Origins

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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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Herbert J. Brinks, 1935-2011



page 7



page 21

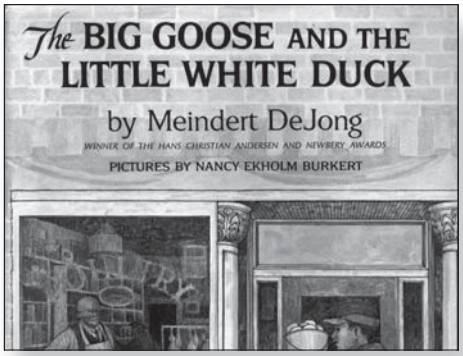
2 **From the Editor**

4 **Herbert J. Brinks**
1935-2011

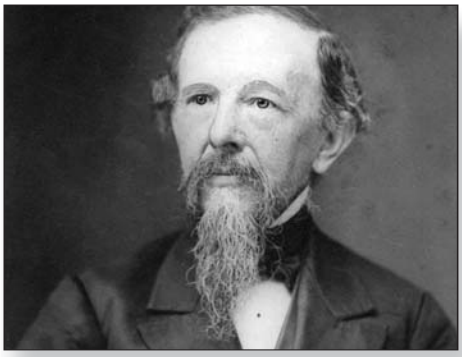
5 **Harmannus "Harry" Westers: Aquaculturist**
Harold and Nancy Gazan

12 **Brother Ploeg: A Searching Saint or a Burr under the Saddle?**
Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

20 **"Now I will tell you children . . ."**
Hendrik De Kruif's Account of His Immigration
Jan Peter Verhave



page 37



page 40

27 **"When I Was a Kid," part IV**
Meindert De Jong, with Judith Hartzell

40 **Rev. Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte**
1811–1876

42 **Book Reviews**
Harry Boonstra and Eunice Vanderlaan

45 **Book Notes**

46 **For the Future**
upcoming Origins *articles*

47 **Contributors**

from the editor . . .



Time to Renew Your Subscription
It is time to remind you, as we do in every fall issue, that it is time to renew your subscription to *Origins*. A renewal envelope for this is included with this issue. Subscriptions remain $10 (US) per year. Gifts more than $10 are acknowledged as charitable gifts to *Origins* and we are grateful for such generosity.

This Issue
This issue begins with a note about the founding editor of *Origins*, Dr. H.J. Brinks, who died last May. Harold and Nancy Gazan present the story of Harry Westers, an immigrant who became a leading specialist in aquaculture—the raising of fish under controlled conditions to restock commercially overfished waters. Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, a contributing editor, writes of a nineteenth-century immigrant to West Michigan who had trouble settling in a religious home, while Jan Peter Verhave introduces and translated the account of Hendrik De Kruif's emigration from Zeeland to Zeeland, Michigan. We conclude with the last installment of Meindert De Jong's account of his youth, written with the aid of Judith Hartzell a number of years after the author stopped writing for young people.

Available On-Line
Thanks to numerous donations, we have added a significant number of family histories to our holdings. The complete list of those available can be found at *http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/genealogies_page.htm*. This listing is updated often, so check back often and send us copies of your family history that we can share with others.

News from the Archives
During the summer we received the extensive collection of the papers of Vernon Ehlers, who served as a representative in Kent County, ten years in Lansing, and eighteen years in Washington, DC. The papers include legislation that he sponsored, legislation that he actively worked to support, correspondence, and records of his service on the House Committees on Education and Labor, Science and Technology, and Subcommittee on Energy and Environment, and the work necessary to be re-elected.

We organized the papers of Dr. Rod Jellema, a poet living in the Washington, DC, area. An additional ten cubic feet of material was added to our collection of Christian school records. We translated and opened for research the very early twentieth-century letters of

Peter Verwolf, a Dutch immigrant in the Dakotas who was incarcerated for a time. The letters provide a unique view of his life in prison. The research files of H. J. Brinks, emeritus professor of history and emeritus director of Heritage Hall, have been organized and are now open to research. The material details the Dutch in North America as well as West Michigan history topics. We processed the business papers of chemist Pierson Boermans which include much on his business ties and personal travels in Japan during the 1960s and 1970s. The personal papers of poet Beth Merizon are now available for research. Rev. Bartel Huizenga's work as a home missionary is documented in his papers, as is Dr. Peter De Boer's work in history and education. We also received and processed the research files of Dr. Andrew Barnes, detailing Christian missionary work in Nigeria during the first half of the twentieth century.

Lastly, we are pleased to report that renovation of our space began during the summer. Funds provided by the Hekman Library, Calvin College development staff, and *Origins* made possible the Phase 1 renovation. The work will convert five rooms, a closet, and a hallway into one large open area with state-of-the-art environmental controls; allowing us to store more material within the same footprint. To date the interior walls have been taken down; work is projected to be completed by January 2012.

Publications

Through a special arrangement with the publishers we have available a limited number of copies of *Famous Frisians in America* (2009) for $20.00 (US); shipping is included. Contact Heritage Hall if you would like a copy. We also have available copies of *Son of Secession* (biography of Douwe Vander Werp) by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, and Kurt Selles's *A New Way of Belonging: Covenant Theology, China, and the Christian Reformed Church, 1921-1951* (reviewed in this issue).

Staff

Richard Harms is the curator of the Archives and editor of *Origins*; Hendrina Van Spronsen is office coordinator; Wendy Blankespoor is librarian and cataloging archivist; Laurie Haan is departmental assistant; Dr. Robert Bolt is field agent and assistant archivist. Our volunteers include Rev. Dr. Paul Bremer, Mrs. Willene De Groot, Mr. Ed Gerritsen, Mr. Fred Greidanus, Mr. Ralph Haan, Mrs. Helen Meulink, Rev. Gerrit W. Sheeres, Mrs. Janet Sheeres, and Mr. Ralph Veenstra.

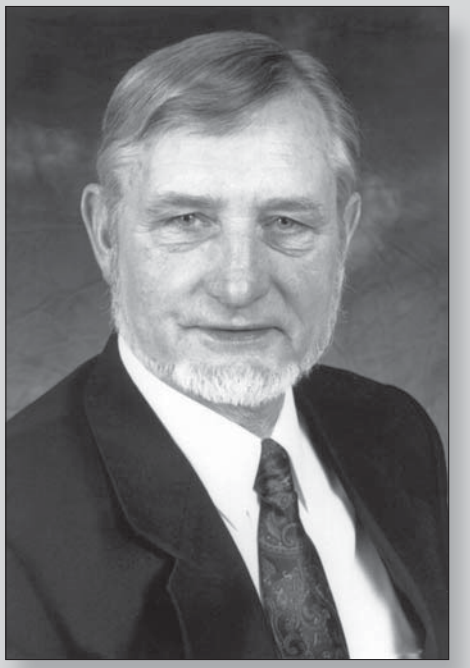


Richard H. Harms

Herbert J. Brinks, 1935-2011

Richard H. Harms

As I write this it was fifteen years ago that Herb Brinks came to talk to me about applying for the position from which he was retiring. I knew him as a published and well-informed historian on the Dutch in North America. During the next decade and a half I came to know this plain spoken and honest, some took him to be gruff, person well. In addition to being a scholar, he was concerned about the world; particularly those people who seem at a disadvantage compared to most. Herb saw potential in people and worked with them so their potential could bear fruit. He loved to fish and especially to garden. His tomato plants began growing in the early spring in pots kept in the garage at night to protect from frost then nurtured so they could bear fruit. His compliments were, like his writing, never effusive but to the point and sincere.



For a number of years Herb dealt with a blood disease. His condition changed last year; this spring his health began to deteriorate. When no further medical treatment could help, content, happy, and satisfied with his life, Herb chose to go home where he died a few days later on 17 May.

Herb was born in South Holland, Illinois, and graduated from Illiana Christian High School and then Calvin College in 1957. For the next two years he taught at Allendale Christian School followed by a year at Unity Christian High School. In 1960 he began graduate studies at the University of Michigan earning an MA in 1961 and a PhD in 1965, both in history. From 1962 until 1995 he was on the faculty of Calvin College, teaching in the History Department and from 1983 heading Heritage Hall, which he founded.

He worked tirelessly to add collections to Heritage Hall to make it possible for others to better understand the experience of the Dutch in North America. In 1976 he received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to search for immigrant letters in the Netherlands and a 1980-1981 Fulbright-Hays Council for International Exchange of Scholars grant allowed him to continue this work. Ultimately he had copies of more than 4,000 letters, now in Heritage Hall, most of which were translated into English. Several books by other scholars are based on the information from these letters.

His skill in history was matched by his skill as a writer. He wrote or edited seven books. Among these are *A Michigan Reader* (1974), *Write Back Soon: Letters from Dutch Immigrants 1847-1920* (1986), and *Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States 1850-1930,* published in 1995 by Cornell University Press. In addition he published chapters in other books, journal articles, and entries in reference works such as the *Encyclopedia of American Social History*.

He was a Dégagé Community Center volunteer and in 1991 organized the Heartside Area Writers' Club composed of inner-city residents interested in improving their literary skills. He was an active supporter of Dwelling Place, an organization making the inner city a hospitable community for its residents. He volunteered at God's Kitchen, the Westminster Presbyterian Church Food Pantry, and set about to learn Spanish to assist West Michigan immigrants from Central America.

As important as all this was to Herb, even more important was his family. In 1957 he and Ruth Kortenhoven were married. They have four children—Timothy and Ruth, Steven and Gail, Marie and Kurt Hamersma, and John and Ruth; and seven grandchildren, all of whom had a special place in his heart. When he talked of them his eyes lit up, even though his voice and tone generally remained steady and unchanged.

In the words of his friend and colleague Bert de Vries, "Herb loved and was loved; he lived well; he discerned astutely and critically; he was a blessing to many, and he departed satisfied."

Harmannus "Harry" Westers: Aquaculturist[1]

Harold and Nancy Gazan

Though Harmannus (later called Harry) Westers was born in a village on a North Sea island where most of the locals were fishermen, he did not become a fisherman; after emigrating to the United States he became a pioneering aquaculturist (someone who studies freshwater fish and other marine life and their environments). His contributions in this profession led to his 1988 induction into the National Fish Culture Hall of Fame; he was the sixteenth person so honored, but the first inducted while still living.

Early Life

Westers was born 5 April 1930 in Hoorn on Terschelling, one of the West Frisian islands in the Wadden Sea, to Luitje and Margaretha Jantina (Uitvlugt) Westers. The elder Westers, the principal of the Christian school in Hoorn, and his wife, Margaretha, already had a five-year-old daughter, Jakoba (Koby), and a two-year-old son, Frans (Frank), when Harry was born.

Terschelling is a windswept island, whose west shoreline of dune grass and sand appears very similar to western Michigan's shoreline. The island economy was based on commercial fishing, some farming, some tourism, and recovering material washed ashore from the numerous shipwrecks near the island. The Westers family worshipped in the *Hervormde Kerk* of Hoorn, which was built in the middle of the thirteenth century as St. John's



The Hervormde Kerk (Reformed Church) *in Hoorn, looking northward toward the dunes and the North Sea beyond, c.1920. Image courtesy of the Westers family.*

Nancy Gazan is a 1957 graduate of Wheaton College with an MA degree from the University of Michigan in 1961. She was a teacher and a homemaker. Harold Gazan is a 1959 graduate of Hope College and received his MSW from the University of Michigan in 1961. He had a 35-year career with the Michigan Department of Social Services as a social worker and held various administrative posts.



The Westers home, 1935-1946, in Bovensmilde, Drenthe. To the right is the school that Luitje Westers served as principal. Image courtesy of the Westers family.

(the Baptist) Church with thick brick walls to support the roof. Typical of old European churches, the edifice is surrounded by burial plots. The building's thick walls also served as shelter during fierce storms blowing off the North Sea, and from raiders who plundered the island.

In the summer of 1931 Luitje Westers accepted a position as the principal of the Christian school in Haulerwijk, a Frisian village near the intersection of the provincial border with those of Groningen and Drenthe. The family continued to spend summer vacations on Terschelling until the German invasion in May 1940. Harry's lifelong love for the out-of-doors, particularly hiking, exploring, and observing nature, was fostered by the summers spent on the island.

In 1935 the family moved from Haulerwijk to Bovensmilde, a small town about six miles southwest of Assen in the province of Drenthe, when Harry's father accepted the position of principal of the Christian school there. The town is surrounded by heathland where sheep continue to be raised today. The surrounding fields and woods provided Harry with many places to further develop his interest in nature. The canal, which passed in front of their home, was used by barges generally pulled by draft horses. Harry, his brother, and their friends fished from a wooden rail that projected out over the canal.

Harry and Frans shared the bedroom on the upper level of the home in Bovensmilde. During the war they heard Allied bombers flying overhead at night. The planes took off from England, flew to Germany, and then returned to England just before dawn. On their illegal shortwave radios, the residents of Bovensmilde followed the events and progress of the Allied Forces with both hope and apprehension. Once it became apparent that the German Luftwaffe no longer dominated the skies, large numbers of Allied bombers flew overhead—British at night and American during the day.

World War II brought hardship and rationing, as the Germans shipped much of the Dutch agricultural harvests to Germany. About 1944 the Christian school was taken over by the German army, which turned it into a barracks for conscripted Dutch men (between the ages of 16 and 40). These men were guarded by German soldiers and were daily forced to dig ditches. The ominous presence of the German military in the community was a constant threat.

As a result, the older Westers children had to walk to school in Assen, a distance of six miles each way, where classes were held in a church building. In the winter, if the canal was frozen, they skated in a group, pulling each other along, which enabled them to get to school much more quickly than by walking.[2]

The Westers family moved to Amsterdam in 1946 into an apartment on



Harry Westers, shortly after graduating from college, and two of his students in Amsterdam. Image courtesy of the Westers family.

da Costa Street, just outside the western boundary of the old center of the city. Harry completed his high school education in 1948, and then attended the *Hervormde Kweekschool* in Amsterdam, a college operated by the Dutch Reformed Church, preparing students to become teachers. While in college Harry developed an interest in art, especially drawing and painting, and also met Johanna (Jolie) Petter. They began dating in May 1951 when both were attending a biology camp near Arnhem. Harry was initially reserved, but he enjoyed socializing with other students and was not above playing practical jokes on his friends. Jolie enjoyed social gatherings and both enjoyed the out-of-doors. Soon their friendship developed into romance.

Both received their degrees in 1952 and began their teaching careers; Harry taught in an Amsterdam school while Jolie taught in Aalsmeer, about eight miles outside of Amsterdam. Harry discovered that he had a deeply embedded desire to work in the out-of-doors rather than the confines of a classroom. Contrary to his father's wishes, he applied to the *Hogere Bosbouw en Cultuurtechnische School* (a forestry school) in Arnhem. A prerequisite to acceptance was completion of six months of actual outdoor work. Through his Uncle Harmmanus, Harry was put in contact with the Meems family who operated a farm in the village of Onstwedde near the Dutch-German border. He lived with the Meems family for six months during the spring and summer and entered the forestry school in the fall of 1954. While attending the forestry school, Harry proposed marriage to Jolie and upon graduation emigration to the United States, where he hoped to pursue a career focused on the outdoors. Jolie happily accepted both proposals. They were married on 16 March 1955 in the Westerkerk in Amsterdam, just a few doors from the Anne Frank House.



Harry and Johanna "Jolie" Petters on their wedding day in Amsterdam, 16 March 1955. Image courtesy of the Westers family.

Harry and Jolie arrived in New York City by air on 22 December 1955 and moved to Michigan. Harry's oldest sister Koby and husband Peter Byl had emigrated to the United States in 1952. Margaret de Groot, who had sponsored Koby and Peter, also sponsored Harry and Jolie. She lived next door to the dairy farm on which these two immigrant couples lived and worked as farm hands in Grattan Township, about eighteen miles east of Grand Rapids.



The house near Thompson (west of Manistique), which became a vacation destination after the family moved to the Lower Peninsula. Image courtesy of the Westers family.

In April 1956 Jolie gave birth to Carolina, the first of their ten children. In November of that year Harry's parents, his brother Frans and his family, sister Roelie and husband Gerard Strieper and their son Egbert, and youngest sister Margaretha arrived in New York City on *Maasdam*. Peter's parents lived and worked on the same Grattan Township dairy farm.

In 1958 Harry and Jolie and their young family moved to the Manistique area in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Jolie's sister, Jannie Pet-

ter, lent Harry and Jolie the money to purchase a small clapboard farm house and acreage on a dirt road near US Highway 2, just west of the village of Thompson. There, Harry began his career with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), then called the Department of Conservation. He worked as an entry-level fish culturist and spent many hours cleaning egg-hatching tanks and hatchery raceways where maturing fish of varying sizes were kept. It was then that Westers began reading and learning about aquaculture and decided that this was the specific career he wanted to pursue.

Professional Life

In the summer of 1960 Harry with his wife and three children moved from Thompson to Hastings, Michigan, midway between Grand Rapids and Battle Creek, to be a research assistant at the Hastings Fish Hatchery. The following year the family, now with four children, moved to Whitmore Lake, about twelve miles north of Ann Arbor, and Westers began graduate studies in fish biology at the University of Michigan, from which he received a Master of Science degree in 1963.

Upon completion of his studies he was promoted to manager at the state's Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery, about ten miles west of Kalamazoo, which required the family to move once again. It was while he was hatchery manager at Wolf Lake that he began to study the problem of waste disposal from fish raceways, concrete channels with continuously flowing water used for high density fish production. The flow down a raceway kept the water aerated for the fish, and waste settled to the bottom. But the motion from the high concentration of fish in the raceways created enough water turbulence to re-suspend some of the waste. Years later, when he presented a paper on the topic at a seminar held in Ames, Iowa, Westers described how he had arrived at his solution. "As solids settle and accumulate in raceways, fish activity will, from time to time, re-suspend [the waste materials] into the water column, breaking them down into smaller particles, which take longer to settle."[3] The solution he developed was a series of baffles, dividers made of a thin solid material, or heavy curtains that were spaced at distances equal to the width of the raceway and extending above the water level and at the same time leaving a gap of about two inches between the bottom edge of the baffle and the raceway floor. As the bulk of the water passed through this narrow bottom gap the velocity increased and thereby moved the solids continuously down the raceway and through a screen at the end of the raceway where the waste material settled into a "quiescent zone" and a sediment trap.[4] The fish tended to stay toward the top of the water, so they were not moved from one section to the next by the water flow.

The design was soon employed in all the DNR hatcheries. Westers continued to refine the engineering principles, and developed various mathematical formulas which he and other aquaculturists used in designing new hatcheries. Today the use of baffles has been adapted by both governmental and commercial hatcheries throughout North America and Europe; and according to Chris Weeks (who later became a partner in Westers's consulting business) these aquaculture design formulas and principles are now being used by professionals around the globe.

In 1967 Westers was appointed a DNR regional fish culturist, requiring the family to move again, this time to Grayling. He played a major role on the team of fish biologists responsible for the introduction of salmon into Lake Michigan. Planting of coho and Chinook salmon in the Great Lakes resulted from a series of studies conducted by the DNR to improve the "sorry state" of Lakes Superior and Michigan, resulting from commercial overfishing.[5] To improve sport fishing, the DNR looked at planting salmon. Salmon, a predatory fish, also proved to be beneficial in controlling dramatic growth of non-native alewife population in Lakes Michigan and Huron after the sea lamprey (also not native to the Great Lakes) had reduced the numbers of native predatory fish.

With federal and state monies, a new $3 million hatchery was constructed on the Platte River southwest of Traverse City. The Platte River location was selected because the river allowed salmon returning from



A concrete raceway at the Harrietta Hatchery, showing a series of baffles. Image courtesy of the Westers family.

Lake Michigan for spawning runs to come right to the hatchery. Salmon from the hatchery were also planted in a number of other streams and rivers in the Great Lakes watershed. Coho salmon eggs were obtained from the Pacific Northwest. About 8 percent of the first million fish planted survived to return to the streams in which they had been placed, meeting the desired goals of the Fisheries Division; a survival rate generally considered to be very high.[6] In Lake Michigan, coho, feeding mostly on alewives, grew from one ounce to ten pounds in seventeen months.

In 1973 Westers was promoted to technical manager of hatchery operations of the Fisheries Division of DNR. He ultimately moved his family to Rives Junction, a town about twenty-five miles south of Lansing. In 1984 he was appointed the DNR's chief of hatchery operations (now known as fish production manager), a position he held until he retired from the DNR in 1992.

In 1979 he wrote "Principles of Intensive Fish Culture: A Manual for Michigan's State Fish Hatcheries," a 105-page document outlining the goals and production theories which became the operational guide to the management of the state's several hatcheries. For example, Michigan hatcheries chose to use groundwater sources wherever practical. This permitted specific pathogen-free rearing, stable water temperatures, and consistent water chemistry. All of these factors are important for reducing mortality rates. However, most groundwater sources are high in nitrogen gas and low in dissolved oxygen levels, which is not well-suited to fish production. To compensate for this, large hatcheries used large amounts of groundwater. Standard aeration techniques at the time could add oxygen to the water, but were not very efficient at removing nitrogen.[7] Through testing Westers and his colleagues discovered that even very low levels of nitrogen gas in the water could have harmful effects on the production of small fish species. Consequently, he developed the concept and worked with bio-engineers who designed a system to inject pure oxygen into the raceways thereby enriching the water. This concept became known as the Michigan Column and is now used throughout the world.[8]

Westers's contributions to the field of aquaculture are considerable. It is because of his contributions to the science that the National Fish Culture Hall of Fame located in a replica 1899 Ice House at the D. C. Booth Historic National Fish Hatchery, "one of the first fish hatcheries in the United States."[9] In 1988 Westers was inducted into the Hall of Fame; the sixteenth person so honored and the first to be honored while still living. The following is from the citation presented to him.

Harmannus "Harry" Westers started his fish culture career in 1958 after his immigration from the Netherlands to the USA in 1955. He has become one of the nation's leaders in the development and transformation of fish culture from an art into a science. His unique ideas and concepts helped develop many useful formulas necessary to the modern hatchery world. Among them are formulas to determine hatchery production, including oxygen consumption and ammonia production rates. Harry Westers also developed hatchery design concept formulas for flow rates, rearing densities, loading capacities, aeration and degassing columns. He has refined the concept of baffles in flow-through rearing units as a means to manage solid waste. In addition, he developed formulas for fish feeding levels based on metabolic rates and temperature unit (TU) growth rates. Harry Westers has been a staunch leader in encouraging fisheries personnel to take a scientific approach. Many fish culturists related Harry Westers to bioengineering and he is known worldwide for his hatchery expertise. He is active in professional fisheries organizations and is a past president of the Fish Culture Section.[10]

Retirement

Westers retired from the DNR in April of 1992 after a 34-year career. Shortly afterward he established his own consulting firm, Aquaculture Bioengineering Corporation. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA), state governments, the Pequot Hatchery at the Pequot Indian Reservation in Connecticut, and many private engineering firms hired him for his expertise in fish hatchery design. He presented numerous papers documenting his research findings and suggesting cutting-edge technologies for improving aquaculture in the United States and Europe.

In 1996 Christopher Weeks joined this consulting business. Weeks had a background in engineering, and Westers mentored him in aquaculture. Weeks continued his education at Michigan State University, earning a doctorate in Fisheries and Wildlife in 2007, and is currently on staff at the USDA-sponsored North Central Aquaculture Center as a liaison specialist for the twelve states that comprise the region. Weeks says of his mentor, "I have never met an individual that was so universally liked and so widely admired as a professional. He was held in such high regard by his colleagues in his chosen profession."[11]

His concern for the environment and his love for the out-of-doors increased each year. He urged his fellow professionals to be sensitive to the need for aquaculture waste reduction, predicting that the continued and rapid expansion of aquaculture



Harry and Jolie (center back) with their ten children in 1996. Image courtesy of the Westers family.

in the United States would heighten the need for the application of scientific feeding and waste management principles. In a presentation at Aquaculture Expo VIII in June 1995 at Washington, DC, he noted the positive experiences of Scandinavian countries which use environmentally friendly aquaculture practices that reduce feed waste and increase digestibility of diet ingredients. Through his research he documented feed and waste relationship and developed formulas for improving feeding strategies and thereby reducing wastes.[12]

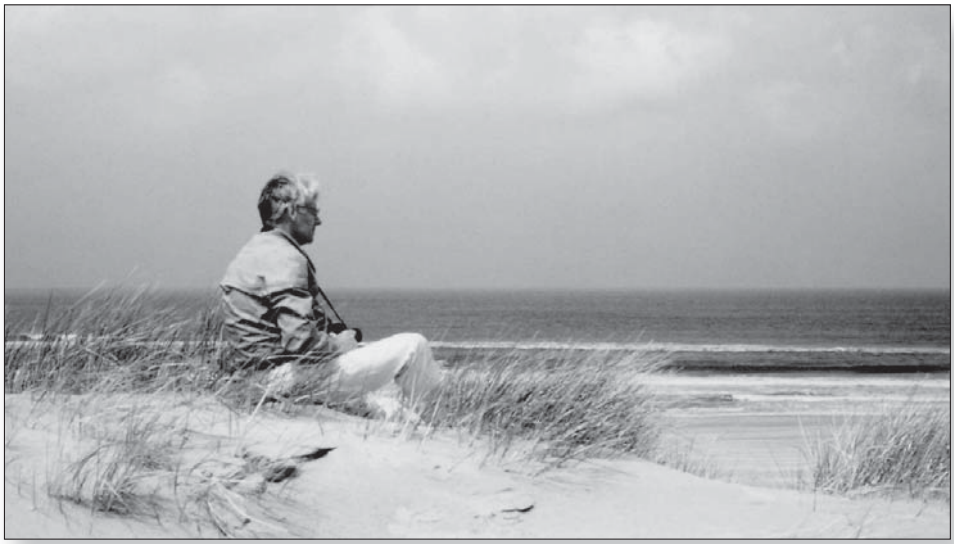
Family

The Westers family spent summer vacations at their former home, the old clapboard house west of Manistique. The children spent many hours in a tree house at the edge of the woods bordering a meadow, and at dusk everyone played hide and seek in the yard. When the family moved to Grayling in 1967, Westers built their home, located on a lot just a block away from the fish hatchery. This project took more than a year to complete, but his energy seemed to be endless. When a promotion in 1973 meant a move to Lansing, he purchased ten acres of farm land in Rives Junction, between Lansing and Jackson. He planned for a place where his children and grandchildren would be able to explore the wonders of nature. While the rest of the family remained in Grayling, he moved into a small trailer on the property and for a second time built a house. The family moved into the partially finished house in 1974.

On 29 December 1981 Jolie delivered twin boys, a significant event in the life of any family, but particularly for the Westers family, given the age of the parents, for which they received attention in local newspapers and national television. The following from the *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, the local newspaper, explains the reason:

> After her eighth child had outgrown his baby clothes, Jolie Westers put them in a box for the taking. Her married children quickly grabbed them up for the five grandchildren that came along. Now Mrs. Westers is hoping to trade back. At age 50, she delivered twin boys on Tuesday. . . . They are the 9th and 10th children of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Westers of Rives Junction. The Westers' other children range in age from 25 to 9.[13]

Each spring Harry planted a very large vegetable garden—his avocation. On warm summer evenings he could be found weeding, often wearing his Dutch wooden shoes. He later purchased several additional adjoining acres and developed a large pond into which he introduced fish. Several



Westers, during a visit back to the island of Terschelling in 1987. Image courtesy of the Westers family.

of the children purchased or built homes in the area; and the grandchildren spent many hours swimming, fishing, or boating on the large pond. The Westers home became a frequent site for family activities, including picnics and games.

Westers was a man of deep and genuine faith, planted and nurtured in him by the Dutch Reformed Church, which shaped his character and informed his values, giving him a keenly felt respect for the historic Christian faith. As he matured, his inquiring mind caused him to raise questions particularly about the relationship between science and faith. This process of inquiry did not challenge his core values. He came to reconcile his understanding of nature and the universe by accepting a less literal hermeneutical understanding of Genesis. He was not one to display emotion or to engage in argumentation. Rather, he studied theology and philosophy to determine the deeper meaning of God's truth as revealed in Scripture and in nature.

During the last years of his retirement, in addition to gardening he found time to rediscover his avocation of painting. He painted well over a hundred pictures which he gave as gifts to many of his family members and close friends.

His life's journey that began on the beautiful and distant island of Terschelling ended on 28 October 2008, in the beautiful countryside near Rives Junction, the result of cancer. During his life he published more than thirty professional papers contributing to the field of aquaculture. He was a frequent presenter at national and international conferences. At the time of his death, he was in the process of co-writing with Weeks a comprehensive textbook titled "Principles of Intensive Fish Culture."

Endnotes

1. The authors express appreciation to the Westers family members and to Dr. Christopher Weeks for their cooperation and assistance in this project.
2. Information on the family's early history comes from an interview with Reolie Westers Strieper.
3. H. Westers, "Best Management Practices for Raceway Culture Systems," *Proceedings: Aquaculture Affluents,* sponsored by North Central Regional Aquaculture Center, USDA, Ames, Iowa, 9 October 2003, 84.
4. Ibid.
5. Harry Westers and Thomas M. Stauffer, "A History of Fish Culture in Michigan," *Michigan Fisheries: Centennial Report 1873-1973* (Lansing, MI: Department of Natural Resources Publication, 1974) 123.
6. Ibid,123-124
7. Harry Westers, "The Use of Pure Oxygen to Remove Nitrogen Gas and Oxygenate Fish Culture Rearing Water," in N. De Pauw, E. Jaspers, H. Ackefors, N. Wilkens, eds., *Aquaculture: A Biotechnology in Progress* (Breda, Belgium: European Aquaculture Society, 1989).
8. Harold Gazan interview with Dr. Christopher Weeks, 26 January 2011; also see: H. Westers, V. Bennett, and J. Copeland, "Michigan's Experience with Supplemental Oxygen in Salmonid Rearing," 1987, or H. Westers, G. Boersen, and V. Bennett, "Design and Operation of Sealed Columns to Remove Nitrogen and Add Oxygen," in *Proceedings of the Fisheries Bioengineering Symposium, American Fisheries Symposium Series*, Number 8."
9. See *www.fishculturesection.org/Hall_of_fame* visited 26 January 2011.
10. Ibid.
11. Weeks interview.
12. Harry Westers, "Feed and Feeding Strategies to Reduce Aquaculture Waste." *Aquacultural Engineering and Waste Management: Proceedings from the Aquaculture Expo VIII*, 24-28 June 1995, Washington, DC, published by the Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service, Ithaca, NY, 1996, 365-366.
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Brother Ploeg: A Searching Saint or a Burr under the Saddle?

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

The Dutch Years

What a spiritual high it must have been for forty-year-old Benjamin H. Ploeg to meet and to shake hands with those noted fellow secessionists gathered in one room for the very first synod of the Christian Seceder Church that early March day of 1836 in Amsterdam.[1] Here he sat, an ordinary grocer and shoemaker, at the same table with such prominent people as Rev. Hendrik P. Scholte, Rev. Hendrik de Cock, Rev. George F. Gezelle Meerburg, and other leading Seceder elders from various provinces in the Netherlands.[2] Shortly after the meeting had begun, two more notables arrived to take their seats—Rev. Anthony Brummelkamp from Gelderland, and Rev. Simon van Velzen from Friesland. And still later candidate Albertus C. Van Raalte arrived to be examined and approved to serve as an ordained minister. Less than two decades later Ploeg and Van Raalte would differ on church matters, but for now there was fraternal goodwill all around.

In September 1837 Ploeg and the church leaders—de Cock, Scholte, Brummelkamp, van Velzen, Van Raalte, and Meerburg—gathered again as a synod. There were others at this synod as well—F. A. Kok, the noted teacher, and Elder Derk Drukker, whose son and grandson would become ministers in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC), and Cornelius Vander Meulen and Jannes Vande Luyster, both elders from the province of Zeeland. As a delegate to the 1840 Synod, Ploeg met Gijsbertus Haan from Hilversum.



Benjamin Ploeg was a member of the Reformed Church in Klundert, the Netherlands, when he joined the religious secession that began in 1834. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

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Rev. Anthony Brummelkamp, 1811-1888, one of the ministers in the seceding churches and later professor of their theological school (now Theological University of the Reformed Churches) in Kampen. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College

The province of Noord Brabant was not represented at the 1843 and 1846 synods, but in 1849 and 1851 Ploeg was again a synodical delegate. At the 1851 assembly he met Revs. Koene Van Den Bosch, Willem Frieling, and Douwe Vander Werp, all men he would meet again, and sometimes clash with, in the new world.

It is fair to say then that Ploeg knew the Christian Seceder Church, its leaders, its decisions, and its struggles from the very first. He was also well versed in its theology; he subscribed to *De Reformatie*, the organ of the newly formed denomination, the *Handwijzer,* and *De Vereeniging*.[3] He owned all of Hendrik Scholte's publications and could readily quote the revered Reformed authors of old. In short, Brother Ploeg was well acquainted, well versed, and well read. When in 1852 Helenius de Cock, son of the late Rev. Hendrik de Cock, intending to write a biography of his father, placed an advertisement in *De Stem* inviting people to share with him their recollections about the early days of the Secession, Ploeg responded with two letters totaling nearly 6,500 words.[4] In them he described in detail the shortcomings of the Dutch Reformed Church and its hierarchy. He also related his own mistreatment for leading the Secession movement in the province of Noord Brabant.

But it wasn't just the Dutch Reformed Church, or the civil authorities that were the windmills at which he tilted. In succeeding years his passion for doctrinal purity would cause him to clash again and again with church authorities. Ploeg's name comes up so frequently in the minutes of the churches he attended and served as office bearer that it is worth taking a closer look at this man.

Background

Born early in 1794 in Vught, Noord Brabant, the son of Hendrik Ploeg, a shoemaker, and Johanna Boon, a midwife, Benjamin was baptized on 23 February 1794 in the Kruiskerk in 's-Hertogenbosch. During his childhood the family moved to Klundert, Noord Brabant, where he married Huijbertje Littooij on 22 July 1820. Officially the Ploegs belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church but were also members of a conventicle that had formed in Klundert in the early 1800s.[5] By 1835 Benjamin and Huijbertje had six children.[6] It was the baptism of their last child born 31 October 1835 that especially gave Ploeg cause to reflect. Like so many at the time, he wondered if he could sincerely answer the question in the baptismal form, "Do you believe that the true doctrines of the Old and New Testaments are preached in this church?" Ploeg believed he could not answer this question in the affirmative and decided to withdraw his membership from the Dutch Reformed Church. On 28 November 1835 he formulated a letter of resignation which he called an "Act of Secession." It was signed by him and eleven others. He personally handed this letter to a council member of his church and assumed that now he was no longer a member of said church. This action had severe repercussions. In a letter to the Minister of Worship, Jacobus D. Janssen, dated 30 November 1835, Rev. A. T. Beausar, minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in Klundert, reports, "Yesterday morning after church in the council room, we were handed a letter which was said to be from Benjamin H. Ploeg. I immediately realized it might contain a statement of separation from the Reformed Church, and did not want to accept the letter. Still, two members of the council, elders, stated that we had to open the letter and deal with it. I left the meeting, but after the afternoon service another elder told me what was in the letter; it was as I suspected, they had separated themselves from our church." The minister then asked for advice on how to deal with these people, and to keep the letter in the strictest confidence.

Secession in Klundert

Two months later, on 31 December 1835 at Ploeg's invitation, Rev. Gezelle Meerburg came to Klundert to organize the Seceders formally into a congregation, baptize little Benjamin, Jr., and install Ploeg as elder. Since Ploeg had allowed the meetings to be held on his property, he could expect to be fined.[7] But his run-in with the law arose over an entirely different issue. In 1836 the Dutch Reformed Church in Klundert assessed its members 2.50 guilders each for repairs. Ploeg refused to pay stating that, since he had resigned his membership the previous November, he was no longer a member of the church. In his letter to Helenius de Cock, Ploeg wrote that the minister and council stated to have no knowledge of his "letter of secession," and since he had no witnesses when he delivered it to a council member, he could not back up his claim of having resigned.

The matter went to the civil courts, which ordered Ploeg to pay. Ploeg refused. On 5 October the bailiff came, inventoried all of Ploeg's household and store goods and held a public auction on 15 October. It is clear that Ploeg, because of his leading role in the Secession movement, was framed. Rev. A. T. Beausar's letter to Janssen, acknowledging the existence of Ploeg's letter, was not made public.[8] There were at least six council members plus the minister who knew of the existence of the letter; yet none came to his defense.

Thus, when Ploeg attended the various Seceder synods he could testify that he too had suffered for the sake of Christ. And Ploeg remained undaunted. He converted an empty building he owned next to his house on Oostervoor Street to accommodate Seceder worship services. On 10 November 1839, from early morning to late evening, Gezelle Meerburg held services in Ploeg's building.[9]

In spite of Ploeg's courage, the authorities, hoping to deter people from joining Ploeg's group by prosecuting him, succeeded. Many in Klundert who might otherwise have joined the movement decided the price was too high. The growth in membership Ploeg had hoped and prayed for did not materialize.

Emigration

Ploeg's disappointment in the growth of "the truth" in Klundert, as well as his belief that God's wrath would be poured out over the Netherlands, may have been the impetus which drove the 61-year-old shoemaker to emigrate to the United States in 1855. His involvement with the Seceders in Klundert had cost him many customers, and his finances by 1855 were tenuous at best. His daughter and her husband had emigrated in 1854 and settled in West Michigan. In January 1855, four months before his departure, Ploeg sold his home for 600 guilders, enough for travel expenses and start-up costs in Holland, Michigan, where Ploeg continued his shoemaker trade.[10]



B. H. PLOEG,

MAAKT en repareert Laarzen, Schoenen, -Muilen enz., tegen eenen zeer billijken prijs. Hij belooft deugdelijk werk en verzoekt de Klandizie zijner Medeburgers. Werkplaats, tegenover Mr. POLSMA.

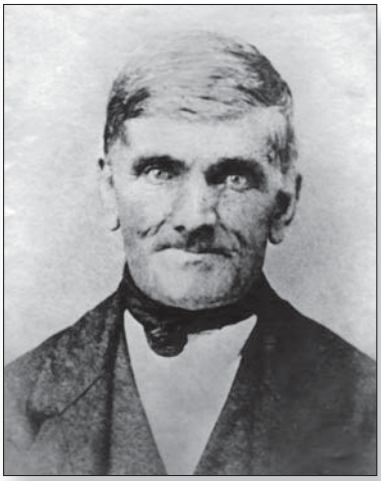
Advertisement from De Hollander *(Holland, Michigan), 23 June 1858. Translation of the text reads, "B. H. Ploeg, makes and repairs boots, shoes, slippers, etc., at a very reasonable price. He promises reliable work and seeks his fellow citizens as customers. Workshop across from Mr. Polsma."*

In the RCA

Once in America, Ploeg and Huibertje and three adult children joined Pillar Church, where A.C. Van Raalte was the pastor. The following January, only six months after his arrival, he was nominated for the office of elder. Apparently some who had known Ploeg in Klundert recalled his character and voiced their objections.[11] Was his erstwhile stalwartness perhaps laced with stubbornness? In his letter to de Cock, Ploeg admitted that most people considered him stubborn. Nevertheless, in Pillar Church these failings were put aside (perhaps due to his personal relationship with Van Raalte) and Ploeg was elected elder. Immediately upon his election he was chosen as delegate to the April 1856 Holland Classis meeting. There he was reunited with Hendrik Klijn, Cornelis Vander Meulen, Jannes Vande Luyster, and met new brothers in the faith. Perhaps because of these people, whom Ploeg had known and trusted before coming to America, and perhaps because his compatriots from Klundert were fully engaged with the Reformed Church in America



Ploeg was a member of the oldest Reformed congregation in Holland, Michigan, which built this Greek revival edifice in 1856. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.



Gijsbert Haan, 1801-1874, a contemporary of Ploeg, was also a lay leader in the Secession before he immigrated to the United States. Like Ploeg, he joined the Reformed Church in America, then the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in 1857 and, like Ploeg, later left the CRC. Image Courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

(RCA), he did not join the Secession faction at that time even though, at that particular classis meeting, Gijsbertus Haan made accusations against the RCA.[12] At the August 1856 classis meeting Ploeg, only one year in this country, was elected to represent Holland Classis at the Particular Synod for the West in Chicago. To be elected delegate after only one year in America indicates his ability to impress others with his knowledge and leadership qualities. However, this honor brought him great frustration. Several years later, in an article in *De Hollander,* he wrote, "Not knowing English, I sat there as a deaf mute, only able to look around myself."[13] This experience convinced him that the RCA had conformed to American ways by, among other things, not retaining the Dutch language.[14] He didn't explain why he expected that the RCA, English speaking since the 1770s, save for a few ministers, would conduct church matters in Dutch.

In April 1857 four churches split from the RCA, forming the CRC.[15] Ploeg had no part in this secession. His beloved wife Huibertje passed away in November 1857, and perhaps he had been too busy caring for her. Until the fall of 1859, he continued to serve as elder at Pillar Church.

However, fissures begin to appear in his relationship with Pillar Church. At the September 1859 council meeting Ploeg, stating he was not well, asked to be considered a *rustend* or retired elder. This request was not granted. In one of his later articles in *De Hollander* Ploeg wrote that he considered the two-year term for elder unbiblical—once an elder always an elder; if others are elected, you then became a *rustend* or retired elder as opposed to an active elder.[16] One other factor that may also have influenced Ploeg's adversarial attitude toward the RCA was its refusal to accept his son's application for membership. On 21 January 1859, 24-year-old Benjamin, Jr., a tailor, came to the council of the Pillar Church to make profession of faith. Fortunately for both father and son, the elder Ploeg was not in attendance at this meeting. After questioning him, young Benjamin was told that he needed to prepare himself better and return sometime in the future. The council made a notation in the minutes that there was so much uncertainty and confusion in his thinking that the council did not have the freedom to admit him as a member.[17] It must have been a disappointment and almost an embarrassment for a father who was so well read and versed to have his son rejected for lacking knowledge of the Reformed faith.[18]

When his term as elder expired at Pillar a dramatic shift took place in Ploeg's demeanor. Early in 1860, the once tenacious warrior for the truth seemed shaken awake to contend against doctrinal errors. Instead of worshiping at Pillar, he began meeting with a group of CRC people in the city. This group included men like Abraham Krabshuis and Johannes Hellenthal, vocal critics of Van Raalte and "errors" in the RCA.

By April 1860, Ploeg, using his former relationship with the Seceder leaders in the Netherlands, tried to affect a union between the CRC and the Seceder Church in the Netherlands. In a letter dated 23 April 1860 Rev. K. Van Den Bosch wrote:

> More and more eyes are opened. Elder B. H. Ploeg, known by many in the Netherlands, has declined the office of elder in the congregation of [Pillar] Holland and he openly protests among the people, and in the *De Hollander.* . . . Elder B. H. Ploeg feels the need to present our need to the [Dutch] Synod again, that the way may be opened to obtain an orthodox minister in the seceded congregation of Graafschap. Many in [the city of] Holland are separating themselves into a fellowship, and look to the congregation of Graafschap with the hope that one day a permanent minister may be found.[19]

From April to November 1860 *De Hollander* printed nearly a dozen articles by Ploeg in which he set out to answer his critics and the failings of the RCA. Hymns and Sabbath school booklets were especially singled out as being unscriptural. This did not go unnoticed by the Pillar Church council. Their minutes of the 14 December 1860 meeting relate a visit by a committee to Brother Ploeg regarding his negligence in attending worship services. Ploeg declared to have issues with the congregation, the council, and the pastor; and that he could no longer worship in the church. When the committee tried to counter the charges, an irate Ploeg stated that he wanted nothing more to do with the church.

In the CRC

The small group of dissidents living

in the city of Holland belonged to the Graafschap congregation that had left the RCA. The walk to Graafschap, several miles south of the city, each Sunday was too far, so Graafschap supported this group by having their own elders lead their worship services. By accepting these people as members (including Ploeg), Graafschap apparently had not complied with the compulsory membership rites, which required that those wishing to join had to undergo a rigorous examination, have their names announced to the congregation on three consecutive Sundays, and then, if there were no objections against them, formally confirm them in a public worship service.[20] This oversight came to the attention of the CRC Classical Assembly of 5 April 1861 (Art. 14), when Rev. Koene Van Den Bosch accused the church council of Graafschap of having accepted the members from "the city of Holland" unlawfully.[21] He claimed that therefore he could not acknowledge them as full members nor baptize their children. It was decided that Rev. Van Den Bosch and council members of Graafschap should go to Holland and examine these people and, after having found them acceptable, Rev. Van Den Bosch would install them and baptize their children.

What should have been a simple formality became a protracted battle of wills between Van Den Bosch and Ploeg, when the latter, in a heated argument, refused to make the correct confession. At the following Graafschap council meeting on 5 November 1861, Van Den Bosch brought a complaint against brother B. H. Ploeg "of the city" (Holland), saying that Ploeg should not be allowed to partake of communion since he had refused to be confirmed formally as a member of Graafschap according to the Church Order; further, that Ploeg had stated that the [church] fathers had erred in



Koene Van Den Bosch, 1818-1897, a Seceder minster from the Netherlands, was the first minister in the Christian Reformed Church, serving congregations in Noordeloos, Zeeland, Grand Haven (all in Michigan), and Chicago. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

1618-1619 [Synod of Dordt] by allowing feast days and, even worse, had allowed civil authorities to influence the church.[22] This was discussed at length and it was decided to visit Ploeg again. The Graafschap council minutes of 14 December 1861 note that, "Brother Ploeg does not want to give offense and will voluntarily abstain from communion." Ploeg's refusal to be confirmed was discussed again at the 27 January 1862 meeting, noting that Ploeg took issue with Articles 27 (term of office for elders and deacons), 37 (election of council members), and 67 (feast days) of the Church Order of Dordt. Several council members voted to keep Ploeg as a member, allowing him some leeway in his views, but the majority of members voted that Ploeg should accept the entire church order, which he refused to do.[23] It was therefore decided that Ploeg could not be considered a member of Graafschap. This did not sit well with Ploeg, and he took his case to the classical assembly held in Graafschap on 4 February 1863. His arguments were not accepted and he was publicly instructed to be quiet because, "Brother Ploeg is too vehement in his speaking, and because he uses improper words" (Art. 4). Apparently frustrated, he decided to discontinue worshiping at Graafschap. At their 16 October 1863 meeting, the Graafschap council censured Ploeg for neglecting worship services. This odd situation of censuring a non-member would bring problems later.

In the Presbyterian Church

With the RCA and the CRC found wanting, it seemed that true doctrine might be found in the bosom of the Old School (OS) Presbyterian Church.[24] An OS Presbyterian congregation consisting of all Dutch emigrants had been organized in Zeeland, Michigan, in March 1863.[25] Perhaps tired of wrangling with Van Den Bosch and the Graafschap council, Ploeg began attending this fellowship. He held off, however, becoming a member of the Presbyterians, hoping that Rev. Douwe J. Vander Werp, who was expected in Graafschap that fall, would adjudicate the Graafschap membership matter in his favor. When Vander Werp arrived in Graafschap in October 1864, one of the first tasks he set for himself was to visit those Graafschap members who had neglected worship services. He and an elder visited Ploeg in November and reported on their visits at the Graafschap council meeting of 9 December 1864. However, as Ploeg stated later, Vander Werp did not want to become drawn into his case and therefore, Ploeg formally joined the OS Presbyterians on 31 December 1864.[26] His talents were recognized and he was immediately elected as elder with 27 out of 33 votes. At the election for elders two years later Ploeg asked not be re-nominated for physical reasons. To attend church

and council meetings, Ploeg, aged 72, had to travel from Holland to Zeeland which may have become too burdensome for him. Nevertheless, when a year later, in January 1867, he was elected clerk he accepted the position. In the summer of 1867 an internal dispute between the then pastor, Rev. John Renskers, the council, and the congregation deteriorated to such a level that the congregation voted to dismiss the entire council. This action ended Ploeg's association with the OS Presbyterians.[27]

Back to the CRC

Where to now? Ploeg returned to the Seceders meeting in Holland and in 1868 requested membership at Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church, which had been organized in 1865. Since Abraham Krabshuis, another CRC-OS Presbyterian wanderer, had successfully transferred his membership from the Presbyterian Church to Central Avenue, Ploeg may have thought that he should have no problem being accepted. But, unlike Krabshuis, Ploeg had been under discipline when he left Graafschap. The Central Avenue council was ready to accept Ploeg's membership from the OS Presbyterian church, but others were not. At the council meeting of 17 August 1868 (Art. 1) three members objected to the manner in which his membership was received by transfer from the Presbyterians without having to make a reaffirmation of faith. They alleged that while a member of Graafschap Ploeg joined the Presbyterian Church without approval and demanded Ploeg confess these sins, after which he could be admitted properly. Ploeg was requested to appear at the following council meeting where he was confronted with his sins, which were:

a) that he had not been received into the Graafschap congregation in conformity with Classical decisions,[28]

b) that he had unlawfully resigned his membership in Graafschap and had joined the Presbyterian Church, and

c) that he was alleged to have said that church leaders acted godlessly with respect to feast days.

Ploeg answered as follows:

a) Concerning being received unlawfully—he acknowledged this but said that neither he nor the pastor nor the council, except for one member, were acquainted with the pertinent classical decision when he was received as a member.[29]

b) Ploeg acknowledged that it would have been better if this had not happened, but that he was not willing to confess to any sin in this matter.

c) He acknowledged to have made the statement when discussing feast days with Rev. Van Den Bosch years prior and taking the position taken by the 1574 Synod of Dordrecht which called for the elimination of all feast days in reaction to the Roman Catholic Church's celebration of multiple saints' days. This synod had established that Sunday was the only day to be observed as holy according to Scripture; the 1619 Synod of Dordt, had given in to public opinion and allowed for such feast days, such as New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. Ploeg admitted that he had then told Van Den Bosch that the church fathers of 1619 had surrendered to popular demand in this case. He added that perhaps he should have used a milder tone, but that he could not, nor would ever make a confession that these comments constituted a sin.

In response the Central Avenue council ruled as follows:

a) It could acquiesce on this point a (probably because Graafschap was as much at fault as Ploeg).

b) Ploeg acknowledged his error in the matter.

c) That the conversation had happened six or seven years previous and had been settled in a classical reconciliation.

At its 8 September 1868 meeting, the council decided that it would accept Ploeg as a member if he would acknowledge before the council that he had been wrong in resigning his membership in the Graafschap congregation and joining the Presbyterian Church, and that the expression that "our fathers had dealt godlessly in the matter of feast days" had been too harsh. After having done so, the pastor would announce to the congregation that the objections had been resolved and Ploeg was accepted as a member. At first Ploeg could not agree to this, but after serious admonition he consented by letter on 12 September; however, the next morning he retracted this via a letter that also stated, "they did not need to worry about him anymore; that he was finished with them." This message was made known to the congregation on Sunday the 13th, and it was announced that Ploeg was considered not to be a member of the congregation.

While his membership eligibility was being discussed and shortly thereafter, he wrote letters to *De Wachter*, the Dutch-language periodical of the CRC founded in 1868 with Vander Werp as editor. In lengthy articles in the 18 August, 9 October, and 18 December 1868 issues, Ploeg explained his ideas on the true Reformed faith, the covenant, and baptism. In the 7 May 1869 issue he set forth his views on conversion. In this way he still managed to have a voice in the CRC even though he was

no longer an officer, or a member, in any congregation.

Back to Basics

Ploeg did not go back to the RCA—his name is not listed in their membership records. Nor did he go back to Graafschap CRC. Other congregations would have been too far for him to travel. It seems most likely that Ploeg did in his old age what he had done in his youth and reverted to worshiping in a conventicle. In the 14 September 1870 Central Avenue council minutes, the minister and an elder were appointed to go to Ploeg's home to ask him to reconsider becoming a member. This visit did not take place until June 1871; at that time Ploeg told the brothers that he no longer wished to have any dealings with Central Avenue. At eighty years old the fight had gone out of him. Ploeg died on 22 December 1874 and was buried in Pilgrim Home Cemetery on Christmas Eve of that year. But he, despising feast days, would not have considered that significant. Even so, he might have been pleased with the notice in *De Hollander* of 30 December 1874 in which his reputation as community leader was evidenced by the fact that many attended his funeral as a final tribute "to this very well-known and esteemed old gentleman."[30]

Endnotes

1. The Seceders were those who had, under the leadership of Rev. Hendrik de Cock, formally left the Dutch Reformed Church in 1834 to form their own denomination, the Christian Seceder Church.

2. One of those elders, Hendrik G. Klijn from Utrecht, would become a minister and in Michigan play his part in a new secession drama.

3. *De Reformatie* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1837), *De Handwijzer* (Amsterdam: D. Allart, 1850); *De Vereeniging* (nd).

4. *De Stem* ('s-Gravenhage: H. Joffers, ed. 1851-1864); Letters of Benjamin H. Ploeg to Helenius de Cock, dated 6 and 30 April 1852, Familiearchief de Cock, inv. no. 56, Gemeente Archief, Kampen, the Netherlands.

5. F. L. Bos, *Archiefstukken betreffende de Afscheiding van 1834* (Kampen, Kok, 1942), v 3, 122. By 1828 this conventicle's growth and enthusiasm came to the attention of the authorities when on 5 February 1828 members signed a request to the King to allow them to continue to meet. Ploeg was one of the signers.

6. Johanna (1821-1857) married Cornelis de Frel, they emigrated in 1854; Sijke (1822-1861) emigrated in 1855, she married Gerrit Bax in Holland, Michigan; Hendrik (1825-1845); Hendrika (1827-1896) emigrated in 1855, she married Frederick Kampferbeek in Holland, Michigan; Johannes (1830-1845); Benjamin H. Jr. (1835) emigrated in 1855. Family archive of Gerrit W. Sheeres, a collateral relative of Ploeg.

7. In an effort to prevent people from leaving the Dutch Reformed Church, the government reactivated an old law on the books from the time of the French occupation that no more than twenty people could meet together at any one time. Anyone allowing such a meeting on their property was subject to substantial fines and soldiers being quartered in their homes.

8. F. L. Bos, *Archiefstukken,* v 3, 8-9.

9. Since only twenty people were allowed to meet at one time, services were scheduled throughout the day to avoid fines.

10. Henri A.V. M. Van Stekelenburg, *Landverhuizing als regionaal verschijnsel: Van Noord-Brabant naar Noord-Amerika 1820-1880* (Tilburg: Stichting Zuidelijk Historisch Contact, 1881), 166. In the 19 May and 23 June 1858 issues of *De Hollander* he placed the following ad: "B. H. Ploeg makes and repairs boots, shoes, slippers, etc. for a very reasonable price. He promises reliable work and invites his fellow citizens to become his customers. *De Hollander,* December 1850–December 1860, Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

11. Minutes of Pillar Church, January 1856, Art. 8, Pillar Church Archives, Holland, Michigan.

12. *Classis Holland Minutes 1848-1858* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Printing Co. 1943), 204.

13. *De Hollander*, 13 June 1860. Archives, Calvin College.

14. Ibid.

15. Although it was first called the True Dutch Reformed Church, for simplification, I will refer to it as the CRC.

16. *De Hollander*, 21 March 1860, Archives, Calvin College.

17. Council minutes of Pillar Church, 21 January 1859, Art. 3.

18. Unfortunately, young Benjamin Ploeg disappears from all records.

19. Letter written to the Seceder Synod meeting at Hoogeveen, Drenthe, and signed by Van Den Bosch, Jan Rabbers, and Abraham Krabshuis. The first request for union by letter written in April 1857 was declined. This second plea for union was also declined. Both letters in

Rijksarchief in Utrecht, Collection GKN Generale Synoden, inv. no. 55.

20. Assembly minutes of 3 February 1858, Article 10; Assembly minutes of 2 February 1859, Articles 13 and 14; Assembly minutes of 5 June 1860, Article 5.

21. Classical Assembly minutes of 3 February 1858, Article 10; Classical Assembly minutes of 2 February 1859, Articles 13 and 14; Classical Assembly minutes of 5 June 1860, Article 5. When the minutes refer to the "city of Holland" or to "those in the city" it is referring to this group. These people, including Ploeg, became in fact members of Graafschap and as such were subject to Graafschap's discipline.

22. The Synod of Dordrecht held in 1574 called for the elimination of all feast days in reaction to the Roman Catholic Church's celebration of multiple saints' days. It established that Sunday was the only day to be observed as holy according to the Bible; the 1619 Synod of Dordt, giving way to popular opinion, allowed for additional feast days, such as New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. Ploeg supported the 1574 decision.

23. Several members of the Graafschap council, such as Johannes Van Anrooy, also objected to feast days and were sympathetic to Ploeg's situation.

24. Now also referred to as Old Style Presbyterians.

25. Adrian Van Koevering, *Legends of the Dutch* (Zeeland: Zeeland Record Co. Inc., 1960) 572, 573. An OS Presbyterian Church had been organized in Zeeland on 12 March 1863 under the supervision of Revs. Johan and Berend Vander Las; there were twenty-eight signers on the original documents of association; the total membership reached eighty. They disbanded in January 1874; many members returned to First Reformed in Zeeland, while others joined the CRC. See also Richard H. Harms, "The Other Reformed: Dutch Presbyterians in Nineteenth-Century America," *Calvin Theological Journal*, v 42, n 1 (2007): 33-49.

26. Apparently Van der Werp, who had already become embroiled in Van Den Bosch's stand-off with the Zeeland church, did not want to get involved in Van Den Bosch's conflict with Ploeg.

27. Ploeg also played a part in this dispute. In July of that year the church council records that the Zeeland CRC had asked the OS Presbyterians to unite with them. They asked for a meeting to discuss the union. Irritated that Ploeg, the clerk, had not entered this matter into the records, Rev. Renskers, the pastor, made a special notation of it; Ploeg reasoned that because he knew that the CRC people would never join the OS Presbyterians and that Rev. Renskers had no intention of joining the CRC, he had therefore left it out.

28. According to which no members of other denominations may be received without confession, except those of the Christian Seceder Church in the Netherlands.

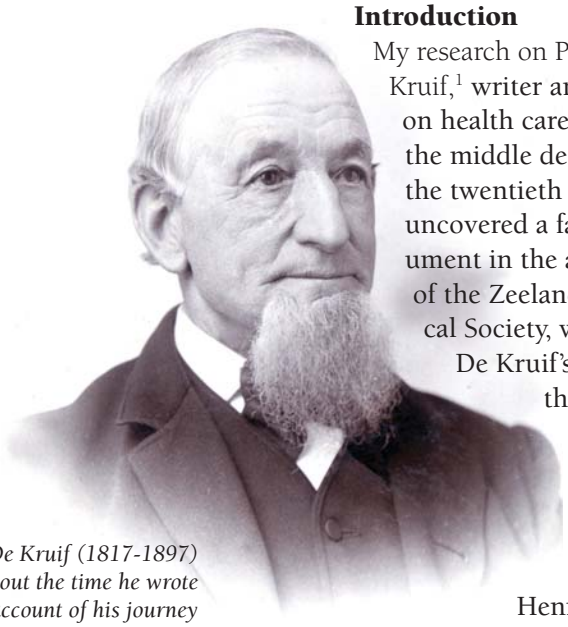
29. Ploeg was correct in this matter; by the time Central Avenue CRC was organized in 1865 their pastor and elders had not been delegates to any of the earlier classical assemblies where these rules were adopted. Only Abraham Krabshuis would have been acquainted with these rules since he attended many of these earlier sessions; however, he himself had joined the OS Presbyterians and returned to Central Avenue without any stipulation as to membership, so he may not have wanted to make an issue of this.

30. *De Hollander*, 30 December 1874; Archives, Calvin College.

"Now I will tell you children . . ."

Hendrik De Kruif's Account of His Immigration

Introduction (and some translation) by Jan Peter Verhave



Hendrik De Kruif (1817-1897) pictured about the time he wrote the longest account of his journey to Michigan for his children. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

Dr. Jan Peter Verhave lives in the Netherlands and is an honorary research fellow of the Van Raalte Institute, Hope College, Holland, Michigan, and Associate Professor, Emeritus, Radboud University Medical Center, Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Introduction

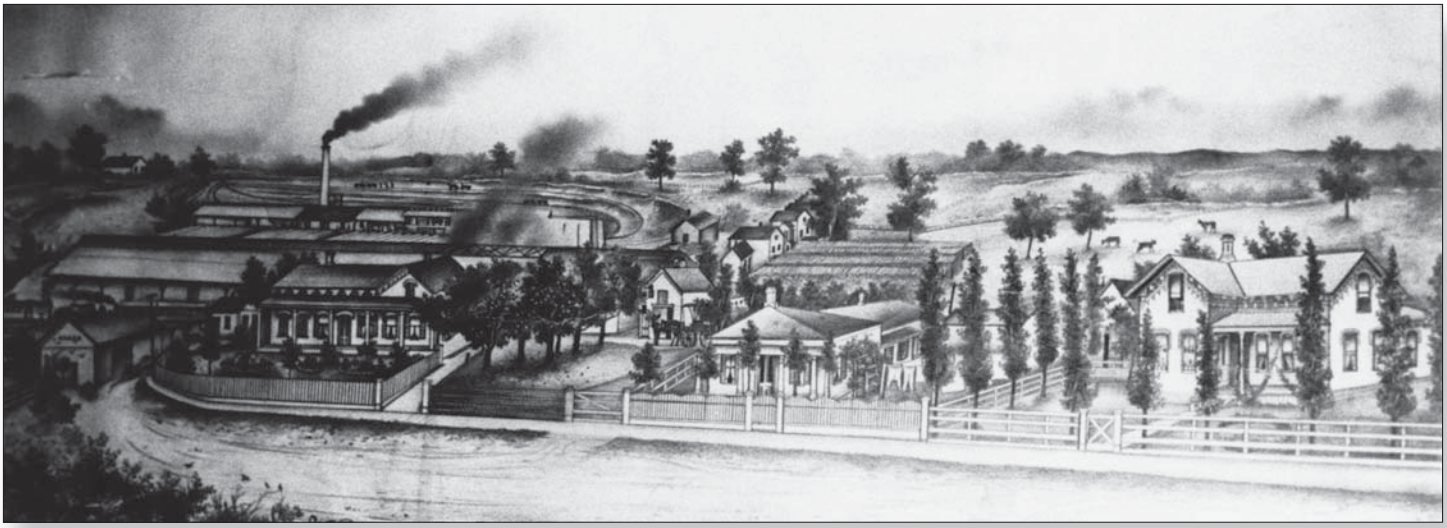
My research on Paul De Kruif,[1] writer and activist on health care during the middle decades of the twentieth century,[2] uncovered a family document in the archives of the Zeeland Historical Society, written by De Kruif's grandfather Hendrik (1817-1896) to his son, Henry Jr., and dated 1894. The elder De Kruif recounts the story of his journey across the Atlantic and through the eastern United States on the way to Michigan; he was among those in the first group of pioneers who founded Holland, under the leadership of the Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte.[3] This previously unpublished account adds another dimension to the collective memory of West Michigan Dutch immigrants.

Henry De Kruif Jr. added to his father's account by collecting historic artifacts from the early period of Zeeland's history and from the Province of Zeeland in the Netherlands, the home of his mother's (Dina Vande Luyster) family.[4] Author Paul De Kruif barely bothered writing about his grandparents, but he knew the family stories. When in Belgium with his wife Rhea in 1930, they visited the town of Tournai and Paul told Rhea that his grandfather had been born there; his "grandpa's folks were indentured, practically slaves."[5]

Indeed, Hendrik de Kruif was born 24 July 1817 in Doornik (Tournai), province of Henegouwen (Hainaut), then part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, now Belgium. His parents were Antony de Kruif, a laborer from Beesd, the Netherlands, and Frederika Doratea Heutgens, born in 's-Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands. Antony went to the southern Netherlands to look for work in 1817 and may have met Frederika there. Antony and Frederika married in Beesd on 30 May 1818, at which time they legally acknowledged Hendrik as their son.[6]

On 27 October 1843, Hendrik Jr. married Elizabeth Geerliena van Beckom in Beesd. She was from the nearby village of Deil, born 6 October 1821, the daughter of Willem van Beckom, a cobbler, and Geerke van Ringelsteijn.[7] Hendrik Jr. and Elizabeth had two sons, Geerlinus Elibertus (born 23 August 1844) and Willem (4 May 1846–20 May 1847). A few months after Willem's death, the young mother died on 28 August, at the age of twenty-seven. Typically, information for the civil registrations of the latter three events would have been provided by Hendrik, but it was given by Willem van Beckom, because his son-in-law had left for the United States and his exact whereabouts were unknown.[8]

As the following accounts reveal, Hendrik had left Deil in 1846, intend-



Hendrik De Kruif lived in and operated a successful business in Zeeland. Michigan. Pictured here is the Veneklasen Brick Works in Zeeland, one of the community's largest employers during the 1850s and 1860s, whose annual production reached 1.5 million bricks. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

ing that his family would follow the next year. He arrived at what would become Holland, Michigan, as one of the first settlers with Rev. Albertus Van Raalte. De Kruif soon mastered enough English to be employed in the store operated by Rabbers & Rekken to wait on American clients. As soon as possible, he became an American citizen in December 1852. He opened his own general store on Central Avenue in Holland, which he ran for several years before selling it.

Paul De Kruif told a reporter in 1948 that his grandfather traded with the Indians, selling flour and various staples that they needed, as well as whiskey; and once a week he walked along a trail from Zeeland to Allegan and back, some forty-four miles, with a 75- to 100-pound package on his back, all in one day. Once during the 1930s, Paul wrote, after passing Zeeland in his car, "In the early morning I drove on a new magnificent concrete road that runs right through the farm where my father was born, and where my grandfather made corn and wheat land out of a malarious jungle–yes, they had malaria there in the old days."[9]

After receiving word that his wife had died, Hendrik married Dina Vande Luyster on 5 March 1848 and built a log house in Zeeland. His new father-in-law, Jannes Vande Luyster, had founded Zeeland and sold De Kruif eighty acres of land, which he cleared and on which he began farming.[10]

Initially Hendrik was a Democrat, but from 1860 onward he actively supported the recently organized Republican Party. He was always a member of the Reformed church in which he was a deacon, served the Zeeland community as a constable (1851), and later as a "court of arbitration." Hendrik and Dina (called Naaije) had eight children—Johannes, Anthony, Dina, Henderika (died at 13), Henry, William, Peter, and Jannes.[11] Geerlinus, the surviving son from his first marriage, arrived in New York on 22 July 1855 and joined his father, stepmother, and half-brothers and -sister.[12]

In 1861 the family moved to nearby Holland where they joined the RCA's Pillar Church congregation.[13] In Holland Hendrik operated a butcher shop and tannery; some years later the family returned to farming in Zeeland Township and in 1892 Hendrik retired to the city of Zeeland. He died in Zeeland on 8 June 1896; his sudden death was attributed to neuralgia of the heart. His widow, Naaije, who was widely known and respected and an active member of the North Street Christian Reformed Church and involved in Christian charity work, died in 1898.

Two shorter undated versions of the emigration, one hand-written with a pencil by Hendrik in rather clumsy Dutch, and the other in a neat handwriting, are stored in the Joint Archives of Holland.[14] These three documents provide a detailed account of De Kruif's experience.

Account 1:

"The Sea Journey of Dr. A. C. Van Raalte, of whom the Undersigned was a Travel Companion"

24 Sept. 1846 from Rotterdam. Professor Brummelkamp and Rev. [Hendrik P.] Scholte bid us farewell in Rotterdam, on our ship [*Southerner*]. Because of his cordial speech I came to love Ds. Brummelkamp so much that I would have liked to carry him on my back to take him along to America.



Map with the villages of Beesd and Deil. De Kruif sailed from Rotterdam via Hellevoetsluis to New York City.

On 24 Sept. we sailed from Rotterdam to Hellevoetsluis[15] in good order; at Hellevoet we had a fire on the ship, which started in the stern. It burned a hole into the upper deck of the ship, but the damage was soon repaired. We waited for a week, from Saturday to Saturday, at Hellevoetsluis. Rev. Van Raalte preached there in a Christian Reformed church; there were so many people sitting and standing, so crowded that they could not have fallen down, even if they had wanted to. And it was so silent that you could hear a needle drop. That sermon comforted me so much that I faced the sea quietly.

From Hellevoetsluis across the North Sea everything was in good order. With all sails the ship had, it went with an eastern wind through the English Channel. On the ocean, I think it was the second day, the wind came up. Yes, a storm; all the hatches were closed because of the waves washing over the ship. Both crew and passengers all got seasick. Only one man by the name of Harm Kok and I remained healthy. H. Kok, with his wooden shoes, I can still see being tossed across the deck from one side to the other. But when the storm was over, we heard for the first time all that had happened, because I did not see anybody that entire time of 7 or 8 days, like H. Kok and the man at the ship's helm. The ship's cook died on land in America.

Rev. Van Raalte looked as if he was recovering from a severe illness when the storm was over. He had collapsed and was tossed from one side to the other [in his first class cabin] and injured on his head and hands. These injuries soon healed, though he was not of much use for us on the ship. But once in New York he recovered and was ready to help. We all trusted ourselves to his care. He negotiated with all offices and we got cheap travel.

I travelled with him to Buffalo, N.Y. There our poor band stayed with a minister of the Reformed church, who was recommended by Van Raalte, I think. For me he was and remained until his death a dearly beloved brother in Christ.

Account 2:

"Sketch of my Departure from the Netherlands to North America"

1. [I went] for my external existence
2. for the freedom of church and school
3. My travel, [starting] on September 21st, 1846 from home to Rotterdam; the 25th from Rotterdam to Helvoetsluis. Here there was a fire on board; we stayed there 8 days, waiting for a favorable wind; we sailed on the 4th of October.
4. at sea
5. 18 Nov. ashore in New York,
6. from New York to Albany by boat,
7. from Albany by train to Buffalo; there I stayed the winter
8. from Buffalo by boat to Detroit
9. from Detroit to Kalamazoo, by train
10. from Kalamazoo to Allegan, via wagon; there I stayed 10 weeks.
11. from Allegan to the Colony, where I arrived at Groningen 10 June
12. My encounter and work

Account 3:

"Hendrik De Kruif-Now I will tell you children . . ."[16]

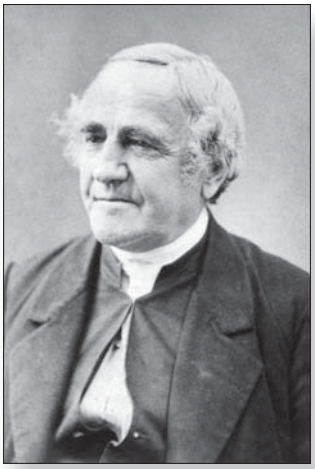
Dearly beloved children!!!

I wish to let you learn through this document my story from the time I left the Netherlands until a few years after I had been in America. In the Netherlands I was married to Elizabeth Geerliena van Beckom. God took her from my side by death in the third year of our marriage. I do not provide details about this here. I believe she died in the Lord.

The reason I went to America was because although married I was living with my father-in-law. He was a shoemaker by trade and he had an herb store [probably a shop that sold produce]. Because of religious enmity the well-to-do forbade the working class to buy from his store. I had rented land which I cultivated. But in 1844 and 1845 a potato blight came and I had planted a great many pota-

toes. Not only did the potato blight bring me trouble but also the concern over how I could struggle through to pay my bills honestly. But the Lord had plans to free me from the ties to my native land. In 1845 God sent hail and torrents of rain, so that in many places fields were covered with water or instead of crops one saw only the bare earth. There were no crops left in the area where the storm had raged. In three years I was plunged into deep poverty and things seemed so dismal to me that often I cried to the Lord in my distress. There were, however, two farmers for whom I had worked when I was young, who offered me work for the whole year, but I was afraid to accept because the wages of a day laborer in the Netherlands was a florin (one gulden 40 cents) or even less.

Under these circumstances letters came from America from people who had gone there in [18]44 and [18]45. They gave such a good account of this country that within a few weeks the report traveled through our Fatherland that the pious were planning to leave the Netherlands for America. That troubled me anew. At first I thought I must stay behind. But the Lord gave me a clear sign that He had heard my prayer. One Sunday toward evening I was walking in a meadow, in the tall grass, and where no one could see me I knelt in prayer and received assurance that I would go with His people and die with them. I could write much about experiences both internal and external, but enough. I, my wife, her parents and two sisters decided to go to America. I was to go in the autumn of 1846 and the others would follow me in the spring of '47. I told a good friend, "I too am going to America," but I didn't know how because I had no money. One day I met a man who asked me if I were going to America. I answered unconvincingly "Yes," but I said, "I don't know when." "How is that?" he said. I



Rev. Cornelius Vander Meulen (1800-1876) born in Zeeland, served Seceder congregations in Zeeland, the Netherlands. He led a group of Dutch emigrants from that province to America and founded Zeeland, Michigan. After serving the Reformed Church congregation in Zeeland, Michigan, he served congregations in Chicago and Grand Rapids. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

answered, "Because I lack the money." "If I may travel with you," [he replied] "I will loan you the necessary funds." I answered, "Of course you can travel with me, you have your own money for travel."

Now I will tell you children why he asked me that. He sometimes drank too much and I had warned him several times and once had picked him up on the road. I think he thought I wouldn't want to bother with such a person. But he [had stopped drinking and] didn't drink any alcohol until we had been in Buffalo a long time. One week after our talk we went to Rotterdam to buy our tickets. We were the last two who bought passage on the boat with Dr. Van Raalte, which pleased me very much.

Now I must return to the last days of my stay at home. Those were so difficult that I didn't know what to do. The reason was the thought of leaving my wife, my two children, father, mother, sisters, and brothers. The 21st of September 1846, between 12 and 1 in the morning, I left my dear ones. All the way from Deil, the village where I lived, I cried for five hours.

Our company consisted of three people, Grades Blom, Frederik van Esterik, and myself. I was always the last because of my tears. I hardly saw anything from the time we left home till Hellevoetsluis, for I was overcome with grief. Reverends Scholte and Brummelkamp[17] took leave of us on the ship at Rotterdam.[18] I shall never forget Reverend Brummelkamp. He was of so much comfort to me. September 25, 1846, we sailed from Rotterdam to Hellevoetsluis.[19] We arrived there on Saturday toward evening.[20]

I was a little seasick. Toward evening we were in the English Channel and saw the chalk [white] cliffs of England. That night I was on watch with another man. This was a precautionary measure to prevent collisions with other ships.

The next morning we left behind the lighthouses of England and Ireland. We had a following wind. Two days after that we realized we were on the ocean. Then a storm arose, lasting seven or eight days. The night before I was again in prayer and so deeply saddened because I missed my dear ones. But the Lord prepared me for the storm and helped me to be reconciled to my lot. During that entire storm there was only one other person besides myself who was not sick. His name was Harm Kok.[21] As a result, the captain asked me to cook for the passengers, and so I was the cook until I too became ill–at which time we had been at sea for twenty days. I was sick when we arrived at New York after forty-two days on the ocean. We landed the 12th of November 1846[22] and I was so weak I could scarcely walk.

We went from New York to Albany by boat. That night my condition began to improve; in Albany I began

to regain my appetite. We went from Albany to Buffalo by rail. In Rochester we met Hollanders who received us in a friendly manner. We stayed there one day. When we arrived in Buffalo my companion, who had loaned me the money for the trip, wanted to stay there, so I had to stay for his sake, although there were others in the Van Raalte party who would have willingly taken me along to Michigan. But I stayed with G. Blom, to whom I owed 79 florins and 79 cents in Dutch money. I paid him my debt that same winter.[23]

. . . night for about 20 cents and I paid that with wood which I carried back at night. It only cost me 80 cents a week for my board. Yes, dear children, I had to work hard and be very frugal because I expected my wife and children and I had to pay back my traveling expenses. I worked with all my might and lived in hope. In the early part of March 1847 I cut my foot with an ax and had to walk in crutches for eight weeks. Then Elder Plageman took me in at no cost until I could earn a living again. The 28th of March we took the boat from Buffalo to Detroit. But the boat became ice bound near Buffalo for two days.

On that journey we passed Rev. Van Raalte, although we did not learn that until we arrived in Detroit. He had already been here (western Michigan) in the forest. From Detroit we went by rail to Kalamazoo. Here I was asked to work as a gardener for $1 a day and board. But my friends wanted my company, so from Kalamazoo we went with ox teams to Allegan. There we found Rev. Van Raalte's family. Here I renewed my courage.

I was still walking on crutches. I want to tell you that Mr. John Kellogg had taken Rev. Van Raalte and his family into his own house.[24] When Mrs. Van Raalte asked them why they were so generous in their hospitality, they said it was because Saint Paul said that thus one might entertain angels unawares. That Scripture verse had been laid on their hearts. Mr. Kellogg had a nice garden with flowers and fruit trees. He had a gardener. I went into the garden on my crutches to see how gardening was done here and also to see the flowers and fruits. I took the tools in my hands and said to the gardener, "This is the way we do in the Old Country." Mrs. Kellogg noticed this and asked me if I wanted to work in the garden the following morning. I said I couldn't do much because of my leg. Then Mrs. Van Raalte, who was the interpreter, said they would pay me 5 shillings and board and would take care of my foot. I accepted the offer and worked ten weeks in Judge Kellogg's garden and when I left he gave me a new coat, which cost $6, as a present. Now as I mentioned before, Jan Rabbers[25] has helped me to pay my debt to G. Blom, so I was duty bound to help him when I could. Jan Rabbers hired me away from Judge Kellogg to be the interpreter for him, because Jan Rabbers was going to operate a store. He also bought cows and oxen and everything of which there was need. I even bought cats to deal with mice and squirrels that were in the tents and log houses. When I made the first trip for Rabbers and Co. (Rekken was the name of his partner) I arrived about 9 or 10 June 1847 in the colony (they called Holland, Zeeland, and environments "the colony") I was brought to Groningen (2½ miles west of Zeeland) because Jan Rabbers lived there. His house stood where the cemetery is now.

I arrived late in the afternoon and since he had no room for me he asked a man to act as my guide and I was to stay at his house. As we walked we told each other our life history; we were so engaged in conversation that we lost our way in the woods. It grew dark and I said to my companion, let's build a fire. So we got a big heap of firewood under a big beech tree and pillowed our heads in the roots of another beech tree and in this manner I spent my first night in the colony. I had a large hunting dog and tied it by a rope to my arm. I thought if wild animals came he will warn us. It was a marvelous dog and if a stranger shook hands with me I had to warn



The grave marker for Hendrik De Kruif and his wife, Dina Van De Luyster (1824-1898), in the Zeeland, Michigan, Cemetery. Image courtesy of the author.

him or the dog would have bitten him. The place where we spent that night was not far from Benjamin Van Raalte's house. I stayed with Jan Rabbers and Co. until 1848, also working on his sawmill.[26] When I left him and settled up, I had $1.28 left. With that I began my marriage on March 5, 1848, with Dina Vande Luyster, and we lived with her father and mother in the township of Zeeland, Michigan, section 19 northwest of the cemetery on the hill overlooking the swamp. There, Father and Mother Vande Luyster died. Father died March 13, 1862. He was 73. Mother died January 10, 1874, when she was 77 years and 9 months old.

Your mother and I lived right next to the First Reformed Church in the village of Zeeland. We lived there 8 years and kept a store. The Lord blessed us richly. It was no small matter to come to this wilderness. We never lacked for food.[27]

. . . notation. This book was lost, not found again. This writing is part of my story I give to my son Hendrik because he is my namesake, as a remembrance.

Feb. 7, 1894

Hendrik De Kruif Sr.

Endnotes

1. Paul Henry de Kruif (1890, Zeeland, Michigan–1971, Holland, Michigan) is most noted for his 1926 book, *Microbe Hunters*. The book was a bestseller, and has remained on lists of recommended reading for scientists. He graduated from the University of Michigan with a Bachelor's degree (1912) and a PhD (1916). His books include: *Our Medicine Men* (1922), *Microbe Hunters* (1926), *Hunger Fighters* (1928), *Men Against Death* (1932), *Why Keep Them Alive* (1937), *Seven Iron Men* (1937), *The Fight for Life* (1938), *The Male Hormone* (1945), *Health is Wealth* (1940), *Life Among the Doctors* (1949), *Kaiser Wakes the Doctors* (1940), *A Man Against Insanity* (1957), and *The Sweeping Wind* (1962). In the Netherlands the name is spelled "de Kruif" while in the United States it is spelled "De Kruif."

2. Jan Peter Verhave, "Paul De Kruif: Medical Conscience of America," in *Dutch-American Arts and Letters in Historical Perspective*, Robert Swierenga, Jacob Nyenhuis, and Nella Kennedy, eds. (Holland, Michigan: Van Raalte Press, 2008), 191-202. Further information about Paul De Kruif will be gratefully received: jpverhave@hotmail.com.

3. Henry S. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings*. rev ed, (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997). See the accounts of Henry Cook, Egbert Frederiks, Evert Zagers.

4. *Holland City News*, 30 October 1913.

5. Paul De Kruif, *The Sweeping Wind, a Memoir* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962) 154.

6. At the time in many locations in the Netherlands engagements were tantamount to marriages and it was not uncommon for a couple to have a child (even children) during the engagement period. It may have been because the couple could not afford to establish their own household or it may have been to show that the woman could have children. Legally, children born before the legal marriage were considered illegitimate, unless the parents acknowledge the birth at the time of their wedding.

7. Beest (now spelled Beesd) is on the north bank of the river Linge, in the western part of the province of Gelderland. Deil is on the south bank, some 3 kilometers upstream.

8. All these data, including the certificate of birth from Tournai, are in the Provincial Archives of Gelderland, Arnhem.

9. For malaria in Holland and Zeeland, see Jan Peter Verhave, *Disease and Death among Early Dutch Settlers in Holland Michigan* (Holland: Van Raalte Institute, 2007).

10. Data are retrieved from 100th anniversary booklet, *The Founding Families of Second Reformed Church Zeeland, Michigan*, 2004.

11. Ibid, and "Henry de Kruif," in *Portrait and Biographical Record, Muskegon and Ottawa Counties*. (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Co., 1893) 416.

12. Geerlinus Elibertus, named after his mother, was living with his father, Hendrik, and stepmother, Dina, in 1860. His age on arrival is given as eighteen, when he was actually twelve; it may have been given to obviate problems with the shipping company and US Customs resulting from someone so young traveling alone. Later he changed his name to George Eldridge.

13. The majority of the congregation joined the CRC in 1885.

14. Earlier translated by Seth Vander Werf and retyped in 1979, these have been retranslated by the author.

15. In 1830 the *Kanaal door Voorne* (Canal through Voorne) was finished that made Hellvoetsluis, then a naval base, the outport of Rotterdam. The town's name translates as "sluice at the foot of hell."

16. The original manuscript, most likely written in Dutch, is not extant. The present document is a translation, apparently made by one of Hendrik's children. The handwriting indicates schooling in America and the translator emphasized the unusual spellings by "father Hendrik." Two pages plus part of the text on the last page are missing.

17. Like Van Raalte, Scholte and Brummelkamp were ministers in the Secession. Scholte was the founder of Pella, Iowa; Brummelkamp was a moderate and the loved pastor who stayed behind. He later became professor of the Theological Seminary of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands at Kampen.

18. The American vessel "Southerner" out of Boston was a three-masted

barque, under the command of Captain T. Crosby. Other sources call it a brig, which by definition is two-masted.

19. Different accounts have different dates of departure which may reflect when the ship left the dock at Rotterdam versus the channel at Hellevoetsluis.

20. Page 7 is missing.

21. Harm Kok died the year of arrival in Holland, on 29 December 1847. See the sketch by his son Henry Cook, in Lucas *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings*, I, 49-53.

22. Most sources record the arrival date as 19 November.

23. Page 10 is missing.

24. Judge Kellogg advised Van Raalte to settle in Ottawa County.

25. De Kruif consistently spelled Rabbers as Rabbens.

26. Planks were sawed and transported by De Kruif to Kasper Lahuis, who built flatboats for transport upstream on the Black River. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings,* I, 116.

27. There appears to be some text missing here.

"When I Was a Kid," part IV

This my childhood autobiography must be dedicated to the beloved wife of my old age—Gwendolyn De Jong

Meindert De Jong, with Judith Hartzell[1]

Meindert De Jong (1906-1991) was an award-winning author (the first American to win the Hans Christian Andersen Medal) of twenty-seven children's books. Judith Hartzell is a professional writer now living in Greenville, South Carolina, who became a friend and co-writer with De Jong when they both lived in southwestern Michigan.

Jan's Birth

Mother was pregnant when we traveled to America, although we boys didn't realize it—such things were never discussed in our family. Then one July day we awoke to find a strange woman busying herself in the house, and Father had stayed home from work, even though the sun was shining.

After weeks of searching, Father had at last found work as a carpenter and was making twenty-five cents an hour, apprentice wages for apprentice work. He'd been a master carpenter, bricklayer, and architect in Wierum, but twenty-five cents an hour was all he could earn here. He accepted it so we could eat.

But this special day he stayed home and told Rem and Dave, without explaining why, to take Knillis and me for a day of exploring the wild countryside around Grand Rapids. We had a fine day, discovering new animal wonders, snakes and even snake eggs, turtles and chipmunks—all wilderness wild to us.

When hunger drove us home at last, we found this unfamiliar woman cleaning something in a washtub in the back yard. Father met us on the front step and told us, solemnly, that God had brought us a new brother and that he was going to be officially named Jan (John) when later he was christened in church.[2]

Father called us in to Mother's bedroom to see the new baby and I asked, "How do you know whether it's a boy or a girl?" I had always secretly longed for a little sister.

Nobody said anything and in a long silence all looked embarrassed.

I came to their rescue and spoke up knowledgeably, "Oh, sure, I know. If it was a girl, she'd have long hair." Little Jan had no hair at all.

All us boys stood solemnly looking at the baby then, until Dave said, "And Jan can become President of the United States, can't he, Father? Because Rem and Meindert and Knillis and I can't—we weren't born in America. But Jan was."

"Yes," Father answered gravely. "Jan can become president."

The baby was sickly and malnourished from the start—born sick, and sick he remained. So he had to be watched constantly. We weren't sure our doctor knew the best treatment, but we owed him so much money, from his attention to Mother during the birth, that we didn't dare call another doctor, for fear we might offend him; then he might send a bill collector after us.

Shortly after Labor Day in early September a black-bordered letter came from Wierum saying that Great Beppe had died suddenly.[3] Father, the black-bordered letter still in his hand, met me on the porch and told me of her death, with tears in his eyes. I



The four De Jong brothers (left-right): Neil (Cornelis David, "Knillis"), Meindert ("Mick"), Raymond (Remmeren), and David Cornel, c.1915. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

remember being very uncomfortable, seeing his tears. I felt totally inadequate to respond to his sorrow—as if I'd betrayed him, loving him so and unable to feel his deep grief or to remove it.

A week later Mother became ill with a mysterious ailment which the doctor couldn't diagnose or cure. He called it "rheumatic fever." Dave now had to take care of Jan, since Father was away all day working. The poor baby gradually grew more sick until he died in November.

Since birth Jan had always been too sick to be taken church for his christening. My parents agonized over that untimely death without baptism. I think they believed that baptism is necessary for salvation. However, the minister said that since the baby was a "covenant child," he was now in heaven. By "covenant child" he meant that God's promise that He would be God to Abraham and his children forever still holds true and includes Christians. For little Jan, the pastor said, this covenant guarantees he will live forever with Jesus.

This comforted my parents. A child myself, I didn't understand and was baffled by their deep concern.

After this, Mother was sick all the time. She just stayed in bed. The doctors came to see her once in a while, but they didn't seem to know how to cure her.

Nellie

Gradually our lives grew better, since Father was able to find work suitable to his considerable experience and skill. But for more than a year Mother remained sick and unable to run our household. Dave did most of the work of cooking and housecleaning after and before school; his life was unending work when he was thirteen.[4]

The worst of it was not knowing what was wrong with Mother and when she would get well. It must have been a hard burden for Father to carry, but he never complained to us: his method of solving problems was by hard work and faithful churchgoing. Mother's doctor, not understanding her sickness, had taken to prescribing painkillers for her, drugs so that she was often drowsy, robbed of will power, and unable to get well or help us grow up.

Into this dilemma came an angel in the form of a nurse named Nellie, who appeared to us kids suddenly and unexpectedly.

Father had befriended a middle-aged spinster from our church who loved to discuss church doctrine and theology with him. This lady, Katie Skeepstra, had a prodigious memory: she could recite word for word our pastor's sermons each Sunday and that was one or two hours of solid sermonizing.

One day, having observed the great unhappiness of our household, with Mother sick and the house ill-managed, Katie—bless her—told Father she had a friend who could help us. The very next morning, Nellie appeared at our door, a tall, skinny, homely, ah, so wonderful woman who entered our house and, that moment, took charge. She had been a nurse in a hospital and now worked taking care of well-to-do women in their homes. The income from that work she used to take care of Mother—desperately poor, sick and helpless—for absolutely nothing.

That first day she assessed Mother's situation and persuaded Father to stop consulting our old-fashioned doctor, and brought in another, younger one, who properly diagnosed Mother. Then Nellie took over totally—fixing meals, cleaning the house, shopping for clothes, baking cakes, bread, and pies; at last, wonderful, tasty foods. She freed Dave from his housemaid's chores and sent him

outside to enjoy life. In fact, enjoying life was her specialty, and she saw to it we all would now begin to join her.

Soon she introduced us to our first American ice cream sodas at the corner drugstore. She watched over us carefully, making sure we were bathed, well-dressed, and especially well-fed. She reveled in that!



Meindert De Jong in 1920 as he began attending the newly opened Grand Rapids Christian High School. Before 1920 high school age students could attend the academy at Calvin College. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

"Seeing you boys happy," she said, "is more fun than twenty picnics!"

We all blossomed out, but the greatest transformation took place in Mother. With a doctor who immediately took her off sedating drugs and properly prescribed for her illness, and with Nellie's constant attention and encouragement, Mother began to get well. Mothers in control are so important to kids.

Soon Mother began to help Nellie with the work of satisfying our boyish, bottomless appetites. Dave bought bags of buns, and Mother hid them under her bed to dole out to us in between Nellie's home-cooked meals, since Nellie, being childless, did not realize the full extent of boys' appetites. We all began to cheer up and fatten up as Mother regained her strength and Nellie worked her charm.

Nellie took us on outings too, to her church as well as other places. They spoke Dutch in her church like they did in ours, but Father and Mother warned us not to pick up any strange, worldly ideas there; Nellie was from the Reformed Church. The truth taught there was, to my parents, less pure than the truth of our own Christian Reformed Church. I don't know about that, but it was from Nellie that we learned what it was to experience the love of God in action.

Eventually, when Mother was well enough, Nellie moved on, to another home which, she said, needed her more than we did. We remained close friends with her until she died. Periodically she would invite us kids over to feed and mother us once again.

When Mother had at last regained her health and strength, she said one day to Father, "Now, when are we going to go back to the Netherlands?"

"We're not going back," Father told her.

"I don't want to stay here where we have had nothing but grief and poverty!" she cried out.

"But that's exactly why we must stay," Father told her. "We have experienced the worst that America has to offer. Now we must find its best."

Mother said that in that case, she would make sure we didn't pick up any corrupting American ways. Dutch, and only Dutch would be spoken in our house. (By this she meant only Frisian would be spoken. All our reading had to be in Dutch.) Also we must keep Dutch customs and eat Dutch foods.

Mother never gave up longing for her homeland. "If I could only crawl back on hands and knees," she said, "I would."

Because so many people then in Grand Rapids also spoke Dutch, she was able to live a normal life—shop, make friends, attend church—without ever learning English. And out of anger at our early suffering, she never did learn it.

But in later years her Dutch-speaking became an inconvenience, when she was unable to converse with her beloved, English-speaking grandchildren. Still, it seemed she and the babies instinctively knew how to communicate.

None of us boys knew a word of English when we came to America, and we were still largely language-ignorant when school began in September. In Wierum I had been in the fourth grade, with the big kids and the headmaster, which was equivalent to the sixth grade in America, since we'd continued classes year-round in the Netherlands and didn't have months-long, bucolic summer vacations. But here I was pushed down into the third grade because I couldn't speak English. My brother Dave, who had already finished school in Wierum and had gone to work, had to go back to school here, way down in the sixth grade.

Then, after Mother became sick that first autumn, she couldn't care for little Knillis anymore, so I became his nursemaid. Father, who had to be away at work all day, got permission from the school board, all members of our church, to have three-year-old Knillis come to school and sit with me at my school desk. Even though it stretched Father's poverty wages to the limit, he and Mother insisted that we continue to attend a private, Christian Reformed school.

Knillis sat there beside me both morning and afternoon sessions, quietly coloring or looking at picture books. While we older three boys were demoted, you could say Knillis was promoted. He was quiet and well-behaved like Dave, and far, far better than Rem or me.

In the Netherlands we had never had spelling as a subject, the words seeming to spell themselves by their sound. But here in the States we had spelling, and a chart was prominently pasted on the front blackboard, with a string of red, blue, or gold stars beside each pupil's name. There, before the whole class but at the very bottom, stood my bare name without a single star. I felt denuded, and rather than endure the daily shame I slowly made myself into a proficient speller.

But arithmetic was something else. I'd had no trouble with sixth grade arithmetic in Wierum, but for some reason the transference of figures and sums into English eluded me. It began in that humiliating third grade, and to this day I still do my figuring in Dutch, however comfortable and even accomplished I now may be in English. (People tell me that I speak with no trace of an accent.)

On Saturdays at the Sigsbee Street Public School, the one-room public library held a story hour, and thus came about my first acquaintance with children's literature and my utter fascination with the fairy tale. Saturday was also pre-Sunday cleaning day in our little blind alley home. At first Dave had to assist. (Later I replaced him as housecleaner.) To get Knillis and me from underfoot, Mother sent us to the Sigsbee School library. I liked to go there—I liked books—and little Knillis doted on picture books.

But then the librarians started a story hour in one of the upstairs class rooms. The kids who were attracted by the story hour first gathered in the library, which had been quiet but now was bedlam. The first time Knillis and I walked into this, I timidly thought I had to go along upstairs for the story hour where with great tongue-clacking and gestures one story got told when the story-teller got the kids quieted down. We went along with this once only.

After that I believed if we went into the library room we'd get sent to the story room, so from then on, Knillis and I played in the schoolyard until after those kids had gone up for their story. Then he and I went into the quiet, kid-emptied room with only the grandmotherly, comfortable librarian there with us. And, in that quiet, I discovered the Lang series of fairy tales, *The Red Fairy Book*, *The Blue Fairy Book*, etc.



Begun in 1905 as Coade Avenue Christian School, the name changed when the street name changed to Baldwin in 1914. In 1973 the school became part of Creston-Mayfield, which closed in 2010, with the opening of the new Grand Rapids Christian Elementary School. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

By our first spring in America, I found out that even in difficult English I could read at least ten tales in the time it took the story hour librarian to tell just one. My math wasn't so bad that I didn't know that ten stories were ten times better than one. So Knillis and I never went back to that wasteful story session.

In Wierum I'd never been to a children's library. The state church had a little library which was open for half an hour only on Saturdays. But it held only serious religious tracts and adult novels. My family never read children's books to us when we were little; we didn't even know such books existed, nor did many exist then, at least not in Wierum.

The Difference between Dave and Rem

Rem's life and adventures were to me much more exciting and penny-and-metal-monetarily more rewarding than Dave's. Viewing Dave through the childhood's gulf of nearly five years, he always seemed more sedate and adultishly mature than did the athletic, excitable, adventurous Rem.

In the early immigrant years in America I don't remember Dave playing, for instance, scrub-ball.[5] Now every one of our three alleys had a vacant lot, which all the alley kids used as our ball field, small as it was. But I don't recall Dave ever being in one of our ballgames, or in a good fist fight.

His self-invented games even way back in the Netherlands were always geographical and statistical—something studious with which Rem hadn't the slightest patience. So I got shanghaied to play with Dave. He knew not only every capital of all the numerous little countries of Europe, but even of the important countries in Africa, Asia, and North America.

Perhaps because we could afford so few toys, all I can remember having was my baby pull-horse and my abacus—kids had to invent their own games. So Dave's was geographical. He'd draw a map of Europe, with its capitals and chief cities. Then we'd throw dice, and according to the number on the dice, be entitled to conquer that much paper terri-

tory, with all its citizens, which Dave would carefully count up.

Not being statistic-minded, I liked to draw corridors to the cities and claim the most possible territory. I think I invented the corridor to the sea, later copied by Hitler when he established the Danzig corridor to divide and conquer quartered and invaded Poland. I should have taken out a copyright.

These corridors would disgust Dave, as not being according to his rules, and he'd impatiently end the game, tired of all the laborious erasure my corridors caused. I suspect, since unlike Rem I was too young to flatly refuse to play, it was my way of getting out of playing geographical statistics. I hated them.

Rem's inventions were less games than they were money-making schemes. Besides fun and mischief, Rem liked money. Here in America Rem's penny-and-nickel invention was sand—sand in winter for icy sidewalks. He and I would dig sand from under our porch in our alley, screen it, and drag it in a wooden box on a sled to the houses of what we thought were the rich, people over on Lake Drive and Cherry Street, who could afford to throw away nickels for a sprinkling of abrasive sand.

After Mother became sick she couldn't supervise us children very well, and Father was always at work. Even when Mother was well she didn't always know what was going on, because she never learned English, so she didn't perfectly understand the school rules and procedures. We two boys, Rem and I, became little scamps, always looking for fun and mischief.

We knew where "Old Man Calkins" lived. He cultivated fruit and nut trees, and we were always throwing things into his trees to get the fruit down. Then Old Man Calkins would chase us with a wickedly long, mean-looking butcher knife and would we run! He never caught us—our fleet-guilty speed kept us each in one uncarved piece.

Orchard Hill Street ran next to Mr. Calkins's backyard. It was well-named. Every house had fruit trees and grapevines. There'd been no fruit in Wierum, so every grape and nut was a sore temptation. We could climb up the trellis and gather grapes from the porch at one house. If the people unexpectedly came home, we'd hide flat on our bellies and protect our shirtsful of grapes from squashing until we could slide safely down and escape.

A man was mowing his lawn once when Rem and I cut through his hedge. The man said, "Don't you know any better than to do that? What are sidewalks for?" Rem answered with a big mouth. The man took off after us then. We ran and were caught by a wire fence; we both vaulted it, but the man got his foot stuck and fell flat on his face. We heartlessly stood and laughed at him. We ran wild in those days. Mother was sick, Dad didn't know, and we misused our almost full freedom.

I had no sense of time and was always late to school, so for punishment would have to stay after school until the teacher went home. One week, while I was serving my sentence, Rem and I had planned to go fishing after school. Rem waited for me in the school yard, and when the teacher was out of the room, I jumped out the window, even though it was on the second floor. I landed hard in the gravel of the schoolyard, but nothing was hurt or broken, so off we went fishing.

Once, when I was late again, in desperation I wrote a note in Dutch, giving a good reason for my lateness and signed Father's name. Obviously the teacher recognized my childish scrawl. That time Father received an official letter explaining what I had done and I got an extra week's full, endless detention.

Rem left school as soon as he legally could—after eighth grade. When he grew up, after a brief stint as a professional boxer (he used me as a sparring partner), Rem became a skilled bricklayer, master mechanic, and carpenter, following right in Father's tracks, except for formal learning. He was very able and had a successful life, but he had no patience with anything intellectual or scholastic. I dedicated one of my books to him once, but I doubt if he ever read it. He was purely a nature boy all his life.

Knillis the Preacher and Robey Place

My younger brother grew up in Grand Rapids' stern, heavy church atmosphere. We all attended church three times each Sunday to hear our fiery preacher[6] warn us of the evils prophesied by Ezekiel, Daniel, and St. John. When Knillis was four and five, church-going was his big excitement of the week. He was a master mimic, and for a while he went through a phase of giving long sermons. He would copy the minister in tone, inflection, long-chinned facial expression and movement, almost exactly in everything.

When we kids had tea parties he would begin to pray over the cookies and tepid tea, and then go on and on. If we laughed at him he'd sternly scold us. "Don't mock the Word!" he would say. Mother was very proud of her youngest son. Praying at the tea parties with other alley kids on the front porch, he was so amazing that peddlers and visitors, even passers-by would stop to listen. He only prayed on the porch, but sometimes in the privacy of our living room he would launch out on full-fledged sermons to us older boys, and we'd better not laugh. "You young people misbehav-

ing there in the back of the church—shame, shame on you!"

The precocity of kids can't be explained. One day he suddenly stopped preaching and turned into an absolutely quiet kid. It was a complete transformation—I suspect he was just preached out.

After that he was off on his own. After supper, and coffee and dessert, Father's habit was to pray and read a chapter of the Bible every night in his slow, deliberate voice. Then we'd sit and talk some more until at last someone suddenly asked, "Where's Knillis?" But always Knillis would be long gone—he had slipped away so smoothly, nobody noticed. In later life he turned into a perfectly normal, witty, and articulate person—and never preached again.

When Mother was nearly well, we heard of a deal from a friend; instead of paying nine dollars a month rent at the dreadful damp Donald Place, Father could buy another house on the middle of our three alleys, Robey Place. He only had to pay off the loan at ten dollars a month. His work now had become steady enough, so we picked up our belongings and moved in to our third and last alley into a house of our own. Our new home was solidly built, had an indoor toilet and a bone-dry cellar. For privacy and distinction it even had a thick privet hedge around its little yard. We were moving up in our alley world, after only two years and two alleys.

Mother learned to cook some American foods in the third alley house. From hucksters she learned about American vegetables and fruit. Men peddling fruits and vegetables door-to-door from wagons were common in Grand Rapids in our early years. In Wierum we'd never eaten tomatoes, but a huckster persuaded my mother to buy one when she became curious because they looked even redder than apples. "They are absolutely delicious," he told her. So she tried one out on Neil and me, the younger boys, at lunch. We each took one bite, and together, jostling each other in our desperation, headed for the back door to spit it out in the yard to get rid of the awful taste. At dinner that evening Father and David and Rem were presented the same treat, and they reacted exactly the same way: one bite, followed by the race to the yard to get rid of the vileness. But Mother liked tomatoes—or didn't dare admit she'd wasted hard-earned money on them. She kept trying and eventually we all ate them.

Mother also learned to bake from a Dutch-speaking friend, Mrs. Overeinder,[7] a very fine cook who lived three houses up in the last house on Robey Place. In the Netherlands Mother didn't bake for the family—she bought all our bread and cakes from the bakery shop. So she was grateful to Mrs. 0 for lessons on baking and also on canning fruits and vegetables. With practice Mother became good enough to bake all our bread. She also had two cakes which were her specialties, one white and one brown.

The Overeinder family had arrived some years before we did,[8] so they already knew the ropes. They came from Groningen in Holland, a neighboring province to Friesland. Mr. Overeinder was a carpenter, like Father.

Their daughter Hattie was an acquaintance of mine from the time I was eight. I would say "friend of mine," but I really didn't know her well at first. She was three years older than I, the oldest of three sisters, and her sisters Liz and Dena hung out with me more than she did. As a child, three years age difference can seem an unbridgeable gulf. There were three years between Hattie and me and five years between Dave and me. At age eight the venerable age of thirteen seems like another, ancient era. When you grow up, the gulf disappears. Dave, instead of Rem, became my closest friend, and Hattie became my wife.[9]

Adventures with Neil

The biggest day of the year for Neil—my brother soon dropped "Knillis" for the more American "Neil"—and me was the county fair; I saved every cent from my grass-cutting jobs for weeks and months beforehand and then splurged every last cent in our day-long orgy of rides, gambling games, and candy eating. We would arrive in the morning before the gates opened and usually had to walk home at end of day, since I never seemed to learn to save two nickels for streetcar fare.

Dad and Mother thought the fair was educational; so did our severe Christian school. Supposedly the one-day-school-dismissed child only went to study the long stables of domestic farm animals—cows, bulls, and horses down to ducks, geese, rabbits, and chickens. Neil and I never darkened any stable door—going to the fair was our annual one day of riotous living. It was worth every last cent and the long walk home.[10]

Mother always gave us a whole quarter and her blessing for the day. Many of the booths had "Lucky Number" games. People would put their nickels on numbers, then the man would roll a ball in a big fancy wheel, and it would land on a number; if it was yours, you'd get the prize. Neil and I played cannily. We'd only play at a booth where nobody else was, and nearly always the man would manipulate the big numbered wheel at the back of his booth so that one of us would win the prize.

Then he'd yell, "Look folks! These little boys just won!" implying that if kids could win, anyone could. After he'd attracted a crowd, Neil and I would take the prize and look for the next empty gambling booth. Another

time we won a duck, but we couldn't carry it, loudly quacking, all the walking way home, so we had to bring it back to the "Ring a Duck—Get a Duck" booth. This time the man won.

The first and last time I ever saw a pig walk a tightrope was at the fair. Once we got stuck on the top of a broken Ferris wheel for a couple of hours.

Next to going to the fair once a year, Neil and I loved swimming together every summer evening in Kooster's Lake[11] best, out Michigan Avenue in the back stretches of the huge "Maryland Farms." It took my little brother a long, long time to trust water. When Neil was only three, Rem, on one of his sudden impulses, threw the child into the eight-foot-deep end of the Wilcox Park swimming pool. Rem then had to dive right in after Neil to rescue him from drowning. It scared Neil so that it was three years later before I could get him even to try to learn to swim. It bothered me deeply, I being such a water rat myself. I'd learned to swim with Rem at the Wilcox Park pool, so much so, I'd made swimming in wild, unguarded lakes my favorite sport.

I took Neil with me to Kooster's Lake, and he would sit in about three inches of shallow water and play. Finally, in his own time, he ventured deeper and eventually became a good, strong swimmer. This happened, I guess, because of my attitude. A child myself, I had the good sense to let him overcome his fear with no urging and no pushing.

We liked swimming in the lake better than in pools because not only were there no supervisory guards, but you could swim bare naked in that back-acre lake. It was luxury. In the city swimming pools even boys had to wear skirted swimsuits that dragged you down.

Neil and I loved to fish too. One summer day he and I were fishing in mile-long Reeds Lake when a swarm of bees came and used our rowboat as a Noah's ark. Crossing the lake, they'd apparently run out of steam or aero-dynamics. With the flat blade of our two oars we fished the drowning bees out of the lake to let them dry out in our boat. In the hot summer sunlight they revived too fast and began to buzz around our heads angrily and thanklessly. So each with one oar, tight together on the middle seat, Neil and I rowed our bee load to the shore, since they seemingly blamed us for their dunking. When we and the bees made it to shore, they dispersed. We won the desperate race without a single bee sting.

Summer Jobs

Like my older brothers, as soon as I was able, I also worked to supplement Father's poor immigrant carpenter's income. For us boys the most available work was mowing lawns and shoveling snow in what we thought of as rich American neighborhoods, where they could afford to waste twenty-five cents and even occasionally a whole dollar on green grass and white snow. In time, as I got other (to me) rich Americans' lawns to care for, not by the job but by the month, this turned into a bonanza.

In the basement of one employer's garage, where the yard tools were stored, there was also, between vertical slats from floor to cellar ceiling, a ceiling-high stack of *Saturday Evening Post*s. I would tend to the yard awhile, then take a break in that heavenly cool basement with its tall storage bin. It was like dope once I started. I couldn't stop reading until I'd get hunger pains. In the course of that summer, I read the *Post*s down from the ceiling to the garage basement floor. I didn't bother with articles or serials but devoured the short stories and, seemingly from that summer's reading orgy, I got my story-telling feel and sense, which later contributed to my writing stories for children.

Still later, when I was older and thus could earn still more, I got a job mowing grass at the big city-owned Greenwood Cemetery, at the farthest end of town from where I lived. We were expected not only to mow the endless grass and sprinkle it, but also to dig graves and, occasionally, dig up bodies that were to be moved to other cemeteries. That was disgusting. The undertakers who sold cement burial vaults claimed that they were air-proof; but they were anything but. The coffins disintegrated along with the bodies. After digging up a recent corpse we wouldn't be able to eat for the rest of that day no matter how hard the digging had been. If the corpse came from an ancient section of the cemetery, things were more decent; there would be nothing left but a skeleton and some transparently thin rags of clothes.

We buried still-born babies too, in their tiny coffins. No one ever came with them—the mortician left the miniature coffin at the cemetery office and you carried it under one arm to the section for stillborns. We always looked inside first. Even though the babies were beautiful, you felt awful that day too.

Six days a week, eight hours a day, we worked, and that's an eternity of lawn mowing. When in the hot summer months we got to sprinkle, it was a blessed relief from lawn mower pushing. There were no power mowers in those days.

Greenwood Cemetery was eighty acres big; in the middle of the summer it took a dozen boys to keep it trim. Families of the deceased were supposed to pay yearly dues for upkeep. If they didn't, I was given a hefty map book of the cemetery and told to drive a stake in the plots, to identify them as unpaid and in arrears. Then the boys would mow

around that plot and it would be left to grow weedy, unkempt and unwatered—sere and wild.

Always we began work well ahead of Decoration Day (Memorial Day) at the end of May, because then families would come to the cemeteries to place flowers on their plots. Everything had to be tidy then, except for the unpaid-for plots, which stood out weedy in the sea of clipped green so everybody could see who wasn't paying their dues.

We younger boys liked to read the oddly-rhymed epitaphs on the older graves out loud to each other. I remember one little poem well:

> Heaven retaineth now the treasure,
> Earth the lowly casket keeps;
> But the angels love to linger
> Where our little Lulu sleeps.

Me [sic] and my mowing partner, both of young age, found this Lulu and while he whistled, I danced around the grave with my shirt held out as if it were a skirt. But then the superintendent came sneaking up to check on us and fired me on the spot. My whistling partner at least had his hands on his lawnmower handle, so he didn't get fired. I told the boss, "Well, sorry you didn't like my little dance," and started to leave, but he called me back; it seemed I couldn't be fired until the end of the day. When I got home by slow streetcar after my last day's work, he'd already changed his mind and wanted me back in the morning. I knew exactly why—when not grave-dancing, I could out-mow anybody. To celebrate my reinstatement from disgrace, I bought a touring car, a Model T Ford, for forty whole dollars, so I could drive to Greenwood Cemetery instead of having to take the stop-and-go streetcar. That was a great day! It started with a firing and ended with a first car.

Felix

The autumn I was fourteen, and Neil nine, a good friend came into our family to stay—Neil's dog Felix. For years young Neil had been longing for a dog, but, in Father's opinion, our little alley houses and yards were too small, and his answer to Neil was always, "Wait and see." That spring "waiting and seeing" had paid off when impulsive Rem bought Neil a baby Boston bull terrier. The poor thing lived only a few months and then succumbed to distemper while Neil, Mother, and I were away in Kalamazoo visiting relatives. Neil had gone away and left a frisky puppy and returned to find nothing—not even the puppy's grave. Perhaps Father intuitively had understood that Neil, in his grief, might dig up the grave just to see his beloved dog again.

Then Neil was back to broken-hearted "waiting and seeing" until good fortune struck through a potato farmer, Mr. Dryer. We ordered potatoes, which Mr. Dryer brought in his old pickup truck, and with him, in a shoe box, was a fat little mixed breed puppy, black and brown with four pure white paws. The pup was in need of a good home. Right away, Mother picked up the squirming little guy, held his nose to hers and named him "Feka," Frisian for "Felix." We pet-named him "Fiekie." He had made a hit with Mother, so now he was "in" as a fully qualified member of the family.

Felix and Thomas the cat became great pals. They would wrestle constantly, and Thomas gave the pup a rough time but, before very many months passed, Felix was twice the size of the cat and still growing. At ten months he weighed at least fifty pounds.

During the summer Neil and I liked to go swimming with Nuppy Everts, who lived next door, and Roy, a chubby kid whom we usually called Pieface, solely in honor of his love of that food. The nickname didn't bother him a bit—he so loved pies. As soon as I was old enough to buy my Model T, we would take Fiekie along to Kooster's Lake. Before Fiekie, our clothes used to get stomped on by cows which wandered around the meadow surrounding this muck bottom lake. But Felix, after being told a few times to "Sic 'em," appointed himself as our wardrobe watcher and chased the cows until they all galloped away with their tails straight up in defeat.

He also, all by himself, appointed himself as the protector of Mother. If



The farm on Remembrance Road, northwest of the Grand Rapids city limit, which Meindert DeJong and his parents moved to during the Great Depression. He and Hattie Overeinder lived on the second floor for the first several years of their marriage. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

anybody came to our door—friend, foe, salesman, or peddler—he would station himself between her and them, and she'd have to warn, "Don't, please, shake hands or in any way touch me—he'll go straight for your throat."

By Fiekie's second winter he had grown into a powerfully built dog. Back in the Netherlands dogs were trained and used to pull carts and sleds, so Mother took some heavy suspenders and made a harness for Fiekie. He trained very easily and enjoyed pulling Neil on the sled.

It was Neil's and my job to do the Saturday morning grocery shopping, and this had become quite a chore because Mother was fussy about her groceries and completely innocent of Grand Rapids' geography. In her opinion one meat market excelled in pork, another in liver sausage, no matter where they were located. Bread must be bought at one special bakery—by this time we were past our poverty days and Mother had given up baking—cinnamon rolls at another, and so on. Fiekie changed the shopping chore to a fun outing, and he and Neil and I caused a sensation wherever we went. Soon Fiekie and Neil and I were in demand to buy other people's groceries for them, and deliver them. We had no problem getting customers, but some problems keeping them. Although Fiekie was very reliable, squirrels, rabbits, and stray cats created a great risk to the safe delivery of some vulnerable items, eggs, milk, and cookies.

Fiekie became famous for his attitude towards cookies. Once when Mother was baking, a cookie fell to the kitchen floor; Fiekie snatched it and ate it. Mother scolded him roundly and then showed him what he should do. "If only part of a cookie drops on the floor, or is handed to you, Fiekie," she said, "you may eat it. That's fine, Fiekie." She broke off a tiny crumb and handed the rest of the cookie to him. "Never, never the whole thing," she scolded. Then she took a whole cookie and offered it to him. He refused it. He wouldn't even look at it. From then on, Fiekie would eat only broken cookies, but never the whole thing, and shopkeepers liked to show off his intelligent discrimination to their customers by handing him a whole cookie which he wouldn't so much as look at. He got a lot of cookies piece by piece and crumb by crumb that way.



Grand Rapids Christian High School began in the same building that previously had housed Calvin College. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

High School—End of Childhood

I was in the very first class of the newly opened Christian High, which was inaugurated as the premier Christian Reformed high school in all Grand Rapids. Its students were not only local but also came from all nearby small towns with Christian Reformed Dutch enclaves. We met in the old Calvin College and Seminary building on the corner of Franklin Street and Madison Avenue. Our most fresh freshman year began in September 1920, and we graduated in June 1924, at which time the school had grown into a full-fledged, four-grade high school.

That was in the roaring twenties, but the only roar we heard was that of our principal and preachers. I well remember the first girl students who'd dared to have their hair bobbed, running weeping from the full session room when a remorseless preacher informed them that the Bible said hair is a woman's crowning glory, and they'd certainly desecrated their God-given crowns. It all did little good. It's as easy to stem the advance of fashion as to stem the tide, and every day there were just more bobs. You couldn't chase all the girls home; you wouldn't have a coeducational school left. Even the girls' mothers conspired against our principal and our preachers, who

were trying to teach their daughters to live right, righteously, and un-bobbed.

Rem left school forever after the eighth grade. His early departure is probably what saved me as a student. I was running with Rem in those days, skipping school at will and spending almost more time in punitive teachers' closets than in their classrooms. Dave had left school after eighth grade too, to work in a drugstore, so that ended the little bit of restraint that Dave provided.

After the drugstore, Dave went back to school at a commercial college, but quit it in total distaste for business and commerce. He still managed to get a job as an underpaid clerk in the city's biggest bank, but he couldn't stomach that job either. Finally Dave went back to finish his high school degree; then he went on to Calvin College, the Christian Reformed college in Grand Rapids. I'd already graduated from high school to Calvin, and so it happened that I, five years Dave's junior, was a year ahead of him in college. By that time we both wanted to become writers, and that was the only thing we both took seriously over our three college years together.

Dave and I looked alike and dressed alike during our Calvin years, which proved convenient for us, because if one of us got in a scrape, the authorities would generally accuse the other one, and he would righteously and indignantly deny it up and down.

Mr. Jenne and Math

Grandfather, Mr. Diekman (my Dutch elementary school accomplished story-telling teacher), and Dave all were influences on my decision to become a writer. But the man who did the most to get me started was Therone W. Jenne—my great, high school, non-Dutch, English teacher. I always wanted to dedicate one of my books to him, I so loved and admired him,



A former Methodist church minister, Theron Jenne was a well-liked teacher at Grand Rapids Christian High and an inspiration to Meindert De Jong. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

but none ever seemed good enough, and then he died.

Like Muoike [Aunt], he had the facility of seeing what was good and interesting in me, and especially in my writing, which was mostly poems at this time. He singled them out for praise and read them aloud to the class. This was heady stuff. More important, he sent them off to be published. It was the first time I knew that could be done.

Unfortunately, none of my high school writings was published. He had, no doubt in ignorance of how to get started in the writing field, sent them to *The Literary Digest,* which only printed republished poems, so of course they sent mine back to him. But his faith in my amateurish writings was enough to give me a swelled head. The seed had been planted that just maybe I could write well enough so others would want to read what I'd written—even perhaps pay money for it.

Mr. Jenne was a Methodist in that otherwise all Christian Reformed high school. Whether this fact sweetened his personality, I'm not sure. He had lived in the South and been a Methodist preacher before he decided to go into teaching. Years later, when I was a successful writer and giving speeches in the Grand Rapids area, people would come up to me, especially girls from his high school classes, and tell me how they too had worshiped him.

Mr. Jenne's sense of humor was marvelous, and his appearance was engaging too: he was short, roly-poly, and always smiling. Basically, he enjoyed teaching and us students. Nor was he a strict disciplinarian like the other teachers.

He saved me in math. I'd flunked it first term, had to take it over and squeakily got passed on "condition" after my second try. Then I got Mr. Jenne for my third mathematical try. I don't think he especially liked math; he was hired as an English teacher, but in those days a teacher had to teach any subject where and whenever the administration needed him. I can remember the principal occasionally coming into the back of the class and sitting through one of his math lessons, to check up on him, and Mr. Jenne would be nervously agitated on these occasions. I sympathized fully. Mathematics nervously agitated me too, and shook my foundations, my roots, and all the rest of me.

But thank goodness he did teach it. I had failed math every year since third grade. In that school system they would pass you on anyway if you only failed in one subject. From third grade on, as I was passed on to higher grades, the math just became ever more difficult, outlandish, and perplexing.

That's when—somehow— Mr. Jenne got me through algebraic math.



Left to right: Calvin College students and friends Ralph Bolt, Meindert and David De Jong. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

I passed the second semester. Then there was just geometry still to go. I got a regular math teacher for that, an old fellow who had a rock-hard set method of testing: every monthly test we got consisted of two theorems and one problem.

So I memorized those two theorems literally word for word, and comma to comma, so I could repeat them precisely, down to the last period. I would get the theorems one hundred percent letter perfect—and the problems one hundred percent perfectly wrong. But the correct theorems got me a passing grade—sixty-six and two-thirds percent was good enough. It got me through high school geometry and through mathematics for life.

I was weak with relief, but when I got my strength back, overnight I became an "A" student. Once I got out of math, my whole attitude changed. If it hadn't been for Mr. Jenne and Mr. Two-theorems-and-one-problem, I probably would have dropped out of high school. The teachers noticed the great change in me, of course, and they discussed it at a teachers' meeting. I saw one of them in the hall later. "You just wasted an hour talking," I told him. "I can tell you the reason for this great change in four words: No more math forever.'"

Becoming a Writer

There are times when things are at their worst that they take a most unpremeditated turn for the better. So it was when along with my father, mother, and brother Neil we tried to eke out a living on a little forty-acre Depression farm, for which we'd traded our house in town.

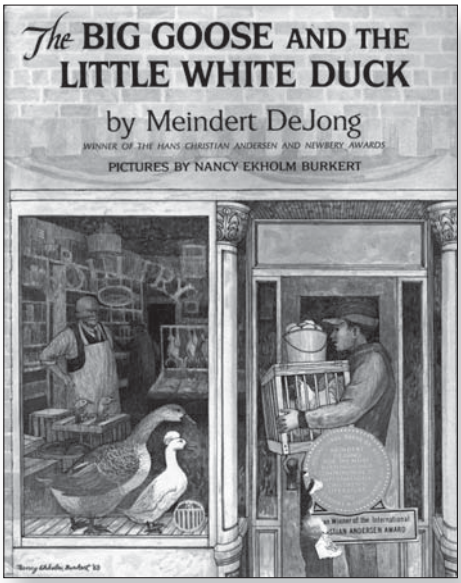
When the Great Depression struck, my Father was a successful builder in Grand Rapids, a prosperous contractor with twelve men working for him. This was only fifteen years after we came to Grand Rapids. By the time I was in high school, Father was doing well enough to buy a comfortable house with a big yard and garage on Dwight Avenue, and he and Rem remodeled it from cellar to attic, so that it was very handsome.

But overnight the 1930 Depression swept Father's building business away. Nobody had money to build new homes. To eke out a living we had to trade our house in town for the farm, owned by a lawyer. Besides the town house, we had to pay him fifty dollars a month on the farm's mortgage.[12] The four of us, Father, Mother, Neil and I, tried our best to earn fifty dollars a month by farming. To stretch the income from our chickens, I stopped selling eggs wholesale and began peddling them out by the dozen to housewives—as this netted sixteen cents a dozen rather than twelve cents wholesale.

Somehow I counted as my customers the two children's librarians in the Grand Rapids Public Library, who in turn graciously peddled them out to the other librarians. Librarians had steady incomes in those difficult days.[13]

On our farm I not only had my chickens, but a pet goose and little duck that both had evidently been trained by some former owner. And as I regaled my children's librarian friends and customers with the antics of my trained pets, they insisted I write a children's book about them. A good customer is always right, but I was upset: "Who me? I never even read a children's book as a child! Impossible!" To assuage them I wrote a six-page story—as short as I could make it and still hopefully keep all those good librarian customers happy. It only whetted their appetite. They demanded more—a whole children's book.

And then, if not exactly persuaded, my own six-page story took hold of me—I had to see where it would go



Dust jacket of the reprint of Meindert De Jong's first book after he had won the prestigious Hans Christian Andersen Award. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.



Remmeren and Jantje De Jong and their four sons (back row, Meindert is on the far right) and grandchildren. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College.

and where it would take me. I was hooked. And so, thank goodness, was the children's editor then at Harper and Row publishers. It needed some rewriting and touching up—I was a novice—but that done, they took it, and my first book, *The Big Goose and the Little White Duck*, was accepted the first time out. Overnight I was a novice no longer, but a professional.[14]

In writing more children's books I received, as a precious gift, total recall of my childhood in the Netherlands. And I discovered that if I directly wrote to please the child in me, I also pleased children. And even though the first royalty from my first book came too late to save our fifty-dollar-a-month farm, on that farm I had discovered my inner love for all animals, not merely household pets, and out of that little farm I wrote the bulk of my books. The fifty-dollar-inadequate farm turned into a gold mine and, more important, a soul-satisfying lifelong career.

Summing Up

In coming to America we lost something precious which we never regained—the life in a community small enough to be cohesive and friendly, but, with its fisher folk, volatile and exciting. There was, no doubt, community in the immigrant sections of Grand Rapids, but when we first arrived, our own folk and kin were unfriendly. At last we made friends, but we still never could replace our lost family. For me, my Pake David's warm, grandfatherly house remained alive only in memory.

But somehow I seem to have been blessed with the ability to recoup something from bitter losses. When I was grown and began to write books about my childhood in Wierum, the whole village came back to me as I wrote. I could see the tower and the ancient church, the dike, the sea, all the streets and their houses. I even remembered the names of the occupants of all the houses. It was all as vivid and total and clear as if set in amber. From that total recall I wrote many of my books, including my two autobiographical favorites, *Shadrach* and *Journey from Peppermint Street*. Again I recouped blessings from loss when Father lost the Depression farm. From that little farm and its animals came material for many more of my books.[15]

Coming to America, we lost the happiness of childhood in a little Frisian village, but we gained what Father had set out to give us: futures for all four boys. Dave and I became writers; with only sixth-grade educations available to us in Wierum, this would have been impossible. Both Rem and Neil became house builders like Father, and both did well and earned comfortable livings to support their families. Any one of us boys could have moved back to Friesland when we grew up if we'd wanted to; none of us did. We accepted the gift of a prosperous future which our parents, through their faith and courage, gave us.

Endnotes

1. De Jong and Hartzell met after he had retired from writing and became her writing mentor.

2. The family were members of the Dennis Avenue (now Mayfair) Christian Reformed Church.

3. Yttje Meinderts De Jong died 24 August 1914.

4. For David's account of this see: David Cornel De Jong, *With a Dutch Accent; How a Hollander became an American* (New York and London, Harper & Brothers, 1944).

5. A version of baseball played without teams. Players work their way up through the various positions until they can bat. If they do not hit safely, they return to the field to begin the process again.

6. Rev. Henry Danhof.

7. Anna (Anje) Burema was married to John (Jan) Overeinder and immigrated from Veendam, Groningen, the Netherlands in 1914.

8. De Jong is mistaken on this since according to records at Ellis Island, John (Jan) Overeinder arrived 9 April 1913, while the census records of 1920 indicate the rest of the family arrived in 1914, the same year that the DeJong family arrived. Perhaps because the Overeinders had acculturated faster than the De Jongs, he assumed they had come earlier.

9. Hattie (baptized Harmke, born 28 February 1903 in Veendam) and Meindert married 6 July 1933.

10. The fair grounds were in Comstock Park, north of the city, about 6½ miles from the De Jong's home

11. It is now called West Lake.

12. De Jong graduated from Calvin College in 1928 and he briefly taught at Grundy College in Grundy Center, Iowa. They bought the farm on a land contract.

13. As city employees their pay was cut by 25 percent in 1932.

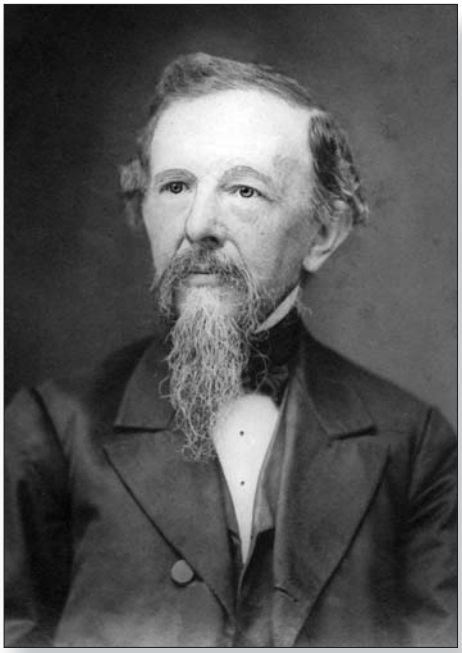
14. The book was published in late 1938. De Jong had moved from the farm into the city in 1936 to concentrate on writing.

15. Fifteen of his twenty-seven published books were based on his experience on the farm.

Rev. Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte
1811–1876

On 17 October 2011 it was two hundred years since the birth of Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte in Wanneperveen, the Netherlands, the eleventh of seventeen children born to Rev. Albertus van Raalte and his wife Christina Caterina Harking. The younger Van Raalte also became a minister but not in the Dutch national church, the *Hervormde Kerk*, like his father, but in the churches that seceded from the *Hervormde Kerk* beginning in 1834. In 1846 he led a group of emigrants to North America, the first in a wave that would total 300,000 by 1920, when the United States began placing strict limits on immigration. A conference examining Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte's roles as a leader and liaison began with two days of sessions at Hope College on 24 October and concluded with two more days in Ommen, the Netherlands, on 3-4 November.

Albertus C. Van Raalte graduated from the University of Leiden in 1834 planning to become a minister in the Hervormde Kerk. While at the university he and other students became acquainted with the seceder movement and in 1836 he was ordained a minister in these churches rather than the national church, that same year he married Christina Johanna de Moen. He served several congregations experiencing arrests and fines by civil authorities attempting to eradicate the seceder movement and who later forbade the seceders from operating their own Christian day schools.



Rev. Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte, 1811-1876.

These experiences coupled with an economic depression in the Netherlands that affected his parishioners severely and the potato blight that swept Europe during the 1840s destroying the principle food source for his parishioners convinced Van Raalte and fellow minister, and brother-in-law, Anthonie Brummelkamp that the time had come to leave the Netherlands. Others were doing the same and going to either the United States or South Africa. After careful study and writing for more information Van Raalte concluded that the availability of land, social opportunity and

religious freedoms made the United States the better destination. In 1846 a group, with a constitution, was formed to emigrate to North America. On 2 October 1846 the first group of fifty-three with Van Raalte as their leader sailed for New York, intending to follow the Hudson River, Erie Canal, and Great Lakes to Wisconsin, where a smaller group of Dutch immigrants had already settled.

They arrived in New York City on 17 November and were greeted by ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church (now the Reformed Church in America). Given the lateness of the season the group was advised to stay in the Hudson River Valley for the winter. Instead they continued via Albany, then Buffalo, to Detroit, where they were forced to spend the winter when ice closed the Great Lakes to shipping. While in Michigan they were convinced to settle in West Michigan rather than continuing to Wisconsin.

Van Raalte and a small group traveled to West Michigan to inspect land available from the federal government. They selected the region around Black Lake (now Lake Macatawa), about midway between the mouths of the Kalamazoo and Grand rivers, for settlement. Sailing ships could not enter Black Lake because a sand bar blocked the channel between the lake and Lake Michigan, but Van Raalte was convinced that once the sandbar was cleared a thriving harbor could be built. He envisioned that the harbor, called Holland, would serve as the commercial, social, and religious center of all Dutch settlements in West Michigan.

The early years in the "Colony," as it was called by the immigrants, were difficult as they adjusted to a new physical environment, climate, and diet. In addition to serving the West Michigan community as a pastor, Van Raalte was the land agent for his followers, their legal advisor, and, at times their doctor. He established churches, with others began newspapers and business enterprises, and sought state and federal funds to improve the community, particularly to clear the sandbar and build dock facilities, and in 1857 established secondary education in the colony by opening an academy. The academy was expanded into Hope College in 1862. Within three years the number of Dutch immigrants in Michigan grew to more than 5,000.

In 1850 the Dutch congregations joined the Reformed Church in America (RCA), a decision not accepted by all. Criticism of this union along with other complaints about how the Colony was run led to a number of emigrants leaving the RCA and initially joining the Presbyterian but those leaving beginning in 1857 formed a new denomination that is now known as the Christian Reformed Church.

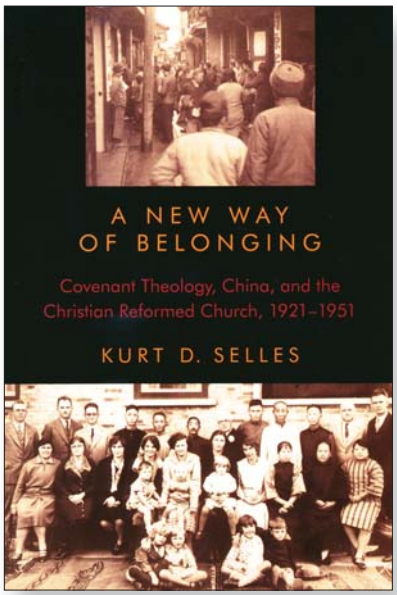
In spite of the dissention Van Raalte continued to work for the community's growth. But the work took a toll on Van Raalte and his wife, who bore eleven children (seven survived into adulthood). Twenty years after establishing Holland, Van Raalte retired as the minister of First Reformed Church. He briefly attempted to establish a Dutch colony near Amelia Court House, Virginia, in 1869, but returned to retirement in Holland late that same year. His reputation suffered from the events of the late 1860s and his prestige in the community declined.



Christina Johanna de Moen Van Raalte, 1815-1871.

Van Raalte spent his remaining years managing his investments, primarily in land, and helping his children. When Christina died 30 June 1871 his life became lonely. After the October 1872 fire that destroyed much of Holland, including its entire business district, Van Raalte rallied the population to rebuild. He died 7 November 1876 recognized for his contribution to his church and community. The Van Raalte Institute at Hope College, various place names in and around Holland, Michigan, and a statue in Holland's Centennial Park recognize the work of this minister, community planter, and leader.

book reviews



A New Way of Belonging: Covenant Theology, China, and the Christian Reformed Church, 1921-1951

Kurt D. Selles

(Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2011)
ISBN 978-0-8028-6662-2,
softcover $28.00

Kurt Selles, whose family lived and worked in China for nineteen years and whose grandparents were Christian Reformed Church (CRC) missionaries to China, is well suited to tell this story. An introduction gives a bird's-eye view of recent centuries of Chinese history—mostly a story of upheavals and wars. The upheavals included opposition to foreign influences, including Christianity.

Chapter 1 provides a brief but penetrating look at the CRC from 1910-1920, especially focusing on its ideas, ideals, prejudices, discussions, and finally a major decision about the church's first foreign mission work in either Africa (mostly Nigeria) or China. Arguments included the racist notion that the African people were "emotional but impressionable," which some thought would make conversion to Christianity easier, while others thought "the sterner teachings of Reformed missionaries" would not succeed when compared to teachings like Methodism. When it came to China some were pessimistic about being able to establish a missionary beachhead there, since so many other denominations had already begun work there (there already were over 8,000 Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries in the country). The arguments became especially heated between 1918 and 1920 as the parties carried on their often passionate, prejudiced arguments in committees, church periodicals, and on the floor of synod. Synod 1920 finally decided to focus its first foreign mission effort on China.

At the time most Christian groups were located along the east coast and through comity agreements missionaries had "staked out" their territories. Since the CRC was a new (and "competitive") group, the new missionaries had considerable difficulty locating a territory until the Presbyterians eventually yielded a location, centered on Rugao City, in which they had found it too difficult to win converts.

The CRC missionaries soon discovered why the Presbyterians had had difficulty gaining converts, since the populace was steeped in Buddhism. Further, by following the mission example of many other first-time missionaries, they had failed to become part of the community. For example, they built their homes outside the city walls, and "from all appearances they could have been transplanted from any Dutch-American neighborhood in Grand Rapids" (p. 79). Their main intent was to organize congregations that would closely resemble CRC congregations back home. Years later they admitted that "we were hasty and ill-advised" to adopt such an approach (p. 83). The mission effort was also greatly hampered by dissension within the CRC mission community, especially by the work and attitude of Lee Huizenga, the missionary physician. The other missionaries tried several times to have him banned from their mission because of his obstreperous behavior (pp. 103-106). The work that was most fruitful initially was carried out by two women—Wilhelmina Kalsbeek and the local "Bible woman" named Wu—as they began to teach the local children.

This work took place as a wave of anti-Western sentiment began to build in China, complicated by several periods of civil war. In 1927 nearly all the missionaries had to flee Rugao, first to Shanghai and then to the United States. Some of the missionaries returned later that same year and the others by 1929. Further, the cultural differences between the Dutch Calvinist other Protestant groups and the

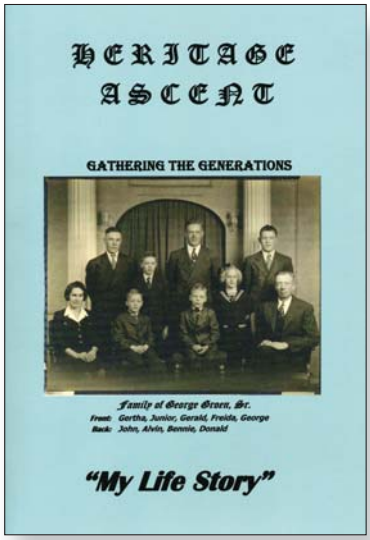
Chinese caused difficulties. For example, the CRC was long suspicious of American style Sunday schools, their theology included the "stern teaching" of Calvinism, they rejected hymns in worship until 1934, condemned movie attendance, and they observed the Sabbath more strictly than many other denominations. Each of these components of doctrine and mores was carefully weighed by the mission and the mission board in Grand Rapids.

The few brief years of relative peace and security soon came to an end in 1937 when the Japanese invaded China (including a bombing of Rugao); this was followed by World War II, which in turn was followed by the civil war between the Nationalists and Communists. All of China suffered tremendously during these years, and life for the missionaries was no exception. Some initially sought safety in Shanghai, to eventually return to the United States. Some who remained were imprisoned by the Japanese and in 1950 the last CRC missionary, Rev. Albert H. Smit, left Shanghai for the United States, ending almost thirty years of CRC work in China.

After 1950 the church in Rugao carried on as a small congregation, with only one evangelist-pastor, Wang Aitang, and only sporadic advice and very limited gifts from the CRC. Wang had to suspend his leadership when he was imprisoned in 1967, and the church "disappeared." Selles's epilogue asks the question, "Does the absence of a Christian Reformed-related church in Rugao mean that the denomination's mission failed . . . ?" His four-page answer is worth reading and pondering.

The CRC learned to look and reach beyond its walls, to carry the Good News to the other side of their world. They sent out their first spiritual ambassadors into an incredibly difficult mission field, where they toiled faithfully, inspiring future missionaries to go and do likewise. As we read about the early missionaries—both about their staggering difficulties as well as their great faith—we also find a reflection of their home community, a Dutch-American immigrant church, trying to find their place in a new environment and learning how to express and share their faith.

Harry Boonstra



Heritage Ascent: Gathering the Generations

George J. Groen

(printed in cooperation with Dordt College Press, 2011) available from author: corcgroen@aol com; 623-203-4853; $10

George J. Groen taught in various Christian schools, eventually serving as Executive Director of Elirn Christian Services, Palos Heights, Illinois, from 1989 to 2000. By his own assessment, he has written a "story" of his life, not a "history." Groen recounts his birth and boyhood in Renville County, Minnesota, where he received his elementary education in a one-room, rural school in Crooks Township. Groen describes sturdy Christian nurturing from devout parents on their farm and among fellow believers in the Emden Christian Reformed Church for him, his twin brother, and five other siblings.

Established in 1890, the Emden church was one of the German congregations founded by Ostfresian immigrants, who had come looking for farmland in west-central Minnesota. The author's recollections are rich with descriptions of life on a family farm and in a country church among the *"plaatduits"* (plattdeutsch or Low German) speakers during the first half of the last century. This book is not a regional history, nor is it so much a family history as it is a generational faith testament. Nonetheless, as Groen recounts the religious journey and customs of folks he knew in Crooks and Ericson Townships, he drops names of many families, places, and events, thereby creating a tool micro-historians have come to value.

Of equal importance are the author's references to the Emden congregation. Groen's descriptions of this rural church form one more small piece in the story and background of German Calvinists—the Ostfrisians and the Grafschaft Bentheimers—who with the Dutch established the Christian Reformed denomination. Traditionally called "the German element" in the CRC, these people still await a comprehensive historical and theological study written in the English language that focuses on them and their experiences with the German State Reformed Church. Such a study would also explore their unique place in the history of the CRC in this country and their influence on that history from the beginning. Books like Groen's encourage this process.

Eunice Vanderlaan

book notes



Nederland emigratieland (1845-1960) Emigratie, landverhuizing, gastarbeid in Duitsland, inburgering Amerika (in Dutch)

Peter Stokvis

Tilia Levis, Berlicum, the Netherlands (www.boekenroute.nl)

ISBN 978-90-71633-13-3

€13.50 Paperback



Soevereiniteit en Religie: Godsdienstvrijheid onder de eerste Oranjevorsten (in Dutch)

Emo Bos

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ISBN 978-90-8704-095-6

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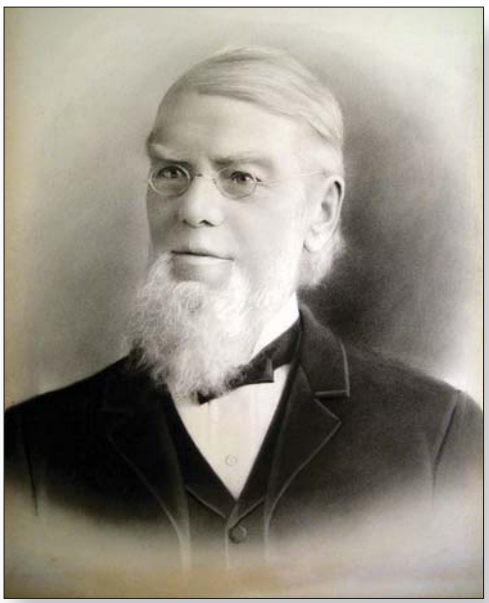
The topics listed below are being researched, and articles about them will appear in future issues of *Origins*.

Jacob Quintus and the Sheboygan Nieuwsbode
by Hans Krabbendam

The New Jersey Dutch *by Richard Harms*

Frisians: Destination–Paterson, New Jersey
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James Koning Memoir (ca. 1908)
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Jacob Quintus

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