot, humid July evening in 1950 we had finally come home.

"Tomorrow we go to Hamilton, to church," one of my cousins explained as we walked along the tree-lined street. "Someone will pick us up on the highway. I'll be going with you. Your

In retirement from a career that included twenty years with the Young Calvinist Federation, for a time as editor of *Insight*, and ten years as director of communication with Bethany Christian Services, John Knight now serves as the director of the Artist in Residence program at the Franciscan Life Process Center in Lowell, Michigan.



The Jan Knegt (brother of John) family in Canada. Photo courtesy of the author.

explained that the church we had visited the day before was Protestant Reformed; that my uncle, once an elder in his CRC, had chosen to leave that denomination. He promised that someone would pick us up the following Sunday to attend his church, only seventeen miles away.

We had gotten a letter from my uncle in 1948 in which he wrote how happy he was in Rev. Persenaire's church, an environment where old-country differences were absent. In the Netherlands my uncle's family had been members of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (liberated), also called GKN (maintaining Article 31), formed in 1944 when Dr. Klaas Schilder had broken with the CRC's Dutch sister church, the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN). As with many others, this schism, which drew almost 70,000 members away from the GKN, had strained relationships in our family. My uncle had failed to write us that he and other former "liberated" folk had left the CRC for the Protestant Reformed Church (PRC).

After that first Sunday in Canada we never again worshiped with my

uncle's family. Only on birthdays, at family reunions, and funerals would our lives briefly touch. Yet, ever since that July Sunday, I've been curious about my "distant" cousins, and how different life might have been had my family joined their church. I

also wondered why the CRC Synod had cautioned its pastors "concerning those immigrants who come to us

tated country with very poor economic conditions. The infrastructure had collapsed, livestock was decimated, and crop yields were less than 40 percent of pre-war production.² Additional factors were the new bureaucracy in charge of reconstruction which at times seemed as oppressive as an occupation force, the absence of living space for younger families, and the fear of another war. Most arrived with little money in their pockets: \$100 per adult, \$50 for each child, the maximum allowed by Dutch authorities from frozen bank accounts.

But what they lacked in cash they often made up in goods. "The Dutch arrivals became known for the large wooden crates they brought with them, forerunners perhaps of modern shipping containers. These heavy and

ungainly crates contained all their worldly belongings. Pier 21 officials in Halifax joked that the crates contained everything but the kitchen sink. The joking stopped on the day a crate, routinely opened for inspection, contained a large, gleaming kitchen sink nestled among the household goods."³

Among these immigrants, in significant numbers, were members of Reformed churches. Their departure impoverished their Dutch denominations, but enriched the Reformed presence in

North America. The earliest arrivals went to agricultural and forestry regions, but increasingly urban centers



John Knight (back row left) next to his brother Jan in Prudhommes Nursery in Fenwick, Ontario, 1950.

from the GKN (liberated)."¹

We came to Canada as part of the exodus of Dutch from a war-devas-

became the attraction. A large number joined the CRC, whose congregations in Canada grew from 14 to 114 during the years 1948-1955.⁴ To most immigrants the CRC offered a breath of fresh air without the old-country church squabbles.

Anticipating the arrival of their spiritual kin from the Netherlands, the CRC Mission Board had recruited fieldmen as early as 1946 to meet and assist the immigrants. The Board also encouraged US pastors who could still speak Dutch to consider work in

Canada. Among them were Home Missionaries Adam Persenaire (St. Catharines, ON, 1948), Peter Hoekstra (Lethbridge, AB, 1949), and pastors Simon A. Dykstra (Hamilton, ON, 1945) and Herman S. Koning (Houston, BC, 1949). Their task was clear: to build new faith communities among a hodgepodge of dislocated people whose geographic roots, educational levels, and denominational ties provided a peculiar mix.

Unlike previous Dutch settlements in North America in which groups often re-established themselves in new-world locations, the nature of Canada's Immigration Act of 1946 scattered the initial quota of 15,000 Dutch agricultural workers across most of its provinces. Isolation made these pioneers yearn for a cultural

haven rather than a carbon copy of their former churches. As a result, the immigrant congregations were made up of members from different denominations in the Netherlands. Some had been very active in those churches, others were members in name only. A few even came who had no former church ties. All were attracted to services in their own language and contact with fellow immigrants.

On Sundays their isolation was broken. They could share their week's experiences, compare wages and catalog purchases, swap Dutch periodicals, share the latest old-country news, and tell stories about Canadian neighbors and their strange customs. In town halls, schools, vacant church buildings, or hastily

constructed new ones, they had serendipitous experiences on Sundays just being together. If they were fortunate they would have a real preacher (always American and seldom fluent in the kind of Dutch they spoke), otherwise they settled for an elder who read a printed sermon from the old country. Either way, their service always included singing a few simple English hymns out of a red hymnal often imprinted with names of American churches.

No one could have dreamed that more than 35,000 Dutch immigrants (25.6 percent of the total) who entered Canada between 1946 and 1956 would join the CRC. Most of them treasured their new CRC ties. Early letters to relatives back home reported the absence of divisive issues



Halifax, Nova Scotia, Pier 21 is out of view to the left. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.



First group of Dutch immigrants in Sarnia, Ontario. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

denomination, "the Protestant Reformed churches are the only ones where our [liberated] church members will feel at home right away." CRC church council minutes show that within months of the arrival of the first boatload of Dutch immigrants, the "militancy of members

which still plagued Dutch churches. Thanks to the wise and patient leadership of experienced pastors, most had begun to put painful memories behind them.

But a few raised questions, unexpected questions, that caught unwary missionary pastors off guard. They were "liberated" folk who sought to bring Schilder's old-country feud into the Christian Reformed Church. But since the CRC was not guilty of the GKN's binding pronouncements, they had to find other reasons to question its "Reformed-ness."

What Dykstra, Hoekstra, Koning, and Persenaire least expected was to be challenged by freshly arrived Dutch immigrants about a 1924 event that caused a split in the CRC. They could not understand why these people, so busy carving out a new existence in Canada, would bring up the "Three Points of Kalamazoo." The issue only made more sense when they learned that a theological kinship existed between Dr. Klaas

Schilder and the PRC founder, Rev. Herman Hoeksema. Schilder had been an admirer of Hoeksema since he first wrote about him in *De Reformatie*.



Rev. Adam Persenaire, 1898-1977, ministered to Dutch immigrants in Canada from 1948 to 1964. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

Twice he experienced a warm reception in Protestant Reformed churches during visits to the United States. In 1947, however, Christian Reformed churches were warned by their

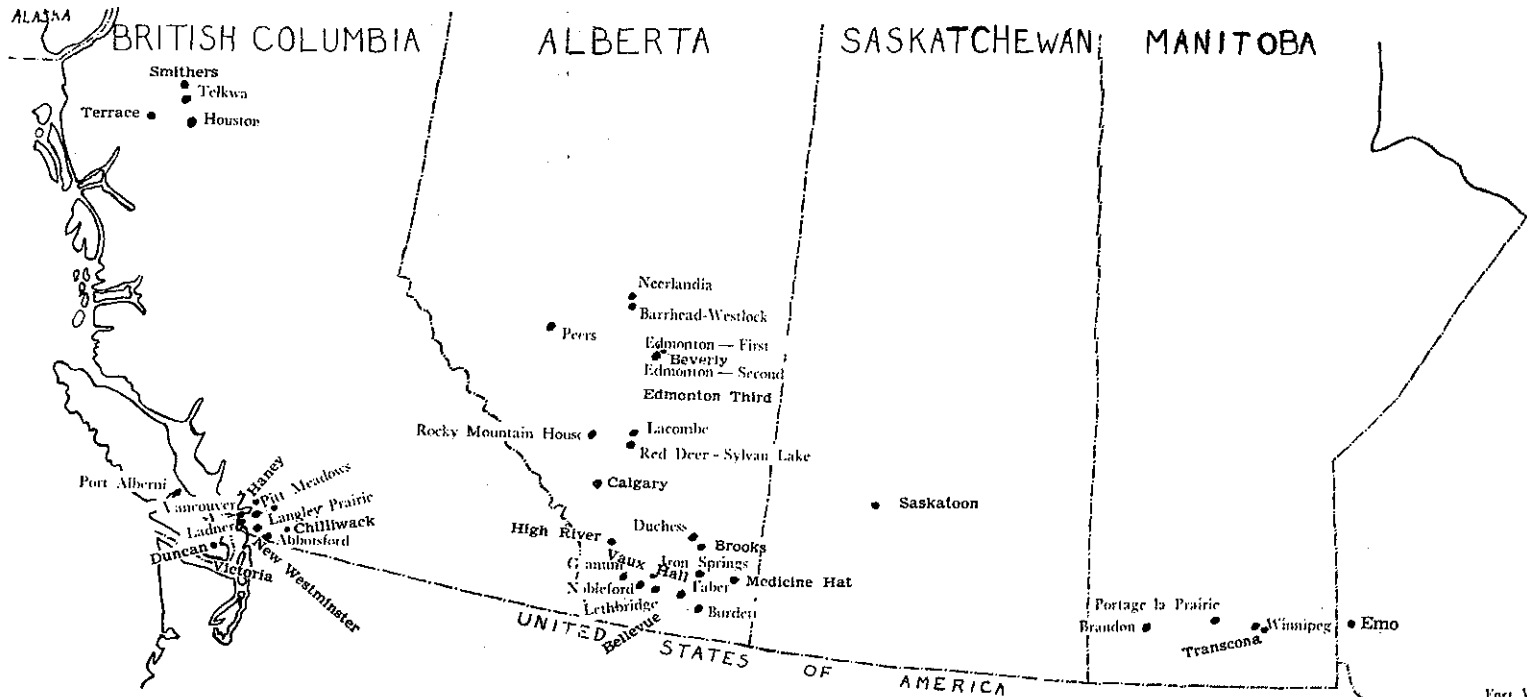
denomination's stated clerk not to open their doors to Schilder.

It was not surprising that Schilder advised would-be emigrants from his

accused of *Schilderism*" had begun to raise havoc in several established congregations like Hamilton, Edmonton, and Houston, and also in new mission stations like Lethbridge and St. Catharines. Some former GKN (liberated) members demanded that their consistories explain where they stood on the doctrinal issues of Common Grace and the Covenant. As a result, the *attestaties* of some were not as readily welcomed as others. Former members of the GKN (liberated) came to be viewed as a potential risk to the peace of CRC churches.

By mid 1949 fieldmen and pastors were given guidelines. Before a church council could accept church papers from former GKN (liberated) members, they were instructed to seek "assurance that as members of our [CRC] denomination they will not agitate the differences which exist amongst the *Gereformeerden* in the Netherlands."⁵

Schilder's endorsement was not lost on the PRC which also began a



mission effort to the immigrant Dutch in Canada. Three of the church leaders in the Hamilton, Ontario, congregation that I attended that first Sunday had been former members of the Hamilton CRC where Rev. Simon Dykstra and his council had put them under church discipline and denied them access to the communion table.

These men, L. Klapwyk, J. Ton and L. VanHuizen, felt ill-treated and aired their grievances in a December 18, 1948, letter to *De Reformatie*, then solidly a GKN (liberated) publication. Feeling unjustly persecuted by the CRC, they explained, "After our consistory declared that the Synodical decisions of Kalamazoo 1924 were according to God's Word and therefore binding to all members of our churches . . . we think it wise to alert the Christian press in the Netherlands and point to the consequences brothers and sisters might experience if they decide to join the CRC in Canada."⁶ Editor Schilder added, "for our people there is no place in the Christian Reformed Church in North America." That issue also carried a notice to "all GKN (Article 31)

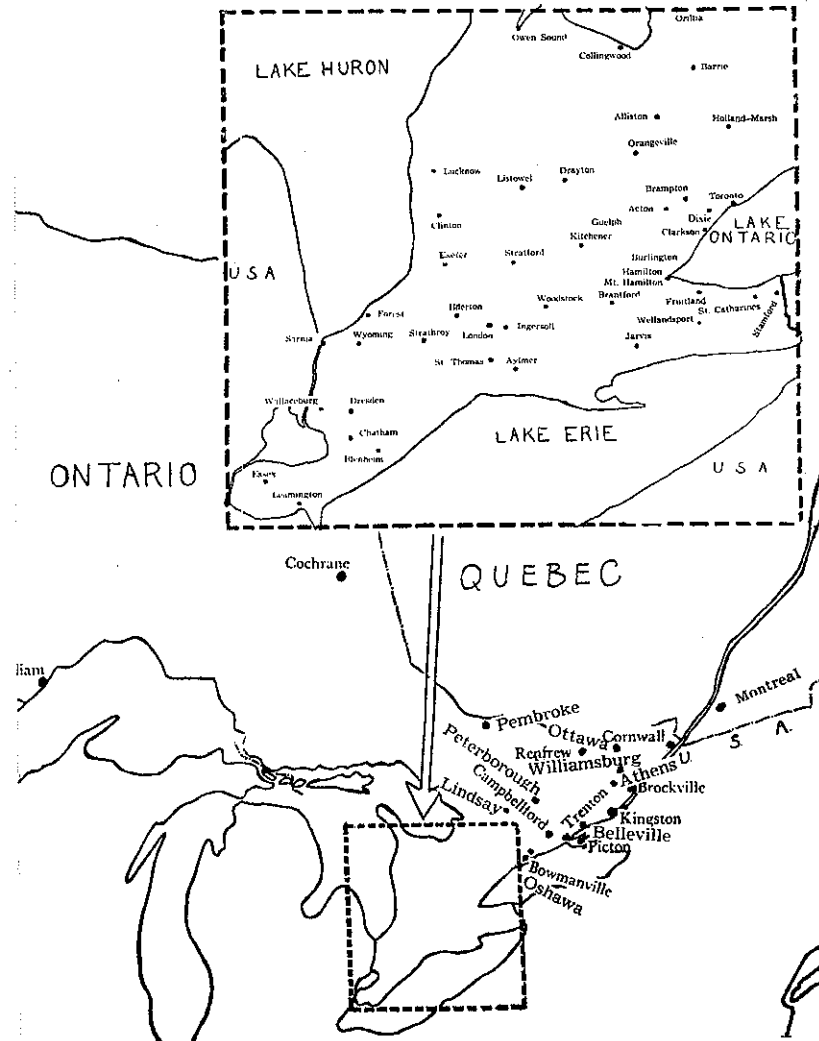
members interested in emigration to Canada to contact a committee of assistance . . . and recommend they transfer membership to the Protestant Reformed Church." Klapwyk of Hamilton was listed as contact person.

While still members of the CRC, Klapwyk and the others had been attending services at a house congregation led by itinerant PRC pastors John De Jong, Hubert De Wolf, and Bernard Kok. Each had been given time off by their Michigan congregations to work among immigrants in Ontario. Out West Rev. Walter Hofman and Rev. Peter Vis also forayed into Canada. It was from PRC pastors that Klapwyk and the others learned that in 1924 a "dictatorial" CRC Synod was to blame for a schism just like they experienced in 1944. When these PRC envoys explained that their denomination had close ties to the GKN (liberated) in the Netherlands and held similar views on Common Grace and the Covenant, they felt comfortable joining the PRC. Before the year's end the Hamilton

PRC needed larger facilities and began using the Labour Temple for its services. With much fanfare, and twenty-eight visitors from Michigan, a congregation was formally instituted on April 17, 1949. Not long afterwards they would welcome their own pastor.

Meanwhile, Rev. Andrew Cammenga had begun to work in Sarnia and Chatham, a work later carried out by Revs. DeWolf and Hanco. Chatham was soon organized as Canada's second Protestant Reformed Church. Requests for pulpit supply and subsidies to pay for their travel came from several groups. By letter, pastors were reminded of the immigrants' needs for sound catechism preaching, "preferably in the afternoon service . . . [but] please note that Lord's Day 1 has already been covered."⁷

Much earlier in Alberta, immigrant John DeHaas had lodged a complaint with his Nobleford CRC consistory. Among other things, DeHaas wanted



his church to protest his denomination's closed-door policy to Dr. Schilder during his visit to the United States in 1947.⁸ From him, the Nobleford pastor (and soon to be appointed home missionary) Rev. Peter Hoekstra learned that a group of immigrants in the Lethbridge area had been reading sermons together on Sundays and now wanted council approval to obtain sermons from the GKN (liberated) churches. Unfamiliar with events in the Netherlands, Hoekstra could only refer them to an earlier decision that allowed only Dutch sermons from the GKN, the CRC's sister denomination. This response led to a conclusion that the CRC, by default, had taken sides in

the Dutch schism. DeHaas and others began looking for another church and took up contact with Rev. Peter Vis, a PRC pastor in Montana. Promised that Rev. Cammenga would soon visit them, they organized themselves and installed office bearers, then wrote Cammenga what they had done.⁹

With two PRC congregations in Ontario, each with a pastor, and now an Alberta group eager to join, the PRC seemed to have a permanent foothold in Canada. Had

manpower been available to work this vast Canadian field, and support been unanimous, the PRC might have doubled its 1949 membership of 5,500 within ten years, simply by incorporating former members of the GKN (liberated) churches in Canada. The potential was there.

But several factors soon undid this potential. First, concern was raised within the PRC when seminary professor Rev. George Ophoff warned his 1949 Synod: "It is not true that we have a greater calling toward immigrants sent to us by Schilder [who] tells his people that he and they on the one hand and we on the other are agreed on doctrine. . . . I see a great danger in our going into Canada with



1952 brochure.

the idea that the liberated in Canada can easily be won over. . . . Like the people of the Christian Reformed churches here in America, they have a double-track theology."¹⁰

Further, for Dutch immigrants with solid church credentials to be treated as objects of mission activity was an insult. When Rev. Cammenga was asked to administer the sacraments in Lethbridge, and answered that he would first have to check with his US consistory, the church's office bearers openly wondered if they should even ask him to preach, since Word and Sacrament are one.¹¹ Ever since Schilder's visit to the US in 1947, doubts about the theology of

the “liberated” church had colored the PRC attitude toward the “liberated” immigrants. Ophoff noted prophetically, “These liberated ministers in the Netherlands, once having learned what we teach, would be just as ready to expel us from their fellowship as the Christian Reformed were in 1924.”¹²

Next a declaration of principles, drafted in 1950 by the PRC Mission Committee as a working document to guide its outreach program, was seen by the Dutch immigrants and their spiritual kin in the Netherlands as a creedal imposition and a stumbling block to membership. Rev. Hoeksema further added fuel to the fire when he wrote in the PRC’s *Standard Bearer* that before newcomers could be admitted, they first had to be instructed in the “Protestant Reformed Truth.”¹³ When the *Declaration* was adopted a year later, Schilder promptly reversed his earlier advice to immigrants, and the PRC, too, was off-limits to his followers.

At the same time, the CRC was also reaching out to the Dutch immigrants. The PRC Synod in 1949 heard this quote from a report by Adam Persenaire to the CRC, “How about the Protestant Reformed Churches you ask? Are you afraid that they are going to compete with us? Not at all. These immigrants are tired of ecclesiastical strife in the Netherlands. They are one with us.”¹⁴ In March 1950, CRC Home Missions secretary Rev. Harry Blystra reported that the denomination had twelve home missionaries in Canada and was in the process of calling two more.¹⁵ The PRC lacked the resources to match what the CRC was sending.

Back in 1944, Rev. J. Hettinga had led two-thirds of his previous Dutch congregation of Hasselt out of the GKN. During the summer of 1950, serving in Harlingen, he made visits to dispersed “liberated” immigrants



Rev. Hubert De Wolf, 1912-1980, worked among the Dutch in Canada for the Protestant Reformed Church. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

meet their expectations.¹⁶

At a consistory meeting of the PRC-affiliated Free Reformed Church in Lethbridge, organized on April 16, 1950, it was Hettinga who proposed they change their name to *Canadian Reformed Church*. When Rev.

Cammenga visited a month later, the church’s leaders assured him of their wish to affiliate. Their minutes record, “The Rev. A. Cammenga . . . gives a brief summary of the doctrine of the covenant in the Protestant Reformed churches and stresses that this doctrine is not binding. Only the

from British Columbia to Ontario. As president of the Association for Help to Emigrants and Emigrated Persons, Hettinga had previously promised assistance from his denomination, in case the PRC should fail to

Word of God and the Confessions are binding.”¹⁷ Cammenga then traveled on to Edmonton, but by the end of his two-week trip through Alberta enough suspicion had surfaced between him and “liberated” immigrants that a PRC presence in Alberta was in jeopardy.

CRC pastor Adam Persenaire came to Ontario with his wife Dora and eight children. Working with immigrants from his home base in St. Catharines he tirelessly planted new churches in the Niagara peninsula. Because his children didn’t understand Dutch, used exclusively in worship, they attended a local Baptist church. Among St. Catharines’ earliest parishioners were former members of the GKN (liberated) churches. The first person to sign the Form of Subscription below Persenaire’s name on August 18, 1948, was Elder J. J. Knegt, my uncle.¹⁸ In Canada Uncle Jan initially



Prior to serving the Dutch immigrants in Canada, Rev. Simon A. Dykstra was a Christian Reformed Church missionary to China. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.



Houston, British Columbia Christian Reformed congregation. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

joined the CRC, but the wounds of the Dutch schism were still raw. It was hard to suppress stories of betrayal by either “liberated” or “synodical” folk. Dutch church papers, to which many subscribed, also kept these wounds open. Even the diplomacy of Rev. Persenaire could not persuade “liberated” members that their old-country problem was not an issue in Canada. They insisted that the CRC must sever its historic ties with the GKN.

Meanwhile in Alberta, John DeHaas, who had earlier pushed to get printed sermons from the GKN (liberated), asked his Alberta church to request that Classis Pacific send an overture to the 1949 CRC Synod to either initiate correspondence with the GKN (liberated) or at least decide with which GKN denomination it

should have a legitimate relationship.

When these attempts failed, DeHaas appealed personally to the CRC Synod. Not mincing words, he condemned the CRC, which, “by its failure to maintain correspondence with the Gereformeerde Kerken (Article 31), and by carrying this on with the Gereformeerde Kerken, has condemned the first-mentioned unheard, and made itself guilty of transgressing the ninth commandment.”¹⁹

A year later some men in Neerlandia, Alberta, also urged the CRC Synod to look into the events that led to the schism in the Netherlands churches. They suggested that the CRC bring delegates of both groups together to present their cases. After listening to both sides, they argued the 1950 Synod should be

able to judge “on the basis of Scripture and Confession with which Church [it] should have correspondence and which group should have to be called to repentance.”²⁰ After Synod denied his 1949 appeal, DeHaas wrote his former pastor in the Netherlands for advice and was told, “to seek help from the Protestant Reformed Churches, but if . . . you cannot recognize [them] as a true Church in the sense of Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, the alternate course is to seek help from the Netherlands in order to institute a Church.”²¹

The brethren in Neerlandia were equally discouraged when the CRC felt

unable to arbitrate in the Dutch conflict. Even when the CRC Synod suggested the communication with the GKN (liberated) could continue, they felt slighted.²² Unlike their kin in Chatham and Hamilton, who had found a home in the PRC, in Alberta it looked more and more that they had to look elsewhere.

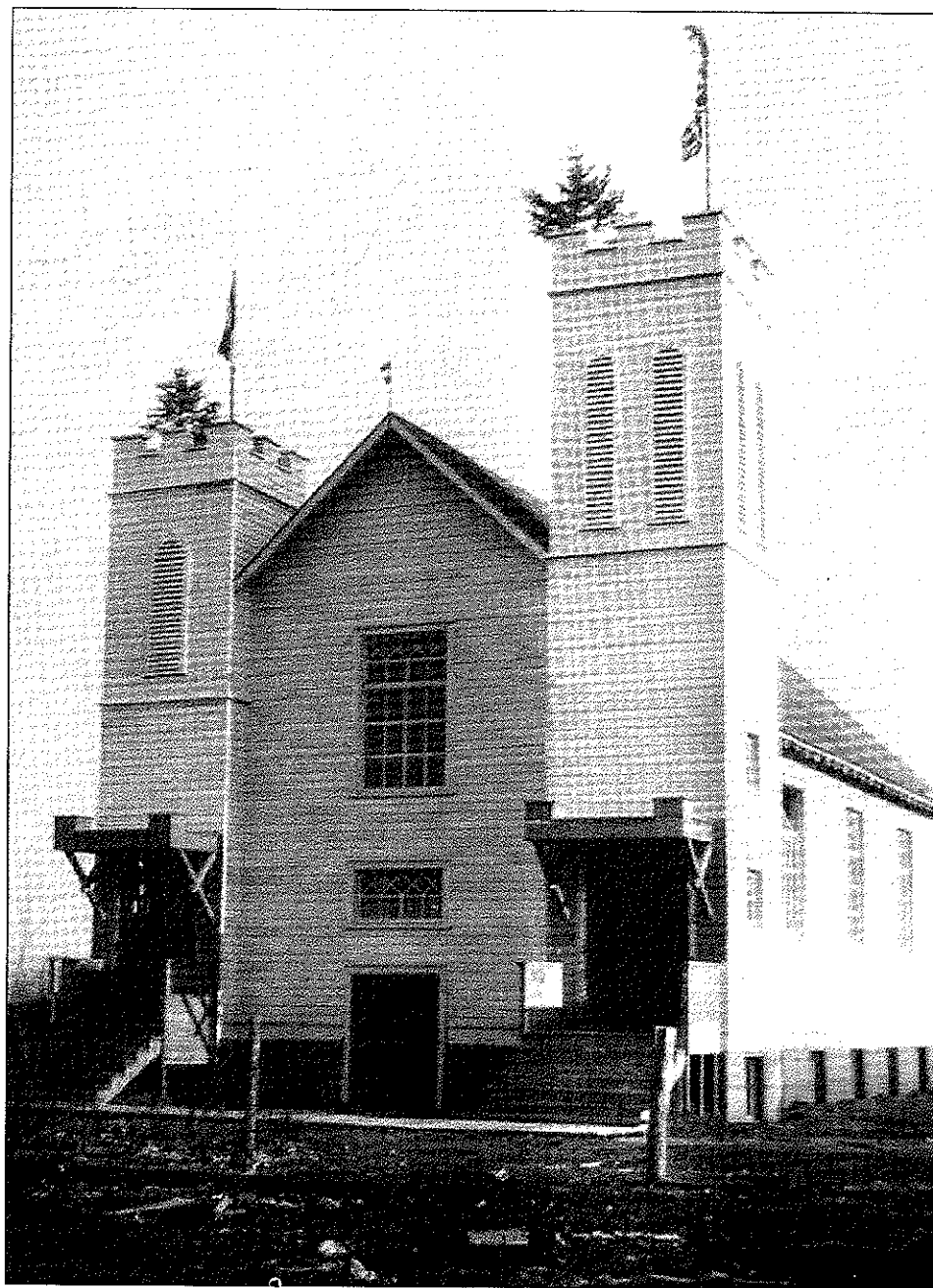
The same CRC Synod which felt unable to arbitrate the Dutch conflict also heard from its Canadian Immigration Committee. Its field personnel reported they would no longer seek out “adherents to the Article 31 group. . . [who] have expressed the desire to be placed henceforth by their own organization.”²³ During those first three years of immigration only a handful of former GKN (liberated) agitated within the CRC. A much larger number found a

permanent church home within the CRC and would play an active role in it. But after 1950 this changed.

Ever since Rev. Hettinga mailed a questionnaire to one hundred immigrant families in November 1949 asking how his GKN (liberated) could serve their needs, the thought of seeking old-country support had grown stronger. His trip through Canada deepened their desire to go back to their roots. Hettinga spoke their language, American pastors did not. They began to see that "liberated" churches could be planted in Canada. Initially they would have to be elder-led, because there were no GKN (liberated) pastors in North America. But hopefully they would find ministers back in the Netherlands willing to accept a call and serve them as fellow immigrants.

Once that option seemed feasible, more and more former members of the GKN (liberated) held on to their transfer papers. In Houston, British Columbia, they arrived about the same time as the CRC pastor, Herman S. Koning, one of the oldest American pastors to venture into Canada. Due to an influx of new immigrants, the ten-year-old church was comfortably filled.²⁴ Some household heads with former ties to the GKN (liberated), however, would attend services and send their children to Koning's catechism classes. But they held on to their *attestaties*. Soon, they began to assemble on Sundays as a house congregation. In November 1950, as their numbers grew, they moved into a school building.

This prompted Koning and his consistory to invite the heads of the group's families to sit down for a discussion. The invitation was mailed on February 9, 1951. The "liberated" brethren agreed to meet only if the proceedings would be published. The council objected, initially wanting only an informal discussion.



Neerlandia, Alberta Christian Reformed Church built in 1929. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

While this dialog took place, the Houston group had already written the Canadian Reformed Church in Edmonton asking for their help in instituting a church.²⁵ The CRC in Houston saw its hopes for a larger, more viable congregation dashed when a Canadian Reformed congregation was instituted in March 1951. Koning's stay in Houston was cut short

by a heart attack a few months later, forcing his return to the United States.

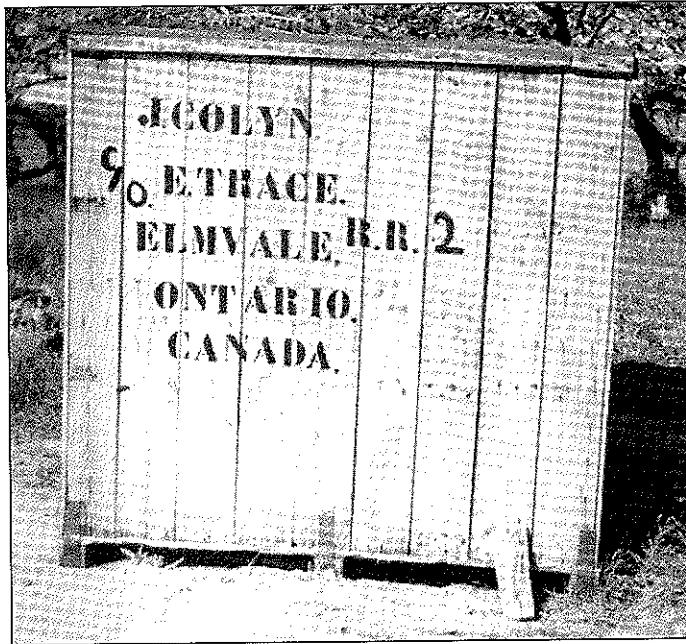
By 1950, immigrants with other than agricultural skills had settled in cities throughout Canada. It was the year the PRC peaked at two congregations, the Reformed Church in America had just begun taking its first timid steps working

with new Dutch-Canadians,²⁶ and the Christian Reformed Church added fifteen new congregations to its existing thirty-two.²⁷

Starting from scratch, the Canadian Reformed Churches established five congregations by the end of 1950: Edmonton, AB; Georgetown, ON; Lethbridge, AB; Neerlandia, AB; and New Westminster, BC. In November it held its first Classis Canada meeting. Soon it looked at other communities where clusters of "liberated" newcomers had settled. As a denomination they lacked the resources of their CRC brethren: low-cost loans, church furnishings, pulpit supply, a hymnal, an English-language Compendium for use in church schools, and a youth federation whose periodical, *The Young Calvinist*, carried Canadian news.

When CRC Classis Grand Rapids East asked its twenty Ontario congregations to form their own classis, at least five immigrant churches protested. They overtured the 1950 CRC Synod not to proceed with the formation of a separate Classis Ontario because, "It would retard the process of Americanization; Dutch would become the official language; [and] if elders from Ontario attend Michigan classes, they will soon be able to follow the discussions in English, and learn to express themselves in English."²⁸ This attitude did not remain. The first suggestion for a separate CRC national synod in Canada surfaced only seven years later.

A remarkable characteristic about the Canadian Reformed Churches was their ability to establish a denomination without the help of clergy. Some elders traveled to other communities where "liberated"



Crate used to ship immigrant possession to Canada. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

members had settled, promoted their cause, and if conditions were favorable, installed a consistory. VanOene details how elder D.M. Barendrecht accompanied Rev. Hettinga to Edmonton to meet with a "liberated" group, then went to New Westminster, in southern BC and finally, after he moved to northern



Immigrant family in Ontario, 1950. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

BC, helped start the church in Houston. It was an elder from Edmonton (700 rail miles away) who instituted the Houston church and ordained two elders and one deacon.²⁹ Elder-run churches organized themselves into classes and their earliest roll calls are devoid of pastors. The elders did more. My cousin Joop was married in a civil ceremony one day and the following day he and his bride had their union solemnized by an elder.

A denomination without trained clergy, however, cannot survive long. Unlike the CRC in Canada, the Canadian Reformed

Churches could only look to the Netherlands for pastors and instructors for their seminary. At the second Classis Canada meeting in 1951, all congregations were asked to help finance the move of the first Dutch minister, Rev. J. T. Van Popta, to Edmonton. The following year such costs began to be subsidized by the Netherlands government, but in 1951 this was still a hardship issue for the young denomination.³⁰ By the time the CRC in Canada welcomed its first two Dutch pastors in December 1952, the Canadian Reformed Churches had already installed six. This immigrant pastor leadership would contribute to the Canadian Reformed Church's already isolated place within Canadian society.

The two denominations would travel parallel paths but avoid dialog. The Canadian Reformed churches spent years fine-tuning their own translations of the confessional documents and church order. When in 1954 it was suggested to temporarily use the Psalter Hymnal of the Christian Reformed Church, a motion limited such use to only the thirty-

four rhymed versions that could be sung on the Genevan tunes.³¹ Later, Canadian Reformed congregations were given the option of using the translation of the Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dordt found in the same Psalter Hymnal, while a definitive text was being worked on by a committee.³²

The Canadian Reformed churches tended to stress distinctiveness rather than find common ground with other Reformed/Presbyterian churches they may converse with. The sticky point

education that disrupted the peace in Hamilton, Ontario.

The future of the Protestant Reformed Church which I attended in 1950 was threatened when a Canadian Reformed church congregation was begun in Hamilton on May 20, 1951. By that time the First Protestant Reformed Church had declared its independence from the PRC federation but still remained vitally interested in denominational issues such as "moves toward liberation" led by Rev. Hubert De Wolf.

arbitration in 1954, conditions for more trauma remained.³⁴

It was the school issue that caused a permanent split in the melded Hamilton Canadian Reformed congregation. Members were divided on where to send their children. Next to their sanctuary under construction, stood the Hamilton Christian School. Most consistory members were inclined to send their children there. The pastor and some council members held out for a distinctly Canadian Reformed school. This conflict

led to factions within the church council deposing each other. On July 27, 1957, Rev. W. Loopstra, Elders J. J. Knegt, Jr., and J. C. J. Kuntz called the congregation to worship the following Sunday at their usual place of worship, the Labour Temple. The remaining nine council members called the congregation to worship at the not yet finished church building on Mohawk Road.³⁵

After a brief courtship with the Protestant Reformed churches, which provided guest

preachers during the conflict, on November 18, 1959, the First Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton was accepted as an *autonomous* group into Classis Hamilton of the CRC; it is now known as the Immanuel Christian Reformed Church. In 1999 it served as the calling church of the first CRC Synod to meet in Canada.

The departure of Immanuel from the Canadian Reformed Churches



First Christian Reformed Church building in Hamilton, Ontario. Photo courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

in discussions with these denominations, and most recently with the Independent Christian Reformed churches, always seems to hinge on their view of the 1944 liberation.³³ Because this Liberation determined the very nature of the Canadian Reformed churches, it is not surprising they have insisted on their own Christian day schools. It was precisely the issue of a separate Christian

With a Canadian Reformed congregation close by, accusations were hurled back and forth between the two groups. But when the shouting was over, overtures toward union were made which was achieved in June 1952. What should have been a joyous occasion turned bittersweet. Within the Hamilton congregation, the two factions remained suspicious of each other. Even after synodical

opened up conditions allowing the incorporation of a congregation affiliated with the Canadian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. A small group had been meeting there since May 1953 as an outpost of the Chatham congregation. Hamilton had repeatedly opposed their joining their denomination because they felt the brethren in Grand Rapids were better off belonging to one of the PRC congregations. In 1957, the group's ninety-eight members became the American Reformed Church. During a 1971 visit, Schilder biographer Rudolf van Reest was told by Grand Rapids pastor Rev. A.B. Roukema that had all "liberated" immigrants who settled in his city remained faithful, his church could have numbered 1500 instead of 173 members.³⁶

As part of the CRC, Hamilton's Immanuel Church would grow into a blended congregation that attracted transfers from other CRCs. But not all bases were covered when the congregation switched allegiance. One Sunday our newly arrived pastor, Rev. Jacob Quartel, one elder, and I as deacon, all signed a form of subscription in an existing minute book. It took some weeks to realize the three of us had pledged allegiance to the wrong denomination. When the error was discovered, it brought a few chuckles in the council room.

The departure of "liberated" members from the CRC and their formation as a separate denomination had little to do with doctrinal issues. It was solely based on the CRC's continued relationship with its sister church in the Netherlands, the GKN. The Canadian Reformed Church spent much of its first half century legitimizing itself within the broader Reformed body of churches. At least twice it addressed the CRC Synod asking it to reconsider its relationship to the GKN. As long as the CRC

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BRITISH COLUMBIA: A. DeJong, 1714 Nanaimo St., New Westminster, B.C.; E. Laninga, 3676 Imperial St. S., Burnaby, B.C.; J. Prins, Beverly, Alta.

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THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH has Congregations or groups in the following places in Canada:

BRITISH COLUMBIA: Terrace; Smithers; Telkwa; Houston; Prince George; Loos-Crescent Spur; Abbotsford; Ladner; Langley; New Westminster; Chilliwack; Haney; Marpole-Fraser St. Vancouver; First Vancouver; Victoria; Duncan; Alberni; Courtenay-Campbell River.

ALBERTA: Lacombe; Red Deer; Rocky Mountain House; Alex; Sylvan Lake; Edmonton, 4 churches; Peers; Barrhead-Westlock; Neerlandia; La-Glace; Medicine Hat; Brooks; Bellevue; High River; Calgary; Vauxhall; Taber; Lethbridge; Nobleford; Iron Springs; Burdett; Granum.

SASKATCHEWAN: Saskatoon; Regina; Red Deer Hall-Prince Albert
MANITOBA: Winnipeg; Brandon; Portage la Prairie; Transcona.

ONTARIO: Sarnia, 2 churches; Forest; Wyoming; Wallaceburg; Dresden; Ridgeway-Blenheim; Chatham; St. Thomas; Aylmer; London; Exeter; Clinton; Lucknow; Woodstock; Essex; Leamington; Bowmanville; Brockville; Cornwall; Kingston; Lindsay; Pembroke; Peterborough; Renfrew; Williamsburg; Ottawa; Athens; Stamford; St. Catharines; Wellandport; Fruitland; Jarvis; Mount Hamilton; Hamilton; Brantford; Guelph; Drayton; Owen Sound; Orangeville; Acton; Burlington; Kitchener; Trenton; Campbellford; Picton; Belleville; Toronto, 2 churches; Holland Marsh; Springdale; Alliston; Barrie; Brampton; Clarkson; Orillia; Collingwood; Ingersoll; New Liskeard; Cochrane; Oshawa; Emo; Fort William.

QUEBEC: Montreal.

NOVA SCOTIA: Middleton; Port Williams; Belmont; New Glasgow.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND: Charlottetown.

Christian Reformed Church ministers, fieldmen, and congregations in Canada, 1952.

failed to recognize the GKN (liberated) as the only legitimate Dutch church still faithful to the Reformed Creeds and Church Order, no common ground existed for any kind of relationship between it and the Canadian Reformed churches.

The Canadian Reformed and Christian Reformed in Canada lived in

separate communities, they rarely talked about their differences or mixed socially, except for mandatory family reunions, the birthdays of family patriarchs, and at funerals. The fact that they only engaged in small talk reflects the Dutch practice of *verzuiling*, now a feature of life in their new country also.³⁷

"virtues" as speaking your mind at all costs. They argued that it has been ceaseless confrontation that had led to the schism in 1944 and to impact Canadian society a gentler disposition had to be adopted.

Both Canadian Reformed and Christian Reformed communities are convinced that God brought them to Canada to further his kingdom. The one set of not-so-distant cousins in the Canadian Reformed churches chose to preserve their heritage in the new environment. The other cousins pursued a riskier, outwardly focused mandate. Looking back to 1950, our family's church membership could have just as easily been placed in either denomination. &

It was not easy for CRC home missionaries to confront the cultural traits of newly arrived Dutch immigrants, and do so patiently. As mentors they sought to chip away at such hurtful old-country



DE HEER EN MEVROUW C. TROELSTRA EN HUN KINDEREN UIT HOENSBRÖCK, LIMBURG, IN HET WINDSOR STATION TE MONTREAL VOOR HUN VERTREK NAAR BRITISH COLUMBIA, BIJGESTAAN IN HUN REISPROBLEMEN DOOR DE HEER J. C. KRUGSMAN, COLONIZATION AGENT, DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION & COLONIZATION VOOR DE CANADIAN PACIFIC SPOORWEG MAATSCHAPPIJ.

Endnotes

1. Acts of Synod 1949, Supplement 22.
2. Norman Phillips, *Holland and the Canadians*, (Amsterdam: Contact Publishing Company, 1946) p. 20.
3. Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic, Pier 21, *The Gateway that Changed Canada* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 1997) p. 133.
4. "Centennial Facts and Background," Centennial Committee of the CRC, 1957, p. 59.
5. Acts of Synod 1949, Supplement 22.
6. *De Reformatie*, January 22, 1949.
7. Letter of J. Ton, PRC Acts of Synod, 1949, p. 73.
8. W.W.J. Van Oene, *Inheritance Preserved*, 1st ed., (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1975) p. 69.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
10. Acts of PRC Synod 1949, p. 50.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Acts of PRC Synod 1949, p. 54.
13. Van Oene, *Inheritance Preserved*, p. 73.
14. PRC Acts of Synod 1949, p. 51.
15. *The Young Calvinist*, June 1950, p. 21.
16. Van Oene, *Inheritance Preserved*, p. 73.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
18. Both Uncle Jan and my father knew Schilder from their catechism years. With their wives, they attended the 1944 rally where a suspended Schilder presented his *Declaration of Liberation or Reconciliation*, a paper drawn up in somewhat archaic language to resemble the Secession document of 1834. After the meeting, my parents chose to remain with the GKN; my uncle's family joined the "1944 Secession."
19. Acts, 1949, XII. Appeal of J. DeHaas, p.65, 66.
20. CRC Acts of Synod, 1950, p. 68.
21. Van Oene, *Inheritance Preserved*, p. 71.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Acts of CRC Synod, 1950, p. 346.
24. *The Banner*, December 23, 1949, p. 1526.
25. Van Oene, *Inheritance Preserved*, pp.83-85.
26. "To Celebrate Our Heritage and Hope," Classis Ontario RCA, 1978, p.10.
27. Centennial Facts and Background, Centennial Committee of the CRC, 1957, p. 58.
28. Acts of CRC Synod, 1950, p. 457-463.
29. Van Oene, *Inheritance Preserved*, pp.85, 82, 85.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
31. Acta van de Nationale Synode van Homewood, A.D.1954, p. 91.
32. Acta van de Synode Homewood-Carman, 1958, p. 219. This translation was not completed until 1972.
33. *The Liberation: Causes and Consequences*, Cornelis Van Dam, ed., (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1995) p. 51.
34. VanOene, *Inheritance Preserved*, p. 129, 142 ff.
35. *Ibid.* p. 155.
36. Rudolf van Reest, *Terugzien na vijftientig jaren*, (Goes, Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1972) p.130.
37. *Verzuiling* typified Dutch society during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. It compartmentalized all of society within narrow denominational boundaries not only in church and school, but also in politics, recreation, entertainment, social welfare, communications, trade and labor organizations, community development, etc.

Klaas Schilder and the 1944 Secession

John Knight

During the 1920s Rev. Klaas Schilder was the youngest and most popular preacher in a three-parish church in Delft. When he preached in his own Westerkerk, young people from other parishes often swelled the ranks and had to sit on the platform, or even the steps of the pulpit. The young Schilder did



Theologian Klaas Schilder. All images in this article are courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

not excel in all pastoral qualities. His “family visits were few and always brief and hurried,”¹ but his sermons were celebrated for presenting old truths in fresh new ways.

He knew the power of communication. It was during his Delft years that Klaas Schilder began to cultivate a national audience: He frequently contributed to *De Reformatie*, wrote columns for three other national and two local

publications, and, in November 1924, helped to found the NCRV (which soon became a prominent Christian radio network).

Schilder was bright and ambitious, a worthy candidate to step into the

Dutch Reformed leadership vacuum created by the deaths of Abraham Kuyper (1920) and Herman Bavinck (1921). Without strong leadership, the Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland (GKN) seemed ill-equipped to deal with worldly influences and the smug complacency within its ranks.

Kuyper’s structures were still in place but they lacked spirit. GKN pastor S.J. Popma wrote about the 1920s, “more urgently than ever, we felt the need for solid Calvinistic thinking . . . [and] yearned for a Church that would nurture us as a mother and *decisively* guide us from cradle to grave.”²

The first concern, Calvinistic scholarship, was being filled by men like Dooyeweerd and his colleagues associated with Amsterdam’s Free University. The second concern was increasingly on the mind of Schilder. A graduate of the GKN seminary in his birthplace, Kampen, he soon set his sights on a doctoral program. Often identifying himself as a direct child of the 1834 Secession,³ Schilder hoped someday to have a teaching position at Kampen’s “Secessionist” seminary. He hoped to bring back the glory days of Bavinck, who had left there in 1902 to join the Free University faculty in Amsterdam.

While still in Delft, Schilder published a rebuttal to critics who accused his denomination of being run by a hierarchy: “We do not have a Sanhedrin in the GKN. Our classes do not have permanent boards run by perpetual presidents . . . Our broader assemblies cannot pick and choose their agenda, but only deliberate what comes from our people, from the

bottom up."⁴ Twenty years later his sentiments about the GKN's establishment would be much different.

Schilder's writings earned him widespread recognition. He spoke his mind and loved a good argument. Especially his contributions to *De Reformatie* received much attention. Its circulation was not large, but important since hundreds of GKN pastors subscribed to it. *De Reformatie*, the brainchild of Herman Bavinck, got its name from a secessionist publication begun in 1836 by Scholte, De Cock, and Brummelkamp. Prof. Dr. V. Hepp became its editor-in-chief when it was



Herman Bavinck.

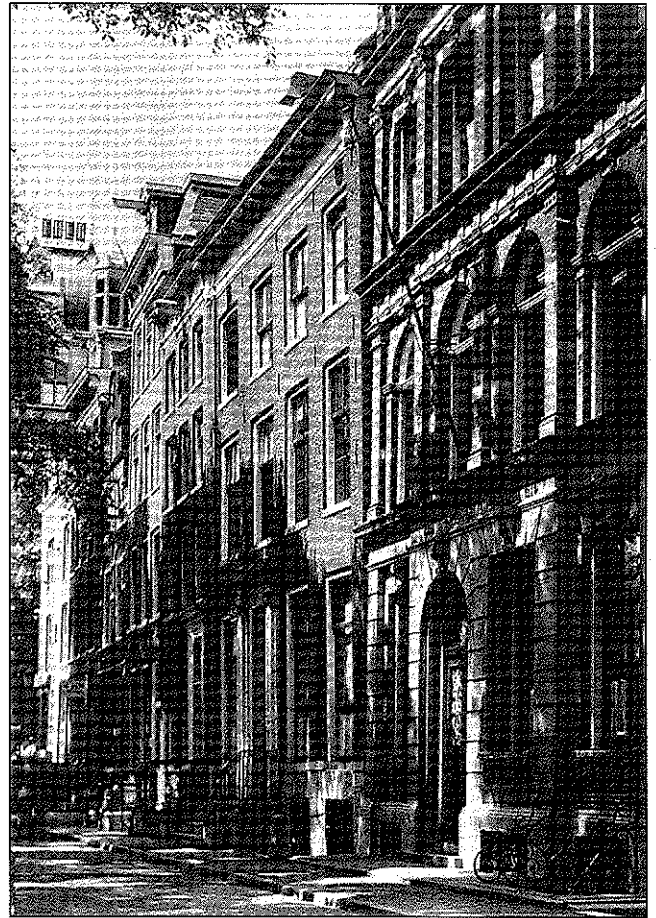
launched in 1920.⁵ Schilder soon earned a place on its editorial board.

When Schilder was given a leave of absence in 1930 by his Rotterdam consistory (his sixth church in fourteen years) to pursue doctoral studies, he first considered the Free University, the logical choice, since Kampen could not grant a doctoral degree. But fellow editor Hepp, Bavinck's successor at the Free University, insisted that Schilder take his introductory course in dogmatics as the condition for pursuing his studies at the Free University. Schilder felt insulted and instead enrolled at the University of Erlangen in Germany.

At the same time a feud had been brewing between Hepp and the other three editors of *De Reformatie*. When Hepp came back from a trip to America to deliver his Stone Lectures in 1930, he found himself relieved of his editorship. Schilder, in the middle of his studies at Erlangen, craved to be back in the Netherlands. One of his fellow editors, the respected psychologist Dr. Jan Waterink, cautiously approached him to see if he might consider an appointment at the Free University, even though he knew Schilder had set his heart on teaching at Kampen. In his usual blunt style, Schilder confided to his friend C. Veenhof, "I can't imagine those high and mighty 'uncles' at the Free University will tolerate my spirit, let alone embrace me."⁶

By 1936, firmly established at Kampen Seminary, Schilder became the sole editor of *De Reformatie*. Increasingly popular in communities where the 1834 Secession had the strongest following, Schilder used this forum to stress differences between its "secessionist" readers and those whose origins could be traced to the 1886 *Doleantie*, an 1886 secession from the Dutch Reformed Church that that merged with the 1834 group in 1892. He was not afraid of verbal tussles. In 1932 he had accused former Prime Minister Dr. H. Colijn of broadening the readership of the daily *Standaard* beyond a more narrow Reformed subscription base.⁷

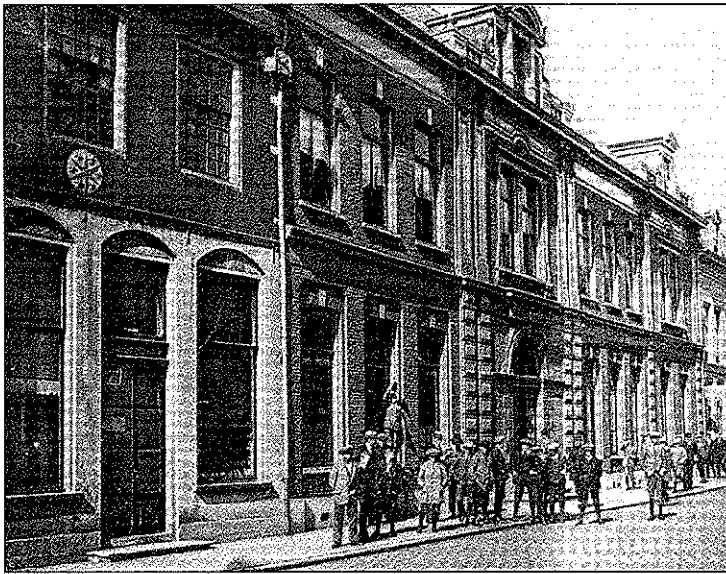
Schilder also was frequently at odds



Free University buildings on the Keizersgracht, Amsterdam.

with H.H. Kuyper, Abraham Kuyper's son and editor of *De Heraut*, on all manner of issues. And when in 1937 his former Delft colleague, Rev. T. J. Hagen, wrote a favorable review of a book by Dr. Hepp in which Schilder claimed he was attacked, he asked Hagen's consistory to censure their pastor for transgressing the ninth commandment.⁸

In January 1939 Schilder came to the United States and preached at Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids in a well-publicized Dutch service. Rev. Henry Vander Kam, who was present, mentions that the church was filled to capacity one hour before a service that normally only drew forty or fifty people. Schilder preached for a full hour. "The audience had never seen a preacher perspire the way K.S. did,



Theological School in Kampen.

nor had they seen anyone drink as much water.”⁹

Verbal skirmishes such as these added spice to Schilder’s career as a writer and publisher. During World War II the antagonism between Schilder and Kuyper was not lost on the German authorities who sought to use disagreements within the Reformed community to their own advantage. The head of the puppet Nazi government in the Netherlands, the Austrian Dr. Arthur Seyss-Inquart, readily quoted Abraham Kuyper and his fondness for things German to irritate the Reformed population.

The German invasion shocked the Dutch nation, which previously held much admiration for Germany. Major adjustments had to be made for life under an oppressive regime. With the fall of France and the possibility that Britain might be captured, church leaders scrambled to provide guidelines on how to survive. Some talked compromise, others were more defiant. Three weeks into the war, Schilder wrote, “I have a premonition that unless God works a miracle [among us] we may have to start again to build from the bottom up. Just as De Cock did.”¹⁰ Clearly, he was not referring to

affairs of state. Shortly after German forces occupied the Netherlands, in May 1940, Schilder was arrested. On his release he was placed under a gag order. He could no longer publish his opinions, at least not openly.

At the same time the iron grip of the enemy occupa-

tion gradually smothered freedoms. The once prosperous nation experienced privation and hunger. After the failed Battle of Arnhem in September



German occupation of the Netherlands during WW II.

1944, four million Dutch found themselves trapped with 100,000 allied troops by the Germans, who controlled

whatever food and fuel supplies were left. Able-bodied men were rounded up for forced labor, or went into hiding. By April 1945 rations were cut to 500 calories per day.

There were a few bright spots against this bleak backdrop. But the hardship itself forged bonds of hope as church and unchurched stood together in their fight against a common enemy. An enviable solidarity took shape among Catholics, Protestants, Communists and Humanists. The more arrests by the occupying forces, the stronger became the bond between former strangers. Among the organized resistance, GKN members were the largest number and were only second to the Communists in their zeal to make life difficult for the Nazis.

Schilder took on the GKN establishment after its 1942 Synod declared its views on certain theological matters firm and binding. He instructed his consistory not to abide by Synod’s decision. His views were widely circulated and, by February 1944, the next GKN Synod declared Schilder guilty of schismatic activities. On March 23, 1944, the GKN Synod suspended Schilder. The national *Algemeen Handelsblad* was quick to blame this on the long-running animosity between the Free University and the Kampen Seminary. Because he was in hiding, Synod had to try him in absentia. Contacted through his brother, Schilder was allowed two weeks to declare his contrition. When he refused, by a 41-5 vote he was first suspended for three months, then, on August 3, permanently expelled. Throughout, a face-to-face meeting between Schilder and Synod never took place.

The occupation forces were well aware of the tensions within the GKN. Seyss-Inquart sent one of his deputies to Schilder’s brother with word that he could freely move around without fear of arrest. On July 22 he officially



Delft.

became a free man. On August 11 Schilder appeared at a meeting of "burdened" GKN members in The Hague and read his carefully crafted *Act of Secession or Reconciliation*. Most who attended were elderly because men between the ages of 18 and 50 were sought for labor in Germany.

Schilder spoke of "... the corruption within the GKN ... and the assault of tyrannical and hierarchical rule." One statement that would be quoted for months was his description of the GKN exhibiting marks of the false church. Schilder went on to explain that, according to Article 31 of the Church Order, a local church could legitimately refuse to obey synodical decisions if they conflict with God's Word.

During the next weeks GKN members literally battled for church property around the country. Church councils deposed pastors, elders, and deacons. By the end of September almost 70,000 had followed Schilder into the "one true Reformed church." For a few years they called themselves the GKN (maintaining Article 31 of the

Church Order), then simply GKN, the same name as the denomination from which they had come and now no longer recognized. The name GKN (liberated) came to be used to differentiate them from the "synodical" GKN.

Immediately after the war, the "synodical" GKN seemed more contrite about its actions than those who had liberated themselves. It was ready to admit its mistakes, and left the door open to reconciliation. But it was not to be. The 1944 Secession was a done deal.

When CRC observers went to the Netherlands in 1946, they reported, "We feel that the schism which occurred ... during the last part of the German occupation, can be understood only when cast against the background of mentality to which we have referred (i.e., the impalpable effects of the war and a spirit of frustration which took hold of the people)."¹¹

Decades of distrust fueled the confrontation of a Dutch synod which felt duty-bound to dig in its heels, and a brilliant but not-always-tactful

seminary professor who thrived on confrontation. A major clash, even a church schism, may have been unavoidable.

Klaas Schilder, born into the family of a hard-working cigar maker in Kampen, almost lost his opportunity for secondary "gymnasium" education. Had it not been for the intervention of a school principal who recognized his potential, and the financial assistance of several Kampen backers, Dutch church history would have been different. The church would have lost a scholar of stature and a prolific writer whose skills could sway the masses. Even today, Schilder's work in dogmatics, just like that of Bavinck and the lesser-known Hepp, deserves to be read and studied for its Spirit-led insights.

Just as in other church schisms where members choose to go their separate ways, shifts in emphasis affected both parties. In the Netherlands a previously self-sufficient "synodical" GKN committed itself more to local evangelism. The "liberated" group became more inwardly-focused and confessional. In 1971, a group of 28,000 emancipated itself from the GKN (liberated) to form a looser federation.¹²

Reflecting on this schism, Rev. A. H. Algra regrets that since 1944 so little attention has focused on God's covenant with his people within both GKN denominations. The "synodicals" became too preoccupied with more immediate problems, while the "liberated" churches failed to study the implications of the covenant for evangelism or the admission of children at the Lord's table. Instead of preaching about the covenant, sermons tend to be preoccupied with the nature of the church, the only true church.¹³

In Canada, the "liberated" brethren have done remarkably well. They built a small, but feisty church. New congregations were planted in rapid

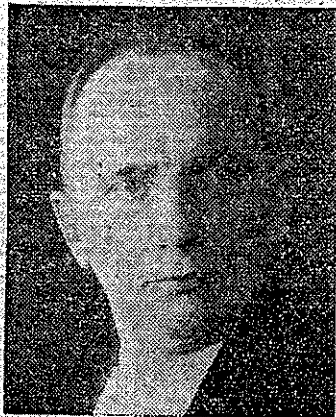
THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Prominent Dutch Theologian Plans Several Talks in City

Dr. K. Schilder, distinguished Dutch theologian and author, will come to Grand Rapids on Jan. 21 to fill a series of lecture and preaching engagements in churches here and in other west Michigan cities.

Professor of ethics and dogmatics at the University of Kampen in The Netherlands, Dr. Schilder gained an international reputation with the publication of his "Christ in His Sufferings," a trilogy on the Passion of Christ, which first appeared in The Netherlands in 1929. This work now is published in English translation by the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. of this city, the first volume, "Christ in His Suffering," having appeared last year. The second volume, "Christ on Trial," was released by the publishers this week. The translation is by Henry Zylstra, former Calvin college instructor now studying at Harvard.

To Stay Here Three Weeks.



DR. K. SCHILDER.

K. VanBaalen, Rev. Daniel Zwier of Holland, Dr. Ralph Danhof of Kalamazoo, Rev. John Dolfin of Muskegon and William B. Eerdmans.

Grand Rapids Press clipping.

succession in four Canadian provinces. For several decades immigrant pastors from the Netherlands provided leadership until a new generation of mostly Canadian-trained pastors took over. As a faith community they

Reformed churches have not experienced a major crisis. Ecumenically, the Canadian Reformed churches remain largely isolationist, with only a few denominations on other continents as part of their extended family. ♣

established separate schools for their children, as well as a seminary and teachers' college in Hamilton. The denomination produced its own psalter, translated its own creeds, and developed its own church order.

If anything, allegiance to the Confessions and the Church Order is even more emphasized today than during the denomination's early years. Unlike the Dutch "liberated" churches, the Canadian

Endnotes

1. J. J. C. Dee, *K. Schilder zijn leven en werk*, vol. 1, 1890-1934 (Goes: Oosterbaan & LeCointre, 1990) p. 122.

2. S. J. Popma, *De Psychologie van een Schisma*, (Groningen: J. Niemeijers, 1945) pp. 14, 16.

3. A major secession in the Dutch Reformed Church that ultimately resulted in the formation of the GKN. The majority of the nineteenth-century Dutch immigrants to North America were theological heirs of the 1834 secession.

4. K. Schilder, *Gereformeerd Farizeïsme* (Delft: W. D. Meinema, 1925) p. 49.

5. Rudolf van Reest, *Schilder's Struggle for the Unity of the Church*, Theodore Plantinga, trans. (Neerlandia, Inheritance Publications, 1990) p. 148.

6. Dee, *K. Schilder zijn leven en werk*, p. 224.

7. *Ibid*, p. 237.

8. *Ibid*.

9. Henry Vander Kam, *Schilder: Preserver of the Faith*, (New York, Vantage Press, 1996) p. 55.

10. *De Reformatie*, May 28, 1940.

11. H. H. Meeter and N. J. Monsma in their report to the 1947 Synod, Acts of 1947 Synod, p. 187.

12. Hans Knippenberg, *De Religieuze Kaart van Nederland* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1992) p. 268.

13. A.H. Algra, *Levende Stenen* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1976) p. 82.

The California Gold Rush and a Few Dutch Argonauts from Pella

Brian W. Beltman

In 1849 a surge of humanity pressed westward with single-minded intensity following the news of the discovery of gold in California. Members of the movement were called "49ers." This followed immediately after the War with Mexico, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the war and transfer of lands including California to the United States, and James Marshall's detection of yellow

discovery of gold. These gold seekers comprised a species of entrepreneurs in magnitude unrivaled in American historical annals.

The nascent Dutch immigrant communities were not immune to gold fever. In correspondence of February 1848 promoting settlement in the Pella, Iowa colony, Hendrik P. Scholte commented that "the rapid change from our ominous and oppressive conditions in the Netherlands to one of space and freedom [in America] caused some dizziness." His reference is to certain Dutch farmers in Marion County who quickly acquired sizeable landholdings on the Iowa frontier considerably larger, on average, than was common in the Netherlands. But the quest for gold in the Far West that emerged a year after Scholte's observation also fit into this euphoric state of mind. Beginning in 1849 and continuing for several years numerous gold seekers streamed through Pella as part of the California Gold Rush, and the Dutch could not help noticing nor be unaffected by these excited migrants.

The flow of "men-on-the-make" brought welcome economic growth to the colony, for some Dutch profited as suppliers of staples, livestock, or equipment needed by the argonauts. One resident living on the main road through the Pella area explained the exchange:

We sold everything we had to the trekkers to California. Then we bought all we could from neighbors who did not live along the State Road and sold it to the trekkers. For a bushel of Indian corn we got a dollar: everything for a dollar—that was



Wagon train heading west. All drawings in this article are from Harper's Weekly.

tracings in the south fork of the American River on John Sutter's property in 1848. A frenzy of excitement seized Americans and other nationals as conversation centered on "gold, Gold, GOLD." By the end of 1849, California's population swelled to nearly 100,000, exclusive of Indians; a state census late in 1852 reported over 223,000 residents, compared to about 16,000 prior to the

A resident of Columbia, South Carolina, Brian Beltman has a Ph.D. in History from the University of Wisconsin and is a student of the Dutch in Iowa, where he grew up. This is his second contribution to *Origins*, the first dealt with his family and was printed in Volume X, no. 1.

easiest. A yoke of oxen brought \$50 or \$55; a cow \$20 or \$25. But the trek-kers could stand it. Some of them carried cooks and slaves in their train. One man from Davenport, Iowa, arrived driving 350 head of cattle. He

Den Bos family network that came in 1849 on the *Franziska* from Overschie and Geervliet in Zuid-Holland.

Three of the eight—Dijkstra, Verploeg, and Jongewaard—were not part of traditional nuclear family

households, although they did have relatives among the original Pella pioneers of 1847-49. With the exception of De Vries, all were single men, and none exceeded the age of 32 when they headed west. As such, they fit a profile of adventurous persons eager for a chance to see new places, an occasion to express manly independence, and an opportunity to hit pay dirt. In short, from their perspectives these young men with minimal

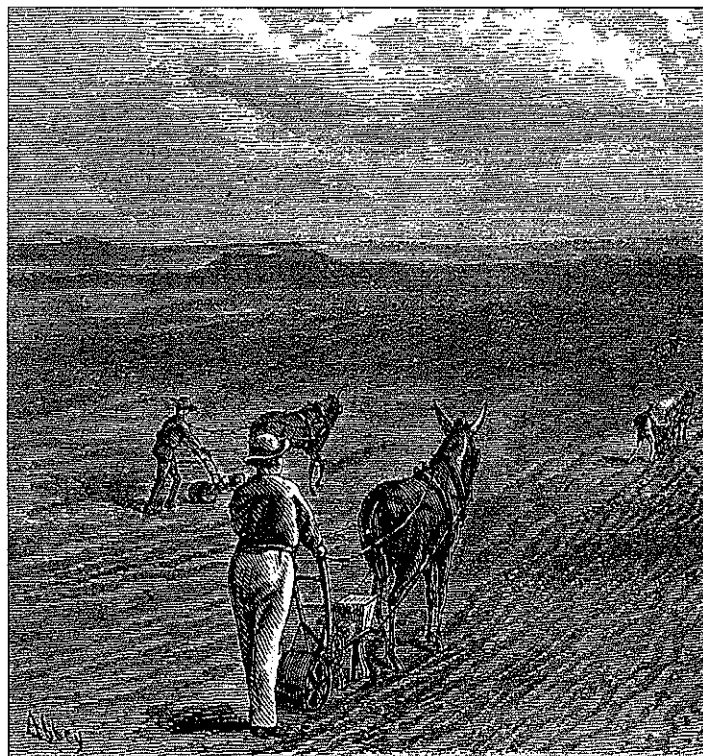
Mississippi River to New Orleans by steamboat and then sailed around the Horn to San Francisco. Either they walked or took a river steamer or sloop for the last hundred miles to the diggings on the western slope of the Sierra Nevadas.

Their ocean voyage was by a conventional, and often not-too-seaworthy, freighting ship, and lasted from four to eight months, depending on the current and winds.

Beginning in 1850 some California-bound men were able to secure quarters on a clipper ship. Here they experienced the exhilaration of sailing under a vast canopy of canvas and cutting ocean waves, although by week three or four stark alternatives of baking sun or soaking waves usually extinguished the travelers' excitement as boredom set in. Still, clipper ships promised fleet passage to California within three months. Speed, however, came at a cost, \$300 and up per passenger.

The trip and relocation introduced Dijkstra and Slot to Hispanic culture and great environmental variations—from Catholic missions to cantinas, from tropical weather to the Horn's frigid zone, from dolphins to burros, from coastal harbors to mountain streams and forests. And it exposed them to an array of humanity of such diversity that it gave new meaning to interpersonal incompatibility—all much in contrast to their usual contacts within the homogeneous ethnoreligious community of Pella or their earlier similar provincial neighborhoods in the Netherlands. Another singular characteristic of the gold miners' world was that it was overwhelmingly male—just over 7.5 percent was female; it was not a place of families.

The two Dutchmen came to know foothill mining camps scattered along rivers such as the American, Yuba, or Feather that flowed into California's



For single young men, the chance of "hit pay dirt" seemed more attractive than plowing Iowa soil.

had on the road two other droves, each of the same number.

In the early 1850s at least eight men from Marion County succumbed to the heady enthusiasm and achieved local distinction, perhaps a mixture of envy and notoriety depending on the observer's point of view, by joining the hordes heading west to discover gold and strike it rich. They included Geert Dijkstra, Hendrik Slot, Jan De Moor, Engel Verploeg, and Engel's relative Dirk Van Zee, all five of whom were fellow passengers on the *Pieter Floris* during the voyage to America in 1847. Others were Cornelis Jongewaard, an 1847 emigrant sailing on the *Nagasaki*, Leendert Van Der Meer and his brother-in-law Izaak De Vries, who were part of the Van Der Meer/Van

personal economic resources in the Pella area probably figured that they had little to lose and everything to gain by trying their luck in the California gold fields. As hopeful entrepreneurs, they were seeking venture capital.

In the winter of 1849-50 Geert Dijkstra and Hendrik Slot, both Frisians, the latter from Dantumadeel, became the first Dutch argonauts. They chose the all-water route, about 18,000 miles by water to California. The decision was not unreasonable at that time despite its vast distance since water travel was customary to Netherlanders and a 2,000-mile overland passage via rudimentary trails was far more daunting. They journeyed down the

Central Valley. There they accumulated some gold through the standard techniques of placer mining that garnered a prospector an average daily income of less than an ounce or about \$20 through much hard work and a good dose of luck. There they also coped with a locally inflated economy and a subsistent living standard famous for misery and miserliness and interrupted only by reckless debauch and the rare exuberance of a gold discovery.

Although occasional bonanzas sustained optimism and forestalled general disillusionment, for many miners, except the most stubborn, reality eventually set in, and their western tour came to an end. After two years Dijkstra and Slot returned to Marion County. The 1860 census affirmed that Dijkstra, forty-two years old, was married to Geertje Buwalda. Their household included three children and a boarder, and they farmed on land in Summit Township valued at \$2,000 with an additional \$800 of personal property. Similarly, Slot, twenty-nine, was married and farming nearby in the same township. Both men had successfully re-entered the socioeconomic mainstream of the Dutch enclave in Iowa, not as King Midases but as ordinary farmers.

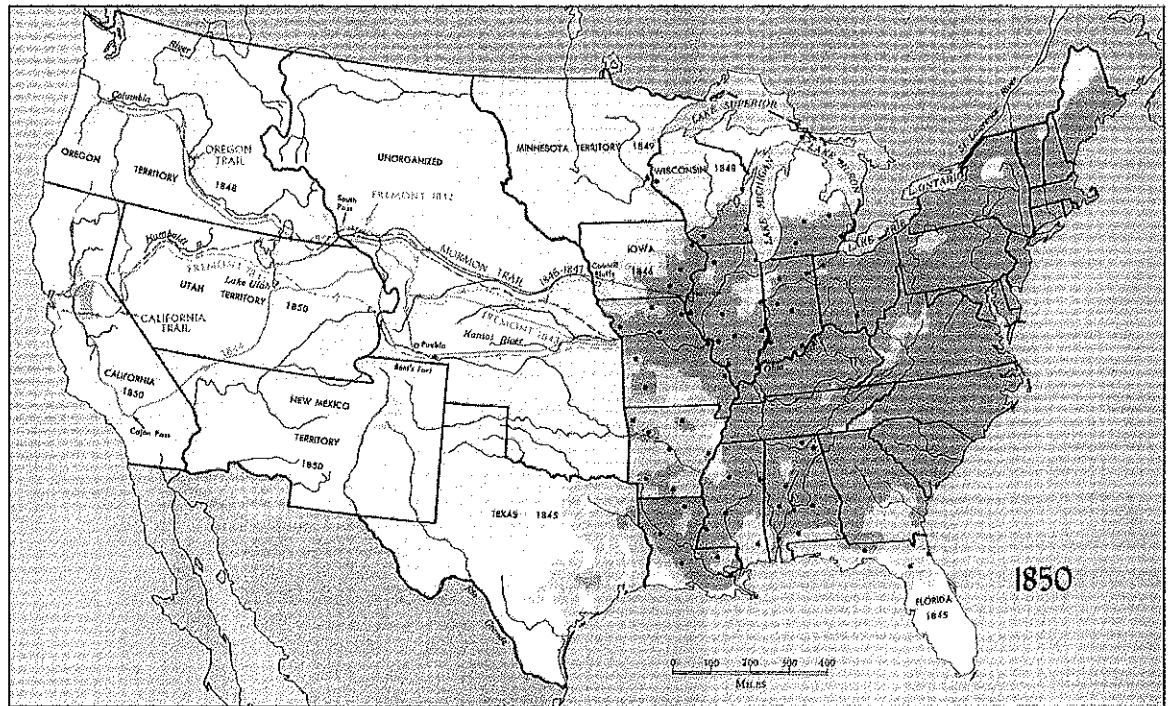
After 1851 or 1852 many communities in the Midwest and elsewhere contained a returned gold prospector or two. They provided an "atmosphere of experience" for others who were either enchanted by their stories or scared off. Invariably some had to go

"see the elephant," as the great exotic adventure of going to California was called at mid century. In 1853 Jan De Moor, Dirk Van Zee, and Engel Verploeg caught the infectious "California Mania." De Moor apparently died in California and Van Zee reportedly took up permanent residence there. I found details only about Verploeg.

Originally Engel Verploeg came to Pella courtesy of one of his uncles, Koenraad or Stephanus Van Zee, who paid his passage of \$85 and for whom he worked to repay the debt. (Koenraad Van Zee farmed 110 acres in Lake Prairie Township in 1850.) Engel hired on with a 30-wagon caravan passing through Pella and assumed duties as an oxen driver to earn his keep during the six-month journey westward. Of the several overland routes available by the early 1850s, an Iowan would have used the Mormon-Oregon-California Trail, the least expensive, shortest, most direct path, but still one fraught with perilous desert crossings and posing

dangers associated with illness, accident, bad weather, and more. Engel later recalled seeing the remains of wagon train equipment, skeletons of horses and oxen, and graves along the route, testimony to the toll the overland passage took. But his observations note confirmed common reports, the tremendous waste of goods found along the trail that the forty-niners abandoned as they discarded many possessions and supplies to lighten their loads on the long trek west. The Dutchmen saw firsthand an early roadside consequence of Americans littering.

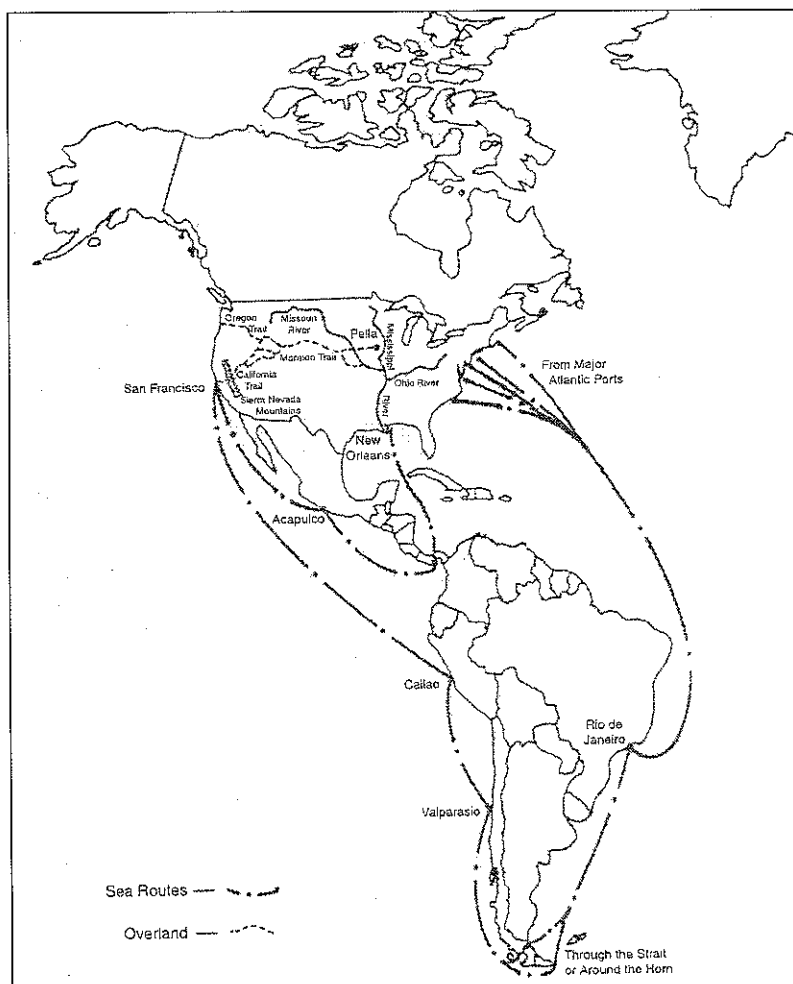
Once in California, Engel shrewdly perceived that easier and perhaps more profitable gain might be achieved, not by grubbing for gold like a gopher through placer mining, but by provisioning prospectors, so he raised garden crops and sold his fresh produce to hungry miners for the "dust in their pokes." They were only too eager for a healthy variation in their dreary diet of flapjacks, pickled pork, jerky, or other dried rations, all



Overland Trails. All maps in this article are courtesy of the author.

of which contributed to nutritional deficiencies and related diseases such as scurvy and dysentery. Engel reportedly accumulated \$5,000 during five years (although one source says two years) in the gold fields.

In time, extremely delayed or faulty communications from his family eventually caught up with him. However belatedly, Engel learned that his widowed mother, Aartje Van Zee Verploeg, and six surviving siblings (and perhaps his maternal grandfather Engel Van Zee) had arrived in Pella from the family's provincial home in Herwijnen, located along the Waal River in Gelderland, in the same year, 1853, that Engel had left Iowa for California. The Verploegs followed the course set by Engel and his uncles' families in 1847, a phenomenon called chain migration. Engel further learned that on his family's journey tragedy knew few bounds. While onboard ship, in rapid succession, a sister died from measles and Engel's father Hendrik succumbed to grief; both were buried at sea. Within days of landing, a maternal uncle and a brother also died. Even before the family's emigration, another brother had drowned in the Netherlands and a sister had died in infancy. The difficulties for Engel's mother were exacerbated when she discovered that her son was not in Pella as expected, but had vacated for the Far West. Fortunately for her, two of her brothers and their families lived in Marion County to provide some kinship support.



Routes to the California Gold Fields.

Accordingly, finally aware of his family's losses and hardships, Engel returned to Iowa by a ship along the West Coast to Panama, on foot across the Isthmus, by ship again up the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans and then to Pella mostly by walking overland. By the most efficient transportation of the day such a journey was possible in five to six weeks. Moreover, the Isthmus route, exotic to any traveler with its tropical flora and fauna and its Hispanic cultural attractions, posed special environmental challenges from infestations of mosquitoes, malarial and yellow fevers and cholera. In 1855 following the completion of the Panama railroad, rail service was available across Central America at \$25 for a 47-mile train ride. Like many

gold seekers, Engel seems to have preferred to save the cost and walked.

Engel's departure from California also coincided with the passing of the first boom years of the Gold Rush. By 1857, when the bulk of the surface diggings were exhausted, the flush times were over in California. Indeed, economic reverberations from this contributed to a serious financial setback for the nation as a whole. And in the gold fields, many miners turned to low-paying jobs with joint-stock, deep-mine companies, or shifted to farming, other trades, became drifting prospectors endlessly searching for *El Dorado*, or like Engel headed back East.

Once back in Marion County Engel traded his gold for Iowa's complement—land. In August 1858 he bought forty-seven acres of farmland in Section 35 of Lake Prairie Township. Within seven months Engel, now thirty-five, married Paulina Buwalda, eighteen. In 1860 the Verploegs had an infant son and recorded in the census \$1,000 worth of real estate and \$400 in personal property (incidentally, an aggregate value considerably less than the \$5,000 allegedly acquired in California). Interestingly, Paulina was a sister to Geertje, the wife of Geert Dijkstra. The women were two of five daughters of Abram and Aaltje Buwalda, a Frisian family from Ee that traveled to America as co-passengers with Engel and Geert on the *Pieter Floris* in 1847. Thus, the men could

share the bond of having married sisters as well as exchanging stories about their experiences out West. And they had plenty of time to embellish their tales and become accomplished local raconteurs; for in 1902 both men died in the Pella area, Engel at seventy-nine and Geert at eighty-four.

In 1852 or 1853 the last trio of Dutchmen, Cornelis Jongewaard, Leendert Van Der Meer, and Izaak De Vries, traveled the overland route west to mining country, either to California or to the Rogue River area in Oregon. Here the Gold Rush spawned the mining camp of Jacksonville that lasted from 1852 to 1854. The argonauts may have visited both gold fields. Information is extremely sketchy.

Jongewaard and Van Der Meer, like the five men discussed earlier, were unmarried. Even the departure of single young men, if they were part of a traditional family unit, as four of them were, seriously affected that institution. Parents had to witness the separation of a son, or siblings a brother, and the social and economic structure of the family as a whole required adjustment and adaptation. Parents often saw a son's departure as a youthful whim of dreaming about riches. With the perspective of age, parents were accustomed to a lifetime of hard work and daily attention to routine duties to provide for family needs. Few therefore approved of living out the fantasy of discovering gold nuggets in a mountain stream. Aging parents expressed particular concern of being left without adequate care and attention if a son headed west. Not only parents but brothers and sisters as well who remained behind had to take up the slack within the family work force, especially if they were all contributors to operating a family farm, as most Pella Dutch were. Parents' greatest fear, of course, was never to see their offspring again.

Offsetting these concerns, however, were positive possibilities. The argonaut might return wealthy and be generous enough to enrich others in the family. And some vicarious pleasure may have resulted from having a family member with enough courage and boldness to take the road less traveled, even if it appeared a bit unconventional. The adventurer may have been exercising an independent, even radical, choice at odds with the

journey as a one-time opportunity to realize prosperity and guarantee the family's future, but Jannetje, like many wives of gold seekers, had a different view. Begrudging consent often came reluctantly only after a firm promise of ultimate return and much assurance of bringing back gold. Left alone, Jannetje would have to bear certain deprivations and sacrifices for the short-term that added stresses in her life. (The couple had already lost a



Gold prospector heading into the hills with his pack.

collective spirit of the ethnic community by striking out to the West, but he was also repeating the act of separation from a larger society and the willingness to migrate that initially brought the Netherlands to Pella. Sons were doing again what parents had done only a few years earlier, albeit under different circumstances and for reasons more brazenly materialistic.

Unlike seven of the eight gold seekers, Izaak De Vries had a wife and son from whom he took leave. If Izaak dreamed of finding an easy fortune, his spouse Jannetje Van Der Meer may have viewed his departure differently. Izaak may have rationalized the

daughter on the overseas voyage in 1849.) Izaak's exit meant the family was deprived of its primary provider, which would burden Jannetje with added responsibilities. But it also probably put more strain on the Van Der Meer family network whose members might need to provide timely assistance by lending money, offering help during sickness, being emotionally supportive, or even sheltering and feeding the ones left behind. Jannetje was not facing abandonment, to be sure, but Izaak's farewell had to have had special poignancy, creating a range of human emotions from sadness to worry, hope mixed with fear,

anticipation and resentment.

In fact, it turned into tragedy and grief, for family folklore records that Izaak was murdered in Portland, perhaps another incident of a green-horn immigrant done in by some frontier tough.

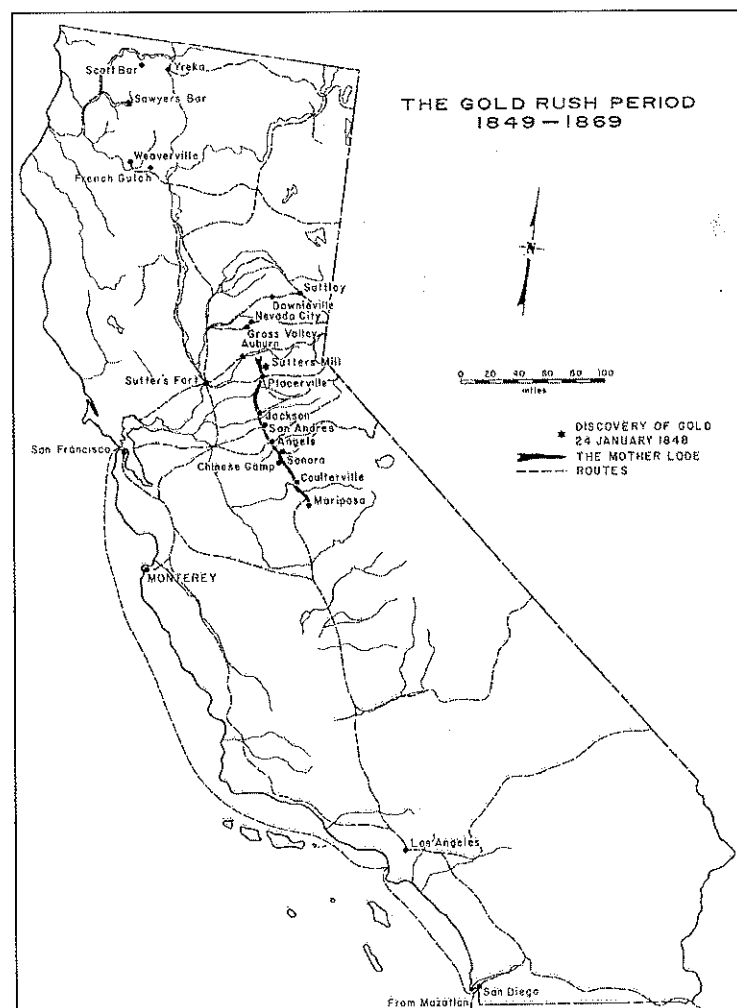
Whatever the case, here was another event for community comment, and it

ships," and Jannetje married a third time—to Luitje Mars. They eventually had three children and lived on a 230-acre farm, 90 of which was under improvement and valued at nearly \$2,000 in 1860. Descendents affirmed that the farm in Black Oak Township in Mahaska County belonged to Jannetje.

\$1,400. For comparison, the average taxable wealth, a figure combining the value of real estate and personal property, for the Dutch-American taxpayer in 1860 was \$1,106.

Studies of gold rushes generally agree that a trip to a mining area was usually intended to be a temporary venture, not a permanent relocation that implied traditional resettlement. Still, it was a change of place that involved a leave of an extended duration of time, often a couple of years or more; it was not a mere lark of days or weeks. The objective was tangible, instant wealth in the form of gold, not the more long-term asset of land. Thus, people willingly undertook a journey demanding considerable commitment in terms of finances, determination, and human capital to take a chance to acquire great riches through what might be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. In the entrepreneurial process they had to balance risk and reward for themselves and their families. For those few individuals who were without any kinship ties, the effort entailed few, if any, complications except personal concern. But most gold seekers had family connections, and their decision to leave home had great present and future impact on the family, for good or ill. Yet many were willing to go on a hardship tour to the West, leave loved ones, and endure a prolonged absence from family—all this for the sake of riches and the fortuity of eventual financial independence for self and family, for that chance to secure venture capital to be applied to more long-term, sedate investments that promised security and stability for a family household.

It is significant that three of the eight Dutch argonauts did not return to Pella; two of them died during their quest for gold. Equally significant, however, the majority of these men did not abandon ties to their kinfolk or their ethnic community, as their



The Gold Rush period.

left Jannetje a widow in her mid-20s. Quick reconstitution of family life was essential for survival in a mid-nineteenth century rural society. Hence, Jannetje, clearly a woman of endurance and practicality, soon married a widower, Gerrit Ellerbroek, who had a son, and together the couple had two more children. In 1859, however, Gerrit died after "unbelievable hard-

Van Der Meer, now 30, was married to Antje Van Den Bos, and they had two children as well as two boarders as part of their augmented family. Van Der Meer, in partnership with his brother Dirk and brother-in-law Dirk Van Den Bos, operated a steam-driven sawmill, one of a half dozen saw services for the burgeoning Dutch community. Van Der Meer valued his real estate at

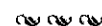
In the meantime, by the end of 1855 Cornelis Jongewaard and Leendert Van Der Meer were back in Pella, with the benefit of trail experience and perhaps a new appreciation of reality and human frailty, even if they did not attain great wealth. In 1856 both men married and soon were leading more settled lives. By 1860 Jongewaard, now 32, had a wife named Ellen S. and three children and was farming on land in Black Oak Township valued at \$1,000.

ultimate return to Marion County clearly shows. Family and home drew them back after they dallied with the pursuit of quick riches. Kinship connections and bonds of ethnicity apparently overcame any attractions posed by exposure to a balmy place or the short-term excitement of being part of the California Gold Rush. Without doubt, the survivors carried forever special memories of their "days of gold," and some acquired enough capital from prospecting to grubstake an Iowa farm and win a wife.

The experiences of these select few of the 1850s might become mere anecdotes in the history of Pella, except that we rediscover some of them on the road again in the next three decades. In the 1860s Verploeg, Jongewaard, and Van Der Meer were instrumental in a large exodus by two groups—one by the overland route and one by the Panama passage. In 1870 Jongewaard and Van Der Meer were among the 253 pioneers who homesteaded free land on twenty-nine sections in Sioux County, Iowa, and

in the process permanently established another Dutch enclave in the Midwest. Finally, in 1882 Van Der Meer was once again among the leadership coterie that guided about one hundred families to Douglas County, South Dakota, to found a third Dutch colony on the prairie-plains that endures to this day. Their knowledge of travel routes and destinations as well as their accumulative migration experiences served the new population movements of the 1860s, 70s and 80s. These veteran trekkers were valuable resources for future reference.

All this enhances their exceptionalism among the usually persistent Pella Dutch, to be sure, but it puts their stories in a more meaningful context. To borrow Robert Swierenga's phrase, they were another kind of "forerunner," and these bold entrepreneurs were rare Dutch participants in a great event of wide-ranging national significance now a century and a half old—that legendary drama of thousands of persons flocking to California to search for gold. §



A Note on Sources

This story is informed by the standard works on Dutch-Americans of Jacob Van Hinte and Henry S. Lucas, both entitled *Netherlanders in America* [short title], as well as the older histories on the Iowa Dutch by Kommer Van Stigt, Cyrenus Cole, and Jacob Van Der Zee. In addition, I used the two-volume compilation, *History of Pella, Iowa, 1847-1987*, that contains alphabetically-arranged family recollections, which I sifted and winnowed to try to eliminate inconsistencies and contradictions that invariably arise in a work of this kind. Further, I relied on Robert P. Swierenga's books of lists: *Dutch Households in US Population Censuses 1850, 1860, and 1870*; *Dutch Emigrants to the United States*; and *Dutch Immigrants in US Ship Passenger Manifests, 1820-1880*. Family histories on the Notebooms and the Roordas also proved helpful. Finally, Richard Doyle's 1982 Kent State University dissertation, "The Socio-Economic Mobility of the Dutch Immigrants to Pella, Iowa, 1847-1925," is essential for any understanding of historical Pella.

For general background and interpretive observations on the California Gold Rush, I depended on Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997); Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Women in Waiting in the Westward Movement: Life on the Home Frontier* (Norman & London, 1994); Jo Ann Levy, *They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush* (Norman & London, 1992); John Walton Gaughey, *The California Gold Rush* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1948); and Rodman W. Paul, *California Gold: The Beginning of Mining in the Far West*, (Lincoln, 1947). I take responsibility for any interpretive errors.

Calvin College School Life in the Early 1900s

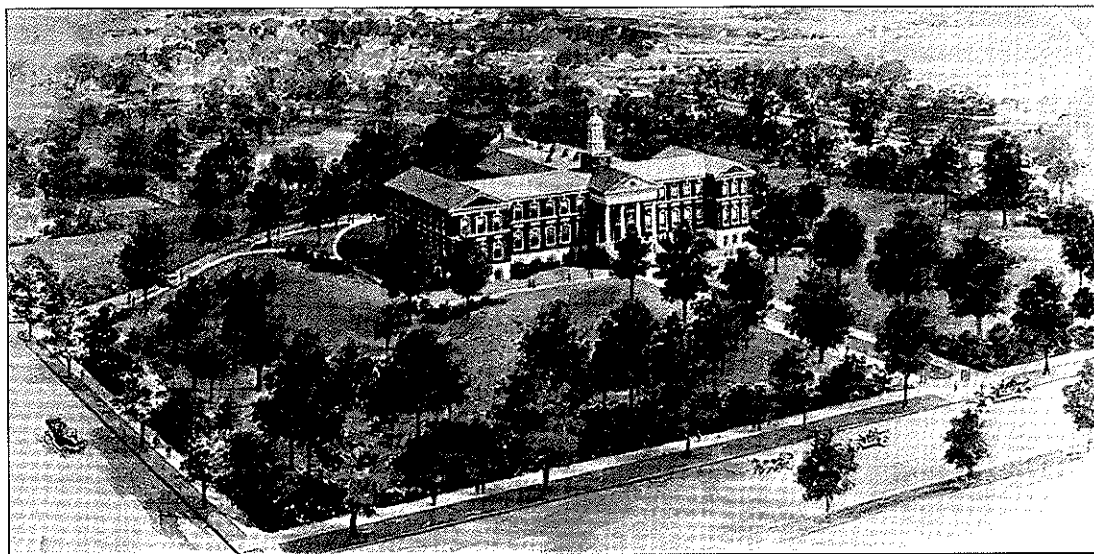
Harry Boonstra

During the mid-1960s Henry Ryskamp, Professor of Economics and Dean of the Faculty at Calvin College from 1920-1964, wrote "The History of Calvin College and Seminary." The manuscript was never published, but was recently edited by Harry Boonstra and published as *Offering Hearts, Shaping Lives: A History of Calvin College 1876-1966* (available from the Calvin Alumni Association). The following excerpts are from Chapters 6 and 9; they deal mostly with the life of students outside the classroom.

A Simple Life

School life about 1900 was in many ways very different from that in the 1950s or 1960s. Both teachers and students walked to school in the first and second decades of this century. This meant that some of the students

the east end. Fortunate was the student who could afford the five cents for streetcar fare from the west side. Automobiles were occasionally seen on the streets of the city, but they were not owned or used by the students. They did not get the



When construction began on the Franklin Campus automobiles shared the streets with horses and buggies. All images for this article are courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

Harry Boonstra has retired from a many faceted career that includes Bible translation and serving as a librarian. He continues as an ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church, and recently edited and had printed *Offering Hearts, Shaping Lives: A History of Calvin College 1876-1966*.

walked all the way from the north-west, the other side of the river, the extreme northeast end of the city, the southwest side, the Grandville Avenue district, and the city limits in

morning news or the evening programs by radio. The use of radios did not become general until the third and fourth decades. When students came in the fall and left

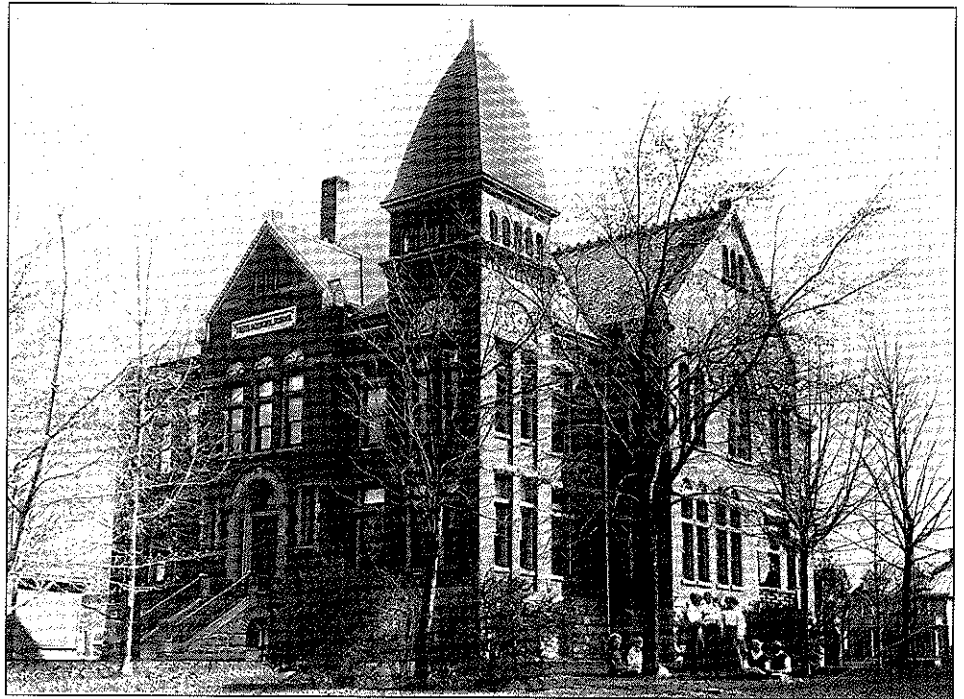
again in the spring for distant parts of the country they did not travel by airplane. Not many had even seen a plane.

If transportation was still primitive (Professor Rooks drove a horse and buggy when the writer first attended Calvin in 1906), arrangements and conveniences at the school were exceedingly simple. At the time of enrollment and payment of tuition, the student's name was entered upon a ledger and the money he paid for



A.J. Rooks in his office.

tuition was placed in the treasurer's (A. S. Postema) cigar box. The student not only walked back and forth to school; he walked to concerts in the evening, and, if he was fortunate enough to have a date (the number of girl students was small) he walked with her to and from the place of entertainment. If perchance his girl friend lived on the west side or the north end, he had to indulge



Students on the lawn of the old campus at Madison and Franklin.

in the luxury of a streetcar ride for two. Entertainment and recreation did not come easily—they were not available at the turn of a radio switch or after a fast ride in a convertible. Opportunities for amusement and recreation were not many and had to be made, not merely taken. When the building at Franklin and Madison was built in 1891, no provision was made for a recreation area or for physical education. The pent-up physical energy of the students consequently found expression in impromptu games on the limited area of lawn surrounding the building. This led to repeated exhortations by the principal, especially in the spring, "not to trample on the tender young shoots." Confined to the building during free periods, student ingenuity led to the exploration of forbidden areas in the basement and the attic. It was the ambition of the younger male student not only to get into the attic but to climb up into the cupola and there carve or write his name. Some of the old graduates must have winced

when they learned that the old building was being torn down.

Student Pranks

Marten ten Hoor writes:

On one occasion when we were up in the attic at work at our mischief, some of the boys who had been anxious to join us and who were jealous of our fun took some hymnbooks and piled them directly in front of the door to the attic, on the top of the steps. When we had finished with our mischief, one of us carefully unlocked the door. We already had our shoes in our hands, prepared to steal down the stairway past Professor A. E. Broene's classroom door. As soon as the door was opened far enough, the whole pile of hymnbooks (I have always thought there was some impiety in using hymnbooks for this purpose) fell over and clattered down the stairs. It was a case of "Run for your lives, men!" And this we did, making considerable racket in the attempt. Professor Broene, as luck would have it, was in his classroom with a class. He heard the noise, hastened to the door, opened it just in time to see two members of our notorious society disappear around the corner and run into the chapel. Thus once again, jealousy of

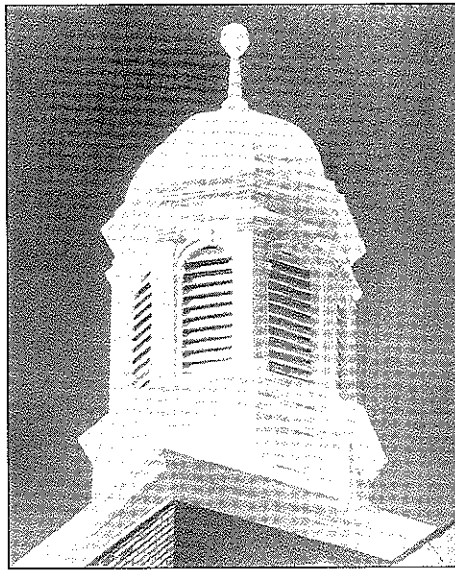
Origins

virtuosity brought ruin to genius.
(From ten Hoor's memoirs.)

No one, student or faculty member, will forget the time in 1930, when the fire department trucks from two nearby fire houses converged upon Calvin to put out a fire that appeared to be destroying the roof of the dormitory. To the astonishment of the bystanders, all that was required to extinguish the fire was the tossing to the ground of a large piece of fire-proof material upon which the fire had been very carefully built. When this was thrown off the roof, the threat of destruction, and the excitement, was over. That was just what the perpetrator of this little plot, Leo Peters, had intended. He, with his brothers, Art and Ted, were frequently involved in affairs that caused pleasure to the students but irritation to the faculty. As is not unusual in the life histories of students with very active minds, Leo Peters is today very successful as an inventor and businessman.

Physical Education

The men students were urged to take regular physical exercise at the local Y. M. C. A. Special low rates on membership fees were given to Calvin students. Once or twice a week young men students walked all the way downtown, participated in calisthenics, indoor baseball, and basketball, and then walked the two and one-half miles back to the east end of the city. Basketball was more interesting to them than calisthenics, and the leader furnished by the Y. M. C. A. was easily persuaded to permit most of the physical education hour to be devoted to that sport. Consequently, the men became well skilled in the game and looked for competition from others than their own team mates. They arranged to play games at the "Y" with other teams. Somehow the information leaked out but not much was said or done. But when the students engaged in a



Cupola of the Administration Building inside which some students carved their names.

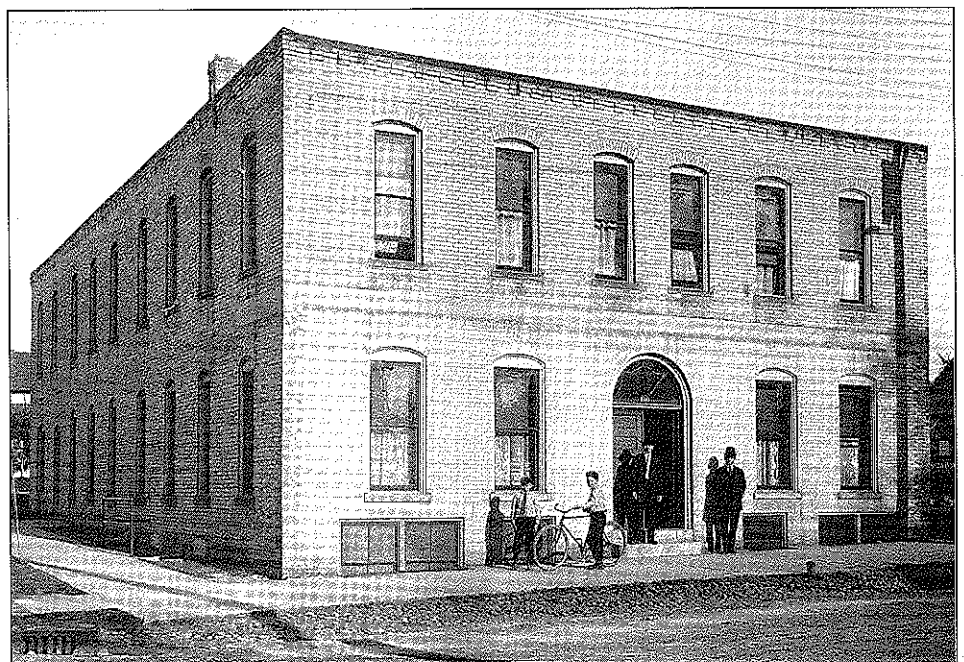
basketball game in Zeeland and attracted a sizeable crowd there, the event was publicized in the Grand Rapids newspaper as a game between Zeeland players and a team from Calvin College. This resulted in a severe reprimand from the faculty and a faculty rule (April 14, 1910) that no games with outside teams would be permitted. Notwithstanding such opposition an

Athletic Club was organized in 1914. The Club members sought faculty approval and thought they had gained it. In 1918, however, the faculty minutes indicate that the faculty was not certain that this was the case. Basketball games continued to be played, and in 1919 the students' desire to have a college team was carried by the faculty to the Supervisory Committee. Regulations were finally approved for the playing of a few games each year with "outside" teams. The first faculty authorized "Varsity" team was organized and played its first fall season during the 1920- 1921 school year.

In 1916 the University of Michigan informed the Calvin authorities that provision for physical education was one of the requirements for continued accreditation. The faculty, therefore, made such temporary arrangements as were possible to meet the requirements and urged upon the Board of Trustees the necessity of providing facilities for physical activities.

Dormitory Life

The urgent need of living accommodations for students who came to the



Dorm at Eastern and Dunham.



William Van Agthoven in the doorway to his office in Cincinnati, OH. Van Agthoven gave \$40,000 during 1920-21 to build a new dormitory.

school from distant places compelled the Board of Trustees to make arrangements for room and board. Private parties agreed to meet the need and, in 1903, converted two houses, one facing Baxter Street and the other on Ella Avenue (now Bemis Street) into a dormitory. According to regulations made by the faculty, the students were required to elect a student board to run affairs in the dormitory and to report on their activities to the faculty Dormitory Committee once a month. The use of these modest houses was by no means satisfactory, and the housing and food problem continued to be a most vexing one for the faculty.

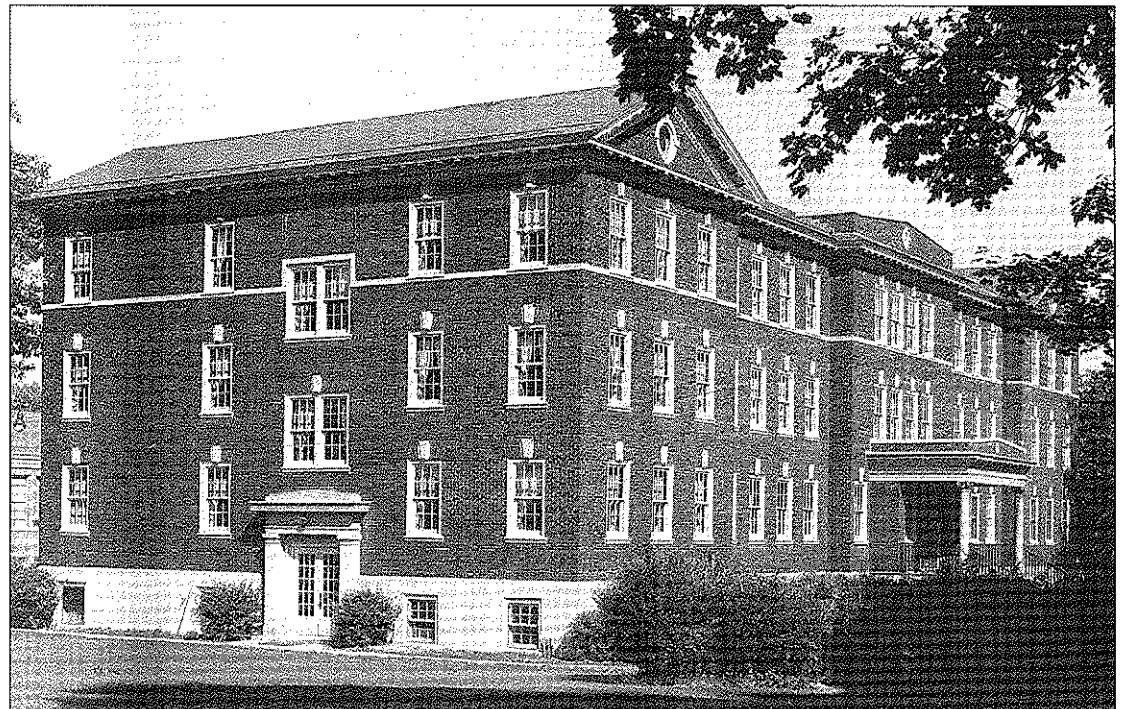
Conditions, it was

thought, were greatly improved when in 1908 private parties purchased a two-story brick structure on Eastern Avenue at Dunham Street and converted it into a dormitory. Living in the still rather close quarters of this building, students of different age groups and of greatly varied academic, social, and cultural interests developed a type of association and conduct which, though generally good, was at times almost bizarre. Strange situations, resulting often from an overdose of good humor on the part of some and the apparent complete lack of it on the part of others, led to conditions that were so explosive as to call for frequent faculty attention and discipline. For a few, life in the dormitory was hilarious; for a few others it was almost unbearable.

One of the incidents that led to active planning for a better dormitory than that of the frame houses on Baxter and Ella avenues was a fire caused by one of the students. A son of Reverend Gabriel De Jong, a resident of the dormitory, was trying to start a fire in a wood stove. Because the wood did

not catch fire immediately, he took an oil can and threw what he supposed would be some kerosene on the wood. The explosion of gasoline and the fire which followed blinded him for life and ruined much of the interior of the building. Throughout the years, whenever the writer saw or heard of this blind person, he was reminded of this tragic incident in the dormitory.

Living conditions in the building on Eastern Avenue were never good and often so unsatisfactory that faculty consideration of the building of a new dormitory at school expense began as early as 1913. Completion of the task of obtaining another building was one of the first goals accomplished by the first president. He succeeded in obtaining from William Van Agthoven, a member of the denomination who had developed a successful business in Cincinnati, the largest financial gift given to the school up to that time, for the erection of a new dormitory. The construction of the building was authorized in 1921 and completed in 1924. It included a gymnasium and served both as a



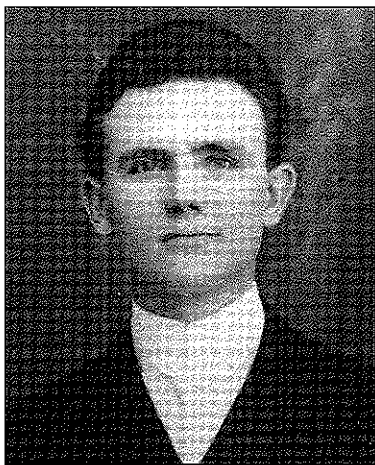
Dormitory on the Franklin campus completed during the early 1920s.

dormitory and a center of physical education and athletics until after World War II.

In the intimacy of the dormitory on Eastern Avenue all kinds of plots were hatched against "easy marks," pranksters dousing them unexpectedly with water, disarranging their rooms, accusing them of anti-social behavior, and hauling them up before a student court for a mock trial, and so forth. Plays were written and rehearsed, quartets organized and songs, even some originally composed, attempted.

Intellectual Stimulation

When the student group was small and, at least as the students felt, the faculty rather distant, intellectual and other activities came to fuller, and of course more unique, expression in a student club than in a classroom. Interaction and response led not only to the conjuring up of pranks to be played on fellow students and the



Herman Hoeksema.

faculty, but also to constructive attempts at essay writing, argumentation, and even musical composition. Interest was stimulated not only by contact with fellow students generally, but, more especially, by the able leadership of some of them. In the period which the author knows best, such men as Herman Hoeksema and Henry Van Wesep delved into religion



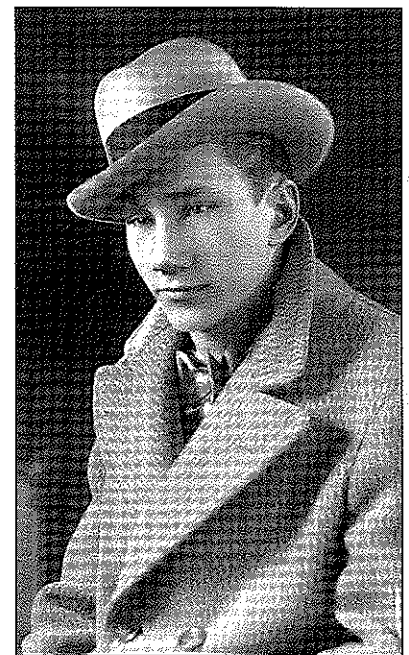
Brothers and authors Meindert and David De Jong (left to right).

and philosophy to the extent of causing real faculty concern over their beliefs. This concern finally led to discipline and, in the case of Van Wesep, to his withdrawing from Calvin and transferring to the university; in the case of Hoeksema to apology and retraction of his extreme statements. Debate drew upon the keen intellects of such men as Clarence Bouma and William Harry Jellema, recitations upon the versatility and originality of a Harry Bultema, side splitting humor upon uniqueness of a C. Cupido, and music upon the musical acumen of a Martin ten Hoor, a son of Professor F. ten Hoor.

These were years of great change in the western world. The number of college students at Calvin was small, but they were not unaware of the changes that were taking place. In meetings with small groups I soon learned what was going on in the minds of the students. The seminary students were eager to know what was going on at the universities, beyond their rather limited academic circle in the Seminary. They were eager to know how Calvinistic philosophy

could apply to or be affected by the new social and economic changes. College students wanted to know which fields were open to college students, and what they would have to take in college in order to prepare for such fields of graduate study. They wished to know how they, with points of view nourished by their traditions, would be regarded at the university.

The period of the twenties was one of monetary inflation, of booming business, of new interests, of bold expressions of new ideas. The spirit of the times was alive in the minds of Calvin students too. This was the period when the two De Jong brothers, the novelist David and the children's story writer Meindert, attended Calvin, the period in which the dormitory was erected and offered new opportunities to students with active, ingenious minds to play pranks on each other and the faculty. The



Peter De Vries.

following decade was the one in which Peter De Vries, later to become one of America's outstanding fiction writers, made dormitory life interesting for himself but often difficult for his

fellows as well as a thorn in the flesh for the faculty. It was he, with some of his cronies, who changed the numbers on doors in the dormitory and who was constantly active in upsetting the routine of dormitory life.

Student Groups and Clubs

This was the period when certain groups of students stood out very distinctly in the student body. There was, for example, the rather liberal little clique of the De Jong brothers, Ralph Bolt, and Harold Battjes; the prank-minded Chicago group made up of Peter De Vries, Red Huiner, Syd Youngsma, and others; the Iowa buddies, Fred Feikema (later Fred Manfred) the novelist, John De Bie, and their friends. Such aggregations of unique student abilities and interests made life in the student body stimulating to the students, but far from easy to understand or to cope with for the faculty. A person as unique in his habits, unconventional in his mode of dress, and radical in his points of view as Johannes Stuart (a friend of the De Jong brothers group) dressed in trousers with one trouser leg blue, the other red or purple, with his long unruly red hair, was not at all unlike the “hippies” of 1966 and 1967.

A few outstanding students, though not members of a group or clique, also left their mark upon the institution. Their names remain in the memories of their schoolmates because of their

noteworthy achievements. There was Cecil De Boer, for example, who became the head of the Student Council and who fought for and succeeded in achieving a rather aggressive role for this organization. And there was Jacob Bruinooge, Editor-in-Chief of *Chimes*, whose bold editorials aroused criticism within and outside of the school. One of his editorials so irritated the faculty that he was asked to write what was tantamount to an apology for it or a withdrawal. There was John Haitema, a very able but somewhat abrasive

finally approved in 1919. Basketball contests were thereafter approved, with the understanding, however, that there was to be no playing of “outside teams.” Surreptitiously this kind of competition did continue. In 1919, a group of young men organized a school club which they called “The Rivals.” Without explicit faculty approval they played, very successfully, some eighteen games as early as the 1919-1920 school year. They continued to seek faculty approval of the organization, one of the purposes of which was the scheduling of



The 1922 Rivals basketball team.

individual whose contributions in class and out aroused comment both in the student body and the faculty.

Athletics

As noted earlier, a student athletic association had been formed and

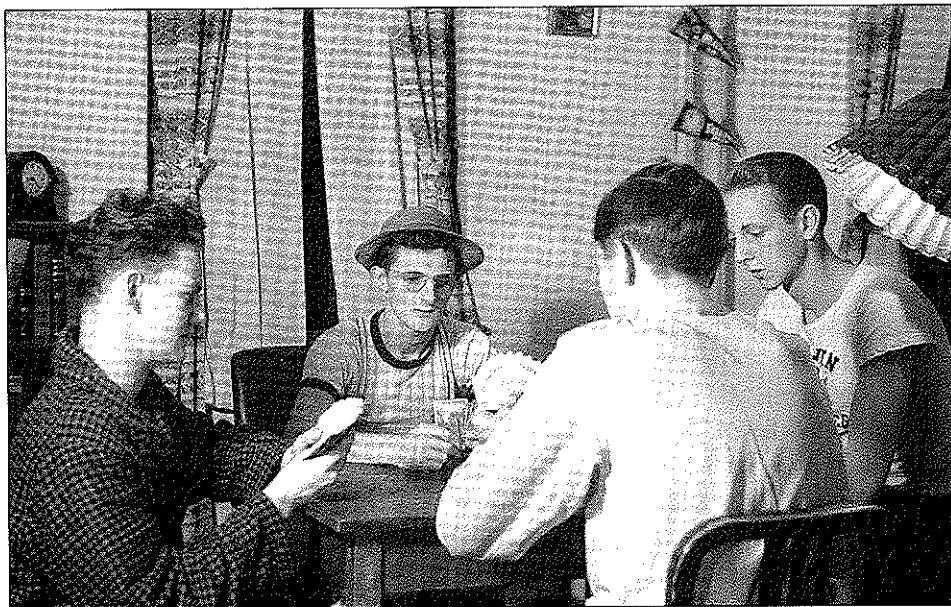
basketball games. They were asked to revise their constitution. They did so, only to learn when it was resubmitted that the faculty refused to approve it. The club, nevertheless, refused to yield and flagrantly violated the faculty's rules, particularly the rule

concerning basketball playing. After much discussion concerning this case, the faculty decided that members of the club should be prohibited from taking examinations, and that those in the senior year could take examinations and thus finish their course but could not appear at the commencement exercises.

After intercollegiate basketball games had been approved, the student body participated in basketball games with an enthusiasm that altered this competitive sport to a form of rivalry which bordered on hostility. The first "Varsity" team, with Peter Holwerda as captain and William Cornelisse as coach, was organized in and played throughout the 1920-1921 school year. One of the first intercollegiate games permitted by the faculty was that between Hope College and Calvin. Hard feelings had already developed at the conclusion of the first game. After the second, or it may have been the third game, feelings on both campuses had risen to such a pitch that the chairman of Hope's Athletic Committee and I, as chairman of Calvin's Athletic Committee, met to discuss the situation. The only decision we could arrive at was the discontinuance of the games for a few years, if not indefinitely.

Amusements

The matter of student indulgence in forbidden amusements has not only vexed but discouraged the faculty in its attempts to control student conduct. At the very beginning of the century, in 1902, students were already reported as attending the "Opera House." Later on it was "theatre attendance" that disturbed the faculty and the constituency. On occasion it was card playing and, more rarely, dancing on the part of students that was reported in the faculty meetings. Students were expected to but did not always adhere to the rigid position of



The problem of worldly amusements (theater attendance, dancing and card playing) among students.

the faculty and the denomination in the condemnation of worldly amusements.

As a matter of fact, freed from surveillance by parents and others who knew them well in the community, the desire to taste the "forbidden fruit" became all the stronger when the student, alone in the big city, saw the alluring theatre signs. Even students from supposedly more rigid and more pious homes succumbed to the temptation. This practice caused the constituency to worry about student conduct and to demand that the faculty do what the parents thought they had done at home, that is, stamp out this worldly conduct. In the years 1916-1919 this was the problem that was regularly brought to the attention of the faculty. Its recurrence and the difficulty in dealing with it was one of the reasons the Synod of the church tackled the matter in 1928 and made a statement which it was hoped would greatly aid in solving the problem:

Synod instructs consistories to inquire of those, who ask to be examined previous to making confession of their faith and partaking of the Lord's Sup-

per, as to their stand and conduct in the matter of worldly amusements, and, if it appears that they are not minded to lead the life of Christian separation and consecration, not to permit their public confession. Synod urges consistories to deal in the spirit of love, yet also, in view of the strong tide of worldliness, which is threatening our churches, very firmly with all cases of misdemeanor and offensive conduct in the matter of amusements; and, where repeated admonitions by the consistory are left unheeded, to apply discipline as a last resort.

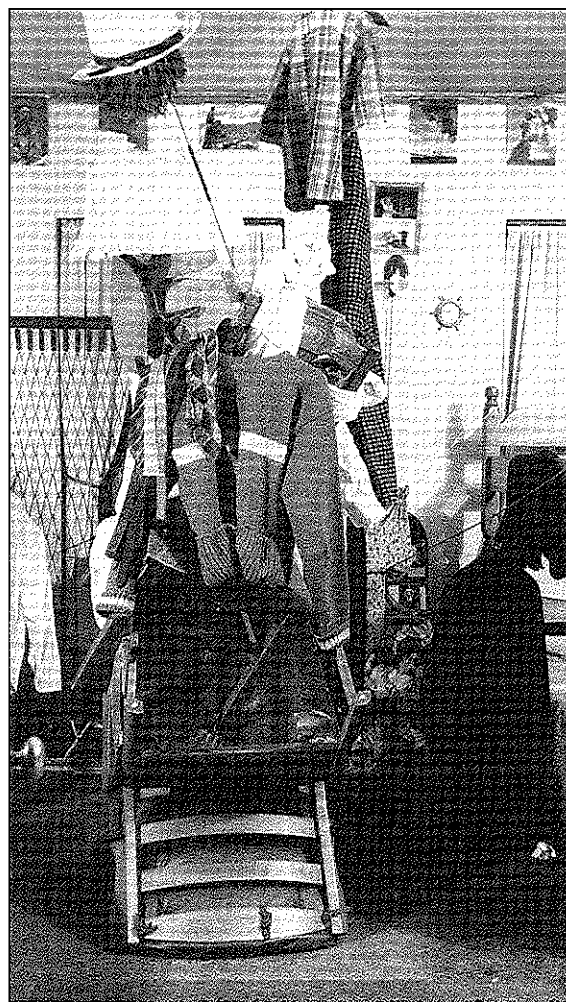
It was understandable that in a school, the only school of the denomination, devoted to the inculcation of the truths and the ideals of the church, the very hint of unseemly conduct would lift the eyebrows of the people. These were people who supported and watched "their school," and who could not brook such conduct in a place which they imagined to be as ideal as their idealization of it.

"Sunday travel" has always caused concern, especially on Sundays just before or after a holiday. As early as 1910 the faculty received a protest against student travel on Sunday. Even

today, when it is practically impossible to prevent such travel altogether, there are repeated requests for arranging the school calendar in such a way as to make Sunday travel unnecessary.

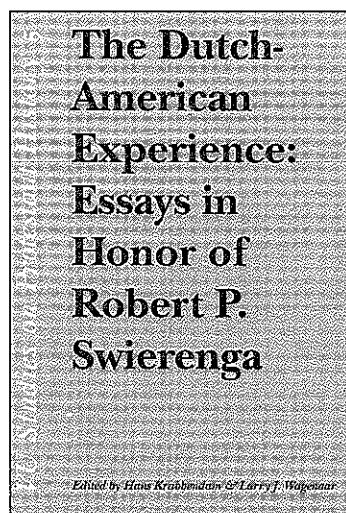
Other problems have risen repeatedly to vex the faculty and the board. One, perhaps a minor problem, is that of smoking in the school building. This problem arose almost as soon as the first building on Franklin and Madison was dedicated, and it has continued to present itself without a complete solution up to the present time. The rule has been difficult to enforce, especially after the return of men students from military services. It

has caused embarrassment to the faculty when their own members were caught, by students, breaking the rule. It caused even greater embarrassment to one Seminary faculty member when on one occasion when he was late for a committee meeting he secreted his still burning pipe in his overcoat pocket only to discover at the end of the meeting that there was almost nothing left of his coat and that only quick action by others had prevented the burning of the building. ♣



Room stackings were other manifestations of student extracurricular activities.

book notes



The Dutch-American Experience: Essays in Honor of Robert P. Swierenga*

Edited by Hans Krabbendam and Larry J. Wagenaar

VU Uitgeverij, Amsterdam 2000

Robert P. Swierenga, a 1957 Calvin College graduate, completed his doctoral work in 1965 at the University of Iowa and for the following three years taught at Calvin. From 1968 until his retirement in 1996, he was a member of the history department at Kent State University in Ohio where his primary responsibilities included teaching graduate students and mentoring Ph.D. candidates. The contributions in this volume were written by his colleagues and former students, all of whom, both in America

and the Netherlands, share his interest in Dutch-American migration and its consequences. These essays honor a scholar who has written approximately 125 articles and written or edited 14 books focusing for the most part on the economic, social, religious, and geographical factors which singly or in combination molded the character of Dutch-American immigrants. The essayists explain, to a degree, the collective behavior of Dutch folk who, while hoping for a better life in America, shared an ethnic and cultural cohesiveness which declined rapidly after World War I.

"Section I: Robert P. Swierenga and the Dutch-American Experience" contains material on Swierenga's own immigrant heritage, mentions his contributions as historian and teacher, and lists his publications. Also found here is a story by James C. Schaap titled "To Take a Crown" describing the bittersweet life of Schaap's mother-in-law who grew up in a tightly knit Dutch-American community.

In "Section 2: Immigration and Ideology," writers comment on the consequences of the ideas held by the new arrivals in America. Widely varied, these notions embraced old-world protests against church-state relations, farming and Reformed faith, socialism, and differing perceptions of class and gender in the Netherlands as compared to America.

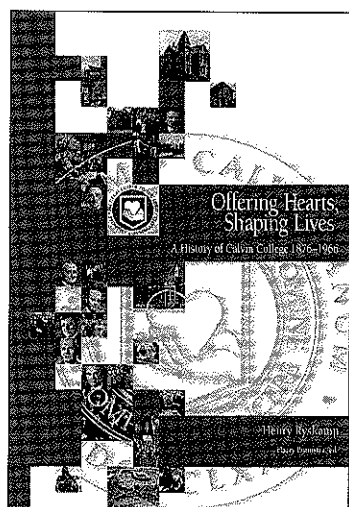
We read in "Section 3: Immigrant Mobility" about the effects of the Civil War on the Pella Dutch and also note remarks concerning the assimilation and urbanization of Dutch-Catholic immigrants who made their home in the Fox River Valley of Wisconsin. The last paper in this section, by Henk van Stekelenburg, a Dutch scholar who died in 1999, focuses on the character of the post World War II Dutch migration from North Brabant to America.

The two articles in "Section 4: Dutch-American Religion" are best summarized by mentioning the titles of each which are "Dutch Immigration and Membership Growth in the Reformed Church in America: 1830-1920" and "Forging a Religious Identity: The Christian Reformed Church in the Nineteenth Century Dutch Immigrant Community." Persons sketched in "Section 5: Portrait Gallery" include, among others, Lammert J. Hulst, an influential Christian Reformed minister; and the Reformed Church pastor, Egbert Winter, who personified the tensions of Americanization exhibited by Dutch-American immigrant communities. Also the Kuyperian theologian, Geerhardus Vos, who taught at both Calvin Seminary and Princeton is portrayed, as are members of the Pieter Ypes Groustra family who migrated from Friesland to Chicago in 1881. The final narrative feature is devoted to Hendrik Willem van Loon, a well-known writer of books for children and adults. He was an atypical member of the Dutch-American community, having nothing to do with the Dutch-American communities of the Midwest, but typified the cosmopolitan lifestyle of many eastern seaboard intellectuals.

Hans Krabbendam (Roosevelt Center in Middelburg the Netherlands) and Larry J. Wagenaar (Joint Archives of Holland, Holland, Michigan) deserve much credit for the preparation of this volume honoring Swierenga, who can be considered an intellectual pioneer in Dutch-American studies. Early in his academic career he saw the value of statistical evidence for historians who wish to analyze Dutch-American immigration as both an historical event and a never-ending influence on Dutch-American life as we know it. ♣

Reviewed by Conrad Bult

*Can be purchased from The Joint Archives of Holland, P.O. Box 9000, Holland, MI 49422-9000 for \$39.95 US funds, plus postage and handling (\$4 in US or \$10 to Canada).



***Offering Hearts, Shaping Lives:
A History of Calvin College,
1876-1966***

Henry Ryskamp;
edited by Harry Boonstra

Grand Rapids: Calvin Alumni
Association, 2000;
(alumni@calvin.edu; www.calvin.edu/alumni), 201 pages, \$10.00 (soft cover).

After having spent three-quarters of his life at Calvin College, as a student, instructor, and administrator, Henry J. Ryskamp produced a manuscript history of the institution. To tell the story of the college, he also includes a brief account of the early years of the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church (now Calvin Theological Seminary). The typed manuscript, with numerous handwritten changes, corrections, notes and additions, remained among his papers in the Archives at Calvin College known to only a handful of researchers as a remarkable and valuable insight into the founding and early years of the college.

As his first project in retirement, Harry Boonstra, formerly the theological librarian at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, took up the task of making this manuscript more widely available. He had the

manuscript scanned into a digital format and then set about editing the work, incorporating the handwritten corrections, distilling repetitive material, and reorganizing sections into a more consistent whole. With the financial support of the Calvin Alumni Association, *Offering Hearts, Shaping Lives* was produced.

The book provides an insider's detailed view of the school's first nine decades, particularly the emergence in 1919 of the four-year denominational college from a three-year preparatory curriculum of the seminary in 1892. It also details the school's growth during the difficult years of the Great Depression and World War II and the impact on the college of the dramatic growth in the demand for college education following the war.

After graduating in 1914, Ryskamp returned to Calvin as an instructor in 1918 and joined the regular faculty in 1920, later serving as academic dean until his retirement in 1964. Consequently, it is not too surprising that the book contains a measure of pro-Calvin College bias, but Ryskamp is candid about both the achievements and shortcomings of the institution and its personnel. Particularly useful are his analyses of the various presidential administrations, academic development, and academic governance of the school. Given Ryskamp's career, these topics receive much attention. As such, *Offering Hearts, Shaping Lives* provides a fine case study of the development of a liberal arts curriculum at a Christian college during the first half of the twentieth century.

Ryskamp, with the help of Boonstra's skillful hand, does not neglect the students. A chapter is devoted to student organizations and publications. Another chapter details the relationships among students, and between students and faculty. And a third chapter details the social life of

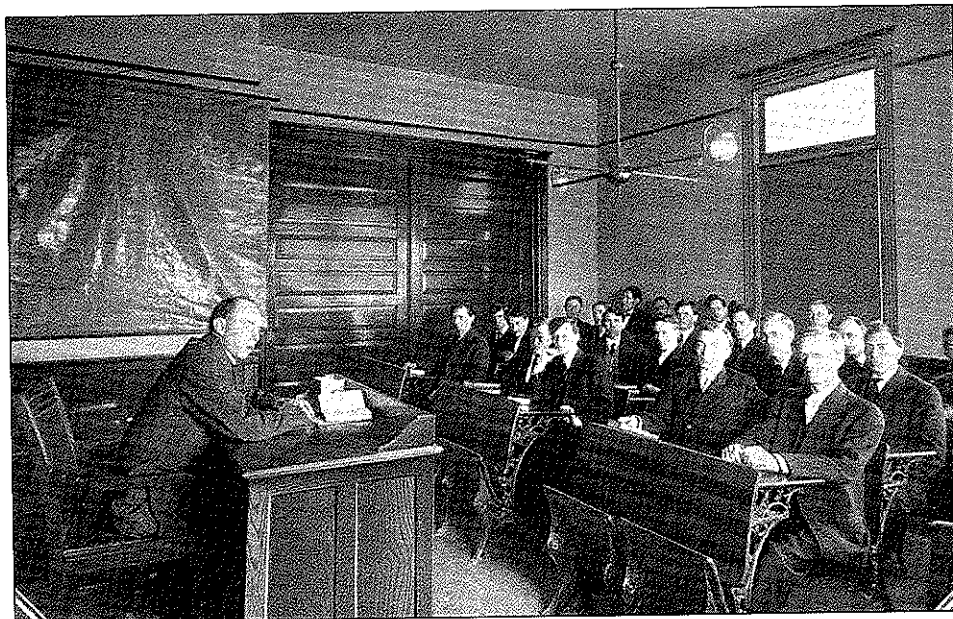
students including athletics, living in dormitories, and some of the more notable student pranks. In the latter category are a number of Moses episodes. Moses, a plaster cast reproduction of the Michelangelo work, became the lightning rod of student misbehavior. The statue was held for ransom, stolen, hidden, and over and over again. Tired of undoing the frequent mischief, staff members attempted to hide the statue from students with little success. The statue was the center of so much work for the Discipline Committee that at his retirement from the faculty the committee's long-suffering chair, when handed a cleaver as a joke, reduced the statue to smithereens.

Boonstra markedly improved the manuscript by adding chapter titles, rearranging sections, removing redundant material and recasting many of the longer sentences into shorter more readable lengths. Yet, he maintains the original flavor and most of the Ryskamp content. Boonstra's inclusion of a number of illustrations adds to the value of this work. The lack of an index is disappointing but the book is a readable, concise and useful history of the college.

Reviewed by Richard H. Harms

for the future

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



Selections from J. Marion Snapper's *Memoirs*

One hundred years of higher education in the Dutch immigrant communities of North America—several authors will examine the schools begun during the period 1847-1947

Recollections of Bill Colzman

Day of Deliverance, March 30, 1945 by Henry Lammers

For the Humblest Worshiper: Architectural Styles by Richard Harms

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Development of the Chinese CRC, by Peter Szto

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 Ms. Elaine Obbink Zimmerman, Woodstock, MD
 Mr. and Mrs. Theodore C. Zwiep, Holland, MI

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