

# Origins

Historical Magazine of The Archives  
*Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary*  
Volume XXIII • Number 1 • 2005



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*Historical Magazine  
of The Archives*

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

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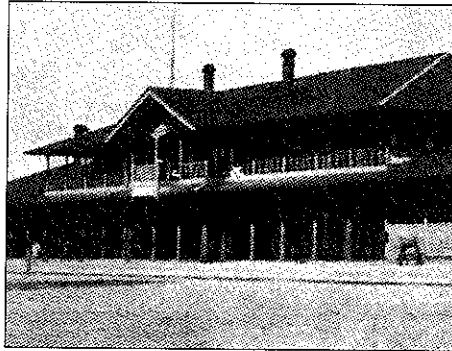
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*Cover photo:*  
*Leonard Trap, 1885-1950, the first  
military chaplain from the Christian  
Reformed Church*



page 8



page 22

### 2 From the Editor

### 3 The First Chaplains

*Richard Harms*

### 12 A Tale of Two Congregations: Acculturation and Its Long-term Impact on Chicago's West Side Reformed Churches

*Robert P. Swierenga*

### 22 Johannes Groen

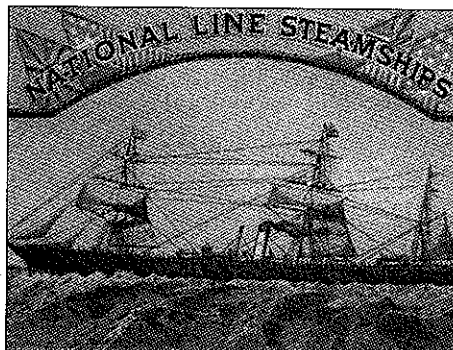
*An Arduous But Faithful Ministry*

*Harry Boonstra*

### 28 Johannes Groen

*Groen in West Michigan Society*

*Harry Boonstra*



page 36



page 40

### 36 Cholera at Sea — 1866

*Loren Lemmen*

### 40 Tabinta Journal, September 1947

*John and Patricia Hogeterp*

### 44 Book Review

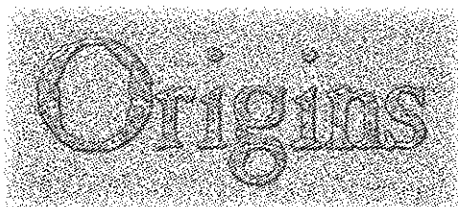
*Steve J. Van Der Weele*

### 46 For the Future

*upcoming Origins articles*

### 47 Contributors

# from the editor...



## This Issue

This number undertakes a wide range of topics. Richard Harms details the beginning of the military chaplaincy in the Christian Reformed Church from several diffuse sources brought on by the declaration of United States entrance into World War I. Dr. Harry Boonstra presents two essays on the life of Rev. Johannes Groen, a product of the conservative Dutch Calvinism subculture in America (to use the descriptor from Dr. James Bratt) and a minister in that subculture, yet who was on the edges of various social reform efforts such as women's suffrage, labor organization, and prohibition. Noted scholar of Dutch-American Studies Dr. Robert Swierenga documents the differing acculturation processes of the first Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America congregations in Chicago. Two entirely different Dutch emigrant ocean voyages, separated by eight decades, with a few commonalities, are described by Loren Lemmen and Johannes and Piertje Hogeterp. ▀

## Available On-Line

Thanks to a Michigan library services and technology grant and support from Hekman Library staff approximately 1,000 images of Michigan churches, schools, events, and places are now in digital formats and can

be viewed via <http://alexandria.calvin.edu/uhtbin/cgiirsi4/eJDf4STXtc/255660055/503/7511>. ▀

## News from the Archives

During the past year we have processed 42 cubic feet of seminary records, 18 cubic feet of college materials, and 103 cubic feet of denominational records. Among these were major additions from the General Secretary's office of the Christian Reformed Church, Home Missions, and the seminary president. In addition to these, 163 cubic feet of institutional records were organized and opened, 179 cubic feet of manuscript material from such groups as Dynamic Youth Ministries, Christian Reformed Conference Grounds, and the Committee for Women in the Christian Reformed Church. The manuscript total also includes approximately 35 cubic feet of records from various Christian schools and other agencies related to the Dutch in North America.

We also completed organizing and cataloging the records of the Midwest Sunday School Association; the Back to God Hour-Guam program; the papers of Fred Klooster, John Hulst, and Nicholas B. Beversluis; and the cataloging of *Onze Toekomst* and the *Stan-daard*. In cooperation with the Meeter Center at Calvin College, we organized the Ford Lewis Battles (1915-1979) papers (33 cubic feet). Battles was the preeminent twentieth-century scholar of John Calvin. ▀

## Book Publication

As we noted in the last issue, since its founding *Origins* was mandated

to publish books in addition to the magazine. We currently have two manuscripts, both biographies, in the process of preparation and should be available soon. Efforts to find a publishing/distribution partner for this effort were unsuccessful and we are currently working with the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America to release our books through their services. ▀

## Endowment Fund

In January 2004 the endowment fund's market value stood at \$275,481, a 6.6 percent increase resulting from improvement in the stock market. We thank *Origins* readers who contributed above the annual subscription, which allows us to keep the subscription at the same level, \$10, as when we began publishing twenty-three years ago. ▀

## Historical Fiction

In our last number we presented a work of historical fiction by former *Origins* editor, H.J. Brinks, titled "The Sabbath." This was the first use of historical fiction in the journal and we asked for your response. A number of you took the time to write, for which we say thank you. Exactly the same number of readers wrote in support of as wrote in opposition to including this genre. Perhaps in the future we will try this experiment again and see if opinions have shifted. For now, we will not include historical fiction. ▀

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Richard H. Harms'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Richard' being the most prominent part.

Richard H. Harms

# The First Chaplains

Richard Harms

After the German government announced the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare in January 1917, five United States ships were sunk in a matter of months. These sinkings were the culmination of a series of events, over a period of years, which led the United States to enter World War I on 6 April. The federal government's first step after the war declaration was to call all National Guard units into federal service. Since far more troops would be needed than those already in service and the federalized guard units, by 5 June 1917 all men living in America (native-born, naturalized, or alien) between the ages of 21 and 31 were required to register for the draft. On 20 July the first lottery drawing was held, selecting inductees from this registration. Among those included in both the federalized guard units and the lottery were young men from the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), which was then comprised of approximately 89,250 members in 237 congregations, located primarily in the Midwest.

Events of the mobilization clearly demonstrated that the nation was poorly prepared for war, but the CRC was not prepared at all. Quickly Henry Beets, the editor of the denomination's English-language periodical, *The Banner*, called attention to the need for the care of the spiritual life of CRC young men in National Guard units.<sup>1</sup> Yet the denomination had no mechanism or personnel to provide such care. In fact, the denomination's membership was not large enough to recommend ministers for the US Army's chaplain corps. Chaplains were accepted only

from the nation's larger religious groups and allocated based on a quota tied to a religious group's size as a percentage of the total national population. Similarly, none of the other denominations in the Dutch Reformed sphere were large enough for a chaplaincy slot. Rumors during the early months of the war, that the federal government was likely going to commission an additional 250 army chaplains and that denominations with 30,000 members could be represented in the corps,<sup>2</sup> proved to be groundless.

A further problem for the CRC was the lack of ordained ministers available, had chaplaincy slots been open,



Leonard Trap, 1885-1950, was the first military chaplain from the Christian Reformed Church. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

with only 167 ministers for the 237 congregations, according to the 1917 CRC Yearbook. Nevertheless, for the CRC, just beginning to look beyond immigrants from the Netherlands as potential new members, the prospect of sending its young men into the world and possible death without proper spiritual care was frightening. As Beets noted, since two-thirds<sup>3</sup> of the CRC's membership lived in states adjacent to Lake Michigan, a large portion of the

Richard H. Harms is the archivist in Heritage Hall that serves Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary and the Christian Reformed Church. He has written on a variety of topics and is editor of *Origins*.

federalized 32nd National Guard Regiment would be made up of Reformed young men, in fact he observed that the regiment's make-up would be nearly 85 percent Protestant, but would have a Roman Catholic chaplain. This prospect was unacceptable to Beets and was the beginning of the effort to have a CRC minister become a chaplain and, until this was achieved, to have CRC ministers provide chaplaincy services to Reformed young men in service.

With no military chaplaincy slots open to Reformed ministers, other alternatives to provide for the spiritual life of the military personnel had to be pursued. One option was to work through the YMCA. The YMCA employed ministers (paying their expenses, travel costs, etc., but not salaries) to work in the various military camps as chaplains. The federal government generally was amenable to allowing these YMCA personnel access to the bases, even making on-base facilities available to them for their use in counseling, religious study, and worship activities. The YMCA also allowed non-ordained



*Richard Pousma, known as "The Billy Sunday of Calvin College," was ordained as a minister and served with the YMCA in Texas. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.*

volunteers to assist. Yet the YMCA was the employer and as such had the ultimate control over the workers in terms of postings and assignments. Another alternative was for volunteers to approach individual camp com-



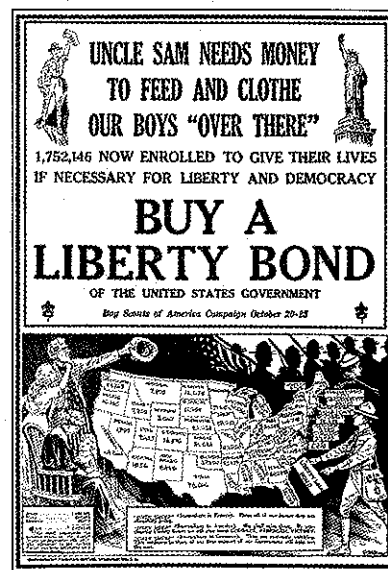
*Albert H. Bratt, 1887-1962, served as a minister to soldiers during both World War I and World War II. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.*

manders and ask for access as "camp pastors." Typically the camp pastors were located off-base but were allowed on-base during the daytime to meet with military personnel if such personnel were willing and not involved in assigned duties. Some commanders welcomed such volunteers and made on-base facilities available to them to use for meeting the troops, but since similar work was being performed by the YMCA, other commanders found it administratively simpler to deal only with representatives of the YMCA rather than every volunteer pastor that came to a camp's gate.

The opportunity to work through the YMCA, as Beets described it, struck a resonant chord among the denomination's laity, since a centralized, denominational response was hindered by the fact that the CRC's synod, or governing body, met only in even-numbered years.<sup>4</sup> The next session of synod, slated to meet in late June 1918, was still a year away when Beets called attention to the need for chaplains. In the absence of centralized denominational action, several grassroots efforts sprouted in the denomination during the early summer of 1917. In response

to a request from the Sherman Street CRC consistory, representatives from the Grand Rapids area churches met on 24 July 1917 and organized the League of Christian Reformed Churches for the Spiritual Welfare of our Soldiers (later referred to as the "Grand Rapids Committee," the name that will be used below). A five-member executive committee was formed, with Rev. Peter J. Hoekenga as the corresponding secretary, and a schedule of bimonthly meetings.

One of the first decisions made by the Grand Rapids Committee was not to work through the YMCA, since working independently initially was not discouraged by the local military



*Archives, Calvin College*

command.<sup>5</sup> This allowed the committee and church to directly oversee the work and not be required to relinquish this to the YMCA had it become the employer. The Grand Rapids Committee next began looking for volunteers to serve and raising funds for salary, lodging and expenses — estimated to be approximately \$1,500–\$2,000 per year per individual. The Committee asked CRC members to consider contributing one dollar per family per year, which would have generated \$17,000 annually.<sup>6</sup> Because the Grand Rapids

Committee's focus was on men from churches in Michigan who tended to be stationed in camps east of the Mississippi River, fundraising efforts were not extended to the churches outside of the state.<sup>7</sup> Funds began to flow to the committee almost immediately. By the end of August, \$219.92 was given, thanks mostly to two of the largest churches in Grand Rapids — \$100 by LaGrave Avenue and \$90.17 by Grandville Avenue.<sup>8</sup>

Several congregations granted their ministers leave time to participate, some for a day or two every week, others for several weeks at a time. Church societies also contributed funds, gifts, and services to the effort. Comestibles were regularly donated by individual congregations for meals and social gatherings for personnel during off-duty time. Other contributions included time. The CRC churches in Kalamazoo regularly sent church singing groups to Camp Custer, just outside nearby Battle Creek, Michigan, and volunteers spent uncounted hours in fellowship with service personnel.<sup>9</sup>

Just a few days after the Grand Rapids Committee began its work, the consistory of First Englewood CRC in Chicago (now Calvin CRC in Oak Lawn, IL) sounded a similar call to action for churches in the Chicago area. The Englewood plan proposed calling one or two ministers as missionaries, with their salaries and expenses paid from the denomination's mission funds. These ministers would serve as volunteer camp pastors. Unordained volunteers, whose expenses would be paid by individual churches, could assist such missionaries.<sup>10</sup>

Within a matter of weeks, volunteers applied to become part of the program. Since the Grand Rapids Committee was organized earlier and a bit more

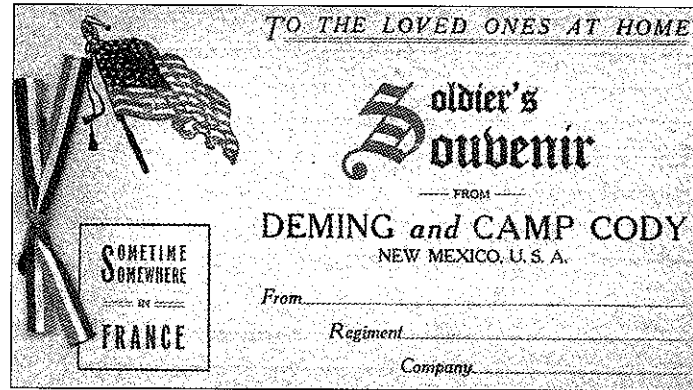
effectively, it took the lead in inaugurating its program. Quickly three applications — Rev. Leonard Trap, pastor at Third CRC in Zeeland, Michigan; C.E. Pratt, a former deacon and member of LaGrave Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids; and Richard Pousma, just beginning his

work with inmates of the Kent County Jail in Grand Rapids. Pousma was accepted because of his dynamic personality, having earned the appellation, "The Billy Sunday of Calvin College."<sup>11</sup>

To facilitate their immediate and effective placement, in spite of previous decisions, the Grand Rapids Committee decided to place all three through the YMCA program. Trap and Pratt were posted to Camp Custer, the army's point of induction for the Great Lakes region. At Custer, Trap and Pratt were to minister to the steady and ever-changing stream of inductees. Pousma was sent to Camp Grayling, in central lower Michigan, the National Guard base where the soldiers were marshalling for federal service. Since Grayling would

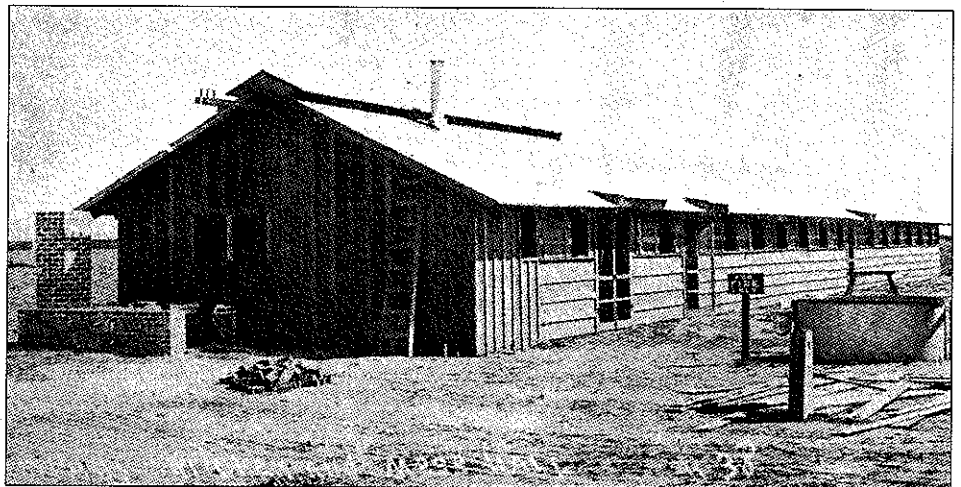
be used only as long as it took for the units to be shipped to their training stations, Pousma was designated to follow the units from Grayling to Camp MacArthur near Waco, Texas.

When Trap and Pratt arrived in Battle Creek, they discovered that the camp's commander did not require them to work through the YMCA, allowing the two on-base access to all off-duty personnel on weekends, security



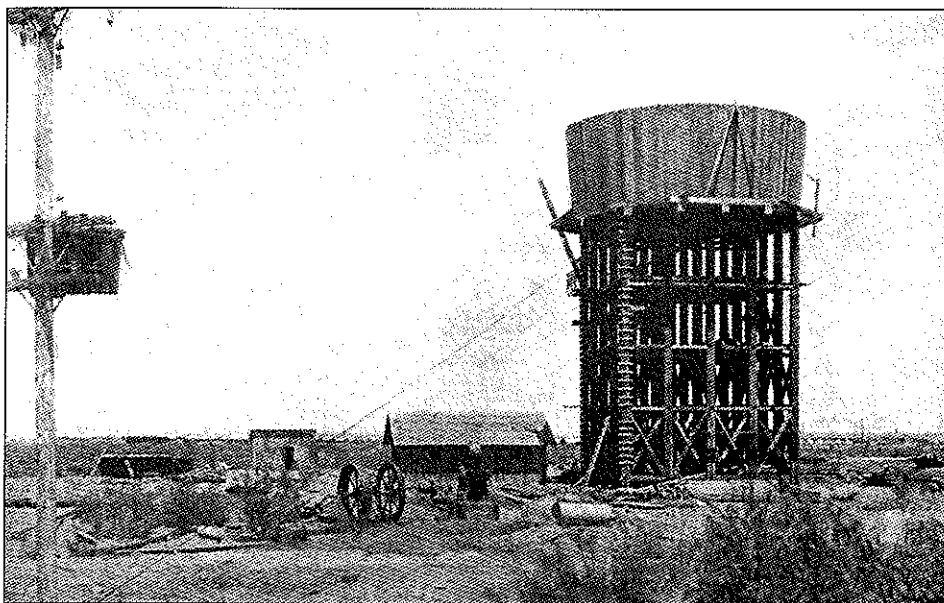
The Deming, New Mexico, Chamber of Commerce presented soldiers stationed at Camp Cody with this souvenir booklet of images of the community and camp. Archives, Calvin College.

third and final year of theological studies at the seminary — were approved. Trap, as an ordained minister, was able to conduct worship services and administer sacraments and, therefore, was immediately accepted for the work. Subsequent events would show that he truly had a heart for the work. Pratt's application was approved because he was very effective in person-to-person evangelism, as demonstrated in his



Built for the war effort, Camp Cody was serviceable, if lacking in élan. This is the mess hall. Archives, Calvin College.





Water for Camp Cody was stored in a number of wooden tanks, open at the top to the elements. Archives, Calvin College.

and health quarantines permitting. Immediately the Battle Creek Presbyterian Church provided space for the two to use during the week. Consequently, the committee decided that the two would remain under the direct control of the CRC and not join the YMCA. Both men found living quarters in Battle Creek and their wives joined them in the work. The women prepared and served countless meals to the young men from the camp while the husbands tended their spiritual needs. There was ready transportation from Muskegon, Grand Haven, Holland, and Grand Rapids to Battle Creek via the three interurban systems (electric trains) that connected the cities. The transportation system made it easy for volunteers and food, donated by church members from throughout West Michigan, to reach the camp pastors and their wives.

The situation at Grayling was different. Because of the distance from Grand Rapids and the greater degree of remoteness, Pousma, who was not married, carried on his work alone. Further, off-camp facilities were minimal so that his contact with personnel had to take place on the base and through the YMCA offices there. His enthusiasm

was sufficient to the work, although he left Grand Rapids so quickly and without proper supplies that he had to borrow a jacket against the cold September nights in Grayling.

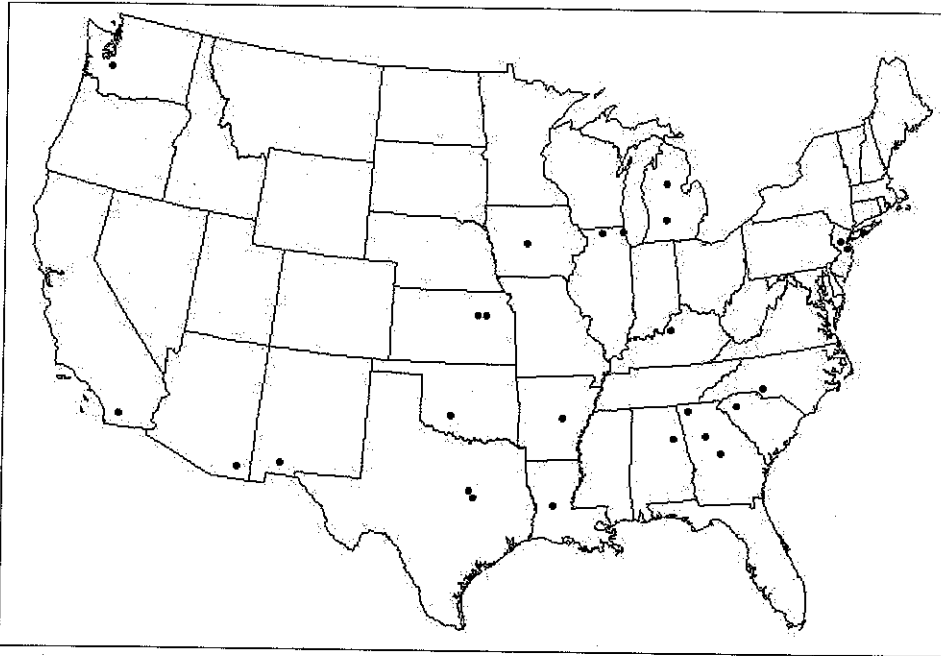
The first task for the three camp workers was to identify the Reformed men on base. Even though tensions between the CRC and the Reformed Church in American elsewhere could still be high, both denominations set aside such differences during the war. Delegates for both denominations served all Reformed military personnel without discrimination.<sup>12</sup> Such cooperative spirits extended beyond Reformed circles as seen in the support from the Battle Creek Presbyterian Church.

Finding the Reformed young men was problematic, since both camps were, in effect, simply trans-shipment points where troops stayed for relatively brief periods of time. By the time the army formulated and could make available rosters at induction sites like Custer, a number of the men would already have moved on. Instead, the workers sought out their charges. They asked, through various reports in *The Banner* and *De Wachter*, for parents, friends, relatives, and churches to send

names and mailing addresses for those men being sent to the camps. They scoured daily logs assembled by the YMCA, as they became available, for any names sent them or other names of obviously Dutch origin. Then, with permission from the camp's commander, they simply began canvassing the camp, door-to-door. Whenever they met someone with a Reformed background, they always asked if that person knew of any others. Lastly, they daily visited the hospitals, but there never restricted their visits based on denomination. Any patient, so desiring, received a visit.<sup>13</sup> This pattern was followed by all subsequent workers in the various camps through the country.

When possible, Trap conducted worship services on Sundays on the base. Typically, communion was offered to full-members and overseen by the councils of the Kalamazoo congregations. When medical quarantines prohibited such gatherings, Trap spent Sundays visiting those hospitalized. One weekend, with three of his brothers, he organized the "Trap Brothers Quartet" to sing and conduct Bible studies in the camp hospital's various wards.

The work was well publicized in *The Banner* and *De Wachter* and within weeks others stepped forward to assist. Theological students Harry A. Dykstra and Herman Moes and Calvin College faculty member J. H. Muyskens all volunteered to serve with the YMCA. As such they were not under the supervision of the Grand Rapids Committee and had financial support directly from local congregations. Burton Heights Men's Society in Grand Rapids provided \$250 for Dykstra, for instance.<sup>14</sup> These and any future such volunteers were deterred within a matter of months by the federal government's decision that young men not in school were eligible for the draft. Both Dykstra and Moes returned to school. Pousma, then in Texas and wishing to follow his regiments to France, took another



Map with the various camps, forts, and one airfield regularly visited by those in the Christian Reformed chaplaincy effort. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

direction. He requested that the faculty of the Theological School designate him a candidate for the ministry, so that he could be ordained and thereby avoid the draft, yet continue serving the members of the regiments in Camp MacArthur as they shipped to France. Because he had not completed his three years of theological studies, the faculty, and later Classis Grand Rapids East, stipulated that his ordination was unique, limited to the chaplaincy and required that he complete his third year of study once his service to the military was completed. He agreed, was called by Eastern Avenue CRC to the work, examined by classis, and ordained on 21 November 1917.<sup>15</sup>

Ordained volunteers also contributed. Many, like Revs. John C. De Korne, Meindert Botbyl, Peter Van Vliet, and John Battema, added visiting nearby military installations to their weekly parish routines. Peter Stam, a lay-evangelist in New Jersey, joined Botbyl and De Korne as they visited with troops in Camps Merritt and Mills, trans-shipment facilities in New Jersey. Reports of such visits, with the names of soldiers

met, were regularly published in the denomination's periodicals to provide relatives a bit of information about the welfare of those in service. Often such reports were published and distributed much more quickly than mail deliveries and were the last words for families on the welfare of their relatives.<sup>16</sup> The two New Jersey camps were important to the entire denomination, since most of the Europe-bound units, regardless of origin, waited in these camps for cross-ocean transport.

Starting in mid-November 1917 several ministers were granted leaves of absence, generally for three months, by their congregations to minister to the troops. On 11 November Peter J. Hoekenga left his Walker, Michigan, congregation to visit various southern camps such as Greene (near Charlotte, North Carolina), Oglethorpe (just inside Georgia near Chattanooga, Tennessee) and Pike (south of Little Rock, Arkansas). The Walker congregation later called Jacob Wyngarden, who was granted three days per week by the congregation to assist at Camp Custer. Martin Schans from Kelloggsville,

Michigan, visited the same southern camps for three months during the late spring and early summer of 1918. James Ghysels from Second Grand Haven, Michigan, followed Schans for the three months during the summer.

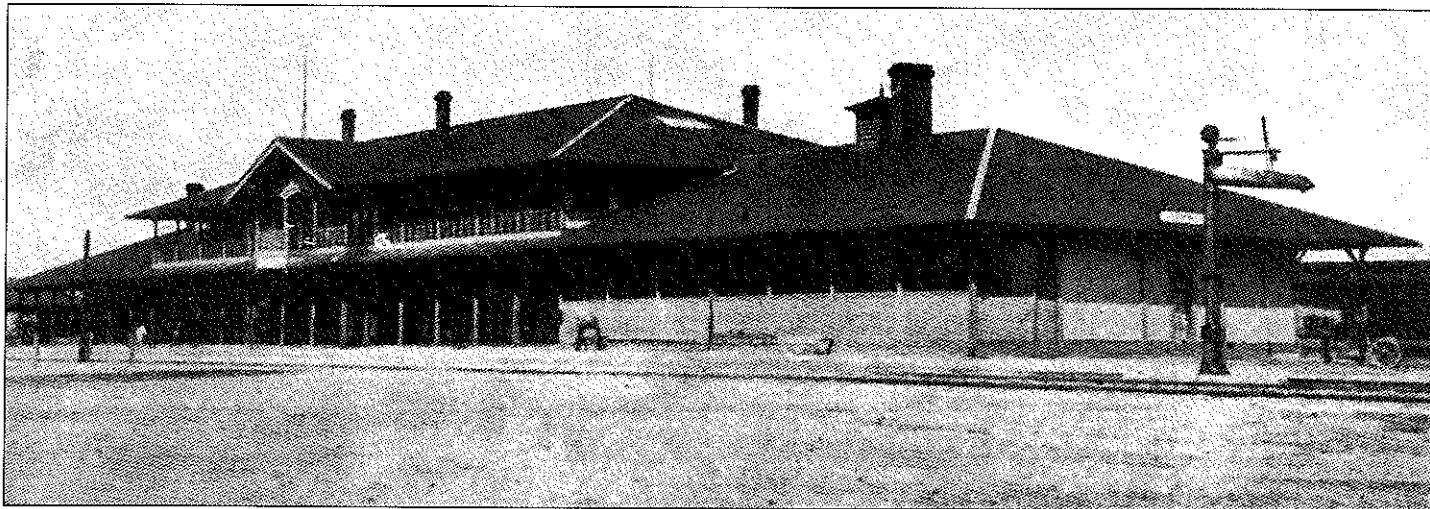
Because many of the inductees and volunteers from the Chicago area were not going to the camps in Michigan during the summer of 1918, William Trap (not a brother of Leonard) and his wife Harriet moved from the Third Roseland manse in Chicago to Rockford, Illinois, to serve the personnel in Camp Grant and the Great Lakes Naval Station. These Traps provided the same sorts of services as those who served at Camp Custer. As in Michigan, assistance in Illinois came from lay and ordained volunteers.

Because the young men from more western congregations were going to camps further west than Illinois, on 14 November 1917, Classes Orange City, Ostfriesland, Sioux Center<sup>17</sup> and Pella held a meeting in Pella, Iowa, to develop a mechanism to provide for the spiritual needs of their church members in service. The representatives met three times and designed a program to call ministers as missionaries full-time for specific camps. These ministers



Peter Geldhof, one of the doughboys from Reformed circles.





The union station in Deming, NM, where all those serving in the chaplaincy arrived and departed. Nearby Camp Cody had its own sidings for troops and equipment. Archives, Calvin College.

would be supervised by the First Pella congregation and would establish branch congregations of Pella near various military installations to conduct worship services and administer communion. The first call letter under this program went to Albert H. Bratt, serving the Otley, Iowa, congregation, who accepted the call. On 9 December 1917, less than a month after the first meeting of the western classes, Bratt left Otley and on the sixteenth was installed to serve Camp Funston and Fort Riley, west of Topeka, Kansas. Likewise John M. Vande Kieft accepted a call and left the Platte, South Dakota, congregation to be installed to serve at Camp Dodge, near Des Moines, Iowa. Funding for these efforts was to come from gifts of \$4.00 from each family in the four classes.<sup>18</sup>

Classis Pacific formed a committee for the military bases along the Pacific Coast. Regularly the classis was able to send people to Camp Lewis, about seventeen miles from Tacoma, Washington. Quite often these people would walk through and around the entire camp looking for Dutch names and members of Reformed congregations and find none.<sup>19</sup> The classis, with eighteen congregations (eleven of which were vacant) and 619 families,

compared to the 5,000 families in the two Grand Rapids classes, found its financial resources stretched because of the distances along the Pacific Coast. Instead, the Grand Rapids and Pella committees assigned some of their representatives to visit Camp Kearny north of San Diego, California (now Marine Corps Air Station Miramar) and Camp Cody, near Deming, New Mexico.

As instructed, the ministers and laity serving the camps regularly sent reports on their work, even though writing such reports added to an already significant work load. Vande Kieft had been instructed to send weekly reports to *The Banner* and *De Wachter* in which he included the names of Reformed young men whom he had met. He also was to send monthly summary reports to the First Pella committee overseeing his work. These reports note that the pace of life of these individuals was hectic, mundane, frustrating, and rewarding. His reports begin with his arrival by train in Manhattan, Kansas, about ten miles from Fort Riley and Camp Funston, on 13 December 1917. Finding that lodging in Manhattan was very difficult to locate, since many people were in the area due to the mobilization, Vande Kieft shared rooms with strangers. Working among the

50,000 troops he found a bit different than that among the 36 families in the Otley congregation. His duties included conducting, at minimum, once weekly worship services, Bible studies, counseling individuals, visiting the sick, and general evangelism through YMCA programs.<sup>20</sup> Although Vande Kieft arrived just as a medical quarantine was imposed on the base, as a camp pastor he was allowed access to Camp Funston which was the hospital for Fort Riley. In February 1918 he was sent to minister at Camps Cody and Kearny. At Camp Cody he organized prayer and Bible-reading meetings in the YMCA building on the same evenings as movies were shown, to provide an alternative for the men.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to ordained ministers and lay workers, some of the troops themselves began to minister to each other. Joseph Vande Kieft, brother of Rev. John Vande Kieft, had been unable to go to the seminary due to limited finances and instead began farming with another brother near Tracey, Iowa. He was inducted late in 1917 into the Army Engineers and stationed at Camp Cody and reported on the spiritual life of the troops between the regular visits of the camp pastors.<sup>22</sup>

The urgency and impact of the

spiritual work also came out in the denominational periodicals. In early 1918 Leonard Trap reported from Camp Custer that a young man wishing to make profession of faith had been shipped to Camp MacArthur

before an elder from Kalamazoo could arrive. On 5 February 1918 he was one of 2,013 troops and 382 crew onboard *Tuscania*, a passenger line converted to a troop ship. About 6 PM, *Tuscania* was torpedoed by a German submarine

and became the first United States troop ship to be sunk during the war, with a loss of 230 lives, including the young man who had wanted to make profession of his faith. Trap concluded his report, noting that while the young man had been at Camp MacArthur he had been able to make his profession.<sup>23</sup> Or when the family of Wiebe Rignalda of Byron Center learned of his death from wounds in the fall of 1918, they were heartened because he had written home that he, along with fourteen others, had made profession of faith in Camp MacArthur with the Revs. Pousma and Hoekenga.<sup>24</sup>

The experience of the camp pastors also had some unexpected results. While working at Camp Funston, during the summer of 1918, Rev. Albert Bratt reported that he had visited with 400-500 people during one month's time. Most of this total included Protestants who were not Reformed and they were both white and black. Bratt noted his surprise to discover that three-fourths of the African-Americans were church members and concerned about their salvation, while less than one-third of the whites were so minded. Taken aback by this, he asked a black woman why this would be the case. She responded, "You know our people. You know the history of how blacks were treated during the last century. You have certainly read of the treatment of blacks by whites in the South. These circumstances all cause us to seek comfort in God; that we all faithfully read the Bible; that we place our trust in Jesus as he is our intercessor."<sup>25</sup>

Providing the personnel and resources to support the spiritual needs of Reformed service personnel as the mobilization grew proved challenging. Complete financial data is not extant, but two reports from the Grand Rapids effort provide some insight. A total of \$11,912.80 was collected during the period 1 August 1917-30 September 1918, of which \$11,331.81 had been

**Table 1**

*Long-Term Camp Service*

<b>Bratt, Albert H.</b>	ordained minister, served 14 November 1917-summer 1918, Camp Funston and Fort Riley, Kansas; Camp Pike, Arkansas
<b>De Korne, John C.</b>	ordained minister, served 28 March 1918-summer 1918, Camp Mills and Camp Dumont, New Jersey
<b>Dykstra, Harry A.</b>	first-year theological student, October 1917-January 1918 and summer 1918, Camp Custer, Michigan as YMCA worker
<b>Gyhsels, James M.</b>	ordained minister, 1 July 1918-1 October 1918, Camp Wheeler, Camp Gordon, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia
<b>Hoekenga, Peter J.</b>	ordained minister, 11 November 17-Summer 1918, Camp MacArthur, Texas; Camp Cody, New Mexico; Camp Dodge, Iowa; Camp Greene, North Carolina; Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia; Camp Pike, Arkansas; Camp Cody, New Mexico; Camp Kearny, California
<b>Hylkema, George W.</b>	ordained minister, November 17, 1917-February 1918, Camp Cody, New Mexico
<b>Pousma, Richard</b>	third-year theological student, later served for the YMCA as an ordained minister, 10 September 1917-23 May 1918, Camp Grayling, Michigan; Camp MacArthur, Texas; Rich Field, Texas
<b>Pratt, Charles E.</b>	lay worker, 4 September 1917-1 October 1918, Camp Custer, Michigan; Camp MacArthur, Texas; Camp Greene, North Carolina; Camp Pike, Arkansas; Camp Wheeler, Georgia
<b>Schans, Martin M.</b>	ordained minister, 14 April 1918-14 July 1918, Camp Greene, North Carolina; Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia; Camp Gordon, Georgia; Camp McClelland, Alabama
<b>Trap, Leonard</b>	ordained minister, 20 August 1917-4 October 1918, Camp Custer; 4 October 1918-8 November 1918, Camp Zachary Taylor for chaplains training, 8 November 1918-November 1919, Chaplain US Army, Fort Custer
<b>Trap, William</b>	12 April 1918-summer 1918, Camp Grant, Illinois and also Great Lakes Naval Station, Illinois
<b>Vande Kieft, John M.</b>	ordained minister, 16 December 1917-summer 1918, Camp Dodge, Iowa; Camp Cody, New Mexico
<b>Van Vliet, Peter D.</b>	ordained minister, Camp Greene, North Carolina; Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia; Camp Pike, Arkansas
<b>Wynngaarden, Jacob</b>	February 1918-summer, received 3 days/week leave from Walker, Michigan CRC to volunteer at Camp Custer, Michigan; later leave: Camp Dodge, Iowa

**Table 2****Short-term Volunteers**

<b>Baker, Henry</b>	ordained minister, volunteer, visited Camp Merritt, New Jersey
<b>Battea, John P.</b>	ordained minister, volunteer, visited Camp Custer, Michigan
<b>Bothyl, Meindert</b>	ordained minister, volunteer, visited Camp Mills, Camp Dumont and Camp Merritt, New Jersey
<b>Heeres, Walter P.</b>	ordained minister, volunteer, visited Camp Merritt, New Jersey
<b>Hoekstra, Johannes</b>	ordained minister, volunteer, visited Camp Merritt, New Jersey
<b>Moes, Herman</b>	theological student (graduated 1919), 17 October–18 November 1917 as YMCA worker
<b>Muyskens, J. H.</b>	Calvin faculty, October 1917 — as YMCA worker
<b>Stam, Peter</b>	evangelist, volunteer, visited Camp Mills and Camp Dumont, New Jersey
<b>Van Buite, Mr.</b>	layman, volunteer, visited Camp Merritt, New Jersey

expended (\$5,768.51 for salaries; \$2,340.11 for expenses; \$1,506.45 for travel; \$151.87 for stationery; \$1,564.87 for supplies). Of the revenue \$15.80 had come from interest on deposits, all the rest from gifts.<sup>26</sup> The largest single month for contribution was September 1917, when \$2,593.94 was collected, and the largest single contribution during the entire fourteen-month period was that of the LaGrave Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, whose members contributed \$596.63. These donations were in addition to what was given for the ongoing operations of the local denominational ministries.

Table 1 notes that fourteen individuals served a minimum of three months of full-time service in the spiritual outreach program, with Rev. Leonard Trap serving the entire time and C. E. Pratt just a few weeks less. In addition to these fourteen, nine more (Table 2) volunteered varying amounts of time, in addition to their existing tasks. Initial plans placed these spiritual leaders in the camps where the men of Reformed backgrounds were stationed — Trap at Camp Custer and Pousma at Camp Grayling, then Camp MacArthur. But the men in services regularly were

moved from one military facility to the next and the denomination did not have enough personnel for every camp where Reformed troops were sent.

Instead, a system of itineration was used where one person visited a series of camps and perhaps a few weeks later another would follow a similar itinerary.<sup>27</sup> Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of the service locations of each camp pastor or volunteer.

At the beginning of the war the US had 241 military posts (army and navy) and 252 chaplains. By July 1918 the number of posts had risen to 275 and the number of chaplains to 900. In addition there were an estimated 400 camp or volunteer pastors. It was estimated that 300 of these camp pastors came from the largest denomination that also qualified for recommending candidates to the military chaplaincy. Of the remaining 100, the CRC was well represented. Six ministers had accepted calls to full-time camp work, six more had accepted three-month term appointments to the work, and six more divided their time between their parish obligations and service to the service personnel.<sup>28</sup>

All of these considerable efforts were

limited, however, to the continental United States. Only chaplains and pastors employed by the YMCA, over whom the army had some control, were allowed overseas. The principle reason Pousma sought ordination prior to completing his theological training was so that he could accompany the Reformed young men to France. In May 1918 the army decided that only men at least 31 years old would be allowed overseas as YMCA pastors; those like Pousma, under 31 (he would be 26 in August), could remain in service within the United States.<sup>29</sup>

This left the problem of spiritual care in the battle zones. William Haze wrote in *The Banner* (23 May 1918: 376) that there were not enough chaplains and YMCA pastors for all the locations in France, though Roman Catholics had an advantage, given the many Roman Catholic churches in France. On the same page Joe Hoogewerf wrote that many objected to the fact that his unit, two-thirds Protestant, was served by a Roman Catholic chaplain, although he was quick to note that this chaplain never attempted to “turn Protestants Roman Catholic.”

The problem for the denomination was that it simply was not large enough to merit a chaplain under the army's allotment quota. By mid-summer 1918 *The Banner* began suggesting that this quota would soon be removed and that CRC pastors should prepare for the military chaplaincy, but that such individuals take additional training in subjects not taught in the theological school, such as: advanced first aid, psychological examination for emotional problems, and facility in aspects of military and internal law.<sup>30</sup> In late July the quota allotment was relaxed and the CRC was allowed to recommend candidates for the military chaplaincy. Leonard Trap, already at work at Camp Custer, was the denomination's first nominee, and soon the names of Revs. Johan H. Monsma and Lambertus J.



Lamberts were added. Once the quota on chaplains was relaxed and the five-week chaplaincy training program was in place, the army announced on 24 October 1918 that camp pastors would no longer be granted access to military posts. Initially, charges circulated that the national larger denominations, already well represented in the military chaplaincy, had orchestrated

the decision, but these were quickly refuted.<sup>31</sup>

Trap began the five-week training at Camp Zachary Taylor, six miles south of Louisville, Kentucky, where the army had opened its first chaplain school the previous February.<sup>32</sup> He was one of 240 students, but on 11 November (the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month), before Monsma

or Lamberts were commissioned, the armistice began. Trap became the denomination's first military chaplain and served at Camp Custer. In 1919 he accepted a call to the parish ministry in West Sayville, New York. The other camp pastors, for the most part, returned to the parish ministry, though several went into mission and church planting work. ☞

## Endnotes

1. "Our Boys in the Army," *The Banner*, 3 May 1917: 281. *The Banner* had become the official publication of the Christian Reformed Church with the 4 March 1915 issue. It had begun in 1866 as a publication of the True Reformed Dutch Church in northern New Jersey, which joined the Christian Reformed Church in 1890 as Classis Hackensack. In 1904 a group of West Michigan men bought the periodical and moved its offices to West Michigan, where, under the editorship of Rev. Henry Beets, it became the unofficial English voice of the denomination until the denomination purchased it in 1914.
2. *The Banner*, 16 August 1917: 526.
3. According to statistics in the 1917 Yearbook, 59,699 of the CRC's 89,257 members lived in this region.
4. The CRC Synod of 1918 approved these various efforts underway and joining the Federal Council of the Church of Christ in America, since membership was required for working as a Red Cross volunteer. See *Acts of Synod 1918*, article 41, pp 41-43. See also John Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Church, A Study in Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949): 112-113.
5. Karst Berman and R. Van Noord, "Report of League of Christian Reformed Church for the Spiritual Welfare of Our Soldiers," *The Banner*, 23 May 1918: 377-378.
6. P. J. Hoekenga, "The Spiritual Care of Our Soldiers," *The Banner*, 9 August 1917: 508.
7. Ultimately, \$515.27 was contributed by non-Michigan churches. From two "Financial Statements of the League of Christian Reformed Church for the Spiritual Care of Our Soldiers," 1 May 1918 in the G. D. De Jong Papers, Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan; and 30 September 1918, in the Classis Grand Rapids North Records, Archives, Calvin

College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

8. "Financial Statement, May 1, 1917," G. D. De Jong Papers, Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

9. Leonard Trap, "Camp Custer," *The Banner*, 14 February 1918: 112.

10. *The Banner*, 26 July 1917: 473.

11. *The Banner*, 20 September 1917: 602. Billy Sunday (1862-1935) a former professional baseball player was a dynamic evangelist from 1896 until his death. He tended to simplify Christian teaching to appeal to as large an audience as possible and condemned gambling, political graft, socialism and particularly liquor. His common entrance into a meeting was to run across the stage and "slide into second base for Christ."

12. *The Banner*, 7 February 1918: 97.

13. *De Wachter*, 7 November 1917: 3.

14. R. Van Noord, "Brief Report of the Work of the Committee for the Spiritual Welfare of our Soldiers," Classis Grand Rapids North Records, Archives, Calvin College.

15. K. Bergsma and R. Van Noord, "Report of Executive (sic) Committee of the League of Christian Reformed Churches for the Spiritual Welfare of Our Soldiers," *The Banner*, 23 May 1918: 277-378 and Peter P. DeBoer, "Richard H. Pousma and the Rehoboth Hospital," *Origins* (vol. 21, no. 1, 2003): 19.

16. Peter Stam listed five names in his report of the 6 December 1917 visit to Camp Mills, and nine names in the report of the 2 February 1918 visit to Camp Merritt, *The Banner*, 14 February 1918: 118.

17. Now known as Classes Heartland, Northcentral Iowa, Lakota, respectively.

18. A. Blik, "Onze Westertsche Militairen," *De Wachter*, 26 December 1917: 2. The funding proposal was ambitious, since the nearly 4,500 families in the four classes would have provided

\$18,000 under the proposal. As of 1 May 1918, \$5,206.66 had been collected, *De Wachter*, 8 May 1918: 6.

19. *The Banner*, 20 February 1918: 3.

20. *De Wachter*, 16 January 1918: 4, 23 January 1918: 5; and 30 January 1918: 8.

21. *De Wachter*, 6 February 1918: 5.

22. *The Banner*, 21 February 1918: 129. Vande Kieft was able to graduate from the seminary in 1927 and, during World War II, served as a camp pastor just as his brother and others had during the First World War.

23. *De Wachter*, 20 February 1918:

3. At the time the story of the sinking was the news story of the nation, with American public sentiment outraged by the attack.

24. *De Wachter*, 23 October 1918: 10.

25. *De Wachter*, 31 July 1918: 8. Translation by the author.

26. "Financial Statement of the League of Christian Reformed Churches for the Spiritual Care of our Soldiers," 1 May 1918, G. D. De Jong Papers, and 30 September 1918, Records of Classis Grand Rapids North, both in the Archives, Calvin College.

27. For a partial summary of the process see: R. Van Noord, "Report of Executive Committee," *The Banner*, 23 May 1918: 377-378.

28. "Religious Forces at Work in the Camps," *The Banner*, 4 July 1918: 485.

29. R. H. Pousma, "Farewell, Waco!" *The Banner*, 23 May 1918: 384.

30. "Chaplaincy Requirements," *The Banner*, 19 July 1917: 457.

31. *The Banner*, 26 September 1918: 695-696.

32. The camp was dismantled after World War I; its operations were moved to Camp Dix, New Jersey; some of the material was sent to nearby Fort (Henry) Knox.

# A Tale of Two Congregations: Acculturation and Its Long-term Impact on Chicago's West Side Reformed Churches

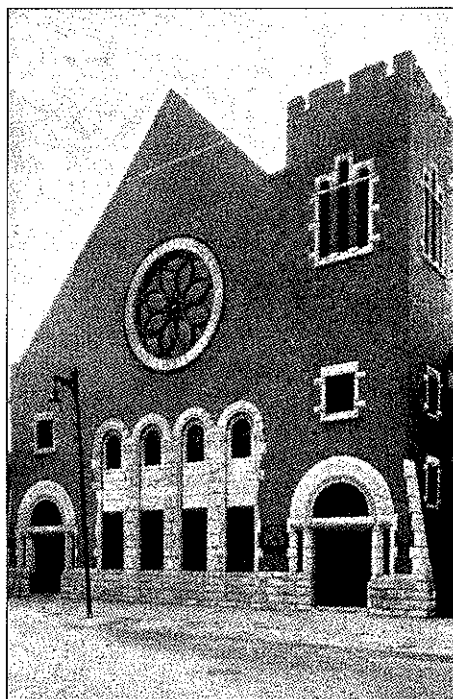
Robert P. Swierenga

**F**irst Reformed Church of Chicago, the mother congregation in the city, celebrated its sesquicentennial in 2003. It was its last hurrah. The church, which relocated to the suburb of Berwyn after the Second World War,

tion's illustrious past and the emotional ties of several daughter congregations in more distant suburbs. But time, distance, and cultural change have taken their toll.<sup>1</sup>

Mobility has always been a hallmark of church life in Chicago, then the nation's second largest city. Congregations grew, flourished and declined as their upwardly mobile members moved to newer subdivisions or more distant suburbs, where spacious new homes with gardens on tree-lined streets beckoned. As their members, the congregations followed, selling their beloved edifices to other ethnic groups. The first Dutch Reformed edifices, erected in the 1850s and 1860s, were razed as part of urban renewal projects, new land uses, or simple decay.

For many years there were two "First" churches standing a stone's throw from one another and competing for members — First Reformed Church of Chicago, founded in 1853, and First Christian Reformed Church of Chicago, founded in 1867. The latter body was born in a schism of fifteen families from First Reformed, which was a delayed reaction to the 1857 secession in West Michigan. First Reformed was affiliated with its rapidly Americanizing denomination, the Reformed Church in America (RCA), while First Christian Reformed represented an immigrant denomination



*The edifice of the First Reformed Church in America congregation in Chicago, which acculturated more quickly than its Christian Reformed counterpart. Photo: Western Seminary Collection at the Joint Archives of Holland.*

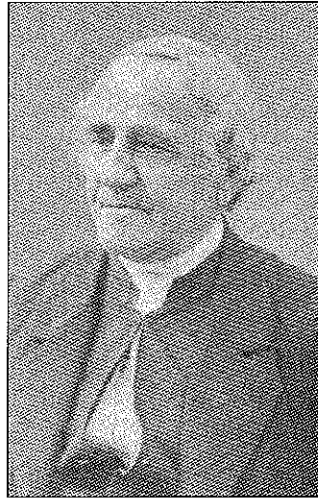
has sharply dwindled in membership and is struggling with the decision to close the doors forever. But a celebration is in order, given the congrega-

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resisting Americanization. The year of secession, 1867, was the very year the RCA officially Americanized its name by dropping the word "Dutch."

The RCA, one of America's oldest denominations, dating from 1628 in New Netherlands, and concentrated in New York City, the Hudson Valley and northern New Jersey, aligned itself with Yankee Calvinist denominations, notably the Presbyterians and Congregationalists. All were greatly impacted by the Second Great Awakening and its revivalist methods and mission outreach programs.<sup>2</sup> Popular institutions of Yankee piety such as annual "Visitations," or marathon revivals, run in January, functioned as "sacred festivals . . . o' wake up and warm the affections of the Christian's heart."<sup>3</sup> Yankee music teachers brought singing schools and organs into the Reformed churches. They introduced new hymnology, taught musical notation and singing in harmony, and broadened Dutch tastes beyond the traditional Genevan Psalter. RCA congregations gladly sang the "man-made hymns" composed by non-Reformed persons and published in new interdenominational hymnals. In short, the Dutch Reformed were "methodized," along with Protestant Christianity in general.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, RCA congregations adopted English, de-emphasized Heidelberg Catechism preaching and instruction, and practiced unregulated communion. Elders were less diligent in "family visits," and they sat with their families in the sanctuary instead of in official pews under the pastor's nose. Further, the denomination recognized other Protestant churches as equals. In short, the RCA lost some of its "Reformedness" and "Dutchness." These Americanizing influences had captured the denominational hierarchy east of the Alleghenies and affected the immigrant congregations on the frontier, although both their orthodox theology and Dutch character died hard.<sup>5</sup>



*Cornelius Vander Meulen, 1800-1876, helped organize First Chicago RCA and served as its first pastor. The congregation enthusiastically supported the Union in the American Civil War during his pastorate. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.*

While the RCA embraced Yankee piety, Christian Reformed Church (CRC) members sensed that American Calvinism was not the same as Dutch Calvinism. The CRC remained an immigrant denomination that walled itself off from American evangelicalism. Its motto was that of Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer: "In isolation is our strength." Indeed, the very name the CRC initially chose — True Reformed Dutch Church, signified its self image as a "bride of Christ, . . . a garden enclosed, a well shut up, and a fountain sealed" (again, to quote Groen Van Prinsterer). The CRC maintained close ties with its mother church in the Netherlands, and clung tenaciously to the traditional confession of faith and church order adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-19). From 1857 to 1900, every one of 114 clerics ordained in the CRC had been affiliated with the Dutch mother church, as compared with only one-quarter of 116 Dutch-born clerics ordained in the RCA.<sup>6</sup> Despite its immigrant character, the CRC eventually went through the same process of Americanization as the RCA. However reluctantly, the CRC

followed the path blazed by its older sister and gradually adopted ways it had once eschewed.

Both Chicago immigrant congregations birthed daughter congregations, both went through the painful transition from Dutch to English services in the era of the First World War, and both relocated to the western suburbs after World War II. Here their similarity ends. First RCA modeled itself after American evangelical churches, while First CRC remained very "Dutchy." First RCA introduced mid-week prayer services; Sunday schools; the use of organs, choirs, and hymns in worship; Sunday evening worship for young people; youth ministries; mission outreach programs; English-language services; and in recent times, women suffrage and women in ecclesiastical office. First CRC lagged by a generation or two in adopting these changes in worship and church life.<sup>7</sup>

Since the CRC clearly remained an immigrant body, it attracted most of the immigrants beginning with the massive exodus from the northern Netherlands in the 1880s and 1890s. These newcomers brought ideas about Christian day schools that Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper and their followers had introduced in the Netherlands. In 1893, First Chicago CRC established a parochial day school (Ebenezer Christian School), which became a "free school" (after the Kuyperian model) in 1902. It was augmented in 1918 by a "free" secondary school (Chicago Christian High School). While CRC youth went to Christian schools, RCA youth for the most part attended public schools. After 1900, therefore, schooling became the salient marker between the two churches. These contrasting cultural practices had a profound impact on the churches as institutions and on membership trends.<sup>8</sup>

### **Church Planting**

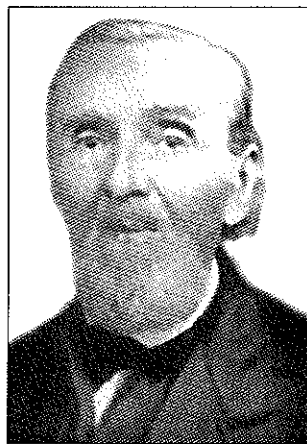
Urban centers like Chicago hosted



inhabitants of every ethnicity and religion. City peoples were polyglot, in contrast to homogeneous colonies like Holland or Zeeland, Michigan. Chicago's first Reformed Dutch settlers preferred the anonymity of city life. They were more desirous of freedom from Old World distinctions and restraints and indifferent to things religious than their kinsmen in the homogeneous colonies. When Rev. Albertus Van Raalte, Holland's founding pastor and leader, visited Chicago in 1852 he found "the ravages wrought by error, worldliness, and quarreling to be great." Those who wanted religion had no choice but to worship in homes or attend English- or German-language churches, despite the language and cultural barriers.<sup>9</sup>

In 1848 a few devout families began meeting for informal worship in homes, a common practice in the Netherlands among seceders from the Dutch Reformed Church. From time to time Van Raalte and Cornelius Vander Meulen, his associate in Zeeland, Michigan, came to preach and dispense the sacraments. In 1853 Van Raalte led the small band, numbering less than a dozen families, to organize as a congregation under the rubric of the RCA Classis of Holland. This body, in a fateful decision, had joined the Americanized RCA in 1850, and now the nascent Chicago congregation tied its fortunes to this church located primarily in the East, of which the members knew very little. Thereafter, the Chicago body was often tugged in two directions; they treasured the familiar Dutch ways but had to be open to their new American friends.<sup>10</sup>

For six years elders led reading services. During that period, in 1856, the rapidly growing body managed to build a small wooden church building (6m x 14m) for less than \$200. In 1859, Vander Meulen accepted a call as pastor of First RCA of Chicago. One of his first efforts was to found a Sunday school, in keeping with denominational policy, so as "to protect the children



*Hendrik Klyn instituted Monday evening prayer meetings and biweekly Wednesday evening Bible meetings, as other American Christian churches were doing, while pastor at First RCA. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.*

from strange teachings." An indication of their being part of American life was the congregation's full endorsement of the Union cause during the American Civil War. They observed President Abraham Lincoln's calls for national days of prayer and fasting, and later, after the Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, gathered for a day of thanksgiving. The congregation also took special offerings for sick and wounded Union soldiers.<sup>11</sup> Hendrik Klyn, First RCA's second pastor, 1862-1968, instituted Monday evening prayer meetings to bring revival, and led biweekly Wednesday evening Bible expositions as other American Christian churches were doing.<sup>12</sup>

Following the Civil War, Dutch immigrants came to Chicago in the thousands. The membership in First RCA nearly doubled in three years, 1866-1868, from 64 to 105 families, and the body completed its long-anticipated new edifice on Harrison Street, capable of seating 400. The new pastor in 1868, Bernardus De Bey, arrived from his prominent pulpit in the Christian Seceded Church in Middelstum (province of Groningen) in time to dedicate the new edifice. At fifty-three years of

age he was in the prime of his ministerial career, with a reputation for effective leadership in church and society. De Bey dominated First RCA for the next quarter century.

Church life at First Reformed Church under De Bey took on increasing aspects of the American style. He was much taken with popular preaching methods and attended a nearby Presbyterian church every Sunday night to practice his English and pick up tips on sermonizing. De Bey particularly admired Yankee ministers for focusing on the central idea of the text and applying it in practical ways to everyday life without much biblical exegesis, analysis, or synthesis. He also marveled at the multi-faceted ministry of American Protestants. In a letter to his cousin in Groningen, De Bey reported:

In our churches here we have something going on virtually every evening of the week — prayer meetings, preaching, catechism, youth societies, choral groups. . . . I could no longer feel at home with some of the pious customs and exclusively Sunday Christianity which characterized my life in Groningen. Here Christianity is more a way of life, an active love, a devotion to God — preaching his Word and laboring for the kingdom.<sup>13</sup>

As a result, during his pastorate De Bey dispensed with several standard practices of Reformed polity. He canceled the formal family visits on a yearly schedule, believing that such "superficial chats" were a "waste of time." He substituted informal Bible studies on Saturday evenings at the vestry. In 1888 the consistory gave up its customary prerogative of nominating elders and deacons in favor of the more democratic congregational selection by vote. But other changes desired by De Bey were blocked for a few years, notably the purchase of a church organ and the singing of half notes in the Psalter along with the customary whole notes.<sup>14</sup>

In 1877 De Bey brought revival to his congregation and the consistory heard the confessions of faith of 120 new believers. The next years, when George F. Pentecost, an understudy of Dwight Moody, held revival meetings in the neighborhood, De Bey volunteered as a counselor and encouraged his English-speaking parishioners to attend. Thereafter, De Bey adopted the spiritual rhythms of American evangelism — conversion, backsliding, and renewal. His biannual reports to the regional church body, the Classis of Wisconsin, concerning the spiritual condition of his congregation were couched in the idiom of revivalism. Another of the “fruits” of revivals was ecumenism, which De Bey adopted wholeheartedly:

We have here a number of churches or denominations, and in very many of these the gospel is preached, and they contain a good Christian element. The best denominations are included in the general category of evangelical churches. . . . Besides working in their own circles, these churches work together for the general promotion of Christianity. Thus, there are combined gatherings, prayer meetings, and other occasions in which there are no references to particular denominations. Together, then, they preach, speak, and pray to influence the unbelieving world and lead sinners to Jesus.

I have a high regard for that work because, after all, faith in Jesus, turning to God, and renewal of the Holy Spirit are really what counts where Christianity and eternity are concerned. Fighting for one's own church and the remote, unimportant, and speculative doctrines has no significance for true Christianity and eternity. . . . A practical Christianity — faith, living, and doing — is earnestly recommended everywhere. . . . I tell you, cousin, I feel genuinely at home in this Christian life.

After quoting this very telling letter at length, historian Herbert Brinks concluded: “Though not explicitly embracing the nondenominational dictum ‘No creed but the Bible,’ De Bey’s perspec-

tive clearly encompassed the essence of that peculiarly Anglo-American anti-creedal expression.” Immigration had happily offered him the opportunity to throw off the Old Dutch Reformed ways and associate with conservative American churches. As Brinks put it succinctly, “Fine theological distinctions, denominational boundaries, and traditional piety were, from his perspective, no longer crucial.” De Bey further distanced himself from his Dutch clerical brethren by not subscribing to the religious periodical of his mother church, the *Bazuin* or the *Wekstem*. He wrote, “All I receive from the Dutch press is the *Provincial Groninger Courant* (a weekly secular newspaper).”<sup>15</sup>

De Bey’s views about American Christianity were in step with those of the RCA, which had earlier embraced the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening. He had come a long way

from his religious roots in the Secession of 1834. No wonder that he criticized “our separated brothers” in the CRC for “proceeding along the old paths.” They were, in his words, “beneath criticism.” Ignore the self-righteous “True Brothers” and they would quickly disappear. “They can say and write what they want,” he declared, “and no one pays any attention to them. That is the best and quickest way to kill them off.”<sup>16</sup>

In the years 1880-1884 the explosive issue of freemasonry came to a head in the RCA. In America, the Masonic lodge had become a quintessential institution, unlike the case in Europe, and many eastern RCA clerics and leaders had gladly joined. The Particular Synod of Chicago, made up of the two Midwestern immigrant classes, Wisconsin and Michigan, condemned the “God-dishonoring sin of Freemasonry” in the strongest terms, and it

would not admit a freemason to membership in any congregation. Nevertheless, the denominational leadership centered in New York insisted that freemasonry was entirely permissible in congregations elsewhere. This “local option” policy did not satisfy the Midwestern congregations, who saw it as forcing them to be “unequally yoked” to those who had joined an “anti-Republican,” “anti-Christian,” and “anti-Reformed” organization. Many congregations were torn and saw members secede over “this evil in the church.” Moreover, the mother church in the



*Although its membership came from Groningen immigrants, just as did the membership in First RCA, First Christian Reformed Church was far more inward looking and protective of its Dutch roots and heritage. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.*

Netherlands held the same views and henceforth would commend its departing members only if they joined the CRC.<sup>17</sup> As a result of this controversy in the RCA, 10 percent of the members of the Particular Synod of Chicago joined the CRC.

De Bey was in the middle of the controversy, which was on the agenda of every session of the Classis of Wisconsin for four years.<sup>18</sup> Before the issue wreaked havoc in the Midwestern RCA churches, De Bey approved his denomination's local option policy. He believed that freemasonry in the United States was not irreligious like its European counterpart, but an American social club that had proven to be compatible with Christianity. But when De Bey saw the CRC gaining thousands of members because of his denomination's acquiescence on freemasonry, he concluded that the church must discipline confessing members who are freemasons. His consistory condemned secret oath-bound societies and warned members not to be stained by them, because they were incompatible with Christianity.



*Like Schepers, the RCA's Peter Moerdyk was born in the Netherlands and had been trained in the United States, but unlike Schepers actively engaged American society while pastor at Chicago's Trinity RCA. Photo: Western Seminary Collection at the Joint Archives of Holland.*

Late in his ministry De Bey could not avoid "worship wars" involving the "language question" and singing of "gospel hymns," which for all his Americanizing ways he had forestalled for years. The Old Dutch Psalms from the Genevan Psalter tugged at the heartstrings. De Bey humored the congregation by selecting only a few dozen favorite Psalms from the opus of 150, notably those that had melodic tunes and were committed to memory. Two Reformed congregations in Chicago, but not First RCA, had adopted the controversial Evangelical Hymnbook of the Netherlandic Reformed Church (Hervormde Kerk Nederland), which the youth favored because of the contemporary tunes and quicker tempo. These and other songs, however, were used at First Church only in the evening English.<sup>19</sup>

The language issue came to a head in 1885 when the RCA Synod adopted a requirement that any immigrant congregation receiving aid from the board of domestic missions must adopt an English service.<sup>20</sup> Even though De Bey was eager to enter the American Protestant mainstream, he stubbornly held to the Dutch language at First Church, even though young people "... disappear gradually in all kinds of English churches and are thus lost to our denomination," lamented a classical committee.<sup>21</sup> When De Bey's own consistory decided to hire an English-speaking evangelist to preach on occasion in the evening service, he stymied the plan by refusing to share the evening pulpit. And De Bey complained when the classis moved to launch an English congregation a mile from First Church.

Nevertheless, De Bey had to contend with dozens of progressive members transferring to the new congregation — Trinity Reformed Church founded in 1891. Under the energetic leadership of Rev. Peter Moerdyke, the English church built an impressive brick edifice one mile away to seat 500,



*Jan Schepers, 1837–1902, the first CRC minister trained in the United States, was nevertheless a strong conservative and separatist when it came to Americanization.*

but membership peaked at only 300 in 1895 and declined steadily thereafter, until the church closed in 1919. During the Chicago Columbian Exposition (1892–1893), Trinity took the lead in promoting a Reformed witness at the World's Fair. As an unabashed American patriot, Moerdyke also welcomed governor and then vice president Theodore Roosevelt to the worship services. On one occasion, the Vice President, a faithful Dutch Reformed layman, was invited to mount the pulpit, and he gave an impromptu homily on the Gospel of James.<sup>22</sup>

While First RCA went through the throes of change, First CRC maintained a steady course. The first pastor, Jan Schepers, brought a conservative, separatist mentality that set the tone for the congregation. Schepers's roots in the stern De Cock wing of the Secession of 1834 stood in sharp contrast to the more latitudinarian and outward-looking De Bey. The pioneer RCA and CRC churches in Chicago, although so alike in membership, were yet so different. Groningers dominated in both, but one was ready to interact with the American scene while the other looked inward and guarded its Dutch theological and cultural treasure.<sup>23</sup>

Ten years after its founding, in 1877, Rev. Willem Greve, another Cocksian and the third pastor of First CRC, started a Sunday school, but the consistory kept teachers under tight control. The Heidelberg Catechism always took pride of place and every prospective member had to demonstrate a literal mastery of the Compendium. The church did bow to pressures by installing an organ, and adopting English in the Sunday school and half days in its parochial school.<sup>24</sup> First CRC grew steadily and reached parity with the mother RCA congregation at about 1,100 souls in 1894.

The Harrison Street community began breaking up in the 1880s and 1890s as Dutch families began moving to the south, southwest, and west. In a familiar pattern, the churches followed. First CRC in 1883 and First RCA a decade later relocated to the Ashland Avenue neighborhood. First RCA also mothered the First Englewood RCA (1886), Bethel RCA in Summit (1892), and West Side RCA in Cicero (1911). First CRC birthed five daughter churches — First Englewood CRC (1887), Archer Avenue CRC (1911), Douglas Park (1899), Third Chicago (1912), and Fourth Chicago (1923), the latter three stood within two miles of each other.

### Ashland Avenue Era

When Rev. Ralph Bloemendal took the helm of First RCA in 1891, the congregation faced “disintegration” due to the forces of “centralization and Americanization from within,” according to the editor of *The Christian Intelligencer*. Bloemendal’s challenge was to cling to the Dutch heritage and yet help the members adapt to living in the heart of urban America. He and the consistory met the challenge admirably. Under his four-year pastorate, said the *Intelligencer*, “this old church is renewing her youth. Prayer meetings, Sabbath-school, and catechetical classes have

all the vigor of new life.” Indeed, 46 adults joined the church by confession in early 1892.<sup>25</sup>

Rense Joldersma, Bloemendal’s successor, had taken ministerial training at both Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, and in Chicago’s McCormick Theological Seminary (Presbyterian). Early in his tenure, Joldersma and the consistory had to deal with charges by various members that the congregation’s new youth program, Christian Endeavor (“CE,” in popular parlance, was a nondenominational youth ministry founded in 1881 by a Congregational pastor that became a big success with 500,000 members in 7,000 local societies by the late 1880s), was un-Reformed, i.e., Arminian. In 1888 the RCA Synod endorsed the program and strongly recommended it to all pastors and churches. The CE focus on prayer meetings and missionary outreach bore the unmistakable marks of American evangelicalism, rather than the traditional Reformed emphases on God’s sovereignty and covenantal faithfulness.<sup>26</sup> The issue of CE festered for months at First RCA, and for a time the consistory considered disaffiliating. But finally the body reaffirmed its support of the program after one of its most prominent members, attorney George Birkhoff, Jr., Netherlands Consul General in Chicago, wrote a strong letter demanding continuing affiliation.

Joldersma pushed English-language preaching and in 1898 he gained consistorial approval on a trial basis to deliver the Sunday evening sermon in English. This proved less than successful, however, and after a year the service was changed to an hour of prayer (in Dutch). First Reformed at this time also allowed a representative of the American Tract Society to speak in an evening worship service and take up a collection for the work. Another sign of acculturation was the decision to schedule a season of prayer with three evening sessions the first week

and each Wednesday evening thereafter for a month.<sup>27</sup>

The Sunday school strongly supported mission outreach. The children were encouraged to put their pennies in jars in the spring; a “jug-breaking” service of celebration was held during a midweek evening. Two-thirds of the monies went to support foreign missions and one-third funded Chicago projects such as the Hebrew Mission, Tract Society, Bible Society, and the Cook County Sunday School Association.<sup>28</sup>

Nicholas Boer, during his short pastorate (1907-1909), quietly encouraged support for the local Ebenezer Christian School (now parent-run but still closely tied to First CRC), even though most youth in the congregation attended nearby Clark Public School. First RCA began scheduling collections for Ebenezer, allowed graduation exercises to be held in the auditorium on occasion, and opened the church for “propaganda” meetings by Christian school advocates in the Reformed Church, such as Western Theological Seminary professor Nicholas Steffens, a neo-Kuyperian.<sup>29</sup>

Just before World War I, First RCA, under Rev. Henry Schipper (1913-1918), guided the congregation “into further paths of Americanization” by making the transition from Dutch to English. In 1915 the church switched the primary morning service and all catechism classes to English. In 1918 they also introduced English in the afternoon service every other week, which in effect reduced Dutch services to two times a month. This momentous change, according to a classical report, in what must be a gross understatement, “slightly ruffled the calm” of the congregation.<sup>30</sup>

Schipper supported the war effort from the pulpit, which led one member to protest by walking out during the service because, as the consistory minutes note, he “did not want to hear any

preaching about the War." The elders rebuked the member for humiliating Pastor Schipper, but the man insisted that the pastor's remarks were inappropriate.

Following the War, the congregation made further concessions to modern ways; it substituted plates for the offering "sacks" at the end of long poles, it allowed women members to vote in congregational meetings, and deacons came to the front of church for a pastoral prayer before the collection. The church also appointed a reception committee for morning worship services to greet strangers.<sup>31</sup>

In the three decades beginning in 1890, while First RCA was Americanizing, First CRC clung to its Dutch ways and attracted new immigrants with considerable success. "The pastor of the Seceders is commendably prompt and zealous to welcome these strangers," admitted Moerdyke, "and he is gathering nearly all that kind of material into his church, where they find a really Holland congregation, and feel at home."<sup>32</sup> But pressures for change were building at First CRC. Younger families demanded English worship and catechism classes, and they left when the consistory put them off. In 1912 First CRC and its Dutch-language daughter, Douglas Park CRC, jointly birthed the first English-using CRC congregation in Chicago, Third CRC.<sup>33</sup> Although the leaders of both mother churches gave the new congregation their wholehearted blessing, not everyone was happy with it. Mrs. Cornelius Kickert recalled that, as a seven-year old, she heard how angry her uncle was when he learned that her parents had joined the English-speaking church. But the reason was obvious. "None of the children could understand the minister's Dutch — evidently our parents thought it was time we understood what the church was for."<sup>34</sup>

While all immigrant churches felt the forces of Americanization during



*John Van Lonkhuyzen began the Americanization process in First CRC during his pastorate, 1918-1928. Ironically he had opposed US entry into World War I and returned to the Netherlands in 1928, but retired to Grand Rapids just before World War II.*

the upbeat postwar decade, the pulpit at First CRC was filled with a pastor from the Netherlands who held a doctorate from the Free University of Amsterdam, John Van Lonkhuyzen, a friend of Abraham Kuyper, fluent in six languages, and a former missionary pastor to Dutch Reformed immigrants in Argentina. In recognition of his talents, the owners of Chicago's Dutch-language newspaper, *Onze Toekomst* (Our Future), quickly recruited him as editor. He was the most educated and traveled pastor ever to serve the congregation and was also its last Dutch dominie. During the post war years his thick accent and Dutch mannerisms made him stand out. Thus, despite his gifts, this intellectual giant often seemed out of step in Chicago.<sup>35</sup>

In the pages of *Onze Toekomst* Van Lonkhuyzen addressed the key issues of the day — Christian schools, the language question, and the rising pre-millennial movement. The denomination stood solidly in support of Christian schools, but friction arose over the issues of English usage and millennial teachings. The conservatives "wished to maintain the Dutch

language in the worship services, fearful that a change to the English language would break down the barriers to the inroads of modernism, while the younger generation growing up in an American climate of English usage would be lost to the church." One stalwart elder of the congregation expressed the sentiments of many, declaring (in Dutch): "When English is preached, the Devil is in the pulpit."<sup>36</sup>

The CRC's regional assembly, Classis Chicago, after years of agitation, in 1923 organized a second English-speaking daughter church — Fourth Chicago CRC — over the bitter objections of Van Lonkhuyzen and his elders of the 1200-member congregation, who considered the new church to be "unnecessary, unordered, and unlawful." Over the next years Van Lonkhuyzen succeeded in gradually introducing English, but only by doubling the number of services from two to four. Usually a guest pastor conducted one or two of the services, but his successor, the energetic Benjamin Essenburg (1929-1945), led all four. Even more amazing, a few zealous, bilingual members could boast of attending all of them.

Because the language issue pitted the older generation against the younger, the transition to English could come only in small steps. RCA congregations introduced English a generation ahead of CRC congregations, but the first step in the mother churches of both denominations in Chicago was the same — to release pressure and buy time by establishing English-language daughter congregations.

The use of English helped First Chicago RCA retain established families but turned away fresh immigrant families with children who only knew the Dutch tongue. After 1915 only the morning worship service and the Wednesday evening prayer meeting remained in Dutch. English was introduced in the prayer meeting in 1925

on alternate weeks. But the congregation clung to the Dutch service until 1937 when, after financial pressures had mounted and a minister had resigned over their refusal to change, they voted by a two-to-one majority to eliminate the Dutch service.<sup>37</sup> At First CRC attendance at the Dutch service declined steadily in the 1930s; in 1938 First CRC dropped the afternoon Dutch worship service and ten years later, in 1948, the morning Dutch service was moved to the afternoon, with English in the morning and evening services. The last Dutch worship was on Christmas Day of 1955.

The long pastorate of Rev. Benjamin Essenburg at First CRC spanned the



*Benjamin Essenburg, pastor of First CRC during the Great Depression and World War II, led the congregation in its Americanization process. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.*

Great Depression and World War II. This marked both the high point and end point for the Groninger Hoek on Ashland Avenue. Essenburg and his congregation first enjoyed the glory years, the 1920s and 1930s, and then the "empty nest syndrome," as one after another of the Dutch families fled the deteriorating Old West Side, leaving only a remnant behind.<sup>38</sup>

Essenburg was the most effective of First CRC's pastors. He was a very popular preacher, a "pulpit pounder," who

drew large audiences with his dynamic messages, which he modeled after the renowned British evangelist, Charles Spurgeon, much to the chagrin of some "amateur theologians" in his congregation who thought Spurgeon's Reformed Baptist theology too Arminian. Essenburg was an activist pastor with a heart for community outreach and Christian political action. His congregation organized a "Community Mission" in 1931, which included a Sunday school and evening gospel meetings for the white underclass in the neighborhood.<sup>39</sup>

### Conclusion

In the early 1940s the two mother churches disintegrated rapidly as the last Dutch Reformed families — the poor and the elderly — moved west to the adjacent towns of Cicero, Berwyn, and Oak Park. This was a culmination of a four-decade process of outward migration by truck farmers, upward mobility among businessmen and professionals, and finally "white flight" by working families in the face of an influx of African-Americans. Already in 1911, the West Side RCA of Cicero was formed, and in the next decades came First Cicero CRC (1925), Second Cicero CRC (formerly Douglas Park CRC, 1927), Oak Park CRC (formerly Fourth Chicago CRC, 1945), First RCA in Berwyn (1945), and Ebenezer CRC of Berwyn (formerly First Chicago CRC in 1945).

In Cicero, the two Reformed Dutch branches continued to Americanize. In 1929 the English-speaking First Cicero CRC allowed its choir to sing during the morning worship service for the first time. The denominational synod subsequently gave its blessing to such choirs, and in 1934 synod commissioned the first Psalter for worship that included hymns as well as the familiar psalms. In the 1930s Second Cicero CRC changed from Dutch to English.<sup>40</sup>

In the 1970s the relentless suburbanization continued, taking the West Side Dutch Reformed into Du

Page County, the next county west of Cook County (which includes Chicago); South Side Dutch moved further southward into Will County, Illinois, and Lake County, Indiana. The congregations sold their former edifices and used the monies, plus many more dollars, to build large new buildings with sanctuaries to seat 1,000, with magnificent organs, choir lofts, and Sunday school classroom wings. These impressive edifices announced that the lowly Dutch Reformed, now fully suburban Americans, had "arrived."

While RCA congregations followed the style of American evangelists and practiced ecumenism, the CRC resisted until the ultra-patriotic crusades of World War I and World War II pushed the Americanization. Thousands of American-born sons served in the second war, as did dozens of military chaplains, and many returned with a new appreciation for American Protestantism and a desire for the CRC to end its isolation and make its mark on the American mainstream.<sup>41</sup>

Rev. Arthur De Kruijter, pastor of the Western Springs CRC and editor of a Reformed weekly in Chicago, sounded the call in 1959:

*It is with some dismay that one searches the newspapers to find a trace of our Calvinistic and Reformed activities in Chicago. Although there are approximately 10,000 families in this area, there still seems to be an inferiority complex among us. . . . What would people think if they began to hear from the Reformed community which has been here for 100 years but has said and contributed so little to the cure of our metropolitan ills?*<sup>42</sup>

De Kruijter lamented the fact that non-Dutch people seldom attended Reformed churches in the mistaken belief that one had to be Dutch to attend and that Dutch was still used in portions of the service. De Kruijter in the next decade acted on his belief in cultural openness by leaving his Christian





*Believing the CRC was too inwardly focused, Rev. Arthur De Kruyter left the Christian Reformed pastorate in 1965 to open the non-denominational Christ Church of Oak Brook, IL. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.*

Reformed pastorate to open the non-denominational Christ Church of Oak Brook, which ministers to the affluent business and professional residents of the far western suburbs.

Although the passing of the generations has changed all the Dutch Reformed churches, judging from current membership statistics the CRC has a much better retention rate. From a membership in 1899 of 1,400 souls in First RCA and Trinity RCA combined, and 1,250 souls in First CRC, one hundred years later the eight CRC congregations in the western suburbs had a total of 3,800 members — more than a

three-fold increase. In telling contrast, the six RCA congregations in the western suburbs had 1,080 members, a loss of 25 percent.

Schooling and fertility rates affected church retention rates. The Dutch historically had large families, but the American culture of individualism encouraged the use of birth control. This Americanization inculcated RCA members earlier than CRC members with the desirability for birth control. As a result, in the postwar period 1950-1965, RCA church birth rates were at least 20 percent lower than CRC rates.<sup>43</sup>

The inbred socialization process in the CRC due to Christian schooling was a further factor in CRC growth, but even more important was the success in gathering in new immigrants in the period 1870-1930. Membership statistics show that most RCA membership losses and CRC growth occurred in the first half of the twentieth century. In 1950 RCA membership in the western suburbs declined by nearly half (1450 to 797, or 45 percent), while CRC congregations grew more than three-fold (1250 to 3876, or 310 percent). But in the last fifty years, after immigration was a minimal factor, RCA membership actually increased, largely through evangelism, by 35 percent (797 to 1,080), while CRC congregations managed to hold their advantage (falling only slightly from 3,875 to 3,800 souls).<sup>44</sup>

Since the 1950s CRC congregations have changed as had their RCA counterparts earlier. Weekly preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism, still mandated by the Church Order, is sporadic or completely ignored. And midweek catechetical instruction of all teenagers by the minister gave way in the 1970s to a briefer “unified” Sunday school curriculum often taught by laypeople. In some congregations the pastor and elders neglect the honored tradition of “family visiting,” and they are reluctant to discipline delinquent members. Worship styles and liturgies have also been modernized, often setting off another series of “worship wars.” The traditional liturgy, derived from the fifty-two Lord’s Days of the Catechism, has given way to individual styles or classical practices based on the *Common Lectionary*. In church music, organists, choir masters, “praise bands,” and soloists increasingly select contemporary Christian music, which is broadly evangelical and often charismatic. For congregational singing, the denominational *Psalter Hymnal*, which formerly ruled supreme, is now supplemented by generic Protestant songbooks or digital musical texts projected on a screen. All of the Dutch Reformed in Chicago are now well on the way to becoming part of the American evangelical mainstream.☛

## Endnotes

1. This paper draws heavily on Robert P. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002).
2. That evangelicalism de-ethnized and modernized the Dutch Reformed churches in America is the thesis of Firth Haring Fabend, *Zion on the Hudson: Dutch New York and New Jersey in the Age of Revivals* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000); and Gerald F. De Jong, *The Dutch in America, 1609-1974* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), 87-108, esp. 105.
3. This and the next paragraphs rely on Fabend, *Zion on the Hudson*, 60-68.
4. So argues Joel L. From, "Antebellum Evangelicalism and the Diffusion of Providential Functionalism," *Christian Scholars Review* 32 (Winter 2003) 177-210.
5. *Ibid.*, 214-15.
6. Robert P. Swierenga and Elton J. Bruins, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches of the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 102. Herbert J. Brinks compiled the statistics.
7. *Ibid.*, 131.
8. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 373-83.
9. Classis Holland Minutes, 1848-1858 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 111; Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 80-87.
10. Swierenga and Bruins, *Family Quarrels*, chap. 2.
11. *Ibid.*, 98-100.
12. *Ibid.*, 101-02.
13. Letter of B. De Bey to A. P. Lanting, 9 March 1871, quoted in Herbert J. Brinks, "The Americanization of Bernardus Be Beij (1815-1894)" *Origins* (vol. 6, no. 1, 1988) 27-28.
14. Hans Krabbendam, "Serving the Dutch Community: A Comparison of the Patterns of Americanization in the Lives of Two immigrant Pastors," (MA Thesis, Kent State University, 1989) 76, 80; Amry Vandenbosch, *The Dutch Communities of Chicago* (Chicago: Knickerbocker Society of Chicago, 1927), 23.
15. B. De Bey to A. P. Lanting, 3 January 1878, 13 September 1870, quoted in Brinks, "Americanization of Bernardus De Beij," 28-30. The *Wekstem* and *Bazuin* were Netherlands church periodicals.
16. B. De Bey to A. P. Lanting, 26 May 1873, quoted in *Ibid.*
17. Classis of Wisconsin Minutes, Art. 59, 18 February; Art. 42, 21 April; Art. 19, 22 September 1880; Art. 8, 13, 14, 17, 20 April 1881; Art. 34, 17 April 1883.
18. Elton J. Bruins, "The Masonic Controversy in Holland, Michigan, 1879-1882," 53-72, in Peter De Klerk and Richard R. De Ridder, eds., *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church: Studies in Its History, Theology, and Ecumenicity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983).
19. Moerdyke, "Chicago Letter," *Christian Intelligencer*, 10 May 1893, 10; 3 January 1900, 8.
20. *Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Protestant Dutch Reformed Church in America*, 1884, 552.
21. Classis of Wisconsin Minutes, Art. 28, 17 April 1883.
22. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 141-48.
23. *Ibid.*, 112-13.
24. *Ibid.*, 116-17, 135-36.
25. *The Christian Intelligencer*, 23 September 1891, 11; 10 March 1892, 11; 26 July 1893, 10; 19 December 1894; Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 153.
26. *Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Protestant Dutch Reformed Church in America*, 1888, 569; 1890, 153; Timothy P. Webber, "Christian Endeavor Society," 256-57, in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990).
27. First Reformed Church of Chicago Minutes, 26 March, 24 April, 24 July 1900, 11 December 1906, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, Holland, Michigan.
28. Moerdyke, "Chicago Letter," *Christian Intelligencer*, 19 April 1899, 9; 28 January 1903, 56; John W. Brooks, "Chicago, Ill.," *Ibid.*, 3 April 1907, 218; "Uit Chicago, Ill.," *De Hope*, 20 April 1904, 5.
29. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 157.
30. Russell L. Gasero, ed. *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America, 1628-2000* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 342, 350; Reformed Church in America, *Minutes of the Particular Synod of Chicago*, 1-2 May 1918, 7.
31. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 159-60.
32. Moerdyke, "Chicago Letter," *Christian Intelligencer*, 25 May 1892, 11.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 176-77.
35. Mrs. Cornelius Kickert, "Last Meeting at Coffee Hour at Cicero I Church — 1976," typescript, 2, Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
36. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 180-81.
37. Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church, *Centennial Booklet, 1867-1967*, 6. The Rev. Eugene Bradford recalled the phrase in an interview with the author, 16 March 1998.
38. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 209-10.
39. *Ibid.*, 201-09.
40. *Ibid.*, 203.
41. *Ibid.*, 218-24.
42. *Chicago Messenger*, 31 May, 27 December 1935. Robert P. Swierenga, "Burn the Wooden Shoes: Modernity and Divisions in the Christian Reformed Church in North America," 94-102, in *Reformed Encounters with Modernity: Perspectives from Three Continents*, eds. H. Jurgens Hendriks, Donald A. Luidens, Roger J. Nemeth, Corwin E. Smidt, and Hijme Stoffels (Stellenbosch, SA: ISSRC, 2000).
43. *Illinois Observer*, February 1959.
44. Gary D. Bourma, *How the Saints Persevere: Social Factors in the Vitality of the Christian Reformed Church* (Monograph Series No. 4, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Monash University, Australia, 1994, 19-20, table 2.3).
45. Membership totals in 1999 for the western suburban RCA congregations in the Classis of Chicago are: First RCA (Berwyn) 100, Downers Grove 226, Lombard 171, Summit (Bethel) 207, Stickney 155, and West Chicago 221, for a total of 1080. CRC congregations in Classis Northern Illinois are: Berwyn (Ebenezer) 150, Elmhurst 956, Faith (Elmhurst), 965, Lombard 712, Naperville 148, Western Springs 487, Wheaton 344, and Winfield 44, for a total of 3,808. See Christian Reformed Church, *Yearbook, 1999*; and *Minutes of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America*, June 1999; Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, Appendix 5, "Church Membership, 1853-1978," 804-09.

# Johannes Groen

## An Arduous But Faithful Ministry

Harry Boonstra

In one of the obituaries at Johannes Groen's death in 1924, the author quotes Milton's Lycidas and Tennyson's Ulysses, "How dull it is to pause, to make an end, To rust unburnished, not to shine in use" to characterize Groen's life and work. Such is high praise for a child born into an obscure Dutch immigrant family in Vriesland, Michigan.<sup>1</sup>



The Class of 1888 when Groen (second row, far left) completed his preparatory (literary) training; three years later he completed the theological sequence and was ordained as a minister. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

This high praise can perhaps be attributed to the hyperbole of the author, a Calvin College English professor, but Reverend Johannes Groen did leave his mark on the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) of his time.

Besides obituaries, very little has been written about and no buildings named after Groen, who deserves a biographical essay.<sup>2</sup> He was one of the more notable and colorful ministers

of his generation, pastor in a historic CRC congregation, and he figured prominently in two CRC controversies: women's suffrage and labor unions, both of which he championed and for this was vilified in the denomination.

### Beginnings

The obituaries all take note of his humble birth in 1865 as the only son of Johannes and Maria Groen, farmers in Vriesland, a hamlet a few miles due east of the village of Zeeland. They were members of the Vriesland CRC, where Groen was baptized. Virtually nothing is known about his childhood other than that he received six years of schooling in the Vriesland country public school. Claims later that he received only six weeks of elementary education and that "he knew virtually nothing of arithmetic and writing and could barely read" are therefore hard to give credence.<sup>3</sup> But the education in the country school no doubt left much to be desired.

He apparently worked on the family farm as a young man and seems not to have been known for his spiritual devotion. "When he was young, he was rather an undisciplined and colorful figure among the young people of his community."<sup>4</sup> But in his late teens he experienced a profound conversion. According to J. G. Vanden Bosch, "His eighteenth was his happiest year." Groen himself wrote, "Then I was brought from the world and from sin to God, as a penitent, as the prodigal son."<sup>5</sup>

As a result of the conversion, Groen expressed his desire to become a minister. The path to ministry in the CRC took the aspirant through *De Theologische School* in Grand Rapids. For most students in the 1880s this meant seven years of study — four years in the Literary Department followed by three years in the Theological Department. The Literary Department offered a miscellany of courses and subjects, at

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the time nearly all taught in Dutch. Although the goal of the Literary Department was the preparation of students at the college level, in some ways it was more like high school training today.<sup>6</sup>

Groen entered the Literary Department in 1884. As noted, his formal schooling had been minimal, and he struggled mightily to complete his course work, but advanced to the Theological Department.<sup>7</sup> By this time he had hit his academic stride and found the studies much more congenial. The final hurdle was the comprehensive examination on 24 June 1891 conducted by the Curatorium (similar to a board of trustees). Apparently the examination nearly became an inquisition over the theological controversy of infra- and supra-lapsarianism swirling through the denomination at the time. "The questions were put so persistently that Dr. Vos, the rector, jumped to his feet and voiced his protest against the way the prospective candidates were unfairly pressed and placed before dilemmas with which they should not be confronted."<sup>8</sup> Groen did receive his diploma and was declared a candidate. On 23 August he married Flora Spoelstra. They had six children, one of whom died four months after her birth.

### First Zeeland Christian Reformed Church

Already as a student, Groen was known for his preaching skills and was frequently asked to "fill the pulpit" of area churches. As a result, when he completed his studies he received calls to serve six churches, accepting the call to the Zeeland First CRC. He was installed as their minister on 13 September 1891, at age twenty-six.

Relatively little is known about his work in Zeeland. Groen himself declared later: "Nine years in Zeeland, much blessing, spiritual success, peace; many young people made profession of faith; not a word of conflict with the consistory."<sup>9</sup> This summary is

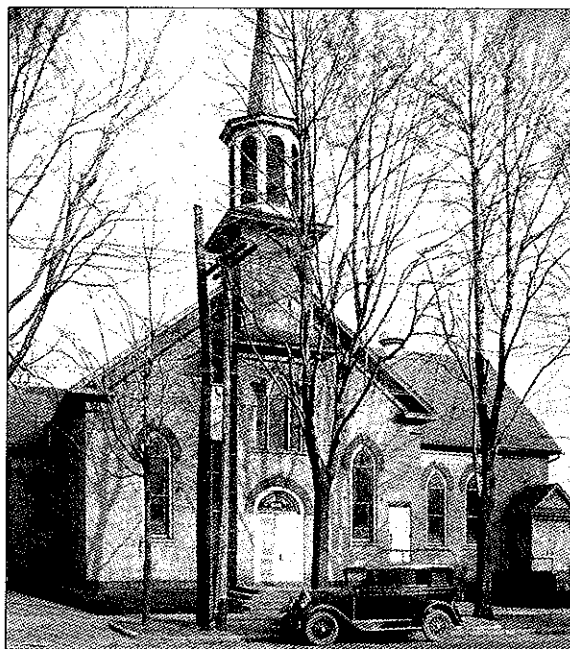
probably too rosy and ignores some of the stresses and strains in the congregation. The congregation had had a history of internal clashes and the ministers before Groen remained in the congregation for as little as two and, at most, four years. An early anniversary pamphlet notes that "under God's blessing Rev. Groen was able to get the congregation accustomed to order and discipline and to appreciate it."<sup>10</sup> From the consistory minutes for those years, one can gather that a frequent problem was members neglecting to attend church and of young people neglecting to come to catechism teaching, both problems common in congregations of the time. A brother in the church was reproved for not coming to worship services. His explanation was that he did not own suitable clothing; the consistory promptly offered him a suit. The elders noted the "irregular conduct of some young people in the rear of the church" and the janitor was charged with controlling the situation.<sup>11</sup> Other minutes reveal further disharmony when a couple was called in for admo-

nition, was impenitent, and refused to greet the consistory — to shake what they called "the Judas hand." Another obstreperous member called Groen "a pope and a monster" and chased the visiting elder from his house.<sup>12</sup>

The minutes also reveal another side to the congregation's life during Groen's service. A decision was also made to offer "a good book" to those who pumped the church organ, even though the congregation was relatively poor and in 1899 an offering was collected for hungry people in India.<sup>13</sup> Although Groen conducted the consistory meetings as its chairman, the minutes do not usually call attention to him. But his wisdom and tact are evident. One brother, who had a long history of being at odds with the consistory, finally came to the point of being willing to confess his sins. The consistory was joyful for the repentance. But then the brother added immediately that he would do so only if the consistory acknowledged its error in the matter. The consistory "was not aware of any guilt and therefore could not do so." Groen

then formulated one sentence that pleased all, "Whereas the consistory asks a forgiving spirit of Brother \_\_\_\_\_ some of the members of the committee in calling on him did not manifest calmness and prudence which is necessary in such cases."<sup>14</sup>

Overall, Groen's favorable memories speak well of the general tenor of the congregation. Under Groen's leadership the congregation did grow both in godliness and in numbers. In 1891 the church counted 130 families (700 members) and when he left in 1900 the count was 175 (820 members). Also, whenever Groen was considering a call from another congregation, and he received



*First Zeeland Christian Reformed Church was Groen's first charge during the 1890s, although the photo dates to a later time the building remained the same. Image: "First CRC Centennial Book," p. 20, Archives, Calvin College.*

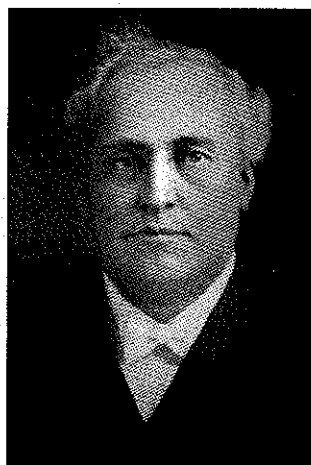
many such calls, the consistory always implored him to stay in Zeeland. When he accepted the call that would take him from Zeeland, the consistory acquiesced that it was the Lord's will by noting, "Since our pastor has accepted a call to Eastern Avenue Church in Grand Rapids, the consistory requests Classis for classical appointments and for a Counselor in order that we may proceed to obtain another minister."<sup>15</sup>

### Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church

The Eastern Avenue congregation (it was called East Street Christian Reformed Church until 1912 when the street's name was changed) was different from the Zeeland church in many ways. It was situated in a larger industrial city, with a less homogeneous population. Many of the members worked in factories or owned small businesses, with an occasional "professional" person, and at least two professors from the Theological School.<sup>16</sup> However, even though the environment of the church was more American than that of the Zeeland church, in many ways it also was an isolated immigrant community. At least until World War I the congregation was generally much more attuned to life, both secular and religious, in the Netherlands than in America, and the continuing influx of new immigrants encouraged a spirit of separation.<sup>17</sup> During Groen's years the question of English versus Dutch (especially in worship) was an ongoing issue, and until 1917 Dutch remained the chief language of worship. In 1900 Eastern Avenue had a membership of 360 families (1,850 members); and even though several new congregations in the area drew members from Eastern during his tenure, when Groen retired in 1919, there were 415 families (2,075 members).

Many of the members had left a homeland with a multifaceted religious dimension. The Netherlands was

officially Protestant, with the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlands Hervormde Kerk) being, in effect, a state church, with ministerial salaries coming from governmental coffers. By the 1800s this church was diversified in its theology, with many theologically liberal ministers. Yet there continued to be pockets of theological conservatism, often tinged with pietistic leanings. Two



*Johannes Groen, 1865–1925, during his tenure at Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.*

groups left the Dutch Reformed Church in protest over the perceived liberalism. The first in 1834, the Afscheiding (Secession) was the source of many of the first immigrants to Michigan and thereby charter members of Eastern Avenue in 1879. In 1886 a second group, the Doleantie, left the Dutch Reformed Church, with Abraham Kuyper as the main leader.

Immigrants that joined Eastern Avenue during the 1890s came from both groups. Still others came directly from the Dutch Reformed Church. This diversity of church background accounted for some of the variety and conflicts at Eastern Avenue. Some people joined the church more out of a sense of social pressure, or social contact with other Dutch people, than for spiritual reasons. Moreover, both before and during Groen's ministry, the im-

migrants came from different villages, towns, and provinces at a time when someone who lived fifteen miles from you was as alien as any from a foreign country. Add to these differences a sense of displacement, adjustment, and emotional upheaval resulting from immigration, it is no wonder that the folks at Eastern Avenue Church were often a challenge to lead and shepherd. The church became a place of refuge in a strange land, and Sunday services especially provided true Sabbath rest for the weary immigrant community.

As in Zeeland, the most frequent complaint recorded in the minutes is non-attendance — parents and whole families not attending the worship services and the children not attending the catechism classes. Some families were reprimanded and visited by the elders for years. The discipline for such families was problematic. The first official step in church discipline was barring a guilty member from communion. However, since these sinners did not come to worship, this punishment was not very effective. In extreme cases of non-attendance the consistory eventually excommunicated the persons from the church.

Sabbath observance also was very strict. Besides having to come to worship services two (or three) times each Sunday, proper observance of the rest of the day was equally important. Entertainment of any sort was suspect. One young man had to confess to the congregation that he had been skating on Sunday, and another that he had attended a show. The consistory took their responsibility seriously and sent several elders to nearby Reeds Lake Ramona Amusement Park on Sunday afternoons to make sure that no Eastern Avenue members were there.

The youth of the church presented a special challenge. Sin against the seventh commandment (this usually meant that a young woman had become pregnant) had to be confessed to the



consistory and in front of the whole congregation. This public confession often took place on the same Sunday that the baby was baptized.

The most frequent youth problem discussed in the consistory minutes was the unruliness of the young men, who were allowed to sit together in the balcony during worship services and made their presence known by talking, laughing, and generally being irreverent.<sup>18</sup> At one service Rev. Groen had to interrupt his sermon twice to reprimand the youth and at their next meeting the elder discussed bringing this offense to the attention of the civil court.<sup>19</sup> The more frequent solution was to post an elder or an off-duty police officer to control the situation.<sup>20</sup>

Some families were plagued by jealousy and other complaints. In some cases husbands and wives separated permanently, although divorce was very uncommon. Alcoholism was a problem in some families. One mother was accused of regularly sending her child to the drugstore to purchase whiskey. Another member had to appear before the consistory because of "misuse of strong drink" and harassing neighbors.

Of course these events show only a small part of the Eastern Avenue congregational life, the majority of the congregation was committed to the faith and devoted to their church. For example, the irreverence and rowdiness of some youths was offset by the large number of serious young people who attended catechism faithfully and made profession of their faith. Often the minutes indicate twenty or thirty young people making profession of faith. And the consistory showed a spirit of concern for the congregation. Requests for financial help with special needs were weighed seriously and whenever possible the deacons would provide assistance, including the payment for half of the cost of an artificial leg. When a member was hesitant to make public profession of faith because of a speech



*During Groen's tenure, the Eastern Avenue edifice was remodeled by J. & G. Daverman, who designed many of the Christian Reformed church buildings of the early twentieth century. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.*

problem, the consistory allowed him to write out the responses. Another member had difficulty with partaking of communion because she was nervous about walking to the communion table, so she was served in the pew. The consistory also aided a recent immigrant who had filled out the wrong government form and, although not a citizen, had been drafted into the army.

### **Groen's Ministry**

Leading a large congregation, many of whom were new to the country, new to the denomination, or new to the local church, was not for the faint of heart. And Groen certainly was not easily daunted as is evident in all the obituaries and memorials which portray Groen as a man of nearly unlimited energy, wide vision and great leadership. Editor of *The Banner*, Henry Beets, sums up Groen's leadership abilities as follows: "We once heard Groen tell that mankind could be divided into two classes: those pushed and the pushers. He evidently decided to belong to the last named class. But to do so means a display of forcefulness that makes foes. It means paying the price of leadership, and that means risking, if not at times losing, popularity."<sup>22</sup> In a differ-

ent obituary Vanden Bosch adds, "How great was his genius as an organizer and the inspiration that came from him as a teacher. . . ."<sup>23</sup>

In the Reformed tradition and certainly in the CRC in the early 1900s the task of preaching was the principal duty of the minister, and reputations and careers were determined mostly by pulpit performance. Groen was well-known for his preaching, and both content and delivery were praised uniformly, particularly his imposing size, rich voice, unaffected delivery, clarity, and sermon content.<sup>24</sup> Even the local newspaper singled out Groen for his preaching.<sup>25</sup> As with most CRC preachers of the time, he delivered three sermons, each about one hour in length, every Sunday, but not all ministers preached to overflowing churches as Groen did.

One interesting aspect of his preaching concerned the language in which he preached. Groen was at pains to urge the CRC not to remain a Dutch enclave, but to become a thoroughly American church. Yet, all his preaching until 1917 was in Dutch and he showed great reluctance to preach in English. This probably resulted from nearly all the education in the Theological Schools being conducted in Dutch,



and his subsequent reading in theology and biblical studies were nearly all in Dutch. Most of the congregational and denominational discussions were conducted in Dutch, as were his writings in *De Wachter*. The exceptions to this were the devotional talks he delivered to the Ministerial Association of Grand Rapids and a small number of articles and

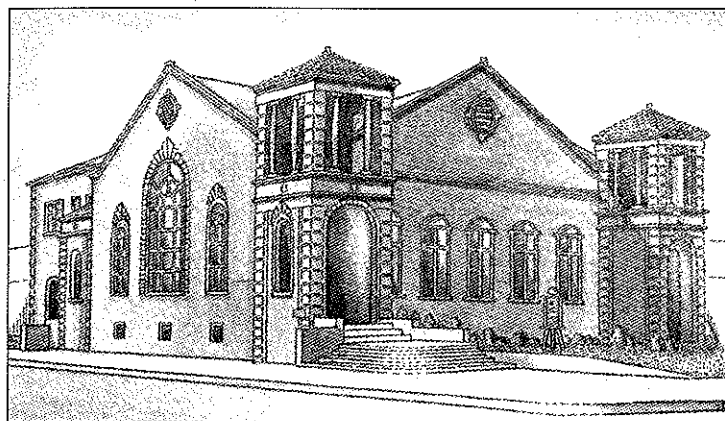
to partake of the bread and wine. This practice was changed in 1918, when on medical advice during the influenza pandemic, the elders decided to use small, individual cups instead of the common cup. Some of the members reacted strongly against this change, because they held that Jesus had used a single cup and they felt that the "com-

munion" aspect of the Lord's Supper was diminished by the use of individual cups. A few stalwarts refused to come to communion for some time because of the change.

Besides his demanding worship schedule, Groen also was busy with the duties performed

Prior to 1916 Groen generally showed great enthusiasm, boundless strength, and vigorous involvement in many issues. Beginning around 1916, however, a series of complications and problems seemed to sap his strength and resistance. No doubt his involvement in several controversies contributed to his malaise. Even though he could defeat most of his opponents in argument and debate, the criticism from both within the congregation and in the denomination took its toll. Also, an attempt on his life in 1916 shook him deeply. On Monday, 15 May, while walking along Wealthy Street near Eastern Avenue just north of the church, William Hoekstra fired two shots from a revolver at Groen. Both shots, coming from only eight feet away, missed their mark as Groen ducked, ran and ducked into a nearby building's stairway. Groen surmised that the man was irked because the Eastern Avenue consistory had refused him membership, since they considered him too religiously fanatic.<sup>29</sup> All of this was at the same time that he was required to preach in English, which contributed to his emotional turmoil.<sup>30</sup> As a result of these difficulties, Groen requested a three-month leave of absence. Prior to this time he apparently never took any vacations. The combined physical and emotional difficulties forced Groen to lighten his workload. The consistory minutes do not deal in any detail with his illness, but he appears to have been absent from most consistory meetings after March 1919, and the retired Rev. Hermanus Van Wesep began to take over many of Groen's duties. Groen and his wife retreated for several months to Harderwyk, and toward the end of that year Groen requested a meeting with the consistory to discuss his absence.<sup>31</sup>

After this meeting events moved quickly. His resignation was accepted by Classis Grand Rapids East on 19 November 1919. A week later the minutes read, "... if the Deacons agree,



While a minister in the First Christian Reformed Church of Los Angeles, the growing congregation built this new edifice. From: "Silver Anniversary of First CRC of Los Angeles," p. 17, Archives, Calvin College.

speeches he produced in English. His spiritual and theological thinking, as well as his oratorical style, were shaped by the Dutch language, and he found it nearly impossible, intellectually and emotionally, to switch to English. This issue first became a stumbling block in 1907 when some members requested services in English. Eventually this group was given permission to found the Sherman Street CRC as an "English congregation." In 1918 the question reappeared in greater force and Groen was compelled to preach some sermons in English. Doing so appears to have been emotionally very demanding, and may have contributed to his failing health.<sup>26</sup>

Congregation controversy also resulted from how the services were conducted. Groen led the congregation in the quarterly celebration of the Lord's Supper. At the time all the participants came forward in groups and sat down at the communion table

by all CRC ministers of his era — visiting delinquent members as well as all the families of the congregation. The latter he tried to do every two years, but the consistory did admonish him at one point, because he was not sufficiently faithful about *huisbezoek* (family visiting).<sup>27</sup>

The teaching of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, or a condensed version, *Het Kort Begrip*, to the children and young people of the church was also considered important, in order to teach them the major doctrines of the church. At Eastern Avenue this was a major undertaking some years. During the period 1910-1914 some 900 pupils attended the classes, with one class numbering 180 pupils.<sup>28</sup> Even though Groen received some assistance with this teaching, the major responsibility was his. In addition he instructed the Sunday school teachers every week in the lesson they would be teaching the upcoming Sunday.

the consistory will meet on December 11 to draw up a trio for the calling of a pastor."<sup>32</sup> The new pastor, Rev. Herman Hoeksema, was installed in February 1920. The last reference to Groen in the minutes is a letter in early 1920 in which he requests permission to preach in several small churches in Michigan.<sup>33</sup>

The last years of Groen are told rather quickly. He had moved to California for health reasons. As he regained his health somewhat he preached occasionally in the Christian Reformed congregation in Los Angeles, a church of fifteen families. When his health improved he moved back to Grand Rapids

briefly, but then received a call from the Los Angeles church and was installed in November 1920. Ironically, at the time the Los Angeles church decided that many of the people could not understand Dutch very well any more, and both morning and evening services were conducted in English, with the afternoon service continuing in Dutch.

Rev. Groen's ministry was greatly appreciated, and the church grew to sixty-five families, necessitating the construction of a new building. However, Groen's health continued to decline, ultimately forcing him to preach while seated, and soon he was forced

to stop preaching. "On the afternoon of 19 March 1924, while most of the consistory members stood around his bed this faithful servant of God was called home, there to be forever with his God."<sup>34</sup> A memorial service was held in First Christian Reformed Church on Bates Street in Grand Rapids, on 13 June, with his good friend Rev. Henry Beets delivering the sermon/eulogy, entitled, "A Prince and a Great Man Has Fallen."<sup>35</sup> But there was more to Groen's life than just his parish work as the next article will describe. ☞

## Endnotes

1. Jacob G. Vanden Bosch, "Johannes Groen," *Religion and Culture*, 24 April 1924, 1963-64.

2. Neither did Groen himself leave behind much of his writing (or speaking) — only a few sermons and a number of essays in church papers. Neither Groen's descendants nor I have been able to locate letters or memoirs.

3. C. J. S. [John C. Schaap?] "Ds. Johannes Groen," *CRC Yearbook* 1925, 176.

4. Jacob G. Vanden Bosch, "Johannes Groen," *The Reformed Journal*, March 1953, 8.

5. C. J. S., "Ds. Johannes Groen," 176.

6. For the development of these two departments into Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary see: Harry Boonstra, *Our School: Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church*. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2001), especially Ch. 3.

7. Ironically, in the 30 June 1888 minutes of the Theological School Curatorium Groen is urged to spend some more time studying the Dutch language. Later in his career he had great difficulty preaching in English, but had become masterful in his use of Dutch.

8. Henry Beets, "Rev. J. Groen's Jubilee" *The Banner*, 7 September 1916, 567.

9. C. J. S., "Ds. Johannes Groen," 179.

10. "Het 50 Jarig Bestaansfeest der Eerste Chr. Geref. Kerk te Zeeland," Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 12.

11. Zeeland First CRC Consistory minutes, translated by John and Frederica Bult, 6 June 1994, Archives, Calvin College,

Grand Rapids, Michigan. The minutes are in Dutch until 1929.

12. *Ibid.*, 3 May 1897 and 16 May 1899.

13. *Ibid.*, 2 August 1899.

14. *Ibid.*, 7 September 1899.

15. *Ibid.*, 14 August 1900.

16. For a description of the neighborhood see: "One Hundred Years in the Covenant," (Grand Rapids, Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, 1979), 13-16. For an overall view of Grand Rapids church life see: James D. Bratt and Christopher Meehan, *Gathered at the River* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1993), especially Ch. 3-4.

17. Most of the new immigrants were farmers or farmhands from the province of Groningen and the church neighborhood was often called "the Groninger buurt."

18. This problem is also discussed in "One Hundred Years in the Covenant," 78, 86.

19. Minutes, 23 August 1910.

20. An article in *The Banner* dealt at some length with this problem. The author thought that it stemmed from the old custom of men and women sitting separately. He judged that fortunately the "English" CRC congregations were adopting the American custom of families sitting together, but the "Dutch" churches did not yet do so, and the boys and young men sat in the back seats or the balconies, working their mischief. Henry Beets, "As 'Families' in the Church," *The Banner*, 21 November 1918, 840-841. In 1906 the consistory also requested that a policeman be present in front of the church, so that the rowdy

youth would not congregate there.

21. Minutes, 30 July 1906, 10 February 1908, 31 May 1917, and 29 May 1918.

22. Henry Beets, "Rev. Johannes Groen," *The Banner*, 28 March 1924, 196.

23. Vanden Bosch, "Johannes Groen," *Religion and Culture*, 24 April 1924, 1963.

24. Vanden Bosch, "Johannes Groen," *Reformed Journal*, March 1953, 8.

25. "Rev. J. Groen's Commemoration," Reprinted in *The Banner*, 12 September 1912, 577.

26. C. J. S., "Ds. Johannes Groen," 178.

27. *Ibid.*, 28 May 1911.

28. "Seventy-five Years on Eastern Avenue," (Grand Rapids, Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, 1954), 14.

29. "Grand Rapids Notes," *The Banner*, 18 May 1916, 325.

30. It is ironic that Groen's successor, Rev. Hoeksema, preached and wrote in English with ease, even though he was born in the Netherlands and emigrated at age eighteen.

31. Minutes, 5 November 1919.

32. *Ibid.*, 26 November 1919.

33. *Ibid.*, 31 March 1920.

34. "Silver Anniversary of the First Christian Reformed Church of Los Angeles, California, 1914-1939," 17.

35. An anniversary book notes, "The services were held in the Bates Street church because the incumbent consistory of Eastern Avenue refused the use of our church." "Seventy-five Years on Eastern Avenue," 18. This is an oblique reference to the Common Grace controversy at Eastern Avenue at the time.

# Johannes Groen

## Groen in West Michigan Society

Harry Boonstra

Although Johannes Groen was thoroughly immersed in denominational issues, loved the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), and had great leadership abilities, he did not have a high profile in the church's official circles. Several authors comment on this lack of visibility, and the consensus on why this was the case is that Groen too frequently was out of step with accepted CRC views. His stance on women's suffrage, labor unions, socialism, revivals, and other issues kept him out of the governance structures of the church. Besides, his keen insights and his unyielding debating skills no doubt helped him to win arguments, but not necessarily friends and allies. This lack of acceptance did not, however, keep him from speaking out on a variety of social issues. In many of the controversies he exhibited wide reading in a variety of topics, in which he ranged far beyond his formal education.

### Women's Suffrage

Probably the issues that generated the greatest amount of antipathy toward Groen were those focused on women's suffrage. During the second decade of the twentieth century most in CRC circles felt the Bible, and therefore by extension the church, clearly spoke against women voting.

The women's suffrage movement has a complicated history in both the United States and the world.<sup>1</sup> In North America the battle for gaining the right to vote for women was a long one, with conflicting opinions strongly held

and emotions running high. Wyoming Territory was the first to grant voting rights to women in 1869; Michigan did not do so until 1917. Finally, in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution granted women suffrage. Although many Grand Rapids citizens were opposed to women's suffrage, this opposition was certainly not universal. During the 1880s "Furniture city suffragists began efforts to gain all women the right to vote in municipal elections. In 1891 the efforts expanded to seek total equity for women rather than just the right to vote."<sup>2</sup> Individuals from Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo became leaders in the state-wide suffrage movement during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Consequently, local churches, theologians, and preachers became very involved in the controversy. Most American churches were violently opposed to the new-fangled notion that would turn age-old traditions upside



Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo provided the strongest leaders and support for the women's suffrage movement. This is Grace Kelly (nee Michels) from Grand Rapids. Photo: Richard H. Harms.

down. After all, they argued, didn't God ordain the husband to be the head of the household and owner of both his money and his family?

The CRC also fought adamantly against the notion of granting women voting rights. In editorials, articles, lectures, and sermons there was near unanimous opposition to women suffrage.<sup>3</sup> In an article written just before Michigan was to vote on women suffrage in 1912, Jacob Vanden Bosch summarized the most common arguments. Women suffrage would overturn the traditions of both civil society and the Christian church. The movement, he continues, militates against all of Scripture, which clearly teaches that men (especially husbands) are to represent and rule women; human society consists not of individuals but of families; giving women the vote will not make political or social life better, because women are just as corrupt as men. The suffragettes' claim that they would be able to promote better hygiene and better protection for children is nonsense. Vanden Bosch argues, "To

my mind worse foes than these beset the home. Irreligion, immortality [sic!], lack of love, unwillingness to shoulder the hardships of parenthood, love of pleasure — these are the things that ruin the home of today." He closes with another ringing defense of the home: "Certainly we cannot afford to vote for a measure which, if carried and enacted into law, will destroy love, harmony, and intimacy and thus strike a blow at the very foundations of the ideal home."<sup>4</sup>

The measure was defeated in November 1912, but was on the ballot again in April 1913, when it was again voted down. In response, Rev. John Vander Mey titled an article "Congratulations," commending Michigan voters for again defeating women suffrage, especially praising the CRC population of Western Michigan for their part in the defeat. Then he assured his readers that most women were opposed to equal suffrage. "As a rule it is the men-women, the gadabouts, the yellers, the few who bring all the noise and raise all the dust . . . Thanks to God's com-

mon grace, the character of most of the women of our nation is not yet so misinformed and degenerate." He buttressed his case with Scripture. Like the godless heathen, "in all the suffrage propaganda, brawling, and ranting, one hears the clear language of Ps. 2, 'Let us break [God's] bonds asunder, and cast away the cords from us.'" Finally, Vander Mey turned to one huge disappointment: "It has been deeply lamented, and there has been strong disapproval that several pastors defended the Women's Party." Here he had in mind Johannes Groen, who had delivered a lecture at Eastern Avenue Church in which he forth-

rightly defended the cause of women suffrage. Groen was quoted as having said:

The present subordinate position of woman is not due to any inferiority inherent from creation, but is one of the results of the curse pronounced upon mankind as a result of sin. Slavery was another result of the same curse. These resulting conditions must never be held up as an ideal, but we must militate against them with all our might . . . You can't get away from it. In a democracy woman, as a part of those governed, has the right to a voice in the government. Woman must either have the suffrage or she will become a doll, a plaything. Schools, child labor, playgrounds, amusements, manufacture of clothing, preparation of food, the saloon, morals, wages, all belong to woman's sphere and she has a right to assist in regulating them.<sup>5</sup>

Vander Mey was aghast, but took comfort from the fact that "the people read the Bible and fortunately do not just think through their leaders."<sup>6</sup>

Further reaction against Groen came promptly. In the same issue of *The Grand Rapids Press* that reported Groen's speech, twelve CRC ministers from Grand Rapids published a statement disagreeing with Groen: "We wish to go on record as stating that we, the undersigned, have not changed our views on the suffrage question and are opposed to giving woman the ballot because it is not in accordance with divine ordinances."<sup>7</sup>

Vander Mey's article also referred to an essay in *The Banner* in which are listed seventeen reasons for women suffrage, mainly to promote "justice to womanhood and seeking the greatest good for the greatest number politically."<sup>8</sup> The article is signed, "A Friend of the Cause." It is not clear if the author or the editor decided to omit the author's name. It seems most likely it was the editor's decision. Vander Mey implied that the author was Groen, as does Zwaanstra.<sup>9</sup> If so, Groen's views

**JUSTICE**
**EQUALITY**

Why Women Want to Vote

## WOMEN ARE CITIZENS

And wish to do their Civic Duty

**WORKING WOMEN** need the ballot to regulate the conditions under which they work.  
Do **WORKING MEN** think they can protect themselves without the right to vote?

**HOUSEKEEPERS** need the ballot to regulate the sanitary conditions under which they and their families must live.  
Do **MEN** think they can get what they need for their district unless they can vote for the man that will get it for them?

**MOTHERS** need the ballot to regulate the moral conditions under which their children must be brought up.  
Do **MEN** think they can fight against vicious conditions that are threatening their children unless they can vote for the man that run the district?

**BUSINESS WOMEN** need the ballot to secure for themselves a fair opportunity in their business.  
Do **BUSINESS MEN** think they could protect themselves against adverse legislation without the right to vote?

**TAX-PAYING WOMEN** need the ballot to protect their property.  
Do not **MEN** know that "taxation without representation" is tyranny?

**ALL WOMEN** need the ballot because they are concerned equally with men in good and bad government; and equally responsible for civic righteousness.

**ALL MEN** need women's help to build a better and juster government, and **WOMEN** need **MEN** to help them secure their right to fulfill their civic duty.

---

**MICHIGAN EQUAL SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION**

CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS, Grand Rapids, Michigan      GENERAL HEADQUARTERS, Telegraph Bldg., Detroit, Michigan

(Over)

Reproduced by Michigan Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame, Lansing, 1982

THE PRESS, THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 1913.

## GROEN SCORED FOR STAND ON SUFFRAGE

Some Intimation Is Made of  
Excommunication Because  
of Public Address.

PERSECUTION, SAY FRIENDS

Even if woman suffrage was snowed under at the election Tuesday Rev. Johannes Groen continues to hear from his address in favor of voting right for the

"What must be done with a minister who subverts the ordinances of God?" implied that church proceedings should be instituted which would result in excommunication unless he repented.

At the Theological seminary Prof. Louis Berkhof devoted a whole hour to a refutation of Mr. Groen's arguments.

Prof. Barend K. Kuiper of Calvin college wrote an article in De Calvinist which appeared Saturday in which he admitted the literary and oratorical excellence of Mr. Groen's address, but declared it very weak in argumentation. He did not mince words in decrying the insidiousness of the doctrine and declared that it ignored the fundamental principle of government. Several other articles in this issue took shots at the Eastern avenue pastor or his lecture.

The Grand Rapids Press

were remarkably "progressive," and about fifty years ahead of the thinking of most members in the CRC.

Many members of Eastern Avenue also objected to their pastor's views. A 1913 protest was submitted to the elders that a pro-suffrage meeting had been held in the church building. The elders responded that the sanctuary was used only because there was such a large crowd which could not be accommodated in the basement, and had to move to the sanctuary. Later that summer the elders noted that a petition was being circulated in the congregation, castigating their minister. The principal complainant, who accused Groen of unscriptural views, was Jacob Hoeksema, who appeared at successive consistory meetings, refused to confess the error of these complaints and for a time was barred from taking communion.<sup>10</sup>

The conflict spread beyond the walls of the congregation, as others in Classis Grand Rapids East, to which Eastern Avenue belonged, became alarmed at Groen's heretical views. While Oakdale CRC was preparing a formal complaint to submit to the fall 1913 meeting of classis, the Eastern Avenue elders protested and judged that the complaint was inappropriate, since suffrage was a political and social, rather than

a religious issue. They even instructed the delegates to classis to walk out if the complaint was sustained by classis.<sup>11</sup>

The classical meeting took place on 17 September and had to be moved to the sanctuary of the Dennis Street Church in Grand Rapids because of the large crowd — mostly because of the "Groen case." The case was presented, "but the accused brother, as the mouthpiece of his consistory, made a very strong and eloquent defense." Groen repeated the argument that this was a political and social issue, and "insisted on his right to speak on social questions whenever he deemed it necessary. The result was that the case was dropped . . ."<sup>12</sup> This was a significant decision, especially since the denomination echoed this conclusion four years later.

At the denominational level the suffrage issue was dealt with in 1916, when Synod decided to accept the recommendation of its study committee minority report which followed Groen's earlier argumentation that "Women's voting right is a purely political question and does not belong on the terrain of the church," and Synod would therefore not make a pronouncement for or against women suffrage. Although many in the denomination continued to oppose women voting, suffrage was

## Do You Know

—THAT—

Women Vote in  
Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Idaho,  
Washington and California?

Why Not In Michigan?

Do you know that women vote in Norway, Finland, Australia and New Zealand, and have partial suffrage in other countries?

Do you know that women can now vote in China?

### WHO CAN'T VOTE!

Children, Insane, Idiots, Aliens, Criminals and Women

IS THAT A SQUARE DEAL FOR WOMEN?

Vote for Woman's Suffrage next November

Help Us Distribute Literature.

(over)

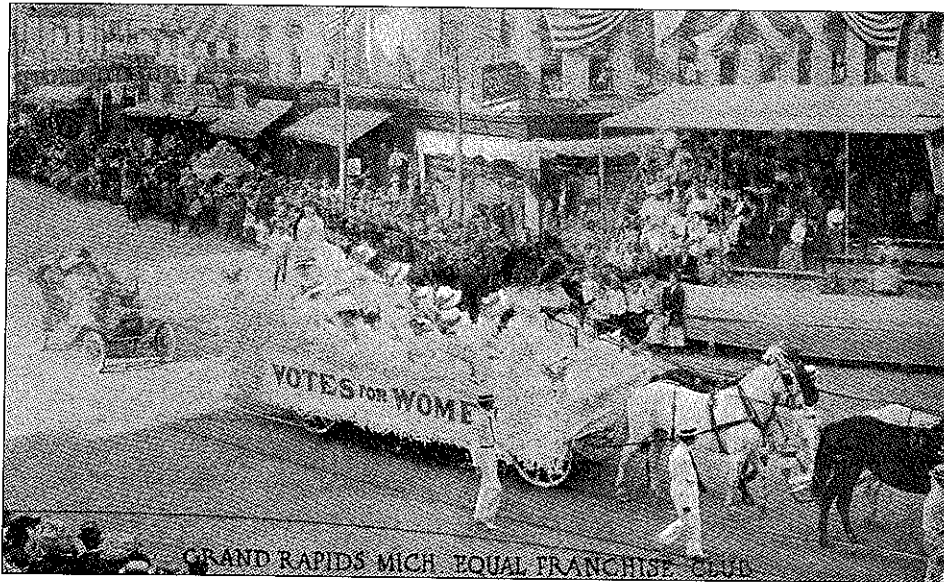
no longer considered a transgression against Reformed teaching.<sup>13</sup>

### Labor Unions

Groen's controversial involvement in labor unions also requires a brief introduction. The founding of labor unions in the United States had a tumultuous and at times violent history. The unions were established to protest against low wages, dangerous working conditions, arbitrary firing, and other forms of exploitation. At times the agitation was prompted by the principles of socialism and communism. The world of factory owners, railroad magnates, business titans, wealthy capitalists and other employers was nearly universally opposed to the formation of unions. Until the Wagner Act of 1935 made collective bargaining legal in the United States, laws tended to support the owners. As a result, employers had unrestricted power over their workers. This level of control, harsh working conditions, and mean pay nevertheless led some workers to organize.

Churches were divided in their reactions to the unions. The more conservative denominations were firmly





Between 1910 and 1920, when the nineteenth amendment of the US Constitution was ratified, Grand Rapids regularly saw parades supporting women's suffrage. On several occasions The Grand Rapids Press produced editions completed, written, and edited by women as part of the effort. Image: Grand Rapids History & Special Collections Center, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, MI.

opposed, since laborers were expected to be obedient to their masters, and any movement supported by socialism was bound to be evil. However, other churches were beginning to see that both Old and New Testaments proclaim economic justice and protection of the poor. In 1891, for instance, Pope Leo XIII's encyclical "On the Condition of Labor," urged workers and owners to bargain freely on wages and working conditions.

The CRC showed great concern about the joining of labor unions, which seemed too closely akin to oath-bound, secret societies. Between 1881 and 1914 there were twelve CRC synods that dealt with the issue and all pronouncements warned strongly against joining the unions and threatened those who did join with censure and potential excommunication.

Some, based on their contact with events in the Netherlands, began to advocate *Christian* labor unions. In the Netherlands the labor situation was strongly influenced by the theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper, whose writings are vast and his views

complex, especially in his outlining of the Christian's relationship to one's culture and society, as he wrestled with the biblical mandate of being in the world but not of the world. Suffice it to say here that Kuyper generally advocated that Christians could best maintain their principles and influence their culture by forming Christian (even Reformed and Calvinistic) organizations and societies, including



Abraham Kuyper, Dutch theologian and politician whose ideas of direct involvement in society mirrored those of Groen. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

Christian schools; Christian political parties; recreational groups, such as a Christian chess society; and economic organizations, such as labor unions. Many Dutch immigrants who joined the CRC accepted this Christian posture and formed the Christian Labor Alliance, with one branch, for example, the Christian Painters' and Paperhangers' Union.

Thus the CRC contained at least three groups: those who were against all labor unions, partly because the unions were often socialistic, partly because it was felt that anyone joining a secular labor union became responsible for all the principles and actions of that union; a small but vocal group who diligently promoted Christian unions, both to protect the workers, and to be a Christian influence; and a very small group who allowed or promoted workers to join the secular or "neutral" unions. Among the latter were, of course, some laborers and factory workers who joined such unions to provide for their families.<sup>14</sup>

Ministers who "allowed" their members to join a secular labor union were very, very few, but among these was Groen. Already in 1911, during the famous strike by the Grand Rapids furniture factory workers, Groen was one of the few Christian Reformed ministers who supported the strikers in their effort to achieve decent working conditions.<sup>15</sup> This support and his later speeches and articles brought considerable opposition and controversy, and less involvement on denominational committees. The furniture industry workforce was largely made up of Dutch Reformed and Polish Roman Catholic workers. The Roman Catholic churches supported the strikes, while the Reformed churches did not.

In spite of his views on the 1911 strike, perhaps because of his grasp of the economic and social issues, Groen was chosen to serve on a synodical study committee, which submitted its



## LABOR UNIONS

## II.

## Minderheidsrapport van de Com. benoemd in zake de Unions.

Aan de synodale vergadering van de Chr. Geref. Kerken te houden in Chicago Juni 17, 1914 en volgende dagen. Eerwaarde Broeders en Vaders:

Reeds vele jaren hadden wij de eer lid te mogen zijn van bovengenoemde Com. Van af het begin hadden wij eenigen twijfel, of het door de Com. en onze Kerken ingenomen standpunt wel geheel juist was, n.l. hierin, dat het lidmaatschap van de union eene censurabele zonde is. Meermalen hebben wij dit bezwaar geopenbaard op de vergaderingen van de Com. Wij gevoelden ons echter in deze ingewikkelde zaak niet krachtig en beslist genoeg om tegen het ingenomen standpunt positie te nemen, en zoo gingen wij aarzelend in de conclusies van de Com. mede.

Wij hebben ons echter langzamerhand die zaak meer zelfstandig ingedacht. Wij werden daartoe vooral gedrongen niet alleen door het ontzettend toenemen van de unions over geheel de wereld, maar ook vooral door

*One in the series of articles Groen penned on behalf of the minority committee report to Synod 1914 on labor unions and published in De Wachter.*

report in 1914 on labor unions. Groen wrote a one-person minority report, in which he succinctly summarized his defense of labor unions. In this report Groen departs dramatically from the previous synodical pronouncements and from the widespread opinion in the CRC. For example, he saw nothing wrong with Christians joining various organizations that were not explicitly Christian, no more so than immigrants seeking citizenship in a country that was not explicitly Christian. Even more interesting, Groen did not accept the notion that the unions arose out of revolutionary, atheistic socialism. Instead, they were organized because wealthy and ruthless capitalists took advantage of their workers, and the formation of unions was the only way the workers could achieve justice. "The struggle of the working class against the increasingly strong and victorious capitalism

is not something that comes from the Evil One, proceeding from a mistaken spirit of revolution (although this sometimes does enter), but a struggle for more equality, freedom and justice . . . ."<sup>16</sup> An attack on capitalism was unusual in the CRC; instead, socialism was considered the great enemy of the Christian faith. Groen also drew heavily on the doctrine of common grace, borrowing from Abraham Kuyper.<sup>17</sup>

Groen was appointed to the next synodical committee on labor unions, and again submitted (with two other members) a minority report. This report repeated some of the same arguments of 1914 and concluded that the CRC should not hold to the judgment that membership in a labor union is incompatible with membership in the CRC.<sup>18</sup>

All of this writing supporting labor unions had made Groen unpopular among many in the CRC, and he added fuel to this fire with a public address delivered on 5 April 1917 at the invitation of a local union on the subject "Organized Labor and Christianity." In it Groen made the point that labor unions and the Christian faith could be compatible. Opposition to Groen came quickly. That same evening Rev. Herman Hoeksema, then in Holland and three years later Groen's successor at Eastern Avenue, gave a lecture on the evil of labor unions which, he said, were a part of the kingdom of darkness. The denominational fray became the talk of the town and fodder for the Grand Rapids newspaper with headlines such as, "Some Intimation Is Made of Excommunication [of Rev. Groen] Because of Public Address." The article mentioned articles and speeches by four leading CRC ministers who attacked Groen for his unbiblical stance.<sup>19</sup>

### Prohibition

There is no record of Rev. Groen specifically preaching or protesting

against the consumption of alcohol, but he did lend his support to two anti-drinking efforts in Michigan. Professor Jacob Vanden Bosch of Calvin College, writing on Groen, asserts that "if at the beginning of his career he openly defended temperance in drinking, through his experience in the congregation he soon became a confirmed abstainer and a leader in the fight for local prohibition."<sup>20</sup>

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the drinking of alcoholic beverages was always more acceptable among European Christians than among those in North America, where views on such drink were undergoing change. Before municipalities began treating their drinking water supplies, often taken directly from rivers early in the twentieth century, such water was not safe to drink during the warmer months. Instead children often drank milk while adults drank beer or, far more rarely, wine. The brewing and fermenting processes tended to kill the microorganisms still active in untreated river water. Moderate consumption of such brewed and fermented beverages was well-established in both Europe and North America. Interestingly, one of the first CRC references to liquor concerned a person who owned a brewery; he was put under censure, not because he had a brewery, but because he worked there on Sundays.<sup>21</sup>

Distilled spirits were another matter. With the onset of industrialization, deplorable living and working conditions, over-consumption of distilled spirits became a ready escape among immigrant groups. In reaction to this growing problem, unlike the *herberg*, which was generally seen as very respectable among the Dutch immigrants, the American lair of iniquity became the saloon. Drinking at home was often acceptable and moderate; and wine for communion virtually universal. There certainly were many incidents of drunkenness and



*Jacob Vanden Bosch, on the Calvin college faculty, 1900–1946, shared Groen's views on social issues and wrote in support of Groen after his death in 1924. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.*

alcoholism among Dutch Christians, but the suggested remedy was nearly always temperance rather than abstinence or prohibition.

When these emigrants came to the United States they were soon confronted with a different mindset among the followers of axe-wielding Carry Nation and the temperance and prohibition movements. These movements reflected a long and complex struggle in American society, reflecting problems in urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. Following the trend in the United States, the 1902 CRC Synod condemned those who operated and visited saloons and issued a general warning against “strong drink.” In 1916 Synod was asked to censure all CRC members who frequented saloons; the resolution stopped short of that posture and instead ruled that the church should lend moral support to the movement to root out the saloon and to urge the churches to battle this evil.

The spectrum of response toward prohibition among CRC clergy ranged from those who opposed prohibition by law to those who declared all consumption of alcohol a sin. Most ministers came to support prohibition activities, although generally not

with the fervor found among American evangelicals.<sup>22</sup> In 1910 twenty-five Reformed Church in America and CRC pastors and Calvin College and Seminary professors published “A General Letter to the Voters of Kent County,” urging them to vote in favor of the “local option” to close the breweries and saloons. But the circular did not advocate total abstinence and churches would still be allowed to use sacramental wine. Groen was among the signatories.<sup>23</sup> A similar recommendation appeared in 1916 when “pastors of the churches of Holland origin advised all to cast their votes in favor of the STATE-DRY AMENDMENT. . . . Let us remove the social evil from our midst.”<sup>24</sup> Again, John Groen signed the appeal.

### **Groen as a Second-Generation Immigrant**

Groen is an interesting study of a bicultural person — even though he was born in the US and never lived elsewhere. His was the biculturalism of an immigrant family — being part of American life and still being very influenced by his Dutch background. He attended elementary school in English, had many English contacts outside of the Dutch enclaves, wrote a number of articles and gave speeches in English, but found it extremely difficult to preach in English. His Dutch was a bit flowery, as was that of most clergy of the time, but he certainly mastered the language well as a rhetorical tool.

His attitude toward the Netherlands was ambivalent. When he compared America to the native land of his parents and grandparents he was scathing in his criticism. The Netherlands was a land of poverty, unemployment, inequality (“many are oppressed by a haughty and worthless aristocracy”) suppression of women, and religious intolerance.<sup>25</sup> However, when surveying the more distant history of the Netherlands he becomes hyperbolic in his praise.

At the time of the discovery of America, the Netherlands stood in the first rank among countries in terms of culture, science, art, commerce, and in the consciousness of political freedom. But not that alone. There is no country in the world in which so much was suffered and fought for the truth and in which so much innocent blood was spilled for the name and the sake of the Lord . . . . We are children of martyrs, of heroes of faith, of a people that valued God's Word more than all earthly treasure, of a people that brought costly offerings for religious and national liberty . . . . A Hollander who does not tremble before God's Word, who does not take hold of Christ, who does not love the Church is no longer a true Hollander.

He concluded by noting that in addition, this wonderful heritage actually influenced the founding and glory of America, both indirectly through the English Puritans who had been influenced by Dutch Calvinism and directly through the seventeenth century arrival of the Dutch in New Amsterdam.<sup>26</sup>

At times Groen was ambivalent about America. In a Fourth of July oration America appeared as the Promised Land, “The United States has been to us an overflowing fountain of rich blessings.” Among these blessings are prosperity, food, higher wages, opportunity for promotion, social equality, educational and religious privileges. To every young man and young woman ready for marriage America offered “health, character, ability, education, religion, and true love.” Women are especially fortunate: “May our women, our wives and mothers remember that our country is especially for them a land of liberty, which will recognize clearly their freedom and God-given rights. More than any other country has the U.S.A. brought womanhood near to the sublime ideal held before us by the Creator.” For all these blessings Dutch immigrants owe the country Christian patriotism. “May our Christianity shine forth brightly in our patriotism, in our love for right, freedom, morality, and in

holy hatred against the spirit of oppression . . . ."<sup>27</sup>

At other times, however, Groen was more sober about his assessment of his native land. He admitted, "It is not all gold that glitters," in either state or church. First he enumerated the dangers in civic life: mammonism, political corruption, selfish trusts and union in the economy, socialism, neo-Malthusianism, secret societies. In the American church he found the dangers of anti-Christian philosophies, all of which are at odds with God's word, as well as higher criticism, and unbelief among the young.<sup>28</sup>

Even though Groen did not always resolve the competing claims and loyalties of his Dutch heritage and his American situation, he did try to find a balance, especially for the CRC. In his final, long sentence of "Roeping" he summarizes the calling of the church:

May we remain true to the principles inherited from our fathers, and may we on one side guard ourselves against liberalism, and, on the other side, against a narrow-minded sectarianism; if we work with diligence and perseverance for the defense and development of Calvinism, on which (through the influence of the Puritans and the Dutch) our politics, constitution, schools, and science were built, then we will be a blessing, not only for ourselves, for our children, for our people of Dutch origin, but for this whole great, developing nation, which has been a great blessing for the whole world, and will become an even greater blessing, if she holds fast to righteousness that elevates a people.<sup>29</sup>

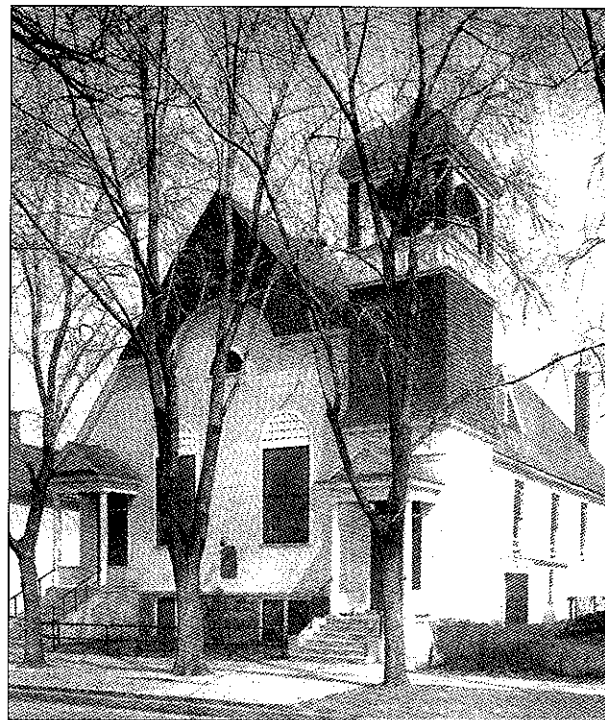
### Groen as a Progressive Conservative

In many ways Groen had a typical, traditional, conservative CRC mindset. He adhered to the principal teachings of the Dutch Reformed tradition, and was faithful to the emphases of the Separation of 1834 in the Netherlands, and to the 1857 split from the RCA.<sup>30</sup> In theology Groen held to the supra-

lapsarian position about God's decree of sin and salvation — a position often identified as hyper-Calvinistic. Although his voice does not often appear in the consistory minutes, it seems that his leadership was firm, and it appears that in regard to church discipline, leading a Christian life and Sabbath observance, he was as stern as most other pastors of his time. He warned against liberalism in American churches and urged the CRC to hold fast to the theological traditions of the Dutch fathers.

Yet he diverged from the denomination on other issues. He adopted Kuyper's principal teaching, the doctrine of common grace. Kuyper stressed the curbing of sin through God's grace, acceptance and use of contributions of "the world," but also the need for Christians to be active in politics, education, the press, and all areas of society — making their distinctive Calvinistic contribution.<sup>31</sup> Many of the more conservative theologians in the CRC strongly opposed Kuyper's doctrine of common grace. The most aggressive opponent was Herman Hoeksema. Groen's enthusiastic acceptance of Kuyper and Kuyper's brand of Calvinism marked him as a progressive in the CRC.

The suffrage controversy certainly marked Groen as a social progressive. As the only CRC pastor agitating for women's voting rights, he was a marked minister, one who allied himself with the forces of humanism and revolution. Groen was not the only one to support secular labor unions, but certainly one of the few, and this stance



*The Dennis Street Christian Reformed Church could seat more than Eastern Avenue and was the venue for Groen's defense of his social positions.*

again separated him from the more conservative voices in the CRC.

Looking back on Groen's life in 1953, Jacob Vanden Bosch provides an astute evaluation of Groen's views and character: "If we wish to characterize the subject of our sketch with one comprehensive term, we perhaps do best by calling him a progressive conservative. He had imbibed the fundamental truths of Calvinism in home and church and school . . . [But] how he disliked anything stagnant. His Calvinism must be progressive. It must be able to cope with every modern situation and to inform it with its spirit."<sup>32</sup>

It is not clear if Groen was aware of the anomalies and tensions in his thinking and his life. What is clear is that he held his opinions with conviction and fervor and with the assurance that his views could be squared with the Word, and were beneficial for church and kingdom. ☞

# Endnotes

1. One recent book that is very helpful in catching the spirit and the main issues is *A History of the American Suffragist Movement* by Doris Weatherford (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998). Biographies of the leaders for suffrage, such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, are among the most fascinating sources.
2. Richard Harms, "Fifty Years for Suffrage," *Grand Rapids Magazine*, March 1996, 27.
3. See Henry Zwaanstra's *Reformed Thought and Experience in a New World*, (Kampen: Kok, 1973) 211 ff. for many more citations.
4. "The Equal Suffrage Question," *The Banner*, 31 October 1912, 684.
5. There appears to be no written or printed record of the speech. The quotation is from a newspaper article that supplied direct quotes from the speech. *The Grand Rapids Press*, 2 April 1913, 5.
6. "Gefeliciteerd," *De Wachter*, 7 May, 1913, 2.
7. Ibid.
8. "The Other Side of the Woman's Suffrage Question," *The Banner*, 3 April 1913, 213.
9. Zwaanstra, *Reformed Thought*, 214.
10. *The Banner*, Ibid., 10 December 1913.
11. Ibid., 30 April 1913.
12. "Church News — Classis Grand

Rapids East," *The Banner*, 25 September 1913, 610.

13. Acts of Synod 1916, 37-38.
14. For details on this and other issues in the CRC see James Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).
15. Z. Z. Lydens, *The Story of Grand Rapids* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1967), 360.
16. Acts of Synod 1914, 122.
17. For a more extended treatment of the union question by Groen, see his nineteen articles in *De Wachter*, between 6 October 1915 and 9 February 1916. A strongly worded response of ten articles by Rev. H. Danhof was published between 16 February 1916 and 3 May 1916. Zwaanstra has summarized Groen's and Danhof's articles in English in *Reformed Thought*, 264-284.
18. Agenda of Synod 1916, 6-14.
19. *The Grand Rapids Press*, 10 April 1913, 14.
20. Jacob G. Vanden Bosch, "Johannes Groen," *The Banner*, 24 April 1924, 163-164.
21. *Acts of Synod 1857-1880*, 74.
22. Henry Zwaanstra summarizes the various positions and authors in detail in his *Reformed Thought*, 219-239.
23. *The Banner*, 10 March 1910, 155-156.

24. *The Banner*, 19 October 1916, also in Dutch in *De Wachter*, 11 October 1916, 7.

25. Johannes Groen, "What Hollanders Owe to the U.S.," *The Banner*, 15 August 1918, 583. This article is the first part of a "Fourth of July oration which has been prepared by him for the use of the Committee on Public Information at Washington, at the latter's request."

26. "Onze Roeping en Idealen voor de Toekomst." (Our Calling and Ideals for the Future) in *Gedenkboek van het Vijftijarige Jubileum der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (Grand Rapids: Semi-Centennial Committee) 219-220.

27. Ibid., "What Hollanders Owe the U.S.," 583-84, 602. No wonder the Committee on Public Information reprinted Groen's oration.

28. "Onze Roeping . . .," 226-227.

29. Ibid., 228.

30. Groen was apparently the principal author of the report about Masonic lodges and other secret societies, and condemned membership in those as fervently as any previous report. (*Acts of Synod 1900*, 96-101).

31. See the titles cited by Bratt and Zwaanstra for many details of Kuyper and his influence.

32. Vanden Bosch, "Johannes Groen," *The Reformed Journal*, March 1953, 9.

# Cholera at Sea — 1866

Loren Lemmen

*[Launched in 1865, SS England<sup>1</sup> had a gross tonnage of 3,308, was 375.5 feet long with a beam of 42.5 feet. She had one funnel, three masts, single-screw propulsion, and a service speed of ten knots. She was refitted and lengthened in 1873–4. Most of her service was on the Liverpool to New York run, but in 1891 began running from London to New York. She was sold and scrapped in 1896 in Italy.]*

With the end of the Civil War in 1865 a fresh wave of immigrants came to America. They brought with them an old and deadly threat — Asiatic cholera. Previous outbreaks had occurred in 1832 and 1854. The 1865 outbreak was facilitated by pilgrims returning from Mecca in the spring. By summer it had reached European ports. America was not immune to these problems, as was evidenced when SS *Atlantic* arrived at New York City in late 1865 with fifteen dead and sixty ill.

Not surprisingly, the large surge of emigrants in the spring of 1866, after a

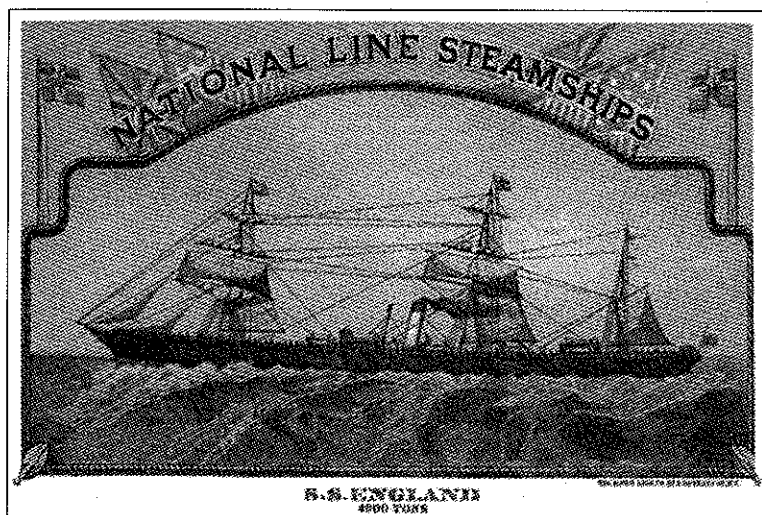
decline during the Civil War years, heightened the cholera problem in the United States. Boarding houses in places like Rotterdam and Liverpool were terribly overcrowded and unsanitary. Emi-

grants went directly from them into the new, larger steamships. About half the emigrants to America took ships out of Liverpool that spring. It was inevitable that the outbreak of cholera would reach these emigrants and, due to their number and close quarters, the effects would be severe.

*England*, one of the new, larger steamships left Liverpool on 28 March 1866, stopped for more passengers in

Queenstown and the following night sailed with 1,202 passengers.<sup>2</sup> About 800 were listed as English or Irish, the rest “aliens,” which the newspapers of the day usually translated to German, but in reality included a significant number of Dutch and a smaller number from Luxembourg. On the morning of the fourth day of the voyage an eight-year-old “German” boy was found dead in his berth. That evening a thirty-five-year-old Irishman died after a few hours of leg and stomach cramps. This was to be the pattern — perfectly healthy people became ill and died, often within a few hours. No one knew who would be next. Deaths increased dramatically in the steerage area, especially after an Easter weekend storm forced them to keep all passengers below deck. The dead often lay in their berths for an extended time as there were so few who were willing to remove them.

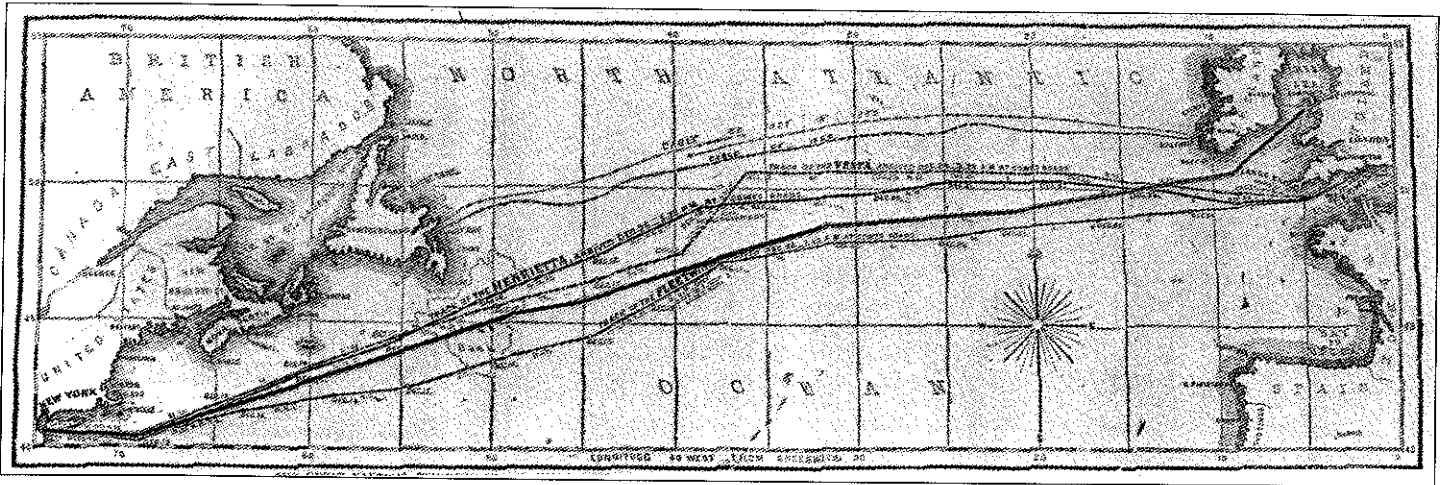
The captain feared what might happen if he continued on to New York, so he headed for Halifax instead, arriving at night on 8 April, a night that was especially still and quiet. Only the sound of carpenters making coffins could be heard. According to the captain’s report, about fifty had died by this time. Illness and death occurred too fast to keep records, so the names of the dead are not known. When morning came, a yellow distress flag was raised. Volunteers came and took off four boatloads of coffins. Many who had died earlier had been buried at sea. One Dutch emigrant, Aris Jan Eelman, later wrote, “I was present when fifty people died in one day and were thrown overboard like cats or dogs.”<sup>3</sup>



A postcard view of SS *England*.

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A typical North Atlantic sailing route between Liverpool and North America during the middle of the nineteenth century. Harper's Weekly, 9 February 1867, p. 86.

In Halifax the sick were put on a surplus navy ship and those who were well were placed in quarantine on McNab's Island in the harbor. The result was chaotic. The few inhabitants of the island fled for their lives. Rumors had it that some emigrant passengers did the same. Tents and straw were provided. Two tents were exclusively for the newly sick. These tents were soon filled and emptied again as the dead were hauled away to unmarked graves on the island.

The first night on the island it snowed and many awoke to find themselves covered in it. Dr. John Slayter, the port health officer, wrote on 14 April: "When food is sent the strong seize it and the sick and the old who have no friends suffer, having no food. Last night was very bad, Frank Garvie (a Halifax physician) and myself were ashore most of the night getting women and children in from the woods, they having been refused admittance into the tents on account of their not having friends."<sup>4</sup> A few days later Dr. Slayter, at age 43, became one of the last on the island to die of the disease. Soldiers were sent to try to maintain order and to keep passengers from fleeing the island. Four nuns from the Sisters of Charity came to take charge of orphans.

The illness came on quickly and the sick often died quickly also. "Some were sick four days, others were well in the evening and in the morning a corpse," reported Henry Wenner, a passenger from Luxembourg. Rev. Ambrose Martin, a cabin passenger, described the sick as follows: "When stricken, the malady was so violent in many cases that the unfortunate creatures had scarcely power to indicate to a passer-by their present state. It was impossible to rally their courage; when they felt themselves seized by the scourge they seemed powerless, and immediately gave themselves up to despondency."<sup>5</sup> The physical symptoms included vomiting, cramps, dysentery, and cold extremities, which turned purple.

Meanwhile *England* was cleaned and fumigated. Baggage was fumigated with chlorine gas and the steerage department scoured with chloride of lime. Bedding belonging to the passengers was burned. In a few days, when the deaths subsided, all healthy passengers were ordered to reboard *England*.<sup>6</sup> About two hundred had died during the brief stay at Halifax. The ill, about sixty, were left behind on a hospital ship when *England* departed on 18 April.

Upon arriving in New York harbor

on 21 April, *England* was placed in quarantine in the lower bay. There she found her sister ship, *SS Virginia*. It had arrived at New York with thirty-eight dead and a similar number sick with cholera. No new cases developed on *England* and all remaining passengers were allowed to disembark on 11 May. A couple of weeks later the fifty-two survivors of those who had been left behind in Halifax arrived on *SS Louisa Moore*.

Several additional ships had left Liverpool with cholera on board. When a Dutch child died before boarding *SS Helvetia*, a coroner's inquest was convened. After a verdict of Asiatic cholera was returned, the Liverpool Health Society investigated the boarding house they stayed at and found out it had held sixty people in one room. In an effort to check the spread of the disease, some were prevented from boarding *Helvetia*, but cholera still broke out before she reached Queenstown and the ship returned to port. The Germans and Dutch who traveled via Rotterdam were singled out as the source of the contagion and were placed in a separate quarantine from the British. A London newspaper editorial commented: "No one who has seen these poor creatures landed on our shore and has witnessed the hardships they have

endured can be astonished that the disease has broken out among them after they have gotten out to sea.<sup>7</sup> Restrictions were put in place and soon no emigrants were allowed to travel this route to Liverpool.<sup>8</sup> Emigrant ships, whose passenger overcrowding had been compared to eighteenth-century slave ships, began to carry significantly fewer people.

Newspapers suggested the disease was carried in the sauerkraut the Germans took with them. The Germans suggested it was the Irish who carried the disease. A Luxembourg newspaper ignored the cause of the problem but noted with a tone of national chauvinism, "No nationality withstood the onslaught better than the Luxembourgers. The Irish died first, followed by the Prussians and the Swiss. The Luxembourgers were the last to die from the disease."<sup>9</sup>

There is no record of who survived and who died, so it is hard to know which group suffered the most. The one hundred or so Dutch passengers were in the thick of it. Seven of the thirteen members of the group from

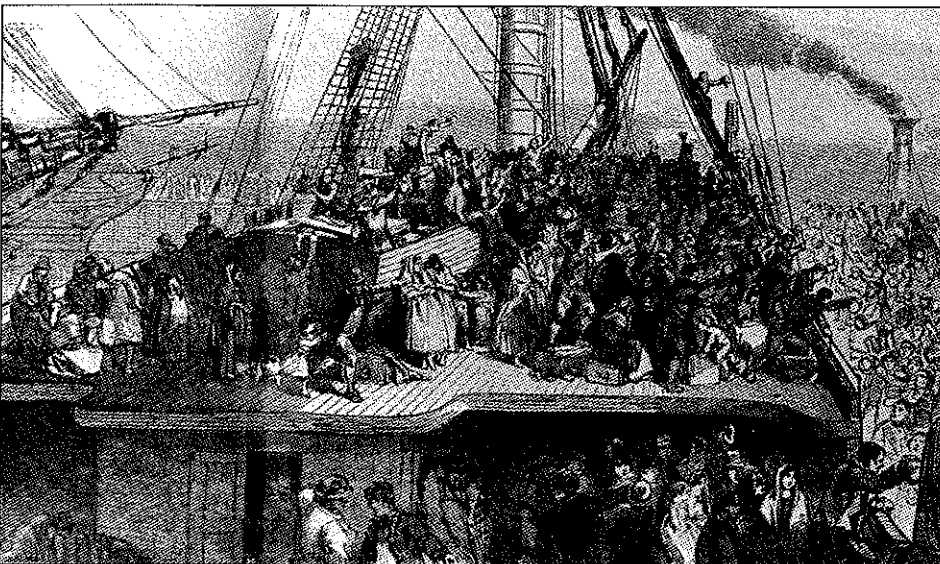
Kedichem, Zuid Holland, died.<sup>10</sup> Aris Jan Eelman became sick but recovered. His cousin Klaas Vlaming and other Dutch passengers were among the sick left in Halifax when *England* left for New York. Klaas died, but the others survived. Of the sixty Dutch for whom evidence exists, about twenty-five died.

One of the saddest stories is that of the Pieter and Cori Lucas family of Strijen, Zuid Holland. They had six children and Cori was due to have their seventh a month after the ship's scheduled arrival. While at sea the youngest, Pieter, came down with cholera. While the mother took care of him in steerage, the father was struck by the disease on deck. He died quickly. For fear of the disease, he was thrown overboard even before his wife was notified. With the body went all the family's money and important papers tucked into secret pockets in his vest. The child died next. The delay caused by the stay in Halifax and the quarantine in New York meant that Cori was approaching her delivery date by the time the passengers disembarked.<sup>11</sup> The Dutch group traveled together by train

to Dunkirk, New York. That evening Cori's baby was born on the floor of a Dunkirk inn where they were staying. The baby, who was named Pieterella, arrived quickly and without the aid of a doctor. The evening of the next day they moved to Cleveland. The other Dutch passengers helped the new mother as best they could. In writing of the event, Aris Eelman could not help but exclaim, "The widow — that was a wonder!" After Cleveland the group went on to Toledo where they split up, about twelve going to Michigan, a few to Chicago, and the rest, including the widow with her newborn and other children, to Pella, Iowa.

*England* suffered the most severe losses of the ship-related cholera outbreaks that year. Like veterans of a horrible battle, the survivors tended not to talk about it. "They did not dare to write about all their troubles,"<sup>12</sup> explained Teunis van den Hoek, a friend of passengers Gerrit and Margie De Groot. Pieter De Jong, a Dutch passenger, never mentioned the trip to his children, but left behind a list of the members of his group, indicating who had lived and who had died. Of the twelve, five perished.<sup>13</sup> It forever changed the life of Aris Eelman, who wrote:

In the midst of it all is the wonder that the Lord spared and kept me. I am thrown overboard like Jonah as a messenger to make it known. It has been a lesson for me which, with the Lord's grace, I will keep all my life. Oh, that I may be a faithful Christian through this chastising. That I may learn for my life from this journey and the many deaths which I have seen. That is my wish, and to that end I continually pray the Lord for His Spirit and presence. Oh my dear wife, that we may realize and learn this together; that when death one day nears our bedside, it will not be for us a King of Terror, but a Messenger of Peace."<sup>14</sup>



A view of conditions on board mid-nineteenth-century sailing ships carrying immigrants to North America. Illustrated London News, 22 August 1896.

## Endnotes

1. When used as a noun, the name of a ship does not take the definite article, since there is only ever one ship with a specific name at any one time.

2. This number may have been kept artificially low due to illegal overcrowding. The author's great-great-grandfather and others known to be on the ship are not included in the passenger list. See the *SS England* web page at [members.iquest.net/~joemilt/england.htm](http://members.iquest.net/~joemilt/england.htm). Most of the sources used for this article are available there.

3. A letter from Aris Jan Eelman, North Holland, Michigan, to his wife, Tetje Bakker, on the island of Texel, May 1866, now in the possession of his great-granddaughter, Thea Van Halsema. Translated by Thea Van Halsema and Janny De Haan. Another Dutch passenger, Gerrit De Groot, reported forty-five died in one day. These numbers are higher than those reported by the captain and Rev. Ambrose Martin.

4. From "A History of McNab's Island," by H. W. Hewitt, published in the *Dartmouth Patriot*, 8 June 1901.

5. *New York Times*, 19 May 1866. Rev. Ambrose Martin wrote a narrative of the

trip which almost seems designed to defend all those in positions of responsibility. He went to some lengths to praise the food on board the ship which others described as fit only to be thrown overboard.

6. According to the Eelman letters an exception was made in the case of a sick child. One parent was allowed to stay. Aris was refused permission to stay and take care of his sick cousin, Klaas Vlaming.

7. *London Times*, 5 May 1866.

8. See "Crossing the Atlantic" in *Origins*, Volume II, no. 1, 1984, for a description of the trip from Rotterdam to Liverpool in 1866 by Teunis van den Hoek. Aris Eelman's wife and family chose to depart from Hamburg when they followed him to America in September.

9. *Luxembourger Wort*, 16 May 1866, as quoted in *Luxembourgers in the New World* by Nicholas Gonner. About 25 to 30 Luxembourgers were believed to have died.

10. "Landverhuizer records of Zuid Holland" for the year 1866; copies located at Calvin College Archives. The loss apparently included the entire

Huibertus vanZanten family.

11. She was not alone in this situation. Marrigje De Groot, a young Dutch bride, gave birth to a baby on the train as it traveled to Dunkirk. This situation is referred to in Aris Eelman's letter and the letter of T. van den Hoek.

12. Teunis van den Hoek to his parents in Zuid Holland 16 May 1866, in H. J. Brinks, ed., *Dutch-American Voices* (Cornell University Press): 111.

13. As reported by a relative, Mark DeJong. Another relative of Mark's, Adrian van Doorn of Oud-Vossemeer, Zeeland, was caught in the *Helvetia* quarantine. Adrian's wife was not allowed to board. It is not known what became of her. Adrian and the rest of the family settled in New York.

14. Aris Jan Eelman to his wife, May 1866. He joined the North Holland Christian Reformed Church, where he served many years as an elder. According to his granddaughter, Tessie Luidens Bouma, he helped many people spiritually and financially. Tramps always knew they could find a meal and a place to sleep at his farm.

# Tabinta Journal, September 1947

John and Patricia Hogeterp

*[Editor's note: Tabinta, built in 1930, was an 8,156 gross ton ship, with a length of 469 feet and beam of 62.2 feet, one funnel, three masts, single screw and a speed of 15 knots. During and after the war she served as a troop ship. She was one of several ships chartered by the Dutch government in 1948 to carry emigrants after World War II. In this service, her first voyage from Rotterdam to Quebec was in September 1947; she made five trips in 1948, four more in 1949, and one in July 1949 to New York. She was scrapped at Hong Kong in 1961.]*

*[Monday, 8 September]*

Dear Mother, Grandmother,  
Brothers, Sister, Uncles and Aunts,

Jan and Hes have probably told you about the bus trip. Well it was very busy work to get on the boat and once on the boat it was also very busy, and warm. The kids didn't really want to go to sleep. When we arrived on the boat around four o'clock after having our



*Johannes Hogeterp and Piertje Deinum on their wedding day in 1937. Photo: Clarence Hogeterp.*

passports and other papers checked, we went directly to the kitchen to eat. White bread with a lot of butter, sausage, jam, coffee with a good deal of sugar, as well as tea was offered. The leftover bread was put into large barrels, enough to feed a whole bunch of pigs with.

It is seven o'clock now and the first group of evening diners is finished. We are part of the second group and it is now our turn.

Kees and I are to work for the same farmer, W. M. Erwin in Waterford, Ontario. We'll have to wait to see how that goes.

It's eight o'clock and we've finished our dinner. In a six-portioned plate we were given a serving of endive, potato, round steak with lots of fat, some soup and a wonderful apple. We ate heartily but it was very busy and noisy and also very warm. We brought the kids to bed amid such crying and bedlam that it was wondrous to behold. Pie [Pat] is lying in bed with the kids, two beside her and three in bunks above her. The men are in beds at the opposite end of the boat.

Joh [Johannes] has written till now and I'm going to try now, but it won't be easy because all the kids are here in bed and not one of them is asleep. They will probably take a while too because all the lights are burning and it's still terribly busy and noisy. And all the beds are shoved together — four beside each other and four above.

*[Tuesday, 9 September]*

It is now 9 September. The boat did not sail last night, reportedly because of engine problems. Breakfast was white bread with a good-sized chunk of butter, cheese, a serving of oatmeal and jam.

N.B.

We slept very well for a few hours last night. Still, around five o'clock a few of us were already on deck enjoying a delicious chew of tobacco or a cigarette. Myself, Huisenga from

*John and Patricia Hogeterp emigrated Heeg, Friesland where John was a farm laborer. They operated a dairy farm near Jarvis, Ontario.*

On board the lights shine night and day. Many of the passengers, men as well as women, are in bed with seasickness. Djoeke is so sick and Kees finally went to bed too. The boat rises and falls quite a bit.

Last night we had a nice view of one of the harbors of England. Hundreds of lights. It was the same harbor from which our contraband ships were controlled. All the kids are jumping around and playing busily on deck. And now I'm going to quit writing because little Klaas is awake. A potty stop and then up on deck, so till the next time.

## [Friday, 12 September]

Here I am again, but meanwhile it has become 12 September and I'm still under the weather. Actually I haven't been well at all. Yesterday I didn't even get out of bed and this morning, after getting up for a while, I crawled back into bed. Seasickness is terrible. Later I hope to write and tell you everything that happened on board, but now I'm going to lie down again.

## [Sunday, 14 September]

Sunday afternoon —

I'm feeling a little better again. I went up on deck for a while this morning, although I didn't go to the church service that was held in the dining salon. I didn't quite dare try that. I've eaten with the others and so far everything has stayed down so I'm hoping for the best. They're saying that we'll see land tomorrow. After that we still have about four days of sailing left before we land. The sea is luckily quite calm and everyone is a little more at ease now. We all ate pretty well at noon. We had vegetable soup, roast chicken, salad with cucumber, baked potatoes and pudding with berry sauce. This morning we had eggs at breakfast but that didn't taste too good to me yet. The kids always eat very heartily. And their eyes pop out of their

heads with all the new and exciting things they see.

Soon church services will be held and I'm going to try to go.

It's probably night time over there already. We turned our clocks back sixty minutes on Tuesday, fifty-five minutes on Wednesday, thirty minutes on Thursday, thirty-four minutes on Friday and thirty-six minutes on Saturday. Right now it's one o'clock here, so you can figure out what time it is over there — actually 4:35.

## [Monday, 15 September]

It's Monday now and raining. We've experienced almost all kinds of weather now except the beautiful weather that we had this summer in Friesland. This morning I did the wash, getting the hot water from the black kitchen help. We have plenty of soap because last week on each bed we found a bath towel, a bar of soap and a package of laundry soap. So I had seven of each.

They're saying that we'll see land

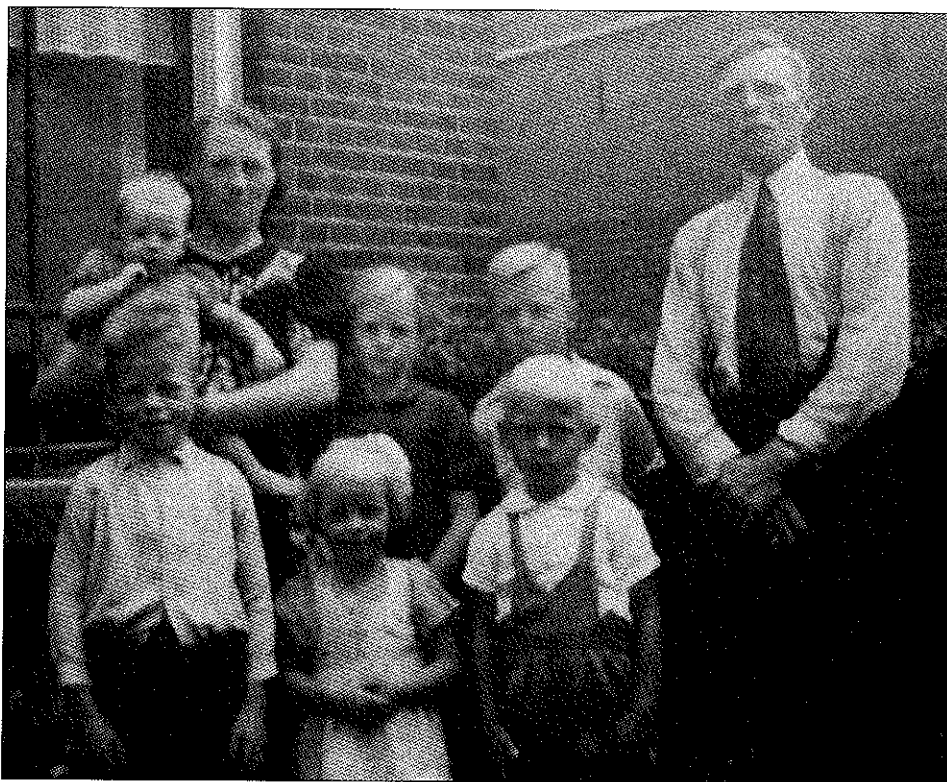
tomorrow around eleven o'clock, but we won't be in Montreal until Saturday. That's quite a while yet. It's starting to get a little dirty around here now because it's getting to the point of trying to make do with little. But we're all pretty healthy again. Hil, a friend, is still sick, so she says she'll never set foot on a boat again. And we've also had our fill of sailing, mostly because of seasickness. We've already been on the boat longer than we expected.

This evening we're all getting together to have a fun time with music and singing. More about that tomorrow. Goodnight.

We sang so hard last night that the ship shook. Frisian, Dutch, all of it. That kind of thing binds a group together, so we're going to try to do that each night from now on.

## [Wednesday, 17 September]

It's Wednesday already. We had a bad day yesterday. It was so foggy that the boat sailed at half power.



The Hogeterps and their six children as they prepared to emigrate to Canada in 1947, a seventh child was born in Canada in 1950. Photo: Clarence Hogeterp.



The fog horn sounded every minute. You couldn't even talk to each other because it was so noisy. And everybody was in the same room, of course, so we could forget about talking or seeing anything. But luckily there's an end to everything, even bad things, and now today it's beautiful weather again. It's quite windy, but the sun is shining beautifully and everybody is up on deck. We've finished eating and I'm watching little Klaas while lying in bed. We had pea soup, beef, cabbage and potatoes for lunch. Dessert was chocolate pudding with vanilla sauce. Delicious. We do so hope to see land soon. The trip is getting us all a little down, although we never make it any harder for each other by complaining out loud.

There are always a few of those really optimistic types and they're fun to have around. As soon as we land we'll send a telegram. We hope you're not startled receiving a telegram. Too bad we didn't know there was a possibility of sending one earlier, or we could have agreed that we'd send one when possible. It's quite common here and then they generally get a reply. Would you send a reply to us?

When we were in customs in Rotterdam someone gave me a package for a certain Van de Heuvel. Well, I thought, how will I ever find this person? And, how is it possible? She was in the bed right next to me. So, before we'd been on the boat an hour, I'd already delivered that package.

And other things one comes across, there's a woman near us, she's Roman Catholic, and they have two kids. Her husband has been an insurance agent

all along and now he's going to work for a farmer. That's going to be quite a change for the little lady because then papa won't be around all the time to help with the kids because it's obvious she's more lazy than tired. There's also a couple with eleven children and a father who is eighty-six years old. He didn't want to be separated from his daughter so they took him along.

There's another couple with fourteen children. They left four back home in Friesland — one was married and the others didn't want to go. And she's a fine looking woman, slim and obviously quite fashionable. There's also a young woman, born in Canada, who married a Dutchman. She was in Holland for about thirteen years. Ten days before the Liberation her husband was executed by firing squad. Now she's returning to her parents as a widow with four children. Then there are also quite a few war brides, and there was a baby born on board. All kinds of things are experienced here.

We sit around and knit when all the work is done. Monday I had just started on Peter's socks when I had to go chase little Klaas, as I was watching him at the time. When I got back all my knitting was gone. It did shock me a bit at first, but as I looked around there sat a lady doing my knitting. I asked Ma'am, do you have my knitting? She said, well sure, you're plenty busy with your children. I have nothing to do, and then I get a little nervous. Nothing calms the nerves better than a little knitting. So, if you'd be so kind, I'll knit these socks for you. Well, naturally, that was fine with me. The lady had one daughter who married a

Canadian and she was on her way to live with them. In spite of her house and everything else that she had in the Netherlands, she said she would rather be near her child. So, today went pretty well. Dag!

And now today we are in sight of the Canadian coast. It seems to be all mountains. Someone said you could see some villages, but I don't know. One can't see them with the naked eye. Tonight a pilot is coming on board to sail us up the river.

We all have to be examined by a doctor and that will be done on the trip from Quebec to Montreal. Then we don't have to wait to leave the ship when we dock. We just had a nice lunch of vegetable soup, roast beef and potatoes with spinach. And for dessert a little piece of pastry. Delicious, but too small. Well, this will probably be the end of this letter because we expect to post it in Quebec. So I'll end here and send it before the one we'll send from Montreal. We're all doing fine; no one is homesick yet.

When I asked Joh what time it was last night, Reinskje [Rose] asked what time would it be by Tante Geert. Now, dear Mother, all the best and greetings from Joh, Pie and kids. And don't send us any news until we send you our new address. Dag! Do we get as long an epistle as this one?

There was no chance to post the letter in Quebec even though we did get a chance to land. We were offered refreshments — milk, beer, ice, oranges and apples. We landed in Montreal about 9:30 this morning.

Dag! Pie ♡

# book review

## The Canadian Story of the CRC: Its First Century

Tymen E. Hofman

Guardian Books, Belleville,  
Ontario, Canada, 2004.

267 pages with appendices, rosters,  
endnotes, and credits.

\$15.95

Available from the author at  
2705 Burton St. SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Many of the great literary epics narrate large beginnings: Virgil's *Aeneid* sets out the poetic origin of Rome; the Old Testament chronicles Israel's exodus from Egypt and appropriation of the Promised Land; Stephen Vincent Benet's *John Brown's Body* treats the early phases of American history, including the Civil War. Though smaller in scope, Tymen Hofman's chronicle of the resettlement of 100,000 Dutch folk from the Netherlands into Canada during the twentieth century resonates with such stories of significant beginnings. This massive emigration, beginning in 1905, introduced a whole new chapter into the history of the CRC in Canada. And the work takes on an added dimension as the author is narrating not just any beginning, but a significant annal in the history of Christ's Church.

As every Dutch child knows, or should know, it was mostly the Canadian army which sixty years ago liberated the Netherlands. This achievement established a special relationship between Canadians and the Dutch. Although New Zealand and Australia also invited the Dutch to their countries, the Dutch found the prospect of emigration to Canada more appealing. What Hofman

chronicles for us is what may be called "the finest hour" of the Christian Reformed Church in North America — the exemplary cooperation between the Home Missions agency and USA churches (especially Oakdale Park), the denominational Immigration Committee, the indefatigable field representatives (many of them pastors who still knew the Dutch language), the Canadian government, and officials in the Netherlands who facilitated the emigration. Through this effort the number of CRC congregations in Canada grew from 14 to 170 after World War II. And, in most cases, Christian schools were begun along with the churches.

The CRC is a bi-national denomination. But the two wings have never been mirror images of each other, and it has taken wise and inspired leadership over these decades to merge the similarities and differences into a functioning denomination. Hofman describes the sources of these stresses and strains. Kuyperianism was weakening in the Netherlands but took on a new life in Canada. The Canadian churches were from the beginning committed to diaconal efforts, a priority which shaped their vision throughout. Language was a great problem. Preaching styles differed — from doctrinal to more pastoral. The Canadians were more committed than the Americans to separate organizations — of labor and farming especially. And the two branches grappled with principles and pragmatic tensions in different ways. It is no wonder that a *los van Amerika* (let's break away from America) movement was always present in those early years.

Hofman helps us live the lives of

those immigrants. Although they could sing the songs of Zion, they were strangers in a strange land. As one writer put it, they were all but speechless. People who had status in their native country were, by contract, obliged to perform physical work on farms — at least for one year. They had to decide, for the sake of their children, when was the right time to change from the Dutch to English in the churches. The residual tensions between the mentality of the Pietist movement, rooted in the *Afscheiding* of 1834, and the more urbane Kuyperian mind which developed later in the century, resurfaced time and again, and, though often fruitful exchanges occurred, some acrimonious episodes prevented the Church from being as effective as it otherwise might have been. And every area of settlement brought people together from several provinces and every branch of the Reformed Church. Moreover, they had to contend with competition from other branches of Reformed churches, which began to send ministers to serve the people from their own denominations. These decisions hampered the achievement of an ecumenical vision. Still, as Hofman's friend Andrew Kuyvenhoven observes, many of these mid-century immigrants were grateful that they had left in time to avoid the far more serious disruptions which occurred in the several Reformed branches of the Netherlands. Hofman gives high marks to the field workers (many of whom merit sidebars) who immersed themselves in the lives of these people to offset these difficulties. They met the emigrants at the ships, accompanied them to their new homes, offered legal and social services, and, of course, pastored them

and preached for them — often serving several churches at the same time.

Hofman's close involvement in all these proceedings has qualified him to write about many of the issues which developed. He writes about the various journals which sprang up — some of which sowed the seeds of dissension. He informs us about the people who offered leadership in forming separate labor, agricultural, political, and educational organizations. He outlines the various ways in which the two CRC branches sought to integrate their ecclesiastical structures and ministries. For example, it is interesting to learn that the Canadian branch of CRWRC receives 40 percent of that agency's contributions, and that the Canadian government generously supplies funds and commodities for distribution.

Beginning with his later chapters, Hofman's discourse takes a different direction as he notes in his preface. He writes not as a dispassionate, professional historian. His zeal for the Church now requires him, for his own integrity, and for the record, to expose some of the movements, the causes — yes, and some of the people — who fomented the discontent which led to

the exodus not only of many members but entire churches. He records — more in sorrow than in anger — the activities of those who could not live with differences and worked for polarization of the denomination rather than its unity. He deals with the contentions in the churches about the charismatic movement, literalistic fundamentalism, and the women in office question, as well as issues imported from the Netherlands churches. Some may question the propriety of identifying people, journals, articles, and mindsets which brought about this disruption. But let his thoughts on these matters serve as a basis for constructive dialogue.

Hofman provides an embarrassment of riches. Photos are numerous. Sidebars occur every several pages — some even spill over to the next page. Many were written specifically for this book, some have been reprinted from a previous history of the CRC, *A Family Album*, and others by friends with firsthand acquaintance with individuals and events. In a separate chapter he furnishes profiles of the children of families who, despite the hardships of emigration, have attained leadership positions in the CRC denomination.

Still another chapter, "Assessment and Evaluation," looking forward to the CRC's centennial in Canada, provides comments from various leaders whose views he solicited about the state of the denomination — Revs. Henry Numan, Louis Tamminga, Jack Vos, and Martin Geleynse among them. These responses reflect hope and anxieties, praise for some changes, dismay at others, together with concerns about secularism, materialism, and hedonism among church members. These comments deserve careful attention. They reflect the author's own sense that, although the partnership of the two wings of the CRC comprises a significant paragraph in the history of the Christian Church, something of the glory has departed from this achievement. He urges the members of the CRC to remember the commitments we have made to each other, together with the accountability which these agreements imply. Such a dialogue would be an appropriate response to the occasion of the upcoming centennial. ♡

Steve J. Van Der Weele  
Calvin College (Emeritus)

# for the future

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



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