

Origins

Origins

Volume XXXI · Number 2 · 2013

Historical Magazine
of The Archives

Calvin College and
Calvin Theological Seminary
1855 Knollcrest Circle SE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546
(616) 526-6313

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.

Richard H. Harms
Editor

Hendrina Van Spronsen
Circulation Manager

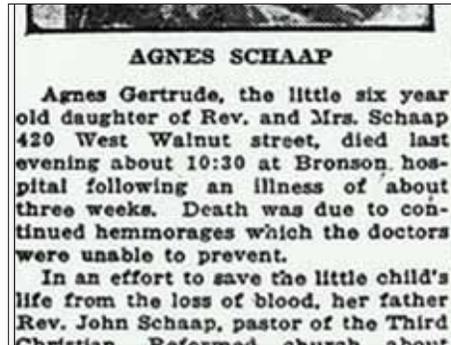
Tracey L. Gebbia
Designer

Janet Sheeres
Associate Editor

James C. Schaap
Robert P. Swierenga
Contributing Editors

InnerWorkings
Printer

Cover photo:
The Hemkes and Schaap families

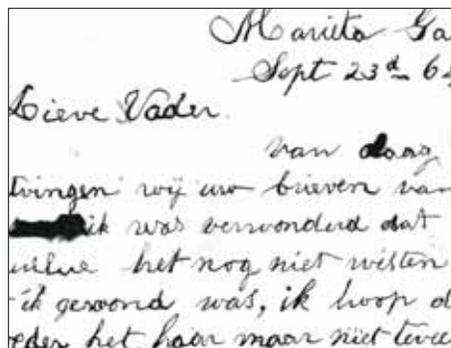


page 6

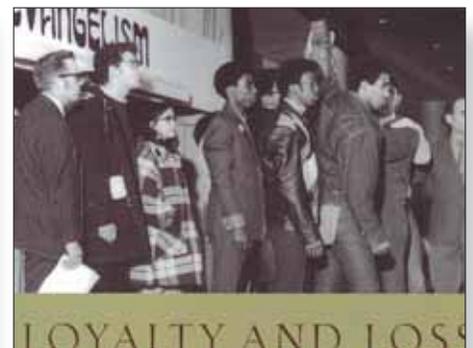


page 23

- 2 From the Editor
- 4 An Old Note of Sympathy:
Considered for Eight Days
James C. Schaap
- 13 The Baerts of Zeeland,
Michigan and the Development
of Medical Education in the
Nineteenth Century
Richard H. Harms
- 23 A Memoir of One Who Served
Kenneth Vander Molen
- 32 Big Star Lake: Growth of a
Love Story
William J. Braaksma



page 42



page 45

- 40 Rev. A. C. Van Raalte on Slavery
Michael Douma
- 43 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's fall, so it's time to remind you that it is time to renew your subscription to *Origins*. A renewal envelope is included with this issue. Subscriptions remain \$10 (US) per year. Gifts larger than \$10 are acknowledged as charitable gifts to *Origins*, and we are grateful for this generosity, which has allowed us to keep the subscription rate the same for more than thirty years.

This Issue

This *Origins* begins with James Schaap's response to a letter of comfort following the death of a child, written ninety-five years ago by his grandfather, a letter filled with poignancy as a parent who lost a child writes to console another parent in the same pain. In the lives of three generations of a West Michigan immigrant family, Richard Harms

details the history of medical education during the nineteenth century. Kenneth Vander Molen describes his perspective on the transformation of a high school student from Detroit, Michigan, into a soldier during World War II. Next, William Braaksma describes several generations that vacationed in a community on the shores of Big Star Lake. The community began with a few families and grew into a summer settlement of Christians. Last, Michael Douma found and translated a summary of a sermon by Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte, who led Dutch immigrants to West Michigan. It is one of the few of Van Raalte's sermon summaries known to exist, but, more significant, it speaks on his view of slavery and the American Civil War. The issue concludes with two book reviews and two book notes.

News from the Archives

During the summer we organized the papers of Dr. Walter Lagerwey (1918-2005), professor emeritus of Dutch language and literature at Calvin College. The collection includes extensive biographical information;

correspondence; papers; articles; research materials; periodical clippings; theater programs in the Dutch language; and manuscripts that detail various aspects of Dutch studies as well as material on his textbook, *Speak Dutch*. We added twenty-nine cubic feet of records to the World Missions collection in the Christian Reformed Church archives. These files contain extensive correspondence and reports from missionaries. Next, the records of the Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism (GRACE) were opened for research. GRACE began in 1947 as the Grand Rapids-Kent County Council of Churches and became increasingly focused on racial reconciliation and justice. In 2011 a new organization, Partners for a Racism-Free Community, took over the work of GRACE. Last, we organized the papers of Dr. Steve Van Der Weele, professor emeritus of English at Calvin College. These papers detail his scholarship, particularly on Christian education, English literature, Hungarian literature and the work of Czeslaw Milosz, and his many published book reviews.

Archival material that arrived during the summer awaiting processing includes eight cubic feet of records from Calvin College's Office of the President, 2002-2012. We also received the records of the Red Mesa Foundation, formed in 1999 to develop, manage, and distribute assets from land just east of Gallup, New Mexico, formerly owned by Christian Reformed Home Missions surrounding Rehoboth Christian School as well as some commercial property along Route 66. The earnings from the endowment helped support the ministries of the local Christian Reformed churches and Christian schools. Once the assets had been distributed, the foundation closed. We also received the records of *Inner Compass*, an award-winning show on topics related to US culture, international issues, faith, life-changers, and relationships; for more than a decade this television series has benefited from national distribution from Calvin College. Last, we received the records of New Hope Church of Dunwoody, Georgia, a congregation that began in the Atlanta area in 1983 and closed in 2013.

Among the materials received from individuals were the papers (1972-2011) of Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga and extensive genealogical records on the Rozendal, Hospers, Tribbles, and Merrit families donated by Jean Rozendal. Quentin Schultze, professor of communication arts and sciences and scholar on Christians and communication, added thirteen cubic feet of records to his papers. His material on St. Augustine on communication and the Old Testament on communications appears in our holdings to be the best collection of source material on the two topics.

Origins is publishing another book by Janet Sheeres. Her extensively annotated minutes of the synods of the Christian Reformed Church, 1857-1880 is scheduled for release next spring through the offices of the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company and the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America.

Volunteers

Since our last issue, two of our dedicated and diligent volunteers have died. Gordon DeYoung, who for years proofread copy, checked grammar,

and checked facts for accuracy, died last spring and Fred (Feite) Greidanus, who translated church minutes from Dutch into English, died in August. Both contributed immeasurably to our work in Heritage Hall and we offer our condolences to the families and friends.

Staff

Richard Harms is the curator of the Archives and editor of *Origins*; Hendrina VanSpronsen is the office coordinator and business manager of *Origins*; Wendy Blankespoor is our librarian and cataloging archivist; Laurie Haan is the department assistant; Robert Bolt is field agent and assistant archivist; and Anna Kathryn Feltes is our student assistant. During the summer Denielle McCarron was our student intern. Our volunteers include Ed Gerritsen, Ralph Haan, Helen Meulink, Clarice Newhof, Gerrit W. Sheeres, Janet Sheeres, Jeanette Smith, and Ralph Veenstra. 🙌



Richard H. Harms

An Old Note of Sympathy: Considered for Eight Days

James C. Schaap

Day One

The hand is not cramped. It's a mannered cursive that would be perfectly readable if it weren't so tiny. Fancy G's on God. An extra swirl on uppercase W's. He learned his penmanship well. And I can tell, simply by the smooth hand, that he was still a relatively young man, a relatively young father, a relatively young preacher—my grandfather John C. Schaap.

perhaps. She is almost seven months pregnant with my father.

"We were greatly shocked at the news that your dear Nelson had passed away." The card that accompanied this letter, written in more of a cramped hand, explained that the letter itself belonged to her grandparents, who had treasured it greatly, having received it in consolation of

their terrible grief, just after the death of their son, who had died suddenly of scarlet fever.

"Scarlet fever" is one of those childhood killers all but banished from our lives today, but the name still horrifies, as if the chill is archived in my DNA. A red mask covers the face, a light rash covers the body, a strawberry tongue. Laura Ingalls Wilder's sister

went blind from it, and when it came on back then, a century ago, in some communities it came as a plague.

"Mrs. Schaap burst out in tears when I told her what had happened at your place," my grandpa says. I'm sure he's not lying. Neither of them has need to dramatize.

"We can more feel for you since it is yet so fresh in our memory when we lost our little Agnes, of about the same age as your little boy was."

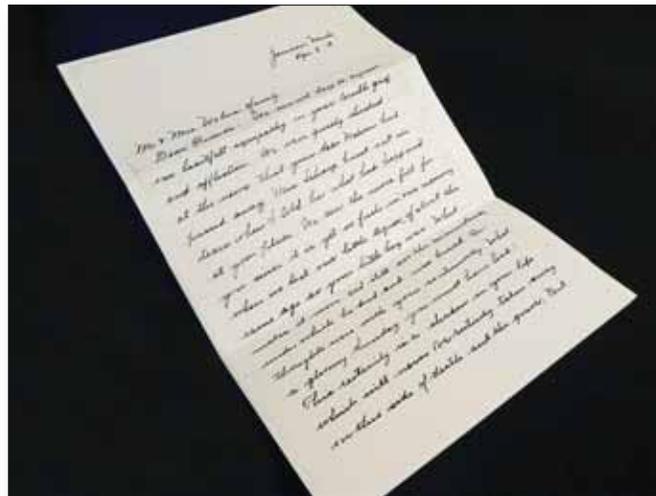
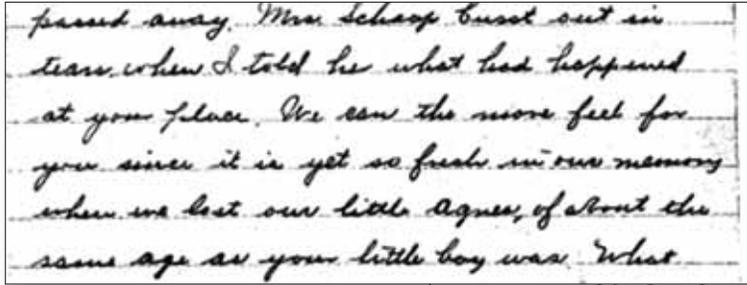


Image courtesy of the author.

"Dear Friends," it begins—somehow he knew them. "One cannot help to express our heartfelt sympathy in your terrible grief and affliction." The hand and the voice is my grandfather's, and he's writing to a couple whose son had just died, age six. It was written from Jenison, Michigan.¹ The date is 8 April 1918. Here's how I picture it—he's writing this note at the kitchen table. My grandma Schaap sits in the chair beside him, reading

James C. Schaap is a published author of both nonfiction and fiction and is professor of English Emeritus at Dordt College. A native of Wisconsin, much of his work has focused on the descendants of Dutch immigrants and on people of the Great Plains. He currently lives in Alton, Iowa.

Read that sentence again. I teach writing and have for years. It's my job to evaluate style as well as content, and I can't help but recognize that the most fractured syntax in the entire letter sets



All images courtesy of the author.

this sentence apart from any other. My grandfather was bilingual, of course; the language of his childhood was Dutch. There's a bit of Dutch in that sentence, especially in inverted word order; but it's more than that. That sentence came haltingly from both mind and pen because putting what he felt into words was no simple task. Simply bringing Agnes's death up required pain as he sat there, his wife beside him. All by itself, the awkward syntax of that sentence weeps.

Their little Agnes died of something unknown at the time. Doctors tried to save her life by a procedure thought then very cutting edge, one of the first ever attempted in the state of Michigan—something called a transfusion. For some time Grandpa Schaap lay beside his precious daughter, the doctors having created some means by which to draw *his* blood out to flow into *her* veins. For three days prospects brightened immensely. She seemed to be in recovery. Then, suddenly, she was gone.

My aunt once told me that she remembered her father, my grandpa, lying face down on the floor of the manse after his firstborn's death. She was a child herself, but the darkness persisted, she told me, until he packed the family in the wagon and took a call to a country church in Allendale, Michigan, where the people of the congregation met the family on the lawn when they drove up, and where, she told me, he stepped off that wagon as a new man.

Some of that story is in this short note. He doesn't tell it to the recipi-

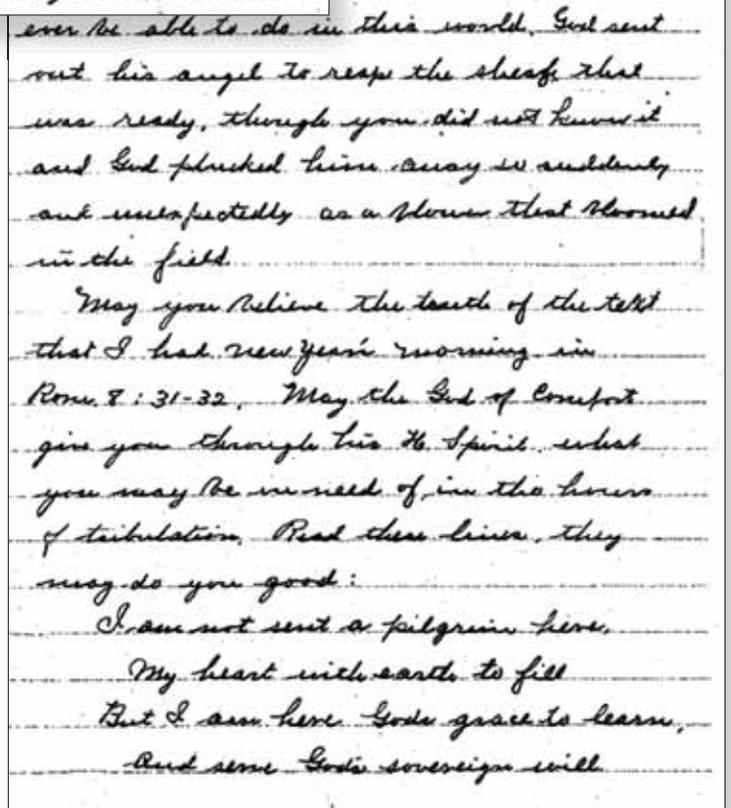
ents. Perhaps they knew anyway. But it's here nonetheless in composition—in both what he wrote and how he wrote.

My grandpa, the writer, and my grandma, his wife, as well as the letter's recipients have all been gone for more than a half century; but when I read this ninety-year-old expression of deep sympathy and grief, the story lingers, as do the characters.

There's more to be read here, more to be felt, more to be learned.

Day Two

In John Gardner's story "Redemption," a little boy dies in a farming accident. In the awful wake of that death's horror, the boy's father steps out of the house and runs wild for a long time. A Christian psychologist once told me that, following the death of a child, parents should be excused—which is to say, forgiven—for just about anything they do for five years. It takes that long for grief to find its own level in the heart. I don't know.



This sympathy note was written five years after Grandpa and Grandma Schaap had buried their own daughter. If the note had been written six months after Agnes's death, it might have a different tone; but then, if twenty years had passed, Grandpa might have responded differently

too. Not in substance—I'm sure the theology by which he interpreted his sadness wouldn't change; what might change is how he accepted that theology.

But it takes the preacher a few sentences before he begins to do what he must. First, more empathy.

"Our thoughts were with you continually," he writes, after referring to their own loss. And then, this rather strange sentence: "What a gloomy Sunday you must have had!"

His own story could not have left him unfeeling, but, to me at least, that last line seems almost callous. To call the day of the boy's burial *gloomy* risks understating the family's horrifying sadness.

But there's a footnote here that helps me somehow. The woman who sent the note along to me explained that, because of the boy's fever and the risk of his fever spreading, the family had been under quarantine.

Somewhere in the fog of my earliest childhood memories, I see a sign that says "Quarantine," but that's all, just an image way back somewhere. If families and their homes are quarantined today, I don't know of it. Ninety years ago, both word and practice were routine, immigrant ships and their passengers regularly subjected to inspection and quarantine. From 1780 to 1820, not all that far from where I live, the population of Arikara Indians, once 30,000 strong, fell to almost nothing at the hands of smallpox. Containment was a necessity, and quarantine meant containment.

Imagine it this way: there is a sign on the door of a house, a legal notice that makes you shiver with cold. No one enters, no one leaves—save the dead.

"What a gloomy Sunday" in all likelihood refers to the fact that this loving, quarantined family, despite their grief, could not attend their little boy's funeral. Ninety years after the

fact that story is still carried along by descendent family members. The family couldn't attend the funeral.

I cannot imagine being Mom or Dad, locked up in the very house of death, the house with the sign, on that day while somewhere down the road the body of my child is being lowered into a small grave. Neither could Grandpa and Grandma Schaap imagine that particular pain, I'm sure, its immense isolation. What an



John C. Schaap about the time he wrote this letter. Image courtesy of the Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.

incredibly gloomy day that must have been.

But there's more.

Day Three

A colleague—a blood relative—lost a son in an accident years ago. At what people here call "the visitation," I was, as far as I knew, the only true family relative in attendance. I was much younger then; and as we slowly marched up to the family at the casket, I wondered how he might react to my greeting, the only blood kin there.

It didn't seem to matter at all as I remember, because his eyes were on the man behind me, a man who, once

**FATHER'S SACRIFICE
DID NOT SAVE LITTLE
GIRL FROM DEATH**



AGNES SCHAAP

Agnes Gertrude, the little six year old daughter of Rev. and Mrs. Schaap 420 West Walnut street, died last evening about 10:30 at Bronson hospital following an illness of about three weeks. Death was due to continued hemorrhages which the doctors were unable to prevent.

In an effort to save the little child's life from the loss of blood, her father Rev. John Schaap, pastor of the Third Christian Reformed church, about two weeks ago gave up his own blood by transmission. For a time both patients seemed to be doing nicely and their recovery was expected.

Rev. Schaap gradually recovered, but Agnes was again taken with hemorrhages and the loss of blood was too great to make life possible.

The funeral will be held from the church Wednesday afternoon at 1:30. and the remains will be shipped to Grand Rapids for burial.

Image courtesy of the author.

we had politely expressed our condolences, hugged my cousin mightily. In a flash, I understood why: the man who followed us in line had also lost a child. Blood kin meant little; shared experience made all the difference.

So when Grandpa says what he does in this note to a grieving fam-

ily, I'm guessing that both writer and recipient recognize the bond of shared experience. What I'm saying is that my grandfather, the preacher, might have written the same words he did that April day, having *not* lost a child; but the fact that he *had* changes the way we read the solace in the words, lending as that experience does incalculable gravity.

"This certainly is a shadow in your life which will never be entirely taken away on this side of death and the grave," he says. Today, I would love to ask Grandpa Schaap whether he would have written those same words thirty years later, when his many kids gave him dozens of grandkids. I'd like to ask him whether, in his own consciousness, the horrifying profile of his own daughter's death eventually lost some of its jagged edge. I don't know that.

And then a stunning line. "But such is life," he writes. *Such* here feels something like a vague pronoun, its exact antecedent only vaguely assumed. Most readers would guess that he's suggesting we suffer agonies throughout our lives, hurts that, like open wounds, never really heal and therefore accompany us right through our own final days. "Such is life."

Let me put the two lines together again: "This," he says, speaking of the death of their son, "certainly is a shadow in your life which will never be entirely taken away on this side of death and the grave. Such is life."

I can't help but think that what he says here feels immensely dark, but then I've never lost a child.

He goes on. "I have made mention of it [presumably, that "such is life"] time and time again in my sermons. . . ."

My grandfather baptized me, but I don't remember ever seeing him in a pulpit; he died when I was six years old. Through the years I've heard stories from countless people who knew

him, and most everyone told me that he was a kind and loving man, nothing close to the caricature of the Calvinist hellfire preacher.

But the way he characterizes his own preaching here makes him sound fatalistic, as if life itself, end to end, is little more than a long, shadowy valley. "Time and time again," he says, he's preached that.

And that makes me wonder how long it took him to get back into the pulpit after the death of his daughter. When he did, I wonder if, time and time again, he told his parishioners that "such is life."

And I wonder if that changed the character of his preaching once he got to that new church in Allendale, Michigan, once he could hold his head up once more and, suitably at least, hold his grief at bay.

Undoubtedly, what happens in church is different today. A century later, worship is often a bit short on lament, brimming as it is with praise. Maybe our perception of preaching has changed too; maybe our well-heeled affluence demands the fulfillment we need from the joy and hope of the Gospel. It seems to me that today a preacher—even a young preacher, as Grandpa was—who tells us, "over and over again" that "such is life" would soon enough wear out a welcome.

But then, I need to remember my psychologist friend, who told me that the rest of us should give a grieving parent a five-year window of forgiveness. Presumably, even preachers.

Day Four

Who knows why, but somewhere along the line, probably in college, Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" stuck to my innards. It's a poem full of sadness, really, Arnold and some beloved companion looking out over the white cliffs of Dover and thinking about the way in which faith itself

seems to be receding from the shore of England's soul. When such great authority loses hold, human beings are left in a kind of empty sadness.

There's a remedy, of course, in that old poem, and that, Arnold says, is human love:

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which
seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor
light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for
pain; . . .

Arnold doesn't so much reject the Christian faith as feel its impotence. "Dover Beach" is not a theological poem, even though it has theological implications; instead, it's a poem that ostensibly accurately reflects what Arnold himself was thinking some night during the late nineteenth century.

Somehow, my students have the opinion that a poem like "Dover Beach" presents a moral lesson, for Christian readers especially—and it does. It clearly offers us the portrait of a thoughtful man trying to determine how to live in a world in which the old testimonies have lost currency. From an orthodox Christian point of view, Arnold is wrong in advising that human love is the only recourse ". . . on a darkling plain/Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight/Where ignorant armies clash by night." To believe that we can somehow garner all we need from human love is, well, romantic.

But the poem offers more, too, more than moral lessons we can slap on a t-shirt or leave behind in the dust. There are plenty of true-or-false quizzes in life, but to read a poem like "Dover Beach" as if it were only theology stifles the poem's own heartbeat.

I am still sort of reeling from what I once said to a class, something I'd

never said before. We were reading three stories from Andre Dubus, and I was getting the sense—by way of their formulation of theme statements—that my students were of the impression that these stories were simply exercises used by the English prof to determine grades.

“This is about us,” I told them. “If there’s one thing I want you to understand about what we’re reading it’s that: it’s all about us.” So is “Dover Beach.” So is Lady Macbeth. So is Dorian Gray and Huck Finn and John Ames. “It’s about us,” I said again, “about us as human beings.”

I don’t know that all my preaching got through. I doubt it. They probably figured I’d just had a bad day.

I don’t believe for a minute that my classroom preaching carried the imperative of the sermons my grandfather claimed to create “time and time again,” sermons that advised his congregation that “such is life.” After all, school is exercise; it’s not real life as much as it is preparation for real life.

And I say all of that because what my grandfather tells this grieving couple, after explaining the nature of so many of his sermons, feels very much like what I felt this week. Here’s what he says: “Though you agreed with it then [meaning, when he was preaching that suffering is in the order of things in this life], you will be more convinced of this truth now better than you ever were before.”

Such is life, says the fellow sufferer. This is us. This is our lot. What he’s thinking is that now—in the deep hurt of deep grief—his sermons have real meaning. That I understand.

And I’m thinking that his use of *you* here is generic. For a moment at least, he may have lost focus on the grieving couple and marched directly into the rhetoric of the pulpit, addressing many, many more than those who were living in that quarantined

house. I may be wrong, but I think he’s even talking to me here.

Truth may well feel relative until it is lived. Sermons may well feel like exercises until they aren’t. “Dover Beach” may be little more than bad theology until, sometime, we too sit somewhere abandoned and alone, as if there is no God.

“But what should comfort you now is the comforting fact that God is a covenant God (*Verbonds God*), who has said that He would be your God and the God of your children.”

Now things get delicate. Sitting there at the table, the Reverend Schaap has written a page and a half of empathy wrung from their own shared experience. Both the letter writer and recipient lost children.

A century ago, however, it was assumed that a preacher would do more than sympathize; he was, after all, the *dominie*, and his words carried authority second only to scripture itself. Dominie Schaap could not simply say, “I feel your pain.” The grieving family would have expected the preacher at least to point the way out of their profound grief, and he does, by way of what Dutch Calvinists used to call “covenant theology.”

Honestly, I can’t know what that family was going through, just as I can’t know how deeply my own grandparents’ grief still manifested itself in their souls. For that reason, it’s likely a ton easier for me to say this than it would have been for them, but I don’t find my grandpa’s words as reassuring as he would have meant them to be, largely because God’s promise of care (“He would be your God and the God of your children”) has just been painfully broken anyway; if he had been, in fact, “the God of your children,” would he have let that little six-year-old succumb to scarlet fever?—would he let that child die?

The remedy for their painful grief

is God’s promises—that’s what my grandfather is saying, even though those very promises had to have been what they held onto during that child’s own last hours. They had to have been pleading with God for their son’s life, on the basis of those very promises.

And now we’ve arrived at the most difficult question believers ever face: if God both loves and rules this world, how is it that we suffer as immensely as we do? God loves us, right?—now explain the Holocaust, Rwanda, the killing fields, the death of my aunt in a car accident. To such profound questions, there are no simple answers.

I don’t think Grandpa would have asked for our pity or sympathy, but we’ve come to the moment in this letter when he knows he must offer resolution, offer a means by which to put this immense pain behind them; and I do feel sorry for Grandpa because I believe there are no good answers.

What did he believe? How did he square the loss of a child—of his own daughter—with the sovereign love of God? I may be reading too much into it, but I think the answer is here, in the letter, for better or for worse.

There’s more to come.

Day Six

If I’ve been coached on what happens to parents who suddenly lose a child, I learned what I know from a young father who also lost a son, but lost him in a farm accident. Two stories that young father told me have stuck with me, even though I wrote his story more than a quarter century ago. One involves being on the tractor after the accident, after the funeral—how especially, he said, moving up and down the back forty begs the mind to travel places far afield. During those times this fiercely religious man told me he used to scream at

God for what had happened. And then he said, “But so did King David. Read it yourself in the psalms.”

The second lesson he gave me about grief involves answers that come too easily—specifically, answers that people offered him and his wife, lines like, “Jesus just wanted a little jewel for his crown.” Answers like that made him angry, he said. “The best way to offer sympathy in a time like that is simply to be there,” he told me. Silent presence, he taught me, is always best. Cheap answers are exactly that.

But Grandpa Schaap’s silent presence wasn’t possible when a boy named Nelson died of scarlet fever back in 1918. The grieving family members were no more his parishioners, so he had to write. And he did, and I have in my hands a copy of that old letter.

And, as I’ve already said, the preacher can’t simply sympathize; in the world in which he lived, people looked to the *dominie* for solutions, for remedy. This is how Grandpa’s remedy for their grief begins:

You may ask yourselves the question, “Why did the Lord give us the child so short a time, only to leave us in grief?” We answer, “God wants children as well as adults before His large white throne, and if you look at it like that, you would not dare to demand your child back to this sinful earth, and not to giving your child to praise and adore God better there than he would ever be able to do in this world. God sent out his angel to reap the sheaf that was ready, though you did not know it and God plucked him away so suddenly and unexpectedly as a flower that bloomed in the field.”

Grandpa’s explanation lists three images or associations, one after another, all three of them, some might say, maybe a bit too easy, almost cheap. The first is God’s desire to

people his court with young and old alike. He wanted the boy, Nelson, Grandpa says, for his own court, an answer that can, at worst, make God seem almost covetous. The second association is to ripeness—i.e., Nelson was simply ready to be harvested. The third equates the boy with a precious flower blooming.

I was once told that if you can give ten reasons for not doing something you should, it means you don’t have one good one. Honestly, I don’t want

rage itself could bring solace. All of this may be revisionist history, but I’m wondering if his saying so much doesn’t suggest that he knows he has very little to say.

But he must say something. So he does. Because there are no good answers, he hands out a whole, bounteous bouquet of clichés.

One line he offers the grieving parents here holds a truth to which he will return, however: “. . . and if you look at it like that, you would not



The Hemkes and Schaap families; left to right: Rev. Gerrit K. Hemkes, his wife Janntje (nee Emmelkamp), Gertrude (nee Hemkes), and Rev. John C. Schaap. According to family tradition, the two children are Nellie and Gertrude. Image courtesy of the author.

to judge my grandfather’s theology, nor may I properly question his propriety—after all, I have not lost a child. He did. Who on earth am I to judge?

But I wonder if the rapid succession of associations here, one after another (God’s court, a wheat field, some lovely flower), doesn’t suggest his own sketchy estimate of the very answers he offers. He tried, as his grandson might yet today, to throw words at the problem, to fill the emptiness with a tumble of ideas, one after another, hoping either that one of them might fit, or that the bar-

dare to demand your child back to this sinful earth. . . .”

He will have more to say, much more, on authority.

Day Seven

Feels like a sermon almost. It starts with something of an anecdote meant to convey sincere sympathy (“Mrs. Schaap burst out in tears when I told her what had happened at your place”), then affirms the family in the bond of their mutual loss by bringing up “our own Agnes, of about the same age,” then moves into consolation with a fairly long confession of

faith (“God is a covenant God . . . who has said that He would be your God . . .”), then attempts the difficult job of answering the doubt both Grandpa and Grandma must have felt themselves when their daughter died.

And now, this precious note moves smoothly into benediction: “May you believe the truth of the text that I had New Year’s morning in Romans 8:31-32.”

I should have guessed that an old Calvinist like Grandpa Schaap would try to draw the grieving back to Romans 8, just as he must have been drawn back himself in his own grief: “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

It’s an either/or proposition that would have been difficult for God-fearing people to doubt: if He is on our side, there can be no opposition. And, there’s always the consolation that even if most of those around us don’t seem to understand what it is we’ve felt at the loss of our baby, God does. He suffered, after all, the very same loss.

That those two verses carried deep currency with my grandfather is suggested by the date of the letter—8 April 1918. Do the math. He must have preached twenty-some sermons since New Year’s morning, explored twenty-some passages during weekly preparations. He had to have been much more fresh on many far more recent passages, but the one he included in what feels like the letter’s own benediction is one he remembered preaching on four months before on New Year’s Day—Romans 8: 31-32.

I don’t know what Grandpa Schaap would have said if I suggest it must have been some kind of favorite; I’m not always taken by the language of

having a “favorite Bible passage.” But it’s clear to me that some four months after his study of that passage and just a few years after the loss of his own daughter, the choice of those verses clearly suggests how important they had to have been—and still were—especially to the region of his soul that still ached. All of that makes sense.

There’s a bit more to this benediction: “May the God of Comfort give you through his H. Spirit what you may be in need of in this hours of tribulation,” he writes.

His grandson, the English teacher, has spotted a couple of errors in this little note, but I think it’s telling that he so unnecessarily puts *Comfort* in uppercase. Having grown up in the same theological world, I’m quite sure I know why: it’s because he—and the grieving parents he was addressing—held a particular poetic line at nearly the same level of awe as the Word itself, that line from the first Q and A of the Heidelberg Catechism:

What is your only comfort in life
and death?

That I
with body and soul,
both in life and in death,
am not my own,
but belong unto my faithful Savior
Jesus Christ

That he would point the family in the direction of the catechism’s first and most famous assertion is not at all surprising either.

But, even though the benediction has been sounded, there’s still more to the note.

Day Eight

I know that Grandpa’s father-in-law, a seminary professor, frequently penned what some call “doggerel,” poems written in rhyming verses and traditional meters. Grandpa too had a penchant for such things. Perhaps in the days before TV, many did. My father

inherited the same poetic wit and agility, and often wrote epic stanzas for weddings and banquets and what not else. Funny things. He was good at it.

The note my grandfather sent to grieving parents is five pages long, three of which are poetry. It’s remarkable to hold that note in your hand and realize he took the time to write out eight four-line stanzas of poetry that, he says, meant a great deal to him and to Grandma. But he did.

For a time, I hoped that maybe the verses were his own work, but they aren’t. They belong to a nineteenth-century Scotsman named John Dickie, who has his own story. Google him sometime. The poem is five stanzas long, has no title. Here’s the first stanza:

I am not sent a pilgrim here,
My heart with earth to fill.
But I am here God’s grace to learn,
and serve God’s sovereign will.

Sure feels like a Calvinist’s poem. There’s more.

He leads me on through smiles and
tears,
Grief follows gladness still;
But let me welcome both alike
Since both work out his will.
The strong man’s strength to toil for
Christ,
The finest preacher’s skill
I sometimes wish,—but better far
To be just what God will.

Why?—I don’t know, but Grandpa chooses to fill the page with this poem. The paper is lined, and on all the other pages he observes the boundaries; but here—see the page above—for some reason he fills the page by writing top to bottom. I don’t know why.

But there’s more to this title-less, author-less poem.

I know not how this languid life
My life’s vast ends fulfill;

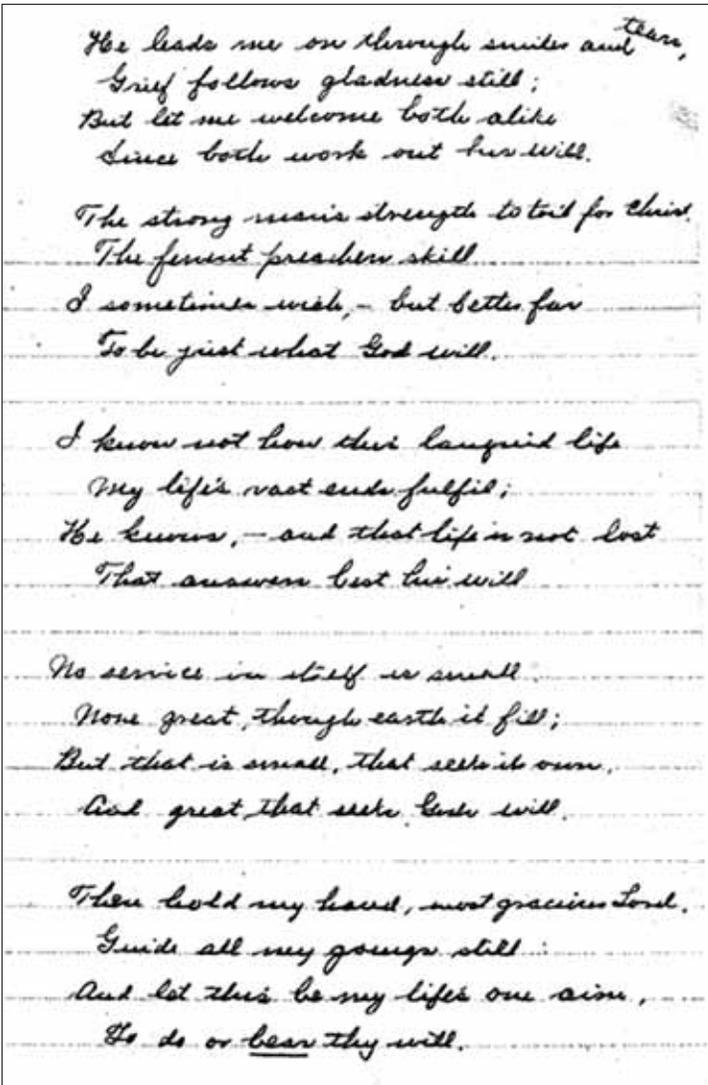


Image courtesy of the author.

He knows,—and that life is not lost
That answers best his will.
No service in itself is small,
None great, though earth it fill;
But that is small, that seeks its own
And great that seeks God's will.

The word *doggerel* has an elitist edge to it—the word carries with it some defamation. *Doggerel* implies silly, cheap, elementary poetic practice. But poems, originally, were little more than memory devices, means people used to remember significant stories or sentiment because rhythm and rhyme helped people hold on to what they chose not to forget. It's obvious

couldn't buy the rigorous Puritan way. I'm not so sure. In a poem she wrote about the death of a grandchild, contemporary critics locate that unruliness in the fabric of the lines.

No sooner came, but gone, and fall'n
asleep
Acquaintance short, yet parting
caused us weep;
Three flowers, two scarcely blown,
the last i' th' bud,
Cropt by th' Almighty's hand, yet is
He good.
With dreadful awe before Him let's be
mute.
Such was his will, but why let's not
dispute,

to me that that's why Grandpa spends almost two pages copy-ing out this one poem.

But why *this* poem?

It reminds me of an old American poem from the Puritan era, a poem by Anne Bradstreet, our first poetess—in all likelihood our first poet. Bradstreet's poetry shows up in anthologies because she spun her work from her ordinary life. In it we see not only craft, but also history.

Contemporary critics laud Ms. Bradstreet for her scrappy nature, her soul's rebel character. They claim she

With humble hearts and mouths put
in the dust,
Let's say he's merciful as well as
just . . .

Here's the proof: See the way "Cropt" breaks the iambic rhythm? In her anger at God, she pushes that word up to the front of the line, snarling. Three times, she seems to want to rally the troops, using the same command form: "let us." Internally, she's undoubtedly rallying her own doubt. Either that or simply echoing what she's been told by her preacher, "Well, Anne, let's be sure we see this for what it is—God's own will"—the smarmy and generic editorial we. So argue the critics.

When I read this poem Grandpa thought so much of, I feel a similar kind of tethered anger because every last stanza marches the reader relentlessly back to God's will. Time and time and time again, the poem corrals unruliness, as if should it not, the human soul would simply take some other path, some profane path. And the truth is simple—life is all about God's will.

Yet, some readers might say this poem deconstructs its own theology, urging a degree of comfort it can't quite accept itself.

Here's the final stanza of the poem Grandpa sends to the child's grieving parents, and underscores *bear* in the final line:

Then hold my hand, most gracious
Lord,
Guide all my goings still;
And let this be my life's one aim:
To do or *bear* thy will.

Grandpa underlined that word, the only time he underlined anything in the poem. That punctuation feature itself underscores the unavoidably resolute character of the poem—it's all a matter of God's will: sign on or you're lost. *Bear* it.

Look, that bothers me—that driving pressure to conform to something I don't know well or understand. And it likely wasn't easy for that grieving family to accept either; in fact, it may well have been hard for Grandpa too.

Here's what I'm thinking. Perhaps my grandpa's real humanity is on display here, in his use of this particular poem, because what he's telling those grieving parents is exactly what he's felt ever since the death of his own six-year-old—that he must, he simply *must*—herd his own doubt and anger into the corral of God's own will.

Theologically, Grandpa had to have told himself that this poem's obvious theme was absolutely right; but its own relentless rhetorical style suggests the immense difficulty of some quick and easy reception. Its theme is probably as true to life as its form.

I treasure this poem—and I'm thankful for the note itself—because it offers the truth both theologically and emotionally. If you doubt it, “read the psalms,” as another grieving father once told me.

In this poem I see my grandfather and, likely, my grandmother, too, more clearly, ninety years later. And myself. 🐣

Endnote

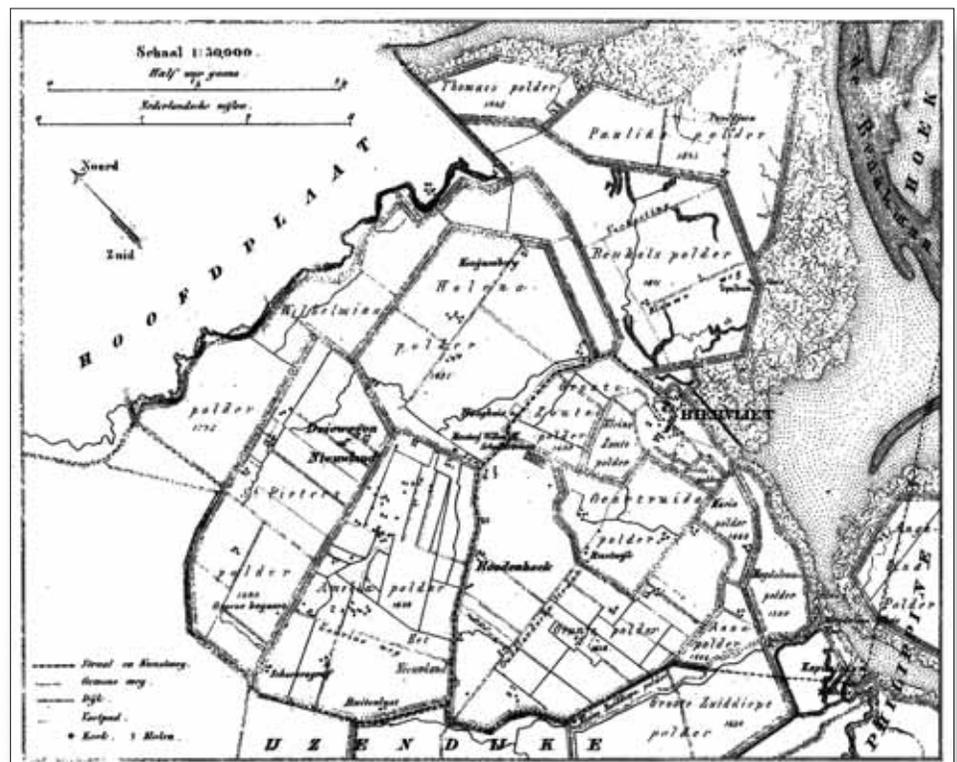
1. Schaap was the minister to the Allendale, Michigan congregation, about ten miles northwest of Jenison, but his mail must have been coming via a rural route from the Jenison post office.

The Baerts of Zeeland, Michigan and the Development of Medical Education in the Nineteenth Century

Richard H. Harms

The foundations of current medical education in the United States resulted from the 1910 report by Abraham Flexner, an educator, on the status of medical training at the beginning of the twentieth century. During the study, Flexner visited all 155 medical schools in North America; several, like Harvard, Western Reserve, Michigan, Wake Forest, McGill, University of Toronto, and Johns Hopkins, were noted for their excellence, but most of the rest differed greatly in

requirements for admission, curricula, and student assessments. Flexner suggested that medical school admission should require, at minimum, a high school diploma and at least two years of college or university study; that medical school curricula should include two years of training in basic sciences followed by two years of clinical training; and that the existing “proprietary” schools¹ be closed or incorporated into university programs.² During the eighteenth century, the



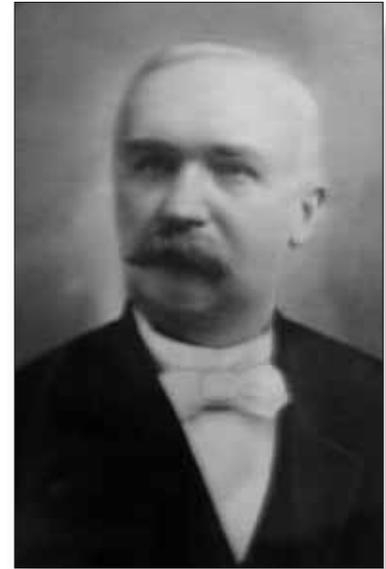
Richard H. Harms is the curator of the archives and director of Heritage Hall at Calvin College. He has degrees in history and has published extensively on the history of western Michigan and the Dutch in North America. He is also the editor of *Origins*.

An 1866 map showing the various polders around Beirvliet, Zeeland. The canals, sluices, and pumps were threatened during the Belgian Revolution. Public domain image.

practice of “regular” (or allopathic) medicine began to become more commonplace, and by the mid-nineteenth century, medical education in Europe was beginning to incorporate science and technology in diagnosis and treatment. But in the United States at the time, numerous health-care theories and disciplines, including charlatanism and quackery, developed alongside what would now be considered more orthodox medical treatments, such as allopathy.³ Most medical practitioners of the time received their training through an apprenticeship system, typically lasting three years. Apprentices studied with a physician who allowed the apprentice to participate in the practice in exchange for a tuition fee and the performance of menial tasks. Although there were

about fifty medical schools in the United States by 1860, the earliest at the University of Pennsylvania (established in 1765), Columbia (1767), Harvard (1782), and Dartmouth (1797), most were intended to be a supplement to the apprenticeship system. After the American Civil War, medical education began to include full-time researchers and teachers in biochemistry, bacteriology, and pharmacology. In 1874, the first teaching hospital was built at the University of Pennsylvania.⁴ During the 1800s in Zeeland, Michigan, three generations of the Baerts lived this development of medical education.

Because Zeeland was established by immigrants from the Province of Zeeland, the Netherlands, the story of the Baerts begins in two communities



Dr. Daniel Baert. Image courtesy of the Dekker Huis/Zeeland Historical Museum.



The Baert daughters, Henrietta, Trijntje, and Lavina, by the fountain in the house’s garden in 1905. Image courtesy of the Dekker Huis/Zeeland Historical Museum.

of that province. On 27 February 1810 Georg H. was born to Daniel Baert and Antonia Marant in Biervliet; the father was a notary and mayor. The next year, on 30 May, Maatje was born to Anthonie Gunst, a master carpenter, and Hendrika Quist in Oude-Vossemeer.⁵ Both fathers were well-to-do and encouraged their children to achieve, and both saw medicine as a profession for some of their children. During the 1820s, Georg Baert was a student in the medical school at the University of Ghent, Belgium, about twenty-five miles south of Bier-

of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 1830, the Belgian Revolution and subsequent independence from the Netherlands forced Baert to leave the university; he returned home and began working as a notary, municipal clerk, and agent collecting rents from farmers working poldered lands for the owners of that land living in Belgium. His level of education was such that he reportedly spoke eight languages.

The year before events forced him to leave the university, Baert registered for military service as he was required to do by the law in 1817 that established a National Militia. According to this law, all nineteen-year-old men had to register for the military lottery in the province of his parents’ residence. If he was selected, service included a period of basic training and then annual service for several years following, lasting from a few weeks to the entire year, depending on the government’s needs. Baert drew the number twelve, but his number was never called.⁶ Instead, Baert volunteered for the civic guard. Because of his education he entered Civic Guard Unit 4 as



The sluices at Kapitalen Dam that were threatened by military action, threats which led to the mobilization of Georg Baert's Civic Guard Unit 4. Public domain image.

a sergeant-major, the highest-ranking non-commissioned officer.

Biervliet was just a few miles from the Belgian border and was considered vulnerable as a military target. The community was located in what had been a complex of wetlands that could readily flood if the dikes against the water of the Scheldt Estuary were breached. Because creeks and streams in the area had begun to silt up, land reclamation began about 1650; the last polder was completed in 1907. In 1788 a dam with sluices was built a few miles from the Belgian border, at what would become the hamlet of Kapitalen Dam, closing off the east source of estuary water that had once made Biervliet an island. Control of Kapitalen Dam determined whether Biervliet remained dry.

On 17 January 1831 a skirmish occurred near Kapitalen Dam, between Dutch troops and “mutineers” (those wanting Belgian independence). Shots were fired, the roof of one building was damaged, and Belgian patrols were reported in the area. The National Guard at Middelburg was called out, and a gunboat immediately was sent across the Scheldt. Since it

would take the National Guard time to cross the Scheldt, Civic Guard Unit 4 was mobilized under Baert's command and immediately marched to Kapitalen Dam, with the sound of gunfire in the distance. By the time the guard arrived at Kapitalen Dam, the skirmish was dissipated, and no enemy

troops could be found. Although no civic guard members were engaged in any fighting, they were commended for their promptness and bravery.⁷ Baert remained with the unit until emigrating and was promoted three times, ultimately becoming a captain.⁸

The interruption of his medical training due to the Belgian war for independence put an end to Baert's medical career. Instead he followed in his father's footsteps to serve in political office. While in the military, however, he became proficient with firearms and enjoyed hunting, although his opportunities for hunting with firearms was limited, a recreation generally reserved for the very well-to-do.

In the central part of Zeeland, near the border with Noord Brabant in Oude-Vossemeer, Anthonie Gunst encouraged his three sons to enter the skilled trades, as could be expected. But he also encouraged his three daughters to become midwives, so that they too could contribute to their own subsequent families' economic and social standing. All three sisters, Cornelia (1801-1888), Maria (1807-1880), and Maatje (1811-1876), be-

came students at the Medical School in Middelburg in the midwifery course.⁹

An 1818 Dutch law stipulated three groups of obstetric practitioners: medical doctors, male-midwives, and midwives; the training required for each group; the services each could provide; and the fees that could be charged. Initially, training consisted of an apprenticeship with a trained midwife, but in 1823 a Dutch decree allowed for the establishment of provincial or municipal medical schools that could include instruction in the “theory of midwifery” taught by medical doctors and attending both hospital and home births with a trained midwife. Between 1824 and 1828, six of these schools were established to teach midwifery. In 1861 a state school was opened in Amsterdam, and by 1867 the six earlier schools closed as a result. Between 1824 and 1867, 416 midwives graduated from these six schools. This relatively low total was due to the fact that midwives could also still receive training via the apprenticeship method.¹⁰

The school in Middleburg required three hours of lectures per week, held in the late afternoon so that the students could attend patients mornings and evenings.¹¹ Cornelia completed the two-year course in fourteen months, passing her exam in October 1827, and was appointed municipal midwife in Oude Vossemeer. Maria completed the two-year course in July 1829 and was appointed the municipal midwife in Tholen. Maatje completed the course in eighteen months, passed her exam on 26 July 1832, and in September moved to Oostburg as the municipal midwife.¹²

Oostburg was close to the Belgian border, about ten miles west of Biervliet, and in the following years Gunst met Georg Baert. The two were married 9 August 1837 in Oostburg. According to Doctor de Man, Gunst

did well in Oostburg and, according to her own records, attended an average of 187 births every year between 1832 and 1848.¹³ Baert bought a flour mill in Oostburg. Both were active in the church and joined the *afscheiding* for which Gunst's brother, Cornelius, served as a lay preacher in Oude Vossemeer. Georg and Maatje had seven children, four of whom died young (Jacoba, Aletta, and Cornelis in the Netherlands, and Hendrika, either while the family was en route to or shortly after the family arrived in Zeeland, Michigan). Daniel, the oldest, and Anthoni lived to raise their own families.¹⁴

During 1840 economic conditions deteriorated, and the European potato blight significantly reduced the principal source of carbohydrates in the diets of the working poor. Leaders within the *afscheiding* decided to emigrate, including a group from Zeeland that had formed a congregation led by Rev. Cornelius Van der Meulen before leaving. The group, in part financed by Jannes Van de Luyster, established Zeeland, Michigan. Because the Baerts were in somewhat better economic condition than others, they did not join this initial group. But the Dutch national debt had increased to f2.2 billion from the unsuccessful military opposition to Belgian independence, and the government was forced to raise taxes, particularly on industry, which included Baert's flour mill. This occurring in an economy that was and would remain stagnant for years convinced the Baerts to leave in 1848.¹⁵

The family left from Antwerp on 3 June and arrived thirty days later in New York, a relatively fast crossing at the time. Georg's brother Heinrich had arrived four days earlier and met the family at the dock. They followed the typical route of Dutch immigrants bound for West Michigan: a train to Albany, an Erie Canal boat to Tonawanda, a Great Lakes ship to

the mouth of Black Lake (now Lake Macatawa), a flatboat as far inland as the Black River was navigable, landing at Het Waterhuisje, and then overland the last few miles to Zeeland. At the time, the community had 500 to 600 residents.¹⁶

The Baerts arrived with sufficient funds to buy a house and to open a general store on two lots in Zeeland on the south side of Central Avenue (then Cross Street) just east of South Centennial Street. Georg bought two more lots, extending his property to Church Street. Like fellow shopkeepers Huibert Keppel, Klaas Smits, Hendrik De Kruif, and Johannes Busquest,¹⁷ Baert bought goods in Chicago and shipped them to Zeeland via Lake Michigan, Black Lake, and the Black River. The store often bartered with customers for butter, eggs, and oak barrel staves, and these local goods were shipped to and sold in Chicago. Georg saw to the buying, shipping, and selling in Chicago, which meant frequent trips across Lake Michigan; running the store was

often left to Maatje and Daniel, who was nine when the family immigrated. In the Netherlands, Georg had become proficient with firearms and enjoyed hunting. Unlike his homeland, West Michigan provided unlimited opportunities for hunting, which meant that the family diet was well provided with meat protein.

Maatje resumed her midwife practice and also administered cupping.¹⁸ Medical care was problematic during the early years of Dutch settlement in West Michigan, when ague (probably from malaria, due to the mosquitos breeding in the numerous swamps), dysentery, typhoid, and smallpox were common and trained medical care sparse.¹⁹ Dr. Johannes Simon Marinus Cornelis Van Nus had accompanied the first immigrants, but he had moved to Iowa in 1851. Dr. Elisha Bailey (born in New York) located briefly in Zeeland; and Dr. Charles D. Shendick (born in Canada) settled in Groningen in 1849 but moved westward four years later; Dr. N. R. Parsons (born in Connecticut) joined



The house on Church Street that Daniel Baert bought in 1864 when he married Trijntje Boonstra. Previously the Zeeland church had been located on this lot. Image courtesy of the Dekker Huis/Zeeland Historical Museum.



Dr. Christian Hendrik Willem Van den Berg, the first Dutch-speaking doctor in West Michigan and mentor of Daniel Baert. Public domain image.

Shendick, but the only information found about him is that he died in 1860 and was buried in the New Groningen cemetery. About the time Shendick left, brothers and doctors Wells R. and Charles P. Marsh settled in West Michigan, but Charles left after two years and Wells a few years later.²⁰

In August 1855 the first Dutch-speaking doctor, Christian Hendrik Willem Van den Berg, arrived. From Ypres, Belgium, Van den Berg had married in Buffalo, New York, in 1851 and practiced in Rochester until moving to West Michigan. Van den Berg emphasized his ability to speak Dutch and that he was skilled in medicine, surgery, and obstetrics.²¹ Van den Berg lived in the Vriesland, Michigan, house formerly occupied by Rev. Maarten Ypma, served patients in that community, nearby Drenthe, and one day per week in Groningen. By early September 1856, Van den Berg moved to Grand Rapids, but the next July he was back in Drenthe.²²

The frequent moves by these doctors suggest that the community did not have the financial means to

support full-time doctors. Further, early accounts make clear that treatment from these doctors often brought little relief from symptoms. In fact, the only effective treatment was quinine from Peruvian bark, mixed with sweet

water to make it palatable, whose anti-spasmodic qualities helped control the shivering from fevers.²³

The Baert family joined the church in Zeeland and became respected members of the community. In 1851, when the Township of Zeeland was organized, Georg Baert was elected one of the three justices of the peace. Maatje's midwifery skills were in demand, and she would travel as much as fifteen miles via roads, paths, and unbroken woods to attend deliveries. When Goerg was away on business and Maatje was away delivering a baby, running the store fell to Daniel



Dr. Baert's medical bag. Image courtesy of the Dekker Huis/Zeeland Historical Museum.

and his younger brother, Anthony. In 1854 the family's resources were such that Georg bought twenty acres of federal land about three miles northeast of Zeeland (northeast of the current intersection of Quincy Street and 80th Avenue). There is no record of why he purchased the land, but perhaps he was intending to harvest the wood products from the heavily timbered plot.

Early in the morning of 30 May 1855, Georg died after suffering a stroke or a seizure, according to Maatje.²⁴ Maatje, Daniel (15), and Anthony (9) were left to run the



Dr. Oscar Baert's house was across Church Street and a little to the north from his parents' house. Image courtesy of the author.



The Italianate-style house Baert had built in 1872. The one-and-a-half story addition to the rear was added eight years later. Image courtesy of the author.



The Baert house. The medical office was at the lower left of the two-story section. The current edifice of the Zeeland Reformed Church is in the background. Image courtesy of the author.

mercantile business, and she also continued her midwifery practice. With a common school education, Daniel took over running the store, as well as buying and selling in Chicago. In addition he traveled with his mother as she delivered babies; on one occasion, when two women in different places were in labor, Daniel delivered one of

the babies unattended.

In January 1856, as the accepted nine-month waiting period following the death of a spouse was coming to an end, Lucas Aling wrote to Maatje proposing courtship.²⁵ The two married six weeks later, on 16 March. Aling eventually took over the mercantile business and later became

a farmer. Maatje continued delivering babies, her last just a few days before her death on 30 January 1876.²⁶

A year after Maatje's second marriage, Daniel, now eighteen, left the family mercantile business in his step-father's hands in order to study to become a doctor. As was common at the time, he became an apprentice to Dr. Van den Berg, performing various menial duties, being allowed to accompany the doctor as he made his calls and, gradually, allowed to perform some of the more routine procedures. Apparently the apprenticeship began in 1857 when Van den Berg moved back from Grand Rapids to Drenthe.²⁷ Almost immediately Baert witnessed the doctor's surgical skill when he removed a cancerous growth from below the lower lip of a person and with a subsequent surgery restored the use of the lip.²⁸

At some point during Baert's apprenticeship, Van den Berg moved to Zeeland permanently. Baert studied with Van den Berg for five years, two more than was typically done, and opened his own practice in 1862, as the second doctor in the community of about 700 residents. He had both village and rural patients, traveling as many as ten miles north, east, and south of Zeeland to visit patients (to the west was Holland, with several doctors) via a horse and buggy (or sleigh). He charged \$1 per visit and \$5 for obstetrics. If patients could not pay, the fee was reduced and even eliminated. Often payment came in the form of chickens, ham, or eggs.²⁹

In 1864 Baert bought a small house and lot south of the church (now 120 South Church Street). That year on October 16, he married Trijntje Boonstra, whose family had experienced medical crises common in the nineteenth century. She was born 26 February 1839 in Ferwert, Friesland, to Atze Klazes Boonstra and Trijntje de Jong, the first of what would even-

tually be six children. Atze Boonstra was a small-scale market gardener in Ferwert. By early 1854, two of their children had died; Klaas was one year old and Renske was three. Further, economic conditions in the wheat and chicory-growing regions, including Ferwert, were so severely depressed that the Boonstras joined others who were emigrating to the United States.

The Boonstra family arrived in Michigan, to live with relatives in Kalamazoo, on 31 May 1854. All had been healthy when passing through Castle Garden in New York on the 28th, but all either contracted cholera during the three days of travel from New York or upon their arrival in Kalamazoo. Trijntje, the mother, died on 3 June; Renske (not yet four years old) died the next day; and Klaas (almost 20 weeks old) died on 10 June.³⁰ Atze and his two surviving children, Trijntje and Wopke (William), began a small market farm in the muck lands near Kalamazoo that ultimately failed when fire destroyed the greenhouse.

How Daniel Baert and Trintje met isn't recorded. Baert's medical practice did well, and in 1872 he had a large brick house built on his lot. It was a true brick house, not a frame house with a brick veneer, but with walls formed by three rows of brick, with voids between the rows to provide insulation. The Italianate-style house featured 14-foot ceilings. The doctor's office was in a small room at the southwest corner of the building, with its own exterior door. By 1880, with four children, Baert had a large addition built onto the rear of the house. At that time beveled lead-glass windows imported from France were installed.

His standing in the community is evident in the fact that, when Zeeland incorporated as a village in 1875, he was elected the first president and was re-elected annually for eleven

years, until he declined to run again. Professionally he was equally well respected, since he read and studied so that he could keep up with medical developments of the time. He was elected by his peers as president of the Ottawa County Medical Society, the only non-degreed doctor to hold that office.

Baert and his wife had nine children, six daughters and three sons. One son and two of the daughters died young. The two surviving sons, Oscar (born in 1867) and George Henry Daniel (born in 1870),³¹ followed their father's career path into medicine. According to the family history, Oscar was not ambitious as a young man, so his father offered him the option of financing his start as a farmer or as a doctor. He selected the medical option, since he thought farming would be physically more difficult than being a doctor. Oscar became a student at Hope College in Holland in the pre-med program (1881-1885) and then apprenticed with Dr. George K. Johnson, a physician in Grand Rapids.³² In 1888 he began his studies at the University of Michigan's Medical School, one of the better such schools in the nation, graduating in 1890 with eighty-seven others. George knew he wanted to enter the medical field, and after the Hope program (1884-1888) he graduated from the University Michigan School of Pharmacy with a degree in pharmaceutical chemistry.

Daniel Baert encouraged Oscar to set up a practice in Zeeland and built a house for him across Church Street at 117. Oscar served one term (1891-1892) as coroner for Ottawa County. He and Maude Vyne, from Grand Haven, were married in 1892; their first two children died young; a daughter, Orsca, was born in 1900. In 1896 he moved his practice and family to Grand Rapids, a city of 60,000 and growing rapidly because

of its furniture industry.³³ At the time, Grand Rapids had three critical-care hospitals—the UBA (later Blodgett), St. Mark's (later Butterworth), and St. Mary's—as well as a professional doctors group, the Kent County Medical Society, formed in 1889.

He opened an office in the Widdicomb Building, one of numerous office/professional buildings in the downtown area, and had hours there (mid-morning and late afternoon on week days, Saturday afternoon, and initially two hours early Sunday afternoon) and made house calls. When the Widdicomb Building was closed, he moved his office into his home.

On the morning of 8 August 1912, while Oscar was making house calls, Maude collapsed at home. She had been ill for several months but had been feeling much better during the preceding two weeks. Orsca, 12, found her mother, tried to help her, and then called neighbors, who called for a doctor. When Dr. John Rooks arrived, Maude had already died. He listed heart failure as the cause.³⁴ Two years later, Oscar married Rebecca M. Guthan (née Hewitt). They had no children together. She died in 1937. When not practicing medicine, Baert enjoyed hunting and fishing, much like his grandfather had, and was an accomplished trap shooter.³⁵ Oscar died 3 November 1945 in his home. The funeral was held in Zeeland at the Baron Funeral Home, which since 1940 had been in the former Baert house on Church Street, and his body was buried in the Zeeland Cemetery.

After graduating from the University of Michigan School of Pharmacy, George Baert taught pharmaceutical chemistry at Purdue University for a year before enrolling as a student at the Medical School at the University of Pennsylvania, the first medical school established in the United States. He earned his medical degree in 1893 and immediately set up his

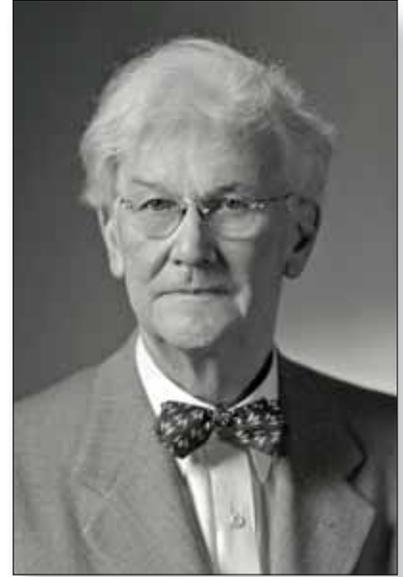
practice in Grand Rapids. His office was in the Kendall Building, near the geographic center of the city, and he rented an apartment in the same building. His office hours initially were 10 a.m.-12 m., 3-5 p.m., and 7-8 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and Sunday 4-5 p.m. Shortly thereafter he bought a house further north on Monroe, and his sister, Lavina, moved from Zeeland to be his housekeeper. Like his father, George Baert sought continuing education opportunities, and in 1896 he attended the New York Post-Graduate Medical School and Hospital (now NYU Langone Medical Center).³⁶

In 1897 George joined the faculty of the Grand Rapids Medical College. Located on Eastern Avenue, the Medical College had been formed in 1895 by Dr. Joseph Griswold, with a curriculum of three eight-month terms, as well as shorter sequences in dentistry and veterinary medicine. Underfunding plagued the school, and it closed within two years but reincorporated in 1897 with better funding and a much expanded faculty.³⁷ The new curriculum excluded dentistry and veterinary medicine and had a faculty of twenty-five doctors that eventually increased to forty. George Baert lectured in pathology, pathological chemistry, and toxicology.³⁸

The same year that he joined the faculty of the Grand Rapids Medical

College, he and Martina Marguerite De Vos, of Chicago, were married on 19 October 1897. The couple initially lived on Monroe Avenue but later purchased a house on what was then fashionable State Street. They had three daughters, Kathleen, Donna, and Martina. That same year he was elected to the Grand Rapids Board of Education and served on the Committee of Teachers and on the Committee on Apparatus and School Library. George Baert became an active member of the Grand Rapids community and a well-respected physician. Other doctors consulted him for his expertise in pathology as well as his laboratory research.³⁹ He was also brought in as an expert witness in legal matters, as in the case of *Ward v. Heth Brothers*, a workers' compensation case that went to the Michigan Supreme Court.⁴⁰

Two grandsons of a Dutch graduate of a midwifery program in a Dutch medical school had graduated from two of the more prestigious medical education programs in the United States and established their own medical practices, and one, like his father, a reputation for ongoing education in his field. The medical tradition in the family did not end with the death of George Baert on 5 November 1959; it simply skipped a generation. George and Martina Baert had three children—daughters:



Dr. George Baert in 1853. Image courtesy of the Local and Family History Department, Grand Rapids Public Library.

Kathleen DeVos, Donna, and Martina. Kathleen and Donna married, Martina did not. George Craig Ramsay, the son of Kathleen Baert and Clarence Frederick Ramsay, graduated from the University of Michigan Medical School as a radiologist and taught at Columbia-Presbyterian, Cornell, and Downstate Medical Centers in New York City. After teaching, he was in private practice in Alabama and Tennessee; he is now retired. But the first three generations of the Baert family in America reflect the development of teaching modern medicine.☺

Endnotes

1. "Proprietary" medical schools were commercial for-profit operations that provided a minimum of courses, often easy and nonacademic, leading to a medical degree.

2. The report was funded by the Carnegie Foundation and is available online at http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/sites/default/files/elibrary/Carnegie_Flexner_Report.pdf.

3. Roger A. Brumback, "Fragmentation of Medicine in the United States: Remnants of the 19th Century and the American Civil War," *Journal of Evidence-Based Complementary & Alternative Medicine* (January 2012) 9-10; also available online at <http://chp.sagepub.com/content/17/1/9.full>.

4. Duke University Medical Students, "The History of Medical Schools in the U.S.," http://www.vault.com/wps/portal/usa/vcm/detail/Career-Advice/Education-Advice/The-History-of-Medical-Schools-in-the-U.S.?id=5586&filter_type=0&filter_id=0, visited 1 May 2013, 9:50 p.m.

5. All family data comes from George Craig Ramsay, "The Baert Family from Zeeland" Family History file, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Baert Family file, Dekker-Huis/Zeeland Historical Museum, Zeeland, Michigan; and <http://www.zeeuwsarchief.nl/zoeken/?q=maria+maertens&tab=archive>.

6. Baert's National Military Certificate, Dekker-Huis/Zeeland Historical Museum, Zeeland, Michigan.

7. *Middelburgsche Courant*, 20 January 1831, [2], and 27 January 1931, [2].

8. *Middelburgsche Courant*, 17 June 1843, [2], 8 October 1844, [2], and 11 November 1848, [2].

9. Doctor J[an] C[ornelis] de Man, *De Geneeskundige School te Middelburg: Hare lectoren en leerlingen, 1825 tot 1866* (Middelburg: D. G. Kröber, Jr., 1902), 130-134.

10. M. J. Van Lieburg and Hilary Marland, "Midwife Regulation, Education, and Practice in the Netherlands during the Nineteenth Century," *Medical History* (1989) 296-317. The six schools and their number of graduates were in Amsterdam (133), Rotterdam (91), Hoom (66), Alkmaar (57), Middelburg (43), and Haarlem (26).

11. *Middelburgsche Courant*, 2 August 1827, [2].

12. Doctor J[an] C[ornelis] de Man, *De Geneeskundige School te Middelburg: Hare lectoren en leerlingen, 1825 tot 1866* (Middelburg: D. G. Kröber, Jr., 1902) 130-134. Clearly it was possible to complete the two-year sequence in less time.

13. Doctor J[an] C[ornelis] de Man, *De Geneeskundige School te Middelburg: Hare lectoren en leerlingen, 1825 tot 1866* (Middelburg: D. G. Kröber, Jr., 1902) 134; and Maatje Baert's obituary in *De Hope*, 16 February 1876.

14. When the family joined the Zeeland, Michigan, Reformed Church, the only children listed were Daniel, Levina, and Anthoni. Levina is listed in the 1850 census, but there is no further record of her.

15. Cornelius Gunst to his sister, 12 November 1855 and 4 August 1874, Baert Family file, Dekker-Huis/Zeeland Historical Museum, Zeeland, Michigan.

16. *History of Ottawa County, Michigan with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Chicago: H. R. Page & Co., 1882). In 1882 the town had two churches, five general stores, a clothing store, a hardware, two boot and shoe stores, two furniture stores, a drugstore, a bookstore, a butcher, a wagon and blacksmith, two hotels, a tannery, two planing mills, a sawmill, a cooper shop, and one flour mill.

17. J. Huizinga, "Zeeland's Geschiedenis in 't Kort - van 1847 tot 1888," *De Hope* (3 April 1880), 2; and Jacob Den Herder, "Sketch of Zeeland's History," in Henry S. Lucas, ed., *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 223.

18. Anna Kremer Keppel, *The Immigration and Early History of the People of Zeeland, Ottawa County, Michigan, in 1847* (Zeeland, Michigan: Zeeland Record Press, [1925]), 43.

19. Jan Peter Verhave, *Disease and Death Among the Early Settlers in Holland, Michigan* (Holland, Michigan: Van Raalte Press, 2007).

20. Jan Peter Verhave, *Disease and Death Among the Early Settlers in Holland, Michigan* (Holland, Michigan: Van Raalte Press, 2007), 41.

21. *De Hollander*, 7 September 1854, [1].

22. *De Hollander*, 3 September 1856,

[1] and 1 July 1856, [1].

23. In the early 17th century, Jesuit missionaries in Peru learned from indigenous healers that bark from several species of trees of the genus *Cinchona* was an effective remedy for malaria. It was variously known as Jesuit's Bark, Jesuit's Tree, and Jesuit's Powder, but came to be known as Peruvian Bark in non-Roman Catholic areas.

24. "Trijntje Boonstra Autobiography," Baert Family file, Dekker-Huis/Zeeland Historical Museum, Zeeland, Michigan, also, *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 5 Jun 1855.

25. Lucas Aling to Maatje Baert, 30 January 1856, Baert Family file, Dekker-Huis/Zeeland Historical Museum, Zeeland, Michigan.

26. According to her own records, Maatje helped with 3,561 births; Baert Family file, Dekker-Huis/Zeeland Historical Museum, Zeeland, Michigan.

27. *De Hollander*, 5 Augustus 1857, [2].

28. *De Hollander*, 5 Augustus 1857, [2].

29. His will stipulated that all outstanding balances were forgiven.

30. "Trijntje Boonstra Autobiography," Baert Family file, Dekker-Huis/Zeeland Historical Museum, Zeeland.

31. Oscar was named for his maternal grandfather, Oscar being the Americanized version of Atze, while George was named for his paternal grandfather and father. Most sources list George's name as George Henry Baert, but his official records at the University of Michigan have it as George Henry Daniel Baert.

32. *The Physician and Surgeon: A Journal of the Medical Science*, v. 19 no. 10 (October 1897), 475.

33. Other area doctors did the same; for instance, Roelof A. Schouten, an 1865 graduate of the Haarlem Medical School, worked in Holland, Michigan, from 1869 until moving to Grand Rapids in 1882.

34. "Mrs. Oscar Baert's Death a Sudden One," *Grand Rapids Herald*, 8 Aug 1912, 10.

35. *Sporting Life*, 12 June 1897, 28.

36. *The City of Grand Rapids and Kent County, Mich.: Up to Date, Containing Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens* (Chicago: A.W. Bowen & Co., 1900), 42.

37. Richard H. Harms, "Whatever Happened to the Grand Rapids Medical College?" in "Wonderland Magazine," *Grand Rapids Press*, 4 December 1988, 39. The college closed in 1905 as the Medical School at the University of Michigan, and the Michigan Medical College in Detroit expanded.

38. George A. Hendricks, *The Physician and Surgeon—A Monthly Magazine, Devoted to Medical and Surgical Science* (October 1897), 475.

39. D. Milton Green, "A Case of Carcinoma and Sarcoma of the Nose," *The Medical News* (6 February 1897), 173-174; and Albert Adams, *Spondylotherapy: Physio- and Pharmaco-Therapy and Diagnostic Methods Based on a Study of Clinical Physiology* (San Francisco: Philopolis Press, 1918), 39-40; although Adams' therapy was later demonstrated to be deceptive, he cites the expertise of Baert and other medical practitioners in his earlier works to make the case for his therapy.

40. *Northwest Reporter*, vol. 180 (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1921), 249.

A Memoir of One Who Served¹

Kenneth Vander Molen

Five minutes before eight o'clock on the morning of Sunday, 7 December 1941, Hawaii Time,² more than three hundred and fifty³ Japanese bombers, fighters, and torpedo planes attacked Pearl Harbor. My brother and I were members of the junior choir of the First Christian Reformed Church, in Detroit, Michigan. That Sunday afternoon we had a practice session, getting

ready for the Christmas service. Our choir director was Dewey Westra. During this practice, the janitor came in and talked to Mr. Westra and told him that it was just announced on the radio that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. Mr. Westra said that we still had about one-half hour of singing practice and after that we could go home. Running home quickly, we turned the radio on and heard for ourselves about the Japanese bombing of the Hawaiian Islands: All we knew was that we had suffered some damage. I got out a world map to locate where in the world Pearl Harbor was.

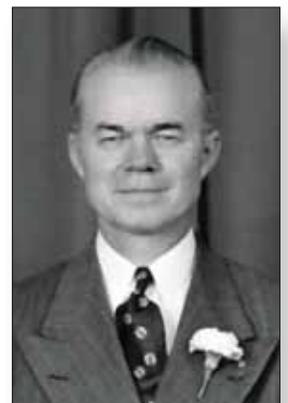
In the tenth grade I signed up to become a member of the Southeastern

High School Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), complete with a really cool uniform. I made a big impression



Gordon (left) and Kenneth Vander Molen in a photo taken when they were home on leave. Image courtesy of the author.

on the young ladies around school. I went to a lot of football games, not to see the games but because I was in ROTC and was able to guard the crowds of kids. By volunteering for guard duty, I was awarded a ribbon on my uniform.



Dewey Westra, the choir director at Detroit Christian Reformed Church, on the afternoon of 7 December 1941. Image courtesy of the Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.

Kenneth Vander Molen moved to Grand Rapids from Detroit after World War II. He and his late wife, Jeanne Tuinstra, had six children. He worked in sales after his military experience, retiring in 1989. In retirement he and his wife traveled to numerous countries. Since completing his book on his military experience in 2001, he has revised and expanded it several times.

One time I “guarded” the cast of Irving Berlin’s show “This Is the Army” at the Masonic Temple in downtown Detroit. I met Irving Berlin in person, and it was a real thrill for me. I also had the opportunity to hear Lily Pons and noted that she had the smallest feet I have ever seen.

Our ROTC would compete with other Detroit high school ROTC units at Briggs Stadium. At these field day exercises, there was lots of marching, setting up of tents, and doing the manual of arms with rifles. But I had never fired a gun; to be able to fire a rifle, one had to be in the twelfth grade. I held the rank of sergeant.

I marched along Woodward Avenue in the annual Armistice Day parade as a member of Southeastern’s ROTC unit on 11 November 1942. It was great to be a member of the military. There were military personnel present requiring us to salute all officers. It was a great experience.

On 7 August 1944 I would be eighteen years old and subject to the draft. Even though I had one more year of high school to finish, my plans were to register for the draft in August, pass my physical, and then enter the Army in September 1944. That way I wouldn’t have to finish my last year of high school. As required by the Selective Service Act, on the day before our eighteenth birthday we were required by law to register with our local draft board. On 7 August my twin brother Gordon and I went to our local draft board, number 17, on Jefferson Avenue, and registered with them. We were told that we were to report for our physicals sometime before the first of September. That was good timing, because school started on 5 September.

My brother and I made plans to fly to Cincinnati. We wanted to spend some time with our older brother Clarence and his wife, Grace. We left Detroit City Airport and flew via

Dayton, Ohio. The Dayton airport was a military base, so we had to have the curtains drawn when we flew in! We landed in Cincinnati for our short vacation. On Thursday, 17 August, while in Cincinnati, we received (via the mail) our questionnaire, which we had to fill out. This form was one of the first steps required before our physical examinations could take place.

Returning to Detroit, we both went before the consistory of the church and professed our faith. This was not done because we were going into service, but because we were ready to profess our faith in Christ and felt that this was the right time. We were asked all the questions in our catechism book. It was no wonder that so few young people wanted to make profession of their faith. We received a small serviceman’s Bible from the church. I carried that New Testament with me all the time I was in service and read it. I especially remember being comforted, when in combat, reading Romans 8: “Nothing can separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.” I even underlined those verses, and they are that way even today.⁴

On Monday, 28 August, we went downtown for the physical examination. As soon as I was finished, the doctor said that I was 1-A. I asked, “When will I be called into service?” He replied, “You will probably be called up in about five months.” That was not what I wanted to hear, because in just seven days I would be back in school. I had to think of something fast. I inquired, “Is there any way to get in the service faster than waiting five months?” Without looking up from his work, he gave me the answer that I wanted to hear: “Sign up now for immediate induction, and you will leave for service on 25 September.” I signed on the dotted line right then and there. Gordon

did as well, so we would be leaving together.

Mother had the idea that I would not be able to pass the physical because she thought I had a bad kidney or something like that; my appendix had been removed, so surely that would keep me out; and, don’t forget, I had another year of schooling. Mother was sure that I would get a deferment for any of these reasons. On Thursday, 7 September, I received the formal greetings from Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States. It was a form letter that stated when to report for service. Along with my brother Gordon, I was to appear on Monday, 25 September, for induction into the United States Service at Chicago, Illinois. I was glad; Mother cried. The last few days at home went by very slowly. We left Sunday afternoon from the Michigan Central Station. I carried just a small bag containing clothes. I don’t believe my mother was at the station, but I do remember that my father was there. I made up my mind that I would not look back but walk straight ahead and enter the train car assigned to inductees.

My brother and I sat next to each other and started to talk with some of the fellows around us. There were men much older than the rest of us, one being Mike Van Couwenberghe. I believe he was twenty-five and married. The train stopped to pick up more inductees in Kalamazoo. Some women from the local Red Cross came on board and gave us doughnuts and coffee. A paper napkin was printed with musical notes around the border with the words of a song that was very popular at that time, “I’ve Got a Gal in Kalamazoo.”

After arriving in Chicago we ate our supper in the Conrad Stevens Hotel. We were assigned to a room and told to be up at 6 a.m. Most of us went to bed early and slept well. This

was the last evening that we would be sleeping as civilians for some time to come. Some fellows spent their last night drinking Chicago dry. The next morning left them with severe hangovers.

I had breakfast in the hotel with the rest of the inductees and then marched (after a fashion) down the streets of Chicago to a building just like every other building in the area. We had roll call, and all were present and accounted for. We filled out a few forms and then had a physical exam by a dentist who thought he was a doctor. We all went up some steps to the second floor and entered a room and sat at desk-like chairs. The corporal in charge explained to us that we would be assigned to either the Army or Navy. One or two of the inductees asked if they could be assigned to the Air Corps, as they wanted to fly. The corporal responded by answering, "Go stand by the window and jump, because that's about the closest you will get to flying."



The author's parents, Cecil and Martha Vander Molen, at their home at 2662 Manistique Street in eastern Detroit. Image courtesy of the author.

We were told to line up and follow the man in front of us as we were about to be assigned to either the Army or Navy. We did not have much of a choice. We were told that today they needed more men in the Army, so it was going to be five men to the Army, with one man going to the Navy. We had no way of knowing where we would be going. Some fellows really wanted to get into the Navy, so they put up a fuss, but the corporal in charge said that it was going to be the luck of the draw as to who went where. We were nearing the counter where the officer in charge was stamping our wrists *Army* or *Navy*. Gordon was ahead of me, and some fellow stepped in between us. *Army* was stamped on Gordon's right wrist and the next man's wrist was also stamped *Army*. Now it was my turn; *Army* was stamped on my right wrist also. The ones assigned to the Navy were directed to another doorway, and we moved on to the next Army officer. This officer assigned

each of us our Army serial number with instructions to know that number forwards and backwards. We would not be able to go unless we knew that number. I was now 36-916-144; Gordon was 36-916-142. No longer were we to be addressed as Kenneth or Gordon, but by our numbers.

Later, a snappy WAC⁵ lieutenant came into the room, and the corporal yelled out, "Attention!" Being in the ROTC, I as-

sumed a military position with eyes to the front, arms to the sides, and heels together. While standing at attention, we were told to raise our right hand and repeat after her the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Army. "One step forward," was her command. We did just that. We had just taken our first step as soldiers in the United States Armed Forces. She gave her second command: "Pick up all the cigarette butts." One of the fellows said that no woman was going to tell him what to do, at which the lieutenant said, "Give me twenty-five push-ups." We learned early to do what we were told.

We ate lunch, boarded the Chicago Northwestern Railroad train, and headed for Fort Sheridan, about twenty miles north of Chicago. There were five carloads of draftees all heading toward new adventures. The first car went on to Great Lakes Naval Training Center about another fifteen miles north of Fort Sheridan. It was late in the day when we arrived and marched to our new barracks. We received a warm welcome from the fellows who were already in camp, with such encouraging words as "You'll be sorry," and "Just wait till you get your shots," and "Barber bait."

The next morning a crazy fellow blowing a whistle came through the barracks yelling it was time to get up. It was only 6 a.m. Where was I? Where was the toilet? Where was I going to eat this morning? What clothes was I to wear? Who was this fellow blowing that whistle? I had a hundred more questions but no time to think, as fifty inductees were all running to the toilet (latrine) to get ready for the day's activities. We hurried to shave; formation was at 6:30 a.m. I really didn't have to shave but did so anyway just to be like the rest of the fellows. Then off to mess. It was here that I saw my first prisoners of war (POW) soldiers, keeping

BELOW Kenneth Vander Molen's selective service registration card.

RIGHT The author's identification tag with name, tetanus vaccination date, serial number, blood type, and religious affiliation.

Images courtesy of the author.

Selective Service Proclamation of the President of the United States

KENNETH Wesley VANDER-MOLEN
(First name) (Middle name) (Last name)

2662 MANISTIQUE, Detroit Mich
(Place of residence)
(This will be identical with line 2 of the Registration Card)

has been duly registered this **17** day of **August**, 19**44**

Joseph Baudera
(Signature of registrar)

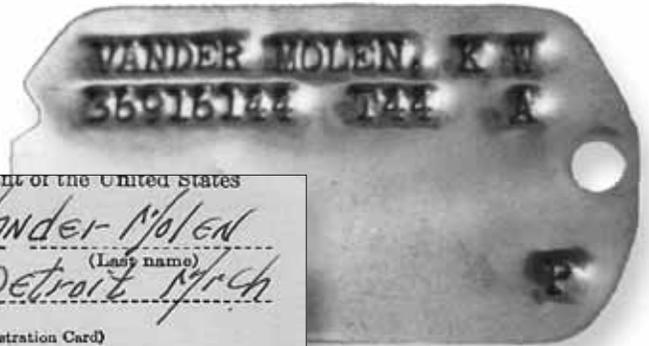
Registrar for Local Board **17 Wayne Mich**
(Number) (City or county) (State)

THE LAW REQUIRES YOU TO HAVE THIS CARD IN YOUR PERSONAL POSSESSION AT ALL TIMES

D. S. S. Form 2 **16-21631**
(Revised 6/9/41)

(Registrant must sign here)

Kenneth W. Vander Molen



some reason our group stayed longer. Of course, the Post Exchange (PX) was open, and we could get some goodies like ice cream or, better still, meet some of the young girls at the PX. It was boring just sitting around camp with no place to go. We could go

the grounds clean and working in the kitchens. Most of the food was dumped on top of each other—green peas put right on top of our mashed potatoes or ice cream on top of our bread. When we complained, the POWs looked at us as if to say, we don't understand English. Later, I watched as the POWs played soccer and observed that they were having a good time. They seemed glad that *their* war was finished while *my* war was just beginning.

Next we went to the barbershop for our military haircuts, one-inch length all over the head. Some guys had a good head of hair, but not after meeting with the Army barber. We then went to the warehouse to be fitted for all the clothes that we would need. It was done like an assembly line, moving first to get measured for our shirts, then pants, later our jackets, shoes, underwear, and even ties. We were given the famous Army duffel bag. Everything we owned had to fit into that bag. If it didn't fit, you didn't need it. We were issued our dog tags, which we wore around our necks;

these tags were inscribed with our name, Army serial number, tetanus shots, blood type, and religion. Our civilian clothes were packed in the small bags we came with. The military saw to it that these were shipped home.

We spent the next three or four days filling out more forms. We were given the Army General Classification Test (GCT). Recruits were classified into five groups according to the test results. The higher the score, the better chance for specialized training. The highest score possible was 163. I was in Class I, with a score of 120, which made me eligible to attend Officer Candidate School (OCS). I took a typing test and passed with a good score. I figured maybe that I would be a clerk. Finally, we were able to call home to inform the folks how we were doing.

We stayed near camp until the time when we would go "bingo," meaning shipped out to our basic training camp. No one knew when we would go; some guys who came in after we had arrived were shipped out, but for

to the post movies; the cost was only fifteen cents.

It was at Fort Sheridan that I attempted smoking. We were all called to the orderly room. We were introduced to a civilian who was from the American Tobacco Company. He said that he had something free to give each of us—two packs of Lucky Strike cigarettes. He told us how good the cigarettes would be for us while we were serving our country and that smoking was really cool. I didn't know what to do with my packs. A couple of the fellows gave their cigarettes to others who smoked. I figured that now was as good a time as any to start smoking. I put the packs in my pocket and went back to the barracks. What I really did was to suck in smoke and blow it out of my mouth without inhaling. In about twenty minutes I had the whole two packs finished. If that was all there was to smoking, I couldn't see any enjoyment in it, so I quit smoking the day I started.

On Monday, 2 October, we were ordered out of Fort Sheridan for places



The water tower and barracks at Ft. Sheridan, where the author and his brother were inducted into the US Army, prior to basic training at Camp Robinson in Arkansas. The fort began in 1877 as Camp Highwood and closed in 1993. Public domain image.

unknown to us. There was no time to call home. We traveled through many small towns. Going slowly through one of these towns, we yelled out to ask the name of the city; the answer was “Joliet.” We were still in Illinois, but heading south. We ate on the train and slept in the seats assigned to us. It was a long, long trip. After some time our train pulled into a large railroad siding; we could tell that this was an Army post.

We had arrived at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, an Infantry Replacement Training Center (IRTC). After roll call we were assigned hut numbers. I located my new home and was introduced to other GIs with whom I would be sharing sixteen weeks of basic training. They were Mike Van Couwenbergh (the older fellow from Detroit); my brother Gordon; Charles

Reynolds, from Gobles, Michigan; a GI named Rothe (I don’t remember his first name);⁶ and Donald R. Twork Jr., from Menominee, Michigan, who spent most of his free time calling his wife or writing letters to her.

Our new home was about twenty by twenty feet. In the center was a gas stove that was lit with a match. It really could throw out the heat. The cots were placed around the room along the outside walls. These were not like the soft beds that we slept on while at Fort Sheridan. These were canvas cots. The windows

around our hut had screens but no glass. At night we would go around outside the hut and drop the shutters making it cozy. One large light bulb hung above the stove. Each GI had a shelf above his cot; under each cot was a trunk, which held clothes, writing materials, and maybe a book or two. Reynolds had a radio with him, and we could listen to local stations. He had the radio set to turn on at 5:30 a.m. and the very first noise we would hear was Roy Acuff singing “Top of the Morning, It’s a Bright and Sunny Day.”

On Monday, 9 October, my sixteen weeks of basic training began with a bugle call over the loudspeaker. We formed into squads of twelve men each; three squads made a platoon. We met our platoon sergeant, named Stripmaster. He was thirty-nine years

old and had been in the Army for twenty years. He had seen service in the Aleutian Islands, and right away I liked him. Three platoons form a company, three companies a battalion, three battalions a regiment, and three regiments an infantry division. I was in the second platoon, B Company, 128th Battalion, 81st Infantry Regiment.

During this first week of training we received helmet liners. The steel helmets didn’t really fit our heads; a liner was required to support the helmet. In basic we wore this plastic helmet liner printed with our name on the outside. Mike Van Couwenbergh had such a long name that it went completely around the back of the helmet liner.

On Saturday, 14 October, we were all ordered to wear combat boots, helmet liners, and nothing over our skin except our black rubber raincoats. That Saturday must have been the hottest day the state of Arkansas ever had. We were marched over to the infirmary, where we were to be given our smallpox immunization shots. We went inside, where it was cool. I walked down the corridor and was told to take my raincoat off and to move down the hallway as a medic struck a needle into my arm. Not only on my right side, but another medic from the opposite side would jab his needle into my left arm. It didn’t hurt going in, but I’m sure they had a hook on the needle when they pulled it out! We got three different shots that day. We were told to take a shower and to stay in bed because these shots would easily knock us out. Some fellows passed out when the shots were given. On Monday we were all back to our regular routine of basic training. For about two weeks no one slapped anyone on the arm.

The second Sunday there I thought I would sleep in and miss going to chapel. I was far away from Detroit,

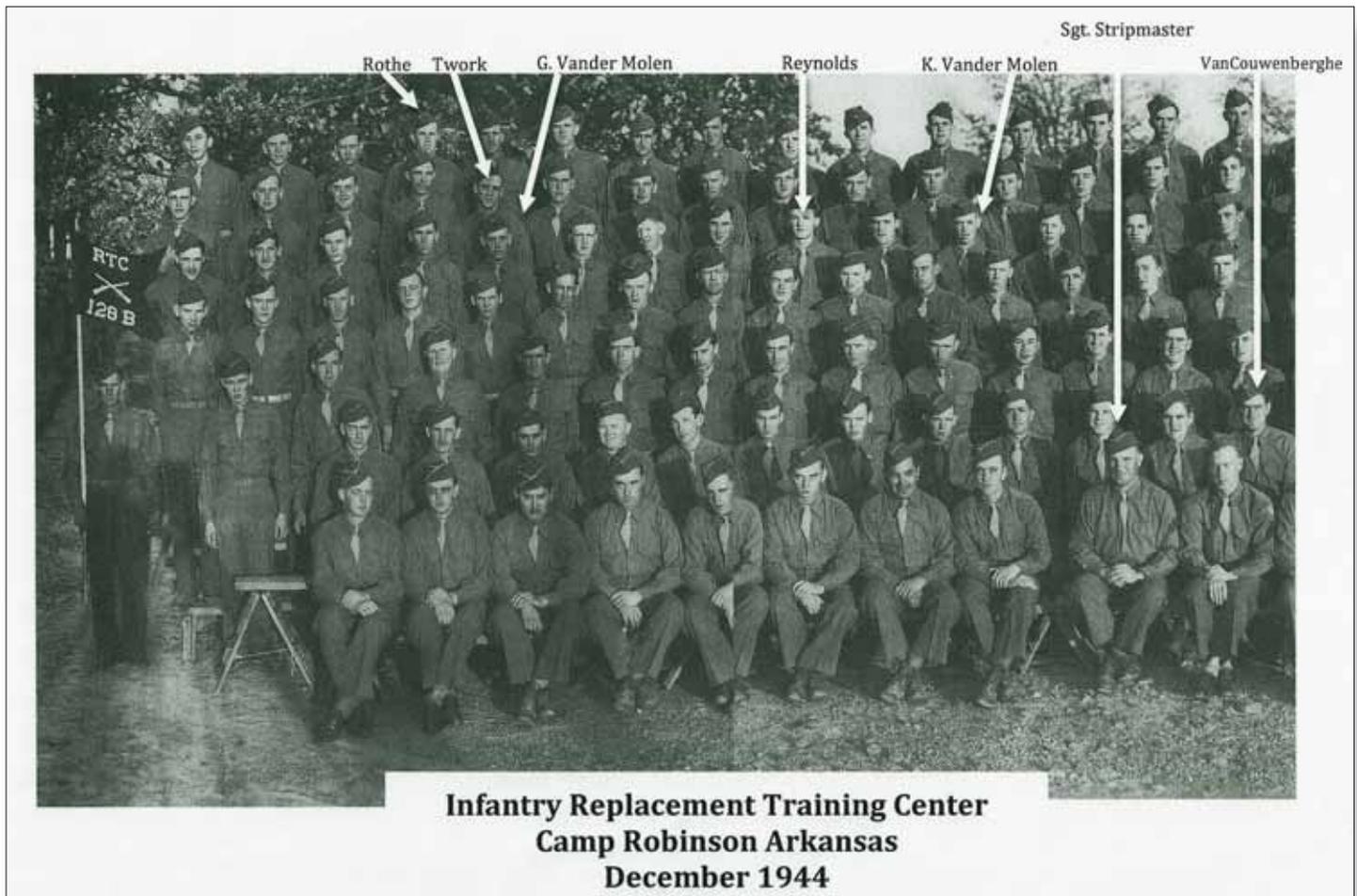
and no one would ask if I had attended church on that Sunday or not. Wrong. Just as I was turning over for forty more winks, there was a knock on the front door and a voice from the other side asked, "Is Private Vander Molen here?" Gordon had left, so I said sleepily, "My name is Vander Molen." He came into the hut and said, "My name is Private Hunderman from Byron Center, Michigan." He had obtained my name from the Young Calvinist membership list and was also a member of the Christian Reformed church. He invited me to go to chapel with him. Even when away from home, the Lord moves in mysterious ways.

We did a lot of physical training (PT) in camp. We called it physical torture. Sergeant Stripmaster told us

that we had to run three miles and in the near future we would be marching twenty-five miles. Every morning we had PT first thing. We would walk about a quarter of a mile and then run a quarter of a mile. The next week we would run half a mile and then walk half a mile. At the end of ten or twelve weeks we were easily running three miles every day. I was really getting in shape. Another of the exercises was a real killer, the telephone pole carry. Our squad of men would pick up a thirty-foot telephone pole and extend it over our heads. We would swing it to the left, then to the right, and overhead again. That really developed muscles.

We were now part of the infantry; we were issued rifles. We practiced cleaning them, taking them apart and,

most important, how to fire them. We even slept with them. It was exciting at the firing range. We were given live ammunition and had to fire at a fixed target. If we missed hitting within the target area, we would get a "Maggie's drawers." This was a red flag which was displayed on the target area to let us know that we didn't hit anything. We also fired other pieces of equipment, such as the mortar, the machine gun, the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), and the carbine. We would fire the mortars at barrels located about 1,000 yards from our firing point. Each of us was to fire three rounds to get our "shell" into the barrels. We fired blanks, not the real shells. We were trained how to use a gas mask to be prepared for gas attacks and, of course, first aid. We were also in-



The completion of basic training at Camp Robinson. Image courtesy of the author.

structed in squad infantry tactics.

The smallest infantry unit was a squad, consisting of twelve men. The squad leader plus nine others were armed with M1 Garand semiautomatic rifles; one with a Browning Automatic Rifle, and one with an M1903 Springfield rifle fitted with a sniper scope. The squad generally operated as a two-man scout section, a four-man fire section, and a five-man maneuver and assault section. The squad leader customarily advanced with the scout section and held the rank of staff sergeant.

We were very busy at Camp Robinson during the sixteen weeks of basic training. We had to learn many ways to survive. I had never fired a weapon before going into service. I learned that there were other Christians in service, and I wondered if they, like me, could kill another person. The chaplain at camp told us to trust in the Lord and obey the higher military authority. When the time would come, could we really kill one of God's creatures?

Payday was once a month. On the fifteenth of the month we signed the payroll, and on the thirtieth we got paid. Payment was distributed according to rank, so the sergeants got paid first and finally the lowly privates. We were paid alphabetically in each rank. Being a private with the name Vander Molen, I was near the end of the line. We always got paid in new money. Since the sergeants were paid first, they would go to the orderly room and cover our pool table with a green cloth. This was the table where we could play poker. Somehow the sergeants always seemed to win. Other tables were set up to play dice or other games of chance. It was a real temptation to play, but I watched some of the new recruits lose all of their month's pay in one throw of the dice. This is not what I wanted. My fifty dollars per month

was hard-earned, and I always set aside \$18.75 each month for a war bond. Four dollars each month was taken out for the laundry service. Once every two weeks we would send our dirty clothes to the supply room; they would be cleaned and returned the next day. We had to mark all of our clothes with the first initial of our last name plus the last four numbers of our service number. All my clothes were marked V-6144. My pay after



The Browning Automatic Rifle developed during World War I became standard issue in the US Army in 1938 and was used extensively during World War II. Public domain image.

expenses was in the neighborhood of twenty-eight dollars a month, or more like seven dollars per week.

On 23 November my parents came to visit us at Camp Robinson. They came down on the Greyhound bus, were put up in the guesthouse on the grounds, and had dinner with us. Mother didn't think much of the food. The weather was damp and cold while they were with us. Father didn't have too much to say. We did get a few days off; we showed them the camp and they also saw our hut.

On 25 December we all were given the week off to celebrate Christmas. Gordon and I went into Little Rock to see the big city. We registered at a local hotel and, since we were not heavy drinkers or interested in girls, we stayed mostly near the hotel. I do remember that we filled a balloon with water and dropped it out of the hotel window. It landed near a couple

of soldiers with their girlfriends. They ran into the hotel trying to find who had tried to "bomb" them. The military police were called and came knocking on every door to locate the culprits. They rapped on our door, and I opened it and claimed that I had been sleeping and didn't know anything about anything.

During the last two months of basic training we acquired a new company commander, a full-bird colonel;⁷

he was from the Americal Division. He wore the blue shoulder patch, with four white stars that formed the Southern Cross. We went into a different training program; instead of doing things as a squad, we started to do things more or less by ourselves or with one other fellow soldier. We practiced more hand-to-hand combat, crawling around on the ground, and digging in the dirt. We did a lot more night marches in silence. We would take off across fields instead of following the roads, as we always had done previously. Our training seemed to be heading more toward the Pacific Theater of Operation (PTO).

Some of the soldiers in camp wanted to go to Little Rock every weekend if possible. I really had no interest in going there. When these fellows had kitchen police (KP) duty on Sunday, I would volunteer my services to work their KP for them. Sunday morning

breakfast usually consisted of cold cereals or pastry. Normally eggs were not prepared on Sunday mornings. For lunch the menu was cold cuts with lots of fresh fruit. You can see by the menu that there weren't a lot of dirty pans that had to be scrubbed clean. I also got a little extra pay from the GIs who wanted to be in Little Rock. Sunday KP duty was a snap.

We were still faced with the twenty-five-mile hike that was required of all men before leaving Camp Robinson. Private Twork said that he wasn't going to march for twenty-five miles; he would find a way out of marching. Well, the night arrived. With full field packs on, we started out down the road for twenty-five miles. Twork was marching in the column behind me, and I kept looking to see if he was still with us. He was, with a big smile on his face. I saw an ambulance going by me and there was Twork, sitting on the back of that ambulance, heading back to camp and the hospital. I knew there wasn't anything wrong with him. We kept marching for the rest of the night and arrived back at camp, dog tired. The weather was cool and rainy; we knew that when we returned to our hut we would have to light the fire in the stove and wait for the room to heat up. When we got to our hut we opened the door and, believe it or not, the stove was lit, the room was nice and cozy, and Twork was sitting on his bed. He had prepared hot coffee and had gotten an apple pie from the kitchen for the five of us. Twork had pulled the heel off his shoe, and no way will the Army let a soldier march with a missing heel. We had a good laugh at that one. Twork went to all the other huts that night and lit their stoves also, so he wasn't such a bad fellow after all.

While in Arkansas we were required by the Army to attend several classes. We had to hear the Articles of War read to us every six months.



*Shoulder patch of the Americal Division.
Public domain image.*

This deals with the law that governs us while in service, such as that being AWOL (absent without official leave) could get you three months at hard labor, the forfeit of all the pay received, and then a dishonorable discharge from the Army. Disobeying an officer could cost three months and the forfeit of all pay for six months. If the enemy captured us, all we had to give them was our name, rank, and serial number. If we gave anything else, we could be considered traitors, and be shot. Another very interesting class we attended was sex education. We saw graphic movies on venereal disease (VD). An airman who had spent the night with a call girl contracted VD and later, while flying his plane in combat with an enemy plane in his sights, he passed out because he had VD, crashed into the ocean, and died. It got much worse and almost made me throw up, and I wasn't the only person in that condition. Then the chaplain got up in front of us and told us not to go out with girls who had VD and that it was morally wrong and a sin to be with a woman unless you were married to her.

Basic training was finished on 19 January 1944. I had survived. I was now qualified to sew a shoulder patch on the left sleeve of my uniform. I felt like real Army, and I had a marksman-

ship medal to wear. On the 25th we were given our orders where we were to report next. Most of us were given a fourteen-day delay en route, which meant that we could travel home. The name of the camp was to be top secret. Some fellows were to report to Fort Dix, in New Jersey, so they knew that they were headed for the European Theater. I opened my papers, and on 9 February I was to report to Fort Ord, California. Most of the men in our hut and company were to report to Fort Ord; we would be going to the Pacific Theater.

The Army gave us money for travel. We had to arrange for our own transportation to California. The cheapest price was by rail, but flying allowed us to spend more time at home. Since I really didn't have a lot of extra cash, I decided to travel by rail. Things surely had changed since we left Detroit. My cousin Ken "Dutch" Zylstra left Grand Rapids and came to Detroit to work. He was staying at our place, and while both Gordon and I were home, he made his bed in the living room.

My folks insisted on having our pictures taken, so we went to a photo shop called John's Studio. Mother also wanted us to have our pictures taken together. I would have liked my picture taken alone. The time at home seemed to just drag on. All of my friends were in service. Gas was rationed, food was hard to get, people worked many hours in defense plants. I did find the time to visit Southeastern High School, and I watched the ROTC unit in action. It seemed to me that these kids were really young.

On 5 February we left by train for Fort Ord, along with Mike Van Couwenberghe. The train was loaded first with servicemen; the remaining seats were for civilians. On boarding the train, we all decided that each one of us would sit by a window to see who would be sitting next to us. We were

going to be traveling to California for at least three days. We all had coach tickets requiring us to sleep in our seats. We were hoping, of course, that some nice young, good-looking girl would sit next to us and we would have a pleasant trip out West. Well, the first one in our coach was a very large woman with a small crying child; she sat next to Gordon. Both Mike and I had a good laugh at this. Another fellow came onboard and sat next to me and didn't have much to say. No one sat next to Mike, so I moved to sit next to him. Someone said that there was room in the last car and the large woman and child left and went to the rear car. Gordon had a smile on his face. Just then a young, attractive girl came in and asked in a loud voice if there were any empty seats in this car. Gordon, without hesitation, jumped up and said he had an empty seat next to him. He carried her bag and put it in the overhead storage and began to get a conversation going with this beauty. She sat next to him the whole trip to California. When it came time to sleep, she put her head back and went off to sleep. This was about the only time that Gordon left his seat, because

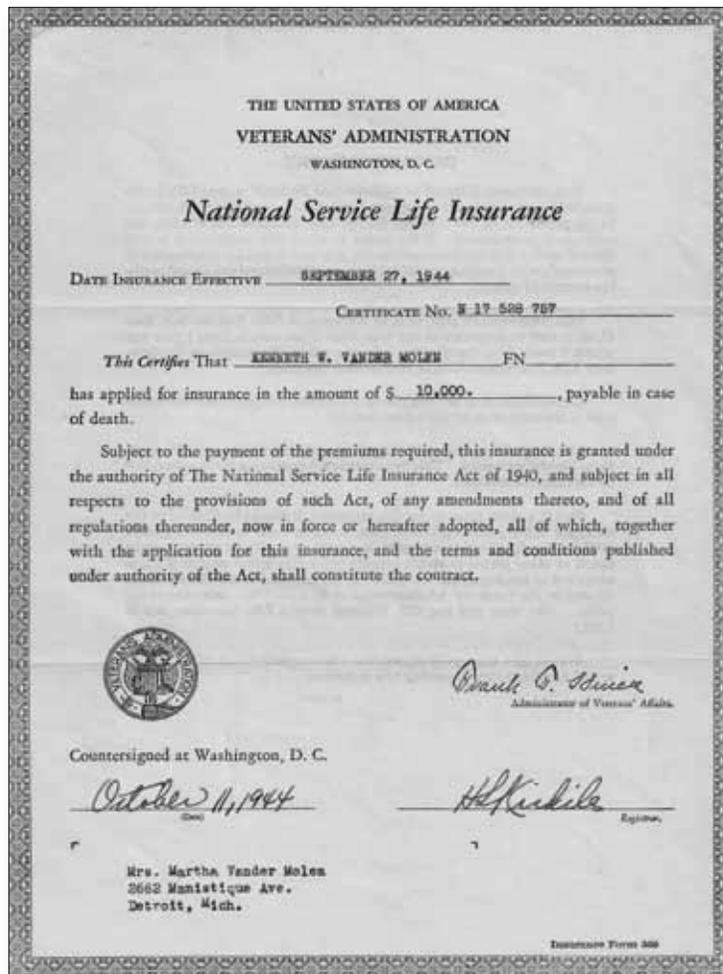
he knew that if he left, even to go to the bathroom, one of us guys would jump right in and take his place. We would have done it too. It was really funny as I think about it now. We went through Kansas City and had a four-hour layover, so we went to a steak house and had a very big steak. Everywhere servicemen went, they were given first-class service.

We reported for duty and were assigned to a barracks. The following morning we again had many forms to fill out, mostly insurance papers and next-of-kin information. I was able to get GI insurance for only \$6.40 per month for a \$10,000 death claim. There was a very large swimming pool in camp, and one morning we all had to swim across the pool.

When we got to the other side, they told us that if we couldn't swim across the pool we would have to stay until we learned how to swim. Of course, they told us this *after* we swam across the pool. While at Fort Ord, we were issued new suntan uniforms. We were headed for the tropical climate, for sure. ☺

Endnotes

1. The article is an extract from the author's *I Remember When: The Memoirs of One Who Served, 1944-1946* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chapbook Press, Schuler Books, 2012), which is available from Schuler Books in Grand Rapids.
2. The time in Detroit, in the Eastern Time Zone was five hours later than the time in Hawaii.
3. Various sources report that between 351 and 366 planes attacked Pearl Harbor. Most official sources put the total at 353, 183 in the first wave and 170 in the second.
4. When I was elected an elder in our church, I carried that New Testament on hospital calls and home visits, and when my grandson, John Mark Vander Molen, entered the Marine Corps, I gave him that Bible.
5. Women's Army Corps (WAC) was the women's branch of the United States Army. It was created as an auxiliary unit, the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in 1942, and converted to full Army status as the WAC in 1943.
6. He never seemed to associate with us. He always went to bed in his birthday suit, that is, stark naked.
7. As opposed to a lieutenant colonel.



The author's \$10,000 government insurance policy naming his mother as the beneficiary. Image courtesy of the author.

Big Star Lake: Growth of a Love Story¹

William J. Braaksma



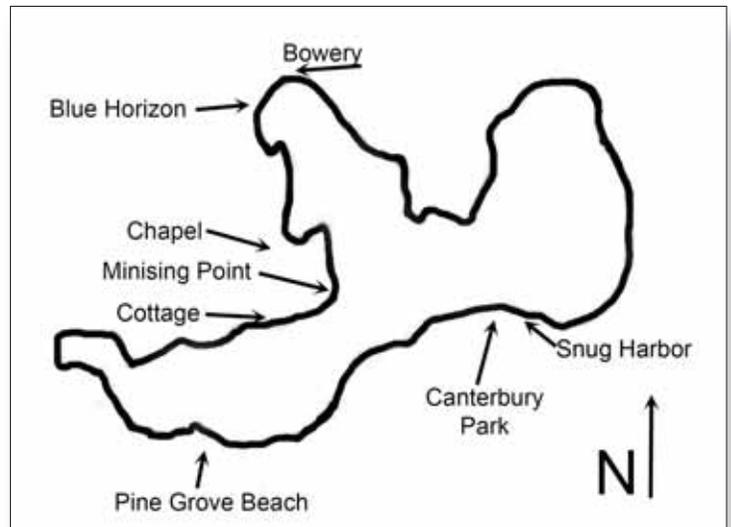
The author on the dock, c 1958. Image courtesy of the author.

During my pre-teen years, in the 1950s, the best weeks of my summers were spent at Big Star Lake. I still remember my anticipation growing as the summer days crept toward the time for us—Mother, Dad, (eventually) my sister Barbara, and me—to leave Kalamazoo for the drive of about 140 miles to Big Star. Once on the road, we'd head north and then circle west of Grand Rapids (this was before US-131 was constructed) to Fruit Ridge Road.² North of Grand Rapids we'd turn onto M-37. We'd drive down a long, steep hill into Newaygo, a hill which Mother each year remarked had frightened her mother when they'd make the same drive in the 1920s and '30s.³ We'd often stop for groceries in Newaygo and lunch in White Cloud. When, after what seemed to be an interminable drive, we'd turn off M-37 onto Big Star Lake Road, I'd know we were close. As the lake grew nearer, I'd know where we could first glimpse Big Star's water in shimmering sunlight, just before we'd pass the Blue Horizon Resort. Curiously, I have no recollection of ever driving to Big Star on a rainy day.

Within minutes we'd turn off the pavement and onto a dirt road, really just two ruts through the woods that took us to the cottage

that Mother and Dad rented, almost always the same cottage. I'd run down to the water. We were there.

The object of my affection, love, really, lies about eighty miles directly north of Grand Rapids in lightly populated, densely forested Lake County. Big Star covers 912 acres; it stretches about two and a quarter miles east to west. Big Star is really three large bays connected at the lake's middle; as a result there is no point, except from the air, where the entire shoreline can be seen. But a physical description does not do Big Star justice. To me and to hundreds, likely thousands of Dutch Reformed⁴ vacationers, Big Star was—and still is—a special place, our place, that transcends mere sand, sun, and water. Quietly, since the early 1920s, an ethnic and religious vacation community has developed at Big Star, a community of the Dutch Reformed.⁵ Drive around the lake during the intervening decades, and even now you'll see dozens of Dutch surnames on signs nailed to trees or



Bill Braaksma is a Calvin College graduate and in 2012 completed a master's degree in history at Western Michigan University, as a "non-traditional" student. He lives in the Kalamazoo area. This is his first article written for publication.

posts: Huizingh, Tiggelman, Koning, Ryskamp, Elhart, and many others.

Ethnic and religious resorts are not unique. Jewish resorts in the Catskill Mountains, made famous by “borscht belt” comedians, were popular during the first half of the twentieth century. The African-American resort at Idlewild, Michigan, coincidentally also in Lake County, has become the subject of a host of books, magazine articles, documentaries, and even movies in recent years. Methodist camp meetings have attracted thousands across the country for nearly two centuries. Yet the Dutch Reformed resort community at Big Star has developed a staying power that many other resort communities have lacked. Perhaps equally significant is the fact that its origin, growth, and staying power are not attributable to any marketing effort by a corporate resort or developer. Rather, the Dutch Reformed who vacationed there were knit by the stronger ties of faith and ethnicity and the desire to share family vacation experiences.

Big Star Lake attracted vacationers at least as early as the first years of the twentieth century. Possibly as early as 1901, Frank Basford and Martin Freeman opened a resort called The Bowery on the north side of the lake. In its first years, vacationers at The Bowery stayed in tents set up by the owners. The Bowery eventually included a dance floor, an attraction for young people from all over Lake County on summer Saturday evenings. Another resort, known as Canterbury Park, projected to have 162 lots in as many as eight rows back from Big Star’s south shore, was platted in 1916.⁶ Other resorts eventually followed.

The beginning of the Dutch Reformed history at Big Star appears to have occurred when Henry Ryskamp, a young economics professor at Calvin College and later dean of the faculty, and his bride, Flora DeGraaf,



A postcard from Big Star Lake, c 1920. Image courtesy of the Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.

learned of Big Star from “a man named Mathieson,” almost certainly W. B. S. Mathieson, secretary of the Grand Rapids School Equipment Company.⁷ Henry rented a cottage at Big Star for two weeks during the summer of 1923 and took Flora, his bride, there for their honeymoon. While the newlyweds had the cottage to themselves for the first week, a host of family members descended on them for the second.⁸ Among the guests were Henry’s sister Pearl, her husband, the Rev. John O. Bouwsma (my grandparents), and their two small children, my mother, Margaret, and her brother, Otis. John Bouwsma was pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan, at the time.

The Ryskamps and Bouwsmas enjoyed Big Star sufficiently that they returned again in succeeding summers. The vacation and recreation industries were just beginning a period of growth there during the 1920s, aided mightily by the development of the automobile. The first few

years after the Ryskamps and Bouwsmas initially visited, perhaps no more than a dozen cottages existed on the lake; many visitors to The Bowery still stayed in the tent colony, though, with time, clusters of cottages grew at Canterbury Park, Pine Grove Beach, Snug Harbor, Blue Horizon, Minimizing Point, and on individually owned lots around the lake.⁹ Although these resorts (with the exception of Blue Horizon) and a few others existed on Big Star by the late 1920s, none appears to have marketed cottages specifically to the Dutch Reformed. No resort or land development advertisements appear in issues of the *Banner* or the *Church Herald* during these years, for example. Instead, reports of the northern vacation paradise there spread by word of mouth. When Henry Ryskamp and John Bouwsma returned home to Grand Rapids and Jenison, respectively, they described their vacation experiences to their colleagues, academic and clerical.¹⁰ Big Star offered clear water, many sandy beaches, wonderful fishing,

and relative solitude, pleasures not available in the cities of southwestern Michigan or metropolitan Chicago. In the years following 1923, increasing numbers of Dutch Reformed clergy, as well as professors from Calvin and eventually Hope colleges, vacationed at Big Star. Some weeks every cottage along Minising Point, a ridge along the north shore of the lake, was rented to a clergyman and his family, till eventually that area became known informally as “holy hill.”¹¹

This presence of clergy at Big Star Lake may well have been significant to its development as a Dutch Reformed vacation community. Clergymen have occupied positions of great respect in the Dutch Reformed community, both in the United States and in the Netherlands. That a minister took his family to Big Star Lake for a vacation may well have legitimized it for the Dutch Reformed laity: if Big Star was good enough for the *dominie*, it was good enough for members of his flock.

The number of Dutch Reformed vacationers at Big Star continued to increase through the 1920s and 1930s. These vacationers typically came from towns in western Michigan possessing large Dutch Reformed populations: Muskegon, Grand Rapids, and Holland, as well as from Dutch Reformed enclaves around Chicago. Most people who vacationed at Big Star during those early years rented cottages. Records of those rentals have long since disappeared; thus, recreating a detailed history of renters is virtually impossible. However, the names of some of those identified as having vacationed at Big Star at the time give a flavor of the presence of the Dutch there: Ryskamp (including Henry and his brothers), Musch, Laansma, Huizingh, Zuidema, Stob, Holtvluwer, DeKoster, and DeJong.¹²

Trips to Big Star during the early years were often adventures. For a

time, much of the route north from Reed City or Fremont consisted of dirt roads, not appreciably better than the drive off Big Star Lake Road to the cottage where my family frequently stayed. If two cars met on such a “road” where woods encroached on the sides, one car or the other would have to back up to the nearest clearing to allow the other to pass. People who rode to Big Star as children with their parents during those years still recall many flat tires and other mishaps.¹³ One regular vacationer to Big Star remembers that, as late as 1936, highway M-37 was gravel all the way from Newaygo (perhaps forty miles south of Baldwin) to Big Star Lake Road.¹⁴

Once at Big Star, vacationers during the 1920s and 1930s stayed in cottages that were often spartan affairs—simply square or rectangular structures in which curtains were often hung to simulate walls. Some of the cottages along Minising Point were reputedly workers’ housing, from a CCC project near the Croton and Hardy dams on the Muskegon River during the 1930s, which had been loaded onto flatbed trailers and

hauled to Big Star.¹⁵ Floors were often simply concrete, so rugs would be packed for the trip north with other supplies.¹⁶ Big Star was not electrified until 1938.¹⁷ Vacationers as late as the 1960s, this writer included, still have vivid recollections of those cottages: outside toilets, studded walls inside, a hand pump for water, a little wood stand behind the cottage for cleaning fish, old furniture, and no hot water. The cottage at Minising Point that my parents frequently rented in the 1950s and 1960s¹⁸ had no hot water, heat only from a wood stove, and toilet facilities in a small enclosure off the back porch, effectively insulated from any warmth from the stove. When we’d come up to the cottage from the lake, we’d wash sand from our feet in a pail of water just outside the back door, water that could be breathtakingly cold. We didn’t have a TV at the cottage—why would we?—though I do recall hunching over a radio in the cottage trying to hear Detroit Tigers’ play-by-plays on WKZO Radio from Kalamazoo, through the static.

Of course, worship was an essential part of a Big Star Lake vacation. During the early years no church,



Dick Stob, his sister, Ellen, and the author at a camp fire. The Stobs are children of Henry and Hilda Stob. Image courtesy of the author.



The chapel with construction materials, c 1948. Image courtesy of the author.

certainly not a Calvinist church, was immediately accessible. Vacationers would attend services at local churches in Baldwin and the surrounding region. Occasionally they would worship at the Tabernacle in Idlewild.¹⁹ Tabernacle worship services must have been memorable for Dutch Reformed visitors: they were loud, energetic, joyous affairs, punctuated with “amens,” up-tempo gospel songs, and clapping of hands, distinctly different from the somber Dutch Reformed worship. On one occasion, likely in the late 1920s, elders at the Tabernacle discovered that my grandfather, John Bouwsma, was a minister and prevailed upon him to take the pulpit and speak to the congregation. While he spoke, his children sat on the stage at the front of the large, packed sanctuary, their legs dangling over its edge; my grandmother, Pearl Bouwsma, sat in a chair on the stage with the wives of the Tabernacle’s elders.²⁰

Eventually, the number of Dutch Reformed vacationers at Big Star grew to where conducting their own services became feasible. This was often done in a cottage or outdoors if weather was conducive. As ministers were almost always among the vacationers, they would frequently conduct services; on other Sundays, Henry Ryskamp or another professor or a layman would lead the wor-

ship.²¹ Often vacationers would carry Bibles and folding chairs to the location chosen for the Sunday worship. The pattern of use of an informal place for worship persisted through the Depression and the Second World War. Despite economic conditions, many continued to vacation at Big Star during the Depression. Some vacationers trace their families’ histories at Big Star to the Depression years.²² Marva DeVries recalls her parents saving money through the winter so enough would be available for the next summer’s trip to Big Star.²³ In the years immediately following the Second World War, as servicemen returned home the numbers of vacationers at Big Star swelled, and with them the numbers of Dutch Reformed gathering for Sunday services similarly mushroomed. By 1947, some persons of foresight concluded that the erection of a chapel in the vicinity of Big Star was feasible and in fact necessary. A parcel of land on Big Star Lake Road, at the entrance to Minis-

ing Point (“holy hill”), was donated by Mr. and Mrs. McCallum of Hesperia, owners of several cottages at Minising Point, and the Big Star Lake Chapel Association was incorporated in 1948.

That same year a wood-frame structure (35 by 50 feet) was erected. Dutch Reformed laity played a large role in the construction of the building. The first secretary of the association, and signatory of corporate documents filed with the State of Michigan, was Henry Huizingh, of Grand Rapids. Others heavily involved were Albert Zuidema, Henry Holtvluwer, and Harvey Holwerda.

The constitution of the chapel association declared that the association’s purpose was to provide a location for religious services on Sundays during resort seasons and to provide means to secure ministers or theological students to preach: “the Word of



Rev. John O. Bouwsma and an unidentified child in the early 1930s. Image courtesy of the author.



The Braaksmas' frequent vacation cabin on "holy hill" west of Minising Point. At the time it was owned by Maynard Spaak and George Owen of Grand Rapids. Image courtesy of the author.

God as interpreted in our Reformed Confessions, particularly the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort" (Article 2). Rev. Lubbertus Oostendorp, pastor of Mayfair (then known as Dennis Avenue) Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, conducted the chapel's dedication service, preaching on "Life More Abundant," on 2 August 1948.

The chapel's initial seating capacity was three hundred. This quickly proved inadequate. The chapel was frequently filled to capacity, and, to accommodate crowds, children were often invited to sit on the edge of the platform at the front of the sanctuary.

By 1954, planning for an expansion of the existing chapel structure had begun. This second project was completed in 1957. The shell of the initial structure was retained, but seating capacity was increased to approximately 650 by adding to both sides of the building. A small office and restroom facilities were also added. Even with the increased capacity, however, the chapel's size gradually proved insufficient. In 1976, second services were added on Sunday mornings of the

Fourth of July and Labor Day holidays.²⁴ Two years later, two Sunday morning services were held from July 2 through September 3. Eventually the two-Sunday-morning-service schedule was extended through the entire vacation season. Currently the chapel once again has one Sunday morning service and two on holiday weekends.²⁵

The rental season at Big Star typically ran from Saturday to Saturday. I recall that on one visit, likely in the late fifties, Sunday dawned clear and hot. We went to a service at the chapel that morning and had a large Sunday dinner that noon, and I then discovered to my dismay that the cottages on either side of ours were rented by ministers and their families. The cool water beckoned. Dad told me that I could go in the water when the ministers' kids did. My fate was sealed: I spent the afternoon in the cottage.

Once the Sabbath had passed, though, recreation at Big Star included

swimming, fishing, and much more. Cane poles, tackle boxes, large containers of night crawlers and earthworms, and cricket boxes made the trip to Big Star along with other items of lesser importance—clothes, bedding, and kitchen supplies. One of my Grandpa John Bouwsma's prized possessions was a cricket box made for him by a member of one of his congregations. When he'd drive to Big Star, the cricket box and the containers of worms and night crawlers were packed in the favored location, the coolest corner of the Bouwsma sedan, for the trip "up north."

By the fifties, fishing tackle may have been modernized somewhat, and we could buy red worms and crawlers at several stores on Big Star Lake Road or in Baldwin, but we still generally fished from a rowboat using hooks and bobbers. Occasionally I'd walk the few hundred yards down the beach to the Minising Point peninsula where



Worshippers after a service at the chapel. Image courtesy of the author.



A recent view of the chapel. Image courtesy of the Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.

a drop-off existed a few dozen yards from the edge of the water. I'd bait my hook, toss my line beyond the drop-off, and wait till the twitching of my bobber meant that a perch or bluegill was investigating my bait.

Older vacationers at Big Star still recall with great fondness many other experiences. For several years, into the late 1950s or early 1960s, a small hamburger stand known as the

Golden Bun stood on a side road a little north of the lake. The Golden Bun was memorable in several regards. Its hamburgers and fries are uniformly recalled as having been wonderful. Service was breathtakingly slow: some joked that they could place a food order there, drive to Baldwin (about six miles away) to grocery shop and return before their food was ready. And in his later years the proprietor



The north shore of Big Star Lake, west of Minising Point. Image courtesy of Andy and Caroline Braaksma.

would give each customer an order number and, regardless of whether that customer was the only one of the day, would bark out the number "One!" when the order was ready.²⁶ In his 1941 book, *A-Hiking We Will Go*, outdoor writer Jack Van Coevering²⁷ described two favorite recreational sites at Big Star: the fire tower and the "haunted cottage." In 1932 the State of Michigan moved a 92-foot fire tower to a spot a little south of Big Star (actually just across the county line in Newaygo County).²⁸ Van Coevering wrote of taking children on a nature hike.²⁹ Of these children, Carl was Jack Van Coevering's son, Jimmy was Henry Ryskamp's son, and Elaine was Henry's niece. After stopping to observe a variety of plants, the group arrived at the fire tower:

"And now to climb the fire tower," said Jackie after he had eaten his last sandwich. Jimmy was already at the top and visiting with the tower man. For the others, it was going to be their first climb up the hundred-foot ladder, which ran straight up the side to the top where there was a lookout cage with windows on all sides.

"All right, Elaine, you go first," I said, "then Jackie. The rest of us will go up later, because there won't be room for all in the lookout cabin at the same time."

Elaine started up bravely. There were steel hoops which stood out straight from each rung of the ladder³⁰ and, as she got up inside the hoops, it seemed as though she were climbing up through a long tube. . . .

When Elaine was half-way up, she looked down. "Ooh," she said. "This is higher than I have ever climbed before in all my life. I don't know if I can go farther."³¹

The fire tower was removed a few decades later. While it stood, climbing it was an adventure not for the faint of heart.

Another chapter in Van Coevering's book described an experience many

still recall, a hike to the “haunted cottage” on the north arm of Big Star Lake,³² really a dilapidated old cottage. Phil and Chuck, sons of Henry and Flora Ryskamp; Mavis, the Ryskamps’ niece; and Jack Van Coevering’s daughter Grieta made the hike which the book relates:

[W]e soon came out from among the sedges and rushes onto high land again. A shadow hung over the lake and, as I looked up, I saw that the sky was beginning to show heavier clouds. At a distance, we could see the cottage which the children called haunted. It was built at the base of a hill with a few pines behind it. There was a porch all around the cottage, but much of the screening was torn and the screen door was off its hinges. As we approached the cottage, the children slowed their pace. As if to reassure himself, Jimmy said loudly, “This cottage has no spooks in it. I know, because there is no such thing as a spook.” But Chuck was not so sure.³³

For many years, bogs in the western half of Lake County produced crops of wild huckleberries.³⁴ Many vacationers picked them; mothers often canned the harvest.³⁵ Evenings, vacationers played Pit, Monopoly, and Sorry, had marshmallow roasts, or played cribbage and caroms.³⁶

Jones Home Made Ice Cream, established in Baldwin in 1942 and selling homemade ice cream, malts, shakes, and sundaes, has been a favorite institution for nearly seven decades.³⁷ I can personally testify to the high quality of its chocolate malts and to the old photos of Baldwin hanging on its walls. In the 1950s a small—even tiny—pottery and curio shop called Nook in the Woods was opened on Central Park Boulevard, off Big Star Lake Road, on the north side of the lake. Nook in the Woods was owned by a couple from Milwaukee who ran another shop there during the offseason. It featured unusually



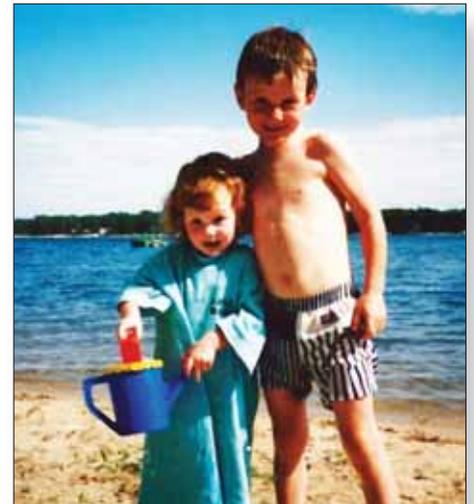
The author’s sons, Will (left) and Andy, c 1990. Image courtesy of the author

attractive pottery manufactured only by a North Carolina family. Eventually the patriarch of the North Carolina family died, the proprietors of Nook in the Woods aged, and the shop closed. While it was in business, though, it sold wares to many, many Big Star Lake vacationers. I still own a few pieces, as I suspect many do.

Hope College professor Robert Swierenga has titled his study of Dutch immigration to the United States *Faith and Family*.³⁸ The importance to the Dutch Reformed of these two foundational elements has been evident in the history of the Big Star Lake vacation community. The manner in which they have for many years conducted their vacations there conformed to Dutch Reformed ideals of community.

The most important commitment in Dutch Reformed life, whether at home or on vacation, has been religious faith. That faith was not shelved during weeks at Big Star. Instead, worship has been a centerpiece of those vacations. The existence of the Big Star Lake Chapel stands as a testament to that faith.

The other half of Swierenga’s equation is family. Pastimes and pleasures in which vacationers at Big Star engaged suggest that vacations there were family affairs (though moth-



Will and Caroline, two of the author’s children, on the beach. Image courtesy of the author.

ers who canned quart after quart of huckleberries might not recall that particular activity with unalloyed joy). While hunting and fishing lodges elsewhere have been male preserves, and night clubs and dance floors were reserved for adults, the Dutch Reformed respect for the commitment to family is evident in the history of the Big Star Lake vacation community.

Of course, whether Big Star Lake will continue to fulfill the needs of Dutch Reformed vacationers in the future remains to be seen. Cultural, economic, technological, and other changes may affect the viability of

that community. But I still visit Big Star and still love it. I hope to spend more time there in coming summers. Services at the Big Star Lake Chapel are still well attended by young families with children as well as by older generations (though attendance at evening services may have dropped off a bit). And Dutch names still decorate large numbers of signboards on trees in front of cottages. 🌳

Endnotes

1. The author thanks the many friends and Big Star Lake vacationers who assisted him in conducting research for this project.
2. There were occasions when we took Peach Ridge Road, which was farther east.
3. In retrospect, driving down that long steep slope in a Saxon or a Model T Ford would have been something of an adventure.
4. Reformed and Christian Reformed vacationers will be referred to collectively as Dutch Reformed.
5. For example, an otherwise quite thorough and well-documented history of Lake County, *Lake County, 1871-1960*, makes no mention whatsoever of the Dutch Reformed vacation community or of the Big Star Lake Chapel. Neither does a history of Lake County published in 1993 by the present owner of the Lake County *Star* newspaper, *Pictorial History of Lake County, Michigan*.
6. Canterbury never remotely approached that size.
7. Numerous interviews with Margaret Braaksma (the author's mother); "Erect 12 Cottages at Pine Grove," *Lake County Star*, April 25, 1924, 1.
8. Flora's reaction to the arrival of her in-laws has not been preserved.
9. "Minising Point" refers to both a peninsula separating the west and north bays and to a low ridge stretching west from that bay. It is not a resort.
10. Numerous interviews with Margaret Braaksma (the author's mother).
11. *A History of Big Star Lake Chapel, 1948-1998* suggests that Henry Ryskamp, his two brothers, his sisters, and their spouses owned a cottage at Minising Point. See p. 2. This is not correct. None of the Ryskamps of Henry's generation ever owned a cottage at Minising Point or elsewhere on Big Star, though Henry's son Philip and his niece Maxine both eventually did. Maxine for a time owned a cottage jointly with Dena Busscher, both teachers from Grand Rapids. Phil Ryskamp still owns a home on Big Star.
12. "Big Star Lake Chapel History," www.bigstarlakehistory.com.
13. Author's interview with Marva DeVries, 4 March 2011.
14. John Lansma email, 11 November 2009.
15. This story has not been verified.
16. Interviews with Marva DeVries, 4 March 2011; and numerous interviews with Margaret Braaksma (the author's mother).
17. "Big Star Lake History," www.bigstarlakehistory.com.
18. Owned by Maynard Spaak and George Owens of Grand Rapids.
19. Idlewild was a prominent resort, organized by white developers in the early 1920s for prosperous African-Americans denied access to segregated white resorts. It was located in the northeast corner of Lake County (Walker Lewis, and Benjamin Wilson, *Black Eden: The Idlewild Community*). That the Dutch Reformed would attend non-Reformed or even non-white churches while on vacation suggests that their desire to worship was powerful and their motivation to worship among their own was not racially motivated.
20. Numerous interviews with Margaret Braaksma (the author's mother). Sitting on the stage at the Tabernacle during the boisterous service had to have been a memorable experience for my grandmother, a quiet, gentle lady raised in a Christian Reformed family in Grand Rapids.
21. Jack Laansma at "Big Star Lake Chapel History," www.bigstarlakehistory.com.
22. Written communication from Berton and Jeanne Wierenga, undated. Jack Laansma posting, www.bigstarlakehistory.com.
23. Marva DeVries interview, 4 March 2011.
24. The chapel since its opening has held both Sunday morning and evening services.
25. Big Star has become increasingly an owners' lake and not a renters' lake. This changing pattern of occupancy may be affecting attendance, in the sense that owners don't necessarily drive to their cottages every weekend.
26. Numerous interviews with Margaret Braaksma (the author's mother).
27. Van Coevering was Dutch Reformed, from Grand Haven, Michigan. He was related by marriage to Rev. John and Pearl Bouwsma. Though he was my mother's uncle, I remember him as "Uncle Jack."
28. "Move 3 Fire Towers," *Lake County Star*, 16 September 1932, 1.
29. P. 101. Elaine Ryskamp later married Rev. Leonard Hofman, a Christian Reformed minister who eventually conducted several worship services at the chapel and who became stated clerk and later general secretary of the Christian Reformed Church.
30. As my dad later pointed out, these rungs didn't guarantee a great deal other than that you'd likely bang your head on each one on the way down if you fell.
31. Jack Van Coevering, *A-Hiking We Will Go* (Louisville, OH: Hubbard Press, 2011), 110-111.
32. *Ibid* 123-143.
33. *Ibid* 139-140.
34. Douglas, *The Lake County We Love, Then (1840) and Now, (1975)*, 4.
35. Marva DeVries interview, 4 March 2011.
36. My mother, Margaret Braaksma, recalled an example of clergy humor at Big Star involving an evening's games. During a game of charades her father, Rev. John Bouwsma, lay on the cottage floor and placed a few small potatoes on his chest. The answer to the charade, which stumped the house, was "common taters [commentators] on John."
37. It still is.
38. Subtitled *Dutch Immigration and Settlement in the United States, 1820-1920* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 2000).

Rev. A. C. Van Raalte on Slavery

Introduction and translation by Michael Douma



Introduction

Historians of the Dutch in America have often repeated the idea that Albertus C. Van Raalte was an opponent of slavery who during the Civil War spoke from his pulpit in defense of the Union. Until recently, however, only secondary sources, and no primary sources, could be shown to support this view. Even Eugene Heideman in his recent and extensive reading of Van Raalte's sermons did not discover any mention of slavery or the Civil War. Heideman's findings, presented at a conference in October 2011, surprised me because I recall coming across a Van Raalte anti-slavery source in my own research.

In the summer of 2005, while working as an assistant to Robert Swierenga at the Van Raalte Institute, I conducted a survey of the major archives across the state of Michigan with the goal of locating any materials relating to Holland, Michigan, or to Dutch immigrants. Elton Bruins and I travelled together to the Clarke Historical Library at Central Michigan University, Dr. Swierenga and I visited the regional archives at Western Michigan University, and I struck out on my own to visit the Bentley Library in Ann Arbor and the State Archives and Michigan State University Archives in Lansing.

Among the materials I discovered in Ann Arbor was a copy of *De Grondwet*, a newspaper published in Holland, Michigan, from 12 August 1863. Because a late-nineteenth-century fire destroyed many of the back issues of this newspaper, there are

only a few remaining stray issues extant from the Civil War period. I have provided an English translation of an interesting column about Van Raalte found in the 12 August 1863 issue.

The article is a summary of a Van Raalte sermon by a contemporary. It is not clear whether the newspaper editor, Jan Roost, wrote the article himself, or if it was submitted to him by someone else. The article makes clear a few points: (1) Van Raalte did indeed speak about political issues from the pulpit, and he did so because he felt that the political issues had intruded on the church. Van Raalte not only rejected the premise that the Bible defended slavery in America, but he also rejected the idea that others should be allowed to hold such a position without retaliation from the church. (2) Van Raalte was vehemently opposed to slavery, specifically racial slavery, as it was practiced in the United States, but he was supportive of the type of slavery found in the Old Testament of the Bible. (3) Van Raalte held that both the restoration of the Union and the defeat of slavery were aims of the Civil War. (4) Van Raalte felt that God's hand was active in supporting the North against the Confederate rebels.

Translation

Many people here recognized the national thanksgiving and prayer day last Thursday. In the First Reformed Church religious exercises were held in the morning and in the afternoon,

Michael J. Douma has a doctorate in history from Florida State University and was a Fulbright Scholar in the Netherlands. He has researched and written about the Netherlands, as well as Dutch immigration to the United States. He is the author of *Veneklasen Brick: A Family, a Company, and a Unique Nineteenth-Century Dutch Architectural Movement in Michigan*.

and during the evening there was a regular weekly prayer service.

In the morning the Reverend Dr. A. C. Van Raalte held an especially serious, powerful, and, according to the circumstances, fitting sermon on 1 Samuel XIV: 1-15, wherein it was pointed out that the hand of God is always present, in defeats as well as victories.

In the afternoon the Rev. continued on this theme, and showed most of all the reasons which the nation, and in particular, *we* ourselves, must be compelled to thankfulness and prayer. Reasons for thankfulness were named as: the glorious victory at Gettysburg, where the rebel invasion was stopped and the north remained saved from immeasurable suffering and terrors; the surrender, without the loss of blood, of Vicksburg and Port Hudson, by which the Mississippi, the great artery of the West, has been returned to us; the victory and progress of Rosenkrans; the capture of the guerilla-chief John Morgan, and God's wonderful protection of our loved ones, who with about two hundred men drove back and defeated 2,000 to 4,000 rebel pirates; the demoralization of the rebel armies of Bragg and Johnston; the complete frustration of the cunning and well thought out rebel plans; the aversion of the unthinkable and uncountable pain and suffering, which threatened during the last week; the uncommon rest, peace, and well-being, which we, in contrast to many others, enjoy; and finally the increased trust and the grounded hope for the restoration of the Union, with the countless prayers and benefits in connection

to that. Like the Reverend remarked, it is fitting for us, in particular, to be thankful for the wonderful sparing of our loved ones.

As reasons for serious and fiery prayer, the Reverend named: the desperate and reckless attempts of the rebel leaders, who, while they themselves are sinking, will risk everything, and who if they were to succeed in their plan, shall cause scenes for which angels and men shall cover their faces; the quick-tempered agitation, spread everywhere through the land, and mostly in the large cities, lit by property-less demagogues, cause spectacles there which cause the blood to stand still; New York gives us an example, where the populace of millions has lost property, and the city burdened with a blemish which cannot be obliterated in a half century; the terrible lack of principles, selfishness, lust for money; and thousands of other cases, each of which is enough for the country to sink and not be saved.

The Reverend also took a few moments to focus on the slavery issue, about which he gave a short and prudent lesson. The slavery issue, said the Reverend, was often used by the political parties as a means for attaining their political goals and for desire for money and honor. People had, just as well, made this question into a religious issue, and so doing the Reverend was required, as servant of the gospel, to communicate his view. In connection to this question there were two extremities which both erred. Some appeal to the Bible, because people assert that this book stands for and approves slavery, and

were, in their fanaticism, in favor of philanthropy that was unpractical and unobtainable; others attempted to show that the Bible protected slavery. Both were wrong. The Reverend showed clearly the difference between the biblical, Old Testament slavery and our American slavery. The Old Testament slavery was through God, and was allowed in the present state of sin, and restricted, guided and softened through his mercifulness. It differs completely in origin, laws, and definition and extent from the present American slavery, which was grounded upon breeding men and was therefore *absolutely* forbidden in the Bible. The two systems had nothing in common with each other, and the biblical slavery allowed none of the atrocities that are characteristic of our slavery. The Reverend hoped that never shall he, nor one of his descendants, ever help support an institution like our present slavery, and that no one will be found who should misuse God's word in defense of such a godless, cursed institution. Never before did we hear the difference between the two systems of slavery better reasoned and explained more accurately.

Both sermons testified of the deep, serious loyalty and love of the Union, and the many-sided political knowledge of the beloved teacher, and were given in a lively and exciting manner. All true patriots, loyal citizens, and lovers of Union and freedom were especially edified, encouraged, and inspired with new seriousness, to once again pick up the weapons and set forth on the "insuppressible fight." 🐦

EDITOR'S NOTE Rev. Van Raalte came to experience the horrors of the Civil War personally, when two of his sons joined the Union Army. Benjamin (1840-1917) and Dirk (1844-1910) both mustered in 23 September 1862 and served in Company I of the 25th Michigan Infantry. They saw service in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia. Both were part of the battle for Atlanta in 1864. On 26 August 1864, Dirk and another soldier were riding and attacked, Dirk was shot in the arm, and his companion was killed. The wound was such that his arm was amputated at the shoulder. He spent two months recovering in Marietta and became a hospital orderly. He was discharged 13 April 1865 and became a successful business leader and politician in Holland, Michigan. Benjamin was discharged 24 June 1865, and returned to Holland where he operated a farm.

Marietta, Georgia

Sept. 23rd '64

Dear Father,

Today we* received your letter of September 12. I was surprised that you did not yet know that I had been wounded. I hope that this does not cause mother too much concern.

I am healing well, my wounds appear to be [healing] exceptionally well. I walk a lot, and appear to be so healthy that no one would think I had been wounded. The amputation of my arm did not weaken me much because I have much time to exercise by walking, and thus far also haven't lost any weight. Our corps inspector amputated my arm and did an exceptionally fine job, because every doctor that examines it comments on the fine job he did.

Benjamin is still here and takes very good care of me, and will stay with me until I can go home. In October I will try to get a furlough, and if I do, I will come home then.

Excuse my sloppy penmanship since I am writing with my left hand and this is a bit difficult. It is raining today. Greet everyone for me.

Dirk Van Raalte

*Dirk and his brother Benjamin.

Marietta Ga
Sept 23^{de} 64

Lieve Vader,

van daag
Ontvingen wij uw brieven van
des ~~die~~ ik was verwondt dat
jullie het nog niet wisten
dat ik gewond was, ik hoop dat
moeder het haer maar niet teveel
mal aantakken. Ik belev
goed, in mijn wonden zien
er bij uitstek mooi uit. Ik
loop veel rond, en zie er zoo
goed uit, dat niemand zou
zeggen dat ik gewond was, mijn
arm afzitten heeft mij niet veel
verhaakt want ik heb al
tijd nog wand geelopen, en ben
er tot dus ver ook nog niet ma
ge van geworden. On de Corp
inspecter heb mijn arm afzitten

en heeft het bij uitstek
goed gedaan tenminste elke
docten die er naar kijken roe
men er op, dat het zoo mooi
geamputated was Benjamin
ik ~~is~~ nog bij my en past my
zou gold-rop, by blijft hier. bij
mij de lot dat ik ~~er~~ naar
huis ga. In October zal
ik en furlough sien te krijgen
en dan kom ik er maar huis.
Vergif mijn slordig schrift
want het is met mijn linker
hand en dat gaat nog maar
moeijelijk. Het regent wa
daag. Weest allen gepoest.
Dirk Van Raalte

book reviews

Envisioning Hope College: Letters Written by Albertus C. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps Jr.

*edited by Elton J. Bruins and
Karen G. Schakel*

Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press;
Grand Rapids, MI:
William B. Eerdmans, 2001
Pp. xxvi+520; \$49
Hard cover

Albertus C. Van Raalte (1811-1876) was a minister and leader of the immigrant group that founded a “colony” of several villages in western Michigan, with the town of Holland as its center. As the colony grew, the immigrants focused on the education of their children and young people. *Envisioning* takes place in the context of the education of the young people, and the fulfillment of Van Raalte’s dream—founding a Christian college, that is, Hope College. The main body of *Envisioning* consists of Van Raalte’s letters to Rev. Philip Phelps Jr., the first president of Hope College.

The letters are faithful reproductions of Van Raalte’s ninety-five letters, with careful interpolations and guesses by the editors when Van Raalte’s English prose becomes murky. The text is accompanied by approximately 1,100 footnotes and followed by explanatory commentary—some

brief, some mini-essays about the context of the letters, about Van Raalte’s family, Hope College, the Holland colony, and the Dutch Reformed church. Many of the footnotes take up more space than the text on the page. Some pack a great deal of helpful information. For example, note 6 on pp. 113-114 summarizes the often contentious question of “Christian schools.” Future scholars on the history of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) will also be grateful for the notes on the identity and careers of hundreds of RCA pastors. At times the footnotes become verbose. Although the great fire of 1871 in Holland was a catastrophic historical event, do we need to know the names of all the members of the relief committee and the names of the stores they owned?

The problems of Hope College were many, including its governance, finances, and academic programs. The governance of the college involved the general synod and its board of education, the classis of Chicago, the local board, the president, and the faculty (with Van Raalte always in the wings trying to fulfill his dream and maintain a hold on its operation). A particular and frequent bone of contention was the teaching of theology and the related preparation of ministers.

In the late 1860s Phelps wrote several reports to the general synod, enthusiastically recommending his

vision for an expansion of Hope College. These dreams were not to be. The depression of 1873, the continuing financial problems of the college, the reduction of support from the general synod—these all came together in 1878, when the general synod took direct control of the college, asked Phelps and the faculty to resign, and discontinued the theological program.

The work also details Van Raalte’s learning of the English language. He had no training in the language until emigration and tried to learn the basics during the voyage to America. After arriving, he did as much reading in English as he could and began to preach in English. The letters show how much he had learned—and how many Dutch words and spellings he still interjected. Comparing the early letters of 1857 with those of 1875, one can detect his improving mastery of the language.

Envisioning Hope College is a treasure trove about Van Raalte and his frustrating experiences in fundraising, but also about his family life, Hope College, the relationship to the RCA, his leadership in the Holland colony, and immigrant life in general. It is a fine addition to the Van Raalte bibliography!

Harry Boonstra

The History of the County of Bentheim

Ludwig Sager

translated by Swenna Harger,
edited by Loren Lemmen

Bentheimers International Society, 2012

Order from Bentheimers International
Society, 124 Round Top Rd.
Lansing, MI 48917

\$12.50

Ludwig Sager (1886-1970) taught school for forty-three years in Bentheim, Germany. After World War II, he was asked to write a history of Grafschaft Bentheim free of Nazi ideology. It was published in 1952 and is now available in English.

He paints pictures of Bentheim that transport youthful scholars from the Stone Age to the beginning of World War II. He begins with “Axes, daggers, saws, chisels, stone hammers . . .” and ends with “The darkest day was on May 10, 1940 when Nazi forces overran our neighboring country, the Netherlands . . . a neighbor . . . with whom we shared a language, family ties and the Reformed faith.”

To explain the coming of Christianity to Bentheim, Sager explores the name “Scholten,” a name familiar to his students. *Scholtes*, Saxon administrators appointed by Charlemagne, were tax collectors and guardians of godly behavior. For instance, funeral processions had to stop at the Schol-

ten farm so that the *Scholte* could confirm that a body was being buried and that it had not been cremated as was the practice in pre-Christian times. Sager notes that surnames like Roerick, Rottgers, Rottering, and Rolink derive from “roden,” individuals who knew how to clear land for farming and were selected by Charlemagne to be model Bentheim farmers.

The religious history of the region includes Martin Luther nailing his theses to the church door in Wittenberg. The Reformation that followed swept through northern Germany, the Netherlands, England, and France. By 1544, Lutheranism had become the state religion in Bentheim. Arnold II, son of the Count of Bentheim, however, was sent to study with John Calvin in Strasbourg and returned with Calvinism, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the resulting Bentheim Church Order of 1708 that is still in force.

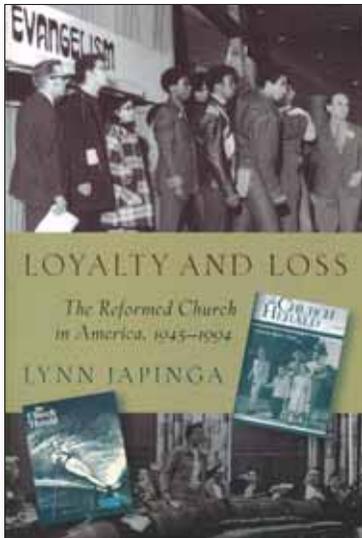
The political history includes vivid descriptions of the Hanovers taking control. Then, during the long conflict between Spain and the Netherlands, the city of Nordhorn in Bentheim was forced to billet 4,000 cavalry and 2,000 infantrymen even though Bentheim was a party in the war but was under Hapsburg rule. Spanish troops took Bentheim children and teenagers into captivity for ransom. Marauding troops stripped fields of crops so that frightened families deserted their farms. Once these families returned, “. . . they found

their fireplaces in the kitchen grown over with weeds, and in their stables wolves were nursing their young ones.” The French, under Napoleon, paid worthless paper currency for impounded wagons of straw, hay, clothing, leather goods, and whiskey. By 1866 the Prussians had ousted the Hanovers, and the Reformed Church of Grafschaft Bentheim had become part of the church of Hanover. Two decades later, Bentheim became part of Bismarck’s greater Germany. Then the threat of military conscription, the depletion of the region’s economy, and the struggle of the German Reformed secession convinced many Bentheimers in the Reformed tradition to emigrate for a better life in America. Here, they linked with fellow Reformed people from the Netherlands.

Swenna Harger’s translation of Sager’s book is a welcome contribution toward an understanding of these German immigrant co-founders of the Christian Reformed, Reformed, and Presbyterian churches. It joins another helpful volume, *Beloved Family and Friends: Letters between Grafschaft Bentheim and America, Vol 1: 1847-1914*, translated by Harger in 2007. Perhaps soon, similar efforts in English will document the history of Reformed Ostfriesians, the other German branch in Calvinist denominations in the United States.

Eunice Vanderlaan

book notes



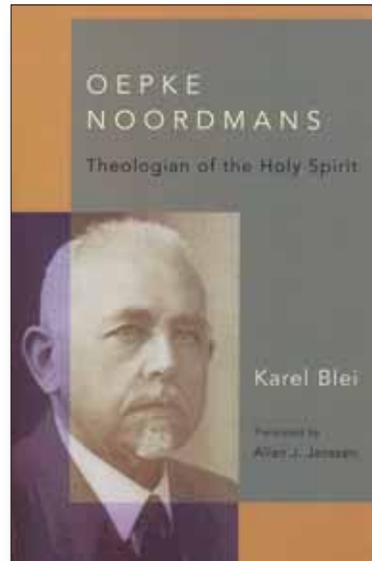
**Loyalty and Loss:
The Reformed Church
in America, 1945–1994**

Lynn Japinga

Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans
Publishing Co., 2013

ISBN: 978-0-8028-7068-1

\$30.00 Softcover



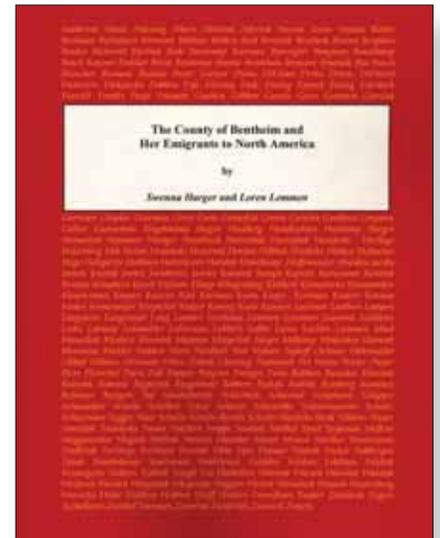
**Oepke Noordmans:
Theologian of the Holy Spirit**

Karel Blei; Allan J. Janssen, translator

Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans
Publishing Co., 2013

ISBN: 978-0-8028-7085-8

\$26.00 Softcover



**The County of Bentheim
and Her Emigrants to
North America**

Swenna Harger and Loren Lemmen

2013

Softcover

for the future

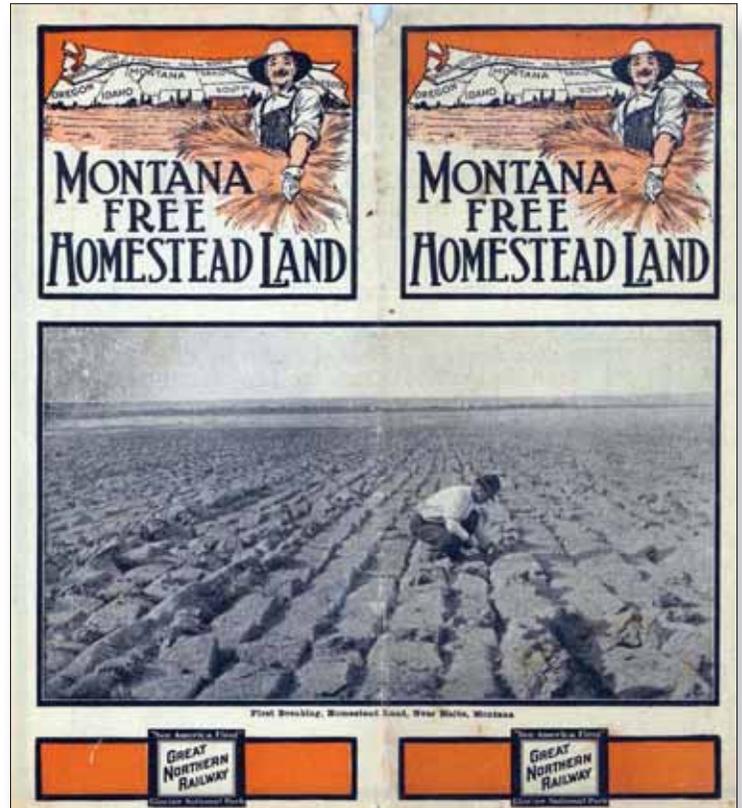
The topics listed below are being researched, and articles about them will appear in future issues of *Origins*.

Minnie Voetberg Brink's journal of her childhood in Montana, 1911-1924

Douglas Rozendal details Jan Hospers's dilemma of staying in Iowa or returning to the Netherlands

Angie Ploegstra has documented the brief history of the Dutch in Liverpool, Texas

Paula Vander Hoven recreates the history of the Dutch in Hamshire, Texas



Yes, I wish to join the "Friends of the Archives."

Name _____

Address _____

Subscriber \$10.00

Contributing Member \$50.00

Contributing Sponsor \$100.00

Contributing Founder \$500.00

Send to: *Origins*, Heritage Hall, Calvin College,
1855 Knollcrest Circle SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Yes, I would also like a gift subscription for:

Name _____

Address _____

My Name _____

Address _____

Send to: *Origins*, Heritage Hall, Calvin College,
1855 Knollcrest Circle SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

contributors

Origins is designed to publicize and advance the objectives of the Calvin College and Seminary 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. We invite you to support the continued publication of *Origins* by becoming “Friends of the Archives.”

Enabling Contributor

Mr. and Mrs. John Meyer, Palos Park, IL

Friends of the Archives Endowment Fund Builders

AEGON Insurance Group, Cedar Rapids, IA

Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth J. Baas, Grand Rapids, MI

Robert and Jane Baker Foundation, Kalamazoo, MI

Mr. Duane D. Binns, Oak Park, IL

Mr. and Mrs. Roger W. Boer, Grand Rapids, MI

Dr. and Mrs. Richard H. Harms, Grand Rapids, MI

*Holland American Wafer Company,
Grand Rapids, MI*

Mr. and Mrs. Peter Huiuzenga, Oak Brook, IL

Dr. William Huiuzingh, Scottsdale, AZ

Estate of Dick and Dena Kortenhoeven, Highland, IN

Meijer, Inc., Grand Rapids, MI

Mr. Gerald W. Meyering, Denver, CO

Drs. Kornelis J. Storm, Aerdenhout, the Netherlands

*Jay and Betty Van Andel Foundation,
Grand Rapids, MI*

Mr. and Mrs. Claude J. Venema, Jackson, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Gary J. Vermeer, Pella, IA

Contributing Founders

Mr. and Mrs. Richard T. Dykema, Laurel, MD

Mr. and Mrs. Bastian A. Knoppers, Oak Brook, IL

Peters Import Marketplace, Grandville, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Leo Peters, Grand Rapids, MI

Clara and Leonard Sweetman, Kentwood, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Max B. Van Wyk, Grand Rapids, MI

Mr. and Mrs. John Zonneveld Sr., Laton, CA

Contributing Sponsors

Walter and Carol Ackerman, Superior, CO

Mr. and Mrs. Jay A. Anema, Seattle, WA

James H. and Diane Bloem, Louisville, KY

Ed and Betty Boersma, Visalia, CA

Dr. and Mrs. Robert Bolt, Grand Rapids, MI

John and Sharon Bouma, Holland, MI

John and Beth Bouws, Holland, MI

Connie and Roger Brummel, Holland, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Conrad J. Bult, Grand Rapids, MI

Mr. and Mrs. John Buursma, Holland, MI

Dr. and Mrs. James A. De Jong, Grand Rapids, MI

Jan and Jeannie de Vries, Berkeley, CA

Mr. Robert Dirkse, Corona, CA

Mark and Ginny Dykstra, South Holland, IL

James and Rosemarie Evenhuis, Novi, MI

Martin and Helon Everse, Birmingham, AL

Dave and Connie Fennema, Durham, NC

Harold and Nancy Gazan, Holland, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Samuel E. Greydanus III, Milton, MA

Kay Hoitenga, Grand Rapids, MI

Dennis G. Holtrop, San Francisco, CA

*Dr. James and Barbara Hoogeboom,
Grand Rapids, MI*

Les and Viv Hoogland, Zeeland, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth A. Hoving, Oak Brook, IL

Herb and Bernace Korthuis, Lynden, WA

Annette LaMaire, South Holland, IL

Mr. and Mrs. Graydon M. Meints, Kalamazoo, MI

Tom and Greta Newhof, Ada, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Scheeres, Grand Rapids, MI

Henry and Evelyn Stevens, Tucson, AZ

Dr. and Mrs. Robert P. Swierenga, Holland, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Gerald A. Talen, Tucson, AZ

Mr. and Mrs. William C. Terpstra, Schererville, IN

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Vandenakker, Ripon, CA

Mr. and Mrs. John C. Vander Haag, Sanborn, IA

Jan and Gary Vander Meer, DeKalb, IL

Warren and Martha Van Genderen, Jackson, WY

*Mr. and Mrs. Allan J. Van Popering,
Grand Rapids, MI*

Mr. Adrian Van Sledright, Caledonia, MI

Sam and Judy Van Til, Crown Point, IN

Max and Carol Van Wyk, Grand Rapids, MI

Dr. and Mrs. Daniel R. Vellenga, Waco, TX

Dr. and Mrs. William Venema, Grand Rapids, MI

Mr. Ted W. Vliek, Portage, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Henry I. Witte, Ada, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Teunis Witte, Byron Center, MI

Dr. Burton and Ellen Wolters, Spring Lake, MI

Mr. and Mrs. F. A. Wybenga, Tallmadge, OH

Mr. and Mrs. Jay L. Zandstra, Highland, IN

Mary Zwaanstra, Grand Rapids, MI

Contributing Members

Mrs. Phyllis Baarman, Grand Rapids, MI

David and Rene Baatenburg, Jenison, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Bajema, Grand Rapids, MI

John and Maria Bajema, Lowell, MI

Ms. Jennifer Baker, Grandville, MI

Richard and Cynthia G. Bandstra, Grand Rapids, MI

Mr. and Mrs. John Bielema, Grand Rapids, MI

Dr. and Mrs. Allan Bishop, Ripon, CA

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Boersma, Marne, MI

Dr. Harmon S. Boertien, Houston, TX

Harry and Thelma Boonstra, Grand Rapids, MI

Carl and Elizabeth Botting, Ada, MI

Mrs. Ruth E. Brinks, Grand Rapids, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Lester Brouwer, Holland, MI

Elaine and Ralph Bruxvoort, Bloomer, WI

Mr. and Mrs. Duane E. Bulthuis, Ripon, CA

Milly and Peter Buma, Grand Rapids, MI

Robert Bytwerk, West Olive, MI

Wayne and Greta Clousing, Shoreline, WA

Mr. Stuart E. Cok, Sparta, MI

Ron and Cathie Corstange, Hudsonville, MI

Dr. and Mrs. W. P. De Boer, Grand Rapids, MI

Robert L. and Frances De Bruin, Grand Rapids, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Willard G. De Graaf, Hudsonville, MI

Ms. Helen Den Boer, Germantown, MD

Mr. Ronald De Valois, Lynden, WA

Lucas and Ann De Vries, Grand Rapids, MI

Barbara DeWitt, Grand Rapids, MI

Henry and Shirley De Witt, Chino, CA

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Dykstra, Holland, MI

Jake and Frances Engel, Ripon, CA

- Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth D. Engelsman, Centennial, CO
 Phil and Trudy Erffmeyer, Prinsburg, MN
 Mr. and Mrs. Robert Essenburg, Grandville, MI
 Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Geldof, Grand Rapids, MI
 Mr. and Mrs. Albert J. Griede, La Mesa, CA
 Carl and Sandy Gronsman, Grand Rapids, MI
 Mr. and Mrs. Andrew J. Haagsma, Grandville, MI
 Ulrich and Elizabeth Haasdyk, Calgary, AB
 George and Audrey Hiskes, Munster, IN
 Dirk and Gladys Hoek, Modesto, CA
 Caroline and Henry J. Hoeks, Ada, MI
 Toots Hoekstra, Kentwood, MI
 Ms. Grace Anne Hoffa, Kalamazoo, MI
 Dr. Richard E. and Alyce Houskamp, Ada, MI
 Bob and Joan Houskamp, Grand Rapids, MI
 Dr. and Mrs. Harvey D. Huiner, Lynchburg, VA
 Harold and Esther Huizenga, Grand Rapids, MI
 Dr. C. J. Huizinga, Jenison, MI
 Fred R. Jacobs, Holland, MI
 Miss Rita Jager, Edmonton, AB
 Glenn R. Jasperse, Sheboygan, WI
 Mary E. Jellema, Holland, MI
 Mrs. P. Ruth Jepkema, Jenison, MI
 Chaplain and Mrs. Herm Keizer, Caledonia, MI
 Rev. Harvey A. Kiekoover, Grand Rapids, MI
 Donald and Elizabeth Kiel, Carlsbad, CA
 Hessel and Alice Kielstra, Calgary, AB
 Peter and Janet Kiemel, Colorado Springs, CO
 Mr. John E. King, Wyckoff, NJ
 Chaplain Louis and Frances Kok, Lynden, WA
 Rev. John M. V. Koole, Strathroy, ON
- Ms. Ardene Lambers, Grand Rapids, MI
 Rev. James C. and Carol Lont, Holland, MI
 Mr. Gerald Meyer, Holland, MI
 Dr. Ted and Mrs. Tena Minnema, Grand Rapids, MI
 James E. and Janice S. Monsma, Medford, MA
 Mr. and Mrs. William Noordhof, Lacombe, AB
 Mr. and Mrs. David Ondersma, Holland, MI
 Robert and Faith Ottenhoff, McLean, VA
 Mr. and Mrs. Neal Peters, Hudsonville, MI
 Quentin and Harriet Remein, Bethesda, MD
 Dr. Joan Ringerwole, Hudsonville, MI
 Mr. John Ritsema, Mableton, GA
 Mrs. Doris Roberts, Grand Rapids, MI
 Mr. Art Robyn, Visalia, CA
 Dr. Jake and Dot Scheeres, Venice, FL
 Al and Mary Scholtens, Caledonia, MI
 Mr. and Mrs. William C. Schultze, Grand Rapids, MI
 Ben and Henny Senneker, Lethbridge, AB
 Dr. Gradus L. Shoemaker, Louisville, KY
 Carl and Cora Mae Sinke, Grand Rapids, MI
 Dr. and Mrs. Richard D. Sjoerdsma, Racine, WI
 Mr. and Mrs. Edward Slenk Jr., Holland, MI
 Bernard and Melinda Smit, Lafayette, IN
 Mr. and Mrs. Albert Snippe, Belwood, ON
 LeRoy and Anjean Stegink, Grand Rapids, MI
 Dr. Joseph C. Stevens, New Haven, CT
 Richard and Joyce Stienstra, Okemos, MI
 Mr. and Mrs. Ronald J. Talsma, Bellflower, CA
 Steve and Barb Timmermans, Palos Heights, IL
 Dr. and Mrs. Ryan Tolsma, Redlands, CA
 Dean and Carol Van Bruggen, Grand Rapids, MI
- Roger and Joyce Vanden Bosch, Zeeland, MI
 Hugo M. Van Den Dool, West Hyattsville, MD
 George and Pat Vander Laan, Grand Rapids, MI
 John and Donna Vander Meer, Grand Rapids, MI
 Evie and Al Vander Plaats, Blaine, MN
 Dr. and Mrs. Gerald L. Vander Wall, Grand Haven, MI
 Dr. Steve J. Van Der Weele, Grand Rapids, MI
 Jan and Adriana Vanderwerf, Mosinee, WI
 Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur Van Dokkenburg, West Lafayette, IN
 Dr. John Van Domelen, College Station, TX
 Dr. and Mrs. James Y. Van Dyk, Comstock Park, MI
 Catherine Van Eck, Lansing, IL
 Dr. Dick and Carol Van Eldik, Gainesville, FL
 Dr. and Mrs. Larry Van Genderen, Jackson, WY
 Henry and Clemmie Van Mouwerik, Redlands, CA
 Mr. and Mrs. Brian Van Stee, Grand Rapids, MI
 Rev. and Mrs. John W. Van Stempvoort, Barrie, ON
 Mr. and Mrs. Richard J. Van Tuinen, Longmont, CO
 Dr. and Mrs. Peter D. Van Vliet, Grand Rapids, MI
 Evert Volkercsz, Stony Brook, NY
 Bill and Pat Waanders, Grand Rapids, MI
 Mr. and Mrs. Philip Wassenar, Uxbridge, MA
 Mr. and Mrs. Klaas Wielinga, Grand Rapids, MI
 Dave and Brenda Wiersma, Tucson, AZ
 Rev. and Mrs. Donald P. Wisse, Wyckoff, NJ
 Robert and Joanne Yonker, Grand Rapids, MI
 Mr. and Mrs. Bernard H. Zandstra, Holt, MI
 Kenneth and Elaine Zimmerman, Woodstock, MD
 Henry and Verla Zuiderveen, Hudsonville, MI
 Mr. and Mrs. Case M. Zwart, Ontario, CA

Origins

The Archives

Calvin College and Theological Seminary

1855 Knollcrest Circle SE

Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

The Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary Archives contains the historical records of the Christian Reformed Church, its College, its Theological Seminary, and other institutions related to the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands and North America. The Archives also contains a wide range of personal and family manuscripts.

Origins

Historical Magazine of The Archives
Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary
Volume XXXI • Number 2 • 2013

