Origins

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1855 Knollcrest Circle SE
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(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:
Bernard and Henry Steenwyk

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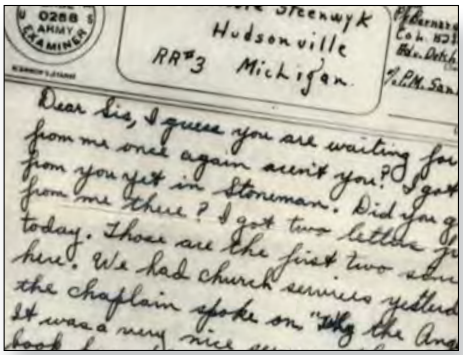

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from the editor. . .

Time to renew your subscription
As is our custom, to save money we do not mail a separate renewal notice, so this is our notice to use the enclosed envelope to send us $10 (US) for the issues to come out in 2016. The subscription rate is the same as when we started in 1983. We suspect that the price of few things has remained the same for thirty-three years. We are able to do this because a number of you send more than the $10, for which we are most grateful. Gifts above the $10 will be recorded as a gift to *Origins*, and you will receive a receipt for tax purposes.

This Issue
We present two articles having to do with wars, two with ministers (written by distant relatives), and one about the malodorous work of rendering animal carcasses. A contributing editor to *Origins*, Janet Sheeres tells about the life of Zachary Sherda, a minister who read extensively and led three congregations, all located on the outskirts of larger metropolitan areas. Kenneth Fles relates the life of Jacob Fles, a premillennialist and early supporter of Christian mission work among Jewish people. The Steenwyk families, of West Michigan, collected an interesting assortment of WW II letters from their relatives in service, while Loren Lemmen recounts the impact of a Civil War POW's experiences. Lastly, David Postma recounts the lives of his grandparents living near and working for the Union Rendering Co., south of Chicago, which did the very necessary work of processing animal carcasses that could not enter the human food chain.

News from the Archives
For the past eighteen years, our staff, which includes dedicated volunteers, has been working on reducing the backlog of unprocessed manuscript and archival collections. Our goal, seldom achieved in archives and manuscript collections, is to organize, rehouse, and make available material very soon after its arrival. We are now able to do that in the majority of cases.

Since our last report, we received and processed the World War II letters collected by the Steenwyk families (some of which are included in this issue) donated by Myrtle Steenwyk; the records of Montello Park Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, a congregation that closed in 2014 after seventy-four years of ministry; the pictorial collections of Eunice Post from her nearly twenty years of teaching in Zuni, New Mexico; the papers on Christian music of William Romanowski, author and member of the Calvin College Communication Arts and Sciences Department; a sizable addition to the papers of Quentin Schultze, author and recently emeritated colleague of Romanowski; and a large addition to the papers of former congressional representative Vern Ehlers.

Two significant collections arrived and were put into temporary storage since additional material is expected shortly. These collections include the files of the late Dr. Hessel Bouma, biologist and ethicist, and the records

of Roosevelt Park Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Roosevelt Park was formed in 1994, when the former Grandville Avenue and Bethel congregations merged, and its collection has material of one of the largest Christian Reformed congregations during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, a congregation that began in 1891.

Smaller collections received and processed include the Rev. William Buursma papers, the Dr. Charles Miller collection, the Rev. Joel Nederhood audio collection, the records of Classes Toronto and California South (both in the CRC), and two boxes from Darlene Meyering, the former executive assistant to the Calvin College president. The Buursma papers include his non-sermonic writing and articles on theological and family history. Charles Miller's collection contains lectures, class notes, and correspondence from the first Calvin College tenured faculty member who was not a member of the CRC. Radio and television broadcasts from the Back-to-God Hour make up the audio recordings collection by Nederhood. The classical records are predominantly minutes and those documents produced that led to or resulted from classical action (discipline and personnel matters are confidential). The documents from Meyering detail the committee work that organized Calvin College commencements for the past twenty years, including the visit of President George W. Bush in 2005.

Although it is not a traditional manuscript item, Heritage Hall also received a fine example of an eighteenth-century Staten Bible. Burton and Marilyn Kleeves donated a 1776 reprint of the 1716 Pieter Keur Bible in memory of their grandmother, Anne Hemmes Kleeves. The Bible features intact brass clasps and catch, eight brass corners, and five of the six original maps. Although the leather cover shows wear and the book's shoulders are broken, the brass hardware is a fine example of what was done when books were dear and well used.

Staff

Richard Harms is the curator of the Archives and editor of *Origins*; Hendrina VanSpronsen is the office coordinator and business manager of Origins; Laurie Haan is the department assistant; Robert Bolt is field agent and assistant archivist; and Chloe Selles is our student assistant. Our volunteers include Phil Erffmeyer, Ed Gerritsen, Ralph Haan, Helen Meulink, Clarice Newhof, Gerrit W. Sheeres, Janet Sheeres, and Jeannette Smith. Bethany Seeley has joined our staff in a temporary part-time position.

To allow sufficient time for consideration and search, Richard Harms has announced that he will retire in May 2017 when he will have reached age sixty-six. A search will be conducted by representatives from the college, seminary, and denomination, which all fund the work of Heritage Hall, except for *Origins*, which is self-funding.

Richard H. Harms

Rev. Zachary J. Sherda: Feeding the CRC Flock for Forty Years

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

Zachary and Clasena Bosch, a registered nurse, were married in 1913. Like her husband, Clasena was born in Michigan to immigrant parents and spoke English and Dutch fluently. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.

Janet Sheeres was born in the Netherlands, emigrated to Canada, and now lives in the United States. An accomplished and published historian, she continues detailing the Dutch emigration to North America. She is also an accomplished genealogist. Her most recent book is annotated Minutes of the Christian Reformed Church, 1857-1880 *(Eerdmans, 2013).*

"Preaching," Rev. Zachary Sherda once remarked, "is like throwing a bucket of water over the congregation and hoping that here and there a drop lands." In his forty years of ministry in the Christian Reformed Church (1913-1953), Sherda threw thousands of buckets of water over his congregants, while at the same time also reaching a wider CRC audience by writing some 225 articles in the *Banner* between 1926 and 1932. Add to that all the catechism classes he taught and the men's and women's societies he led, and you can appreciate the scope of the words this man expended for the church.

Tall and imposing, wearing a Prince Albert coat and a shirt with winged collar when preaching, Sherda served only three congregations—Highland, Indiana; Evergreen Park, Illinois; and First Cutlerville, Michigan.

Family Background

The 1913 graduating class of the Calvin Theological Seminary was smaller than most during the second decade of the twentieth century; Sherda was one of only five candidates for the CRC ministry that year.[1] That young Zachary studied for the ministry was in itself not such an extraordinary achievement; what is noteworthy about his path to the pulpit was that his family's background in the Netherlands would not have presented the same opportunity to study.

His parents, Jan Sjaarda and Trijntje Land, were immigrants from the Netherlands and were an important foundation for allowing Zachary to develop his gifts for preaching, teaching, and writing. They were both born in 1859 in the village of Burum, Friesland, and attended the same church and school.[2] From age two to five, their pastor was Douwe J. Vander Werp, who left Burum for Graafschap, Michigan, in 1864; their next pastor, Willem Frieling, left Burum for Vriesland, Michigan, in 1866; and Hendrik van Hoogen, their pastor from 1867 to 1873, would also emigrate in 1894.

Education for laboring-class children in the Netherlands such as Jan usually ended with the sixth grade. Jan was twelve and barely out of school when his father died. This required that he, as the only surviving son, should go to work and earn a living for himself and his mother.

When Trijntje immigrated to Grand Rapids along with her mother and her mother's second husband, Adrianus Fryling, and his three sons in 1880, Jan found a way to follow the next year.[3] As soon as he had secured a position that would allow him to support a wife and family, the two married in Grand Rapids in 1882. By immigrating, Jan had stepped out of the social class that kept him and others like him confined to their station in Dutch life. In America Jan was still

a laborer, but here his labors allowed his son, Zachary, to become an educated person.[4]

In America, Jan anglicized his name to John Sherda, and Trijntje became Catherine. The couple attended First CRC and joined Franklin Street CRC when it organized in 1887; John was soon elected elder. For the first couple of years of their marriage, it looked as if they might remain childless, but in 1886 Zachary was born. He would be their only child. They named him after John's father, Sake, which is a Frisian derivative of Zacharias. Unfortunately, John died in 1912 of a ruptured appendix, a year before his son's graduation from the seminary. Nevertheless, he knew that his son was only one year away from becoming a minister—an almost unheard-of achievement for a laborer's son in the Netherlands.

Call to the Ministry

When Zachary was ten years old, his step-uncle, Herman Fryling, became the first CRC missionary to Fort

Rev. Herman Fryling (1869-1947), Sherda's step-uncle, was the first permanent Christian Reformed missionary in America's southwest and served there for 33 of his 35 years in active ministry. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.

Defiance in Arizona. No doubt, letters home from the American West stimulated a desire in Zachary to follow in his step-uncle's footsteps. The fiftieth anniversary of the Christian Reformed Church, celebrated in Grand Rapids on April 8, 1907, also may have inspired him to study for the ministry. The downtown Civic Auditorium was filled to capacity by the time the program started at 7 p.m. Speaker after speaker recounted how God had led the small denomination of only four congregations in 1857 to grow into 170 congregations with 60,000 souls, among them 23,500 professing members, a flourishing seminary, a developing college, and an increasing number of Christian schools.[5] Four hundred young people joined their voices in singing a cantata. Who would not want to serve as pastor in such a solid denomination? Sherda, twenty-one at the time, heeded the call.

But he had struggled with the choice, as he wrote later:

> How can a person determine whether he is really called to this work? Isn't it just possible that he imagines himself called? There is a distinction between an internal and an external call. The internal call simply means that anyone desiring the office of a minister should ask himself the question whether he has the gifts which are requisite for the work. Does he have the brains to master the studies necessary for acquiring a good, thorough education? Does he like to study? Has the ability to speak? Can he present his ideas in an orderly way? Or is he scatter-brained. Supposing he meets all these criteria, there are many others who have the same. Then the genuineness of this internal call should be authenticated by the external call of the Church. He should be called and examined thoroughly. As Paul

Zachary Sherda's first charge, the Highland, Indiana, Christian Reformed Church. The Sherdas' first two children were born while they lived in the parsonage, to the right of the church. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.

wrote to Timothy "and let these also be proved."[6]

His own confirmation of an external call first came from the Franklin Street CRC council and Classis Grand Rapids when they approved his application to enroll in the seminary, but it was tested during the long summer months after his graduation in early June 1913. It was not until late August that he was notified by the congregations of Oskaloosa, Iowa; Atwood, Michigan; and Highland, Indiana, that he had been placed on a trio. Highland had called three other pastors unsuccessfully since becoming vacant in June of that year. At the 3 September congregational meeting, Sherda was chosen, and he subsequently accepted their call.[7]

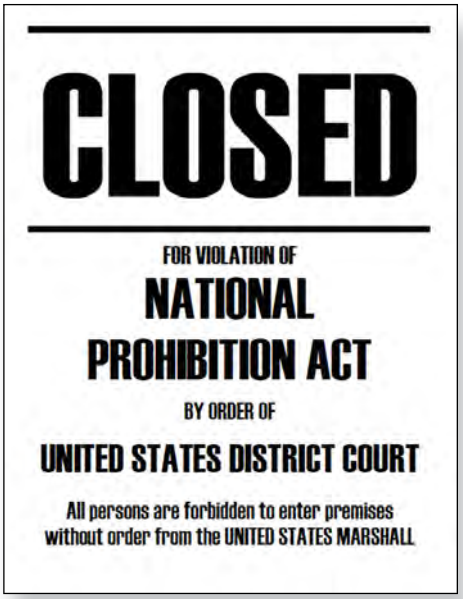
Marriage and Ministry

Three months after his graduation, with a ministerial position secured, Sherda married Clasena Bosch in the Franklin Street CRC. Six years older than Zachary, Clasena was born in Ottawa County, one of ten children to Henry and Hannah Bosch. The Bosches were early settlers in Ottawa County.[8] Thus both Clasena and Zachary were Americans and fluent in English and in Dutch.

Clasena, a registered nurse, lived and worked at the UBA (United Benevolent Association) Hospital.[9] The fact that Zachary fell in love with an older, educated, career woman suggests that he was not intimidated by a strong female presence who would bring her own opinions and ideas to the marriage.

The newlyweds began their married life in the Highland parsonage, where they arrived in a Crow-Elkhart Model L-55 touring car, made in Elkhart, Indiana (price—approximately $800). In Highland their first two children were born—Joan in January 1915, and John in May 1916. Sherda's salary in 1916 was $800 a year, but their financial status appears to have been better than that of most new families, for while at Highland the minutes record that "Mrs. Sherda lent the congregation $1,200 at 5 percent interest."[10] Presumably she had saved money while working as a nurse. Since she handled the family's finances throughout their married life, it may be assumed then that Clasena's savings also financed the automobile that had cost a year's salary.[11]

From Highland it was just a short move north to Evergreen Park, Illinois, in 1916. First Evergreen CRC was organized in 1915 with eighty-six charter members. The congregation built a frame church and began searching for a pastor. Sherda had preached in First Evergreen on occasion and was one of three ministers the council nominated for a vote by the congregation. Sherda had received seventeen votes, with the other two nominees gaining a total of five. He had accepted the call, provided the congregation approved his desire to further his studies at McCormick Seminary. This had been readily agreed to, and he became Evergreen Park's first pastor, at an annual salary of $900. These wages were well earned. The congregation grew considerably during his ministry. He preached four times each Sunday—twice in English at 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. and twice in Dutch at 10:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Two more children, Kathryn and Harry, were born to them in Chicago.[12]



Chicago in the Twenties

His roots had given him an appre-

The Evergreen Park congregation, located in the Chicago area, grew rapidly during Sherda's pastorate. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.

ciation for Christian education, and while at Evergreen Park he advanced the cause so that in the spring of 1925 the first Christian school was built in the community. This was a four-room school with eight grades taught by four teachers.

Three years after their arrival in Evergreen Park, the Volstead Act was signed on 19 May 1919, regulating the manufacture, production, use, and sale of high-proof spirits, etc., thereby initiating a decade of bootlegging, organized crime, murder, and no decrease in the consumption of alcohol over the long run. Evergreen Park was a suburb of Chicago, where "The Chicago Outfit" ultimately headed by Al Capone, controlled organized crime. Prohibition led to excesses, and yet none of the articles he wrote for the *Banner* dealt with temperance. The Christian Reformed Church, while prohibiting dancing, card playing, and movies in 1926, did not regard the moderate and responsible use of alcohol sinful.

While at Evergreen Park, Sherda took classes at McCormick Seminary, and his inquisitive mind found joy in these post-graduate studies. Soon his study walls were lined with books on subjects ranging from theology to the arts. In fact, in Evergreen Park and again in Cutlerville he requested more shelf space for his books. His reading habits ranged widely, including such non-Christian titles as the *Atlantic*. In his writings he refers to such books as John Corbin's *An American at Oxford*, Shailer Matthews's *The Faith of Modernism*, and Kuyper's Stone Lectures. He rationalized his studies this way:

> The teaching elder or preacher should be splendidly educated and trained to meet the needs of the day in behalf of the Church of Christ. It is a decided disadvantage to the Church to have an ignorant clergy, a ministry undisciplined by habits of study and uninformed by wide reading. . . . We frequently hear it said, "Give us practical sermons." There is a cry for simplicity. By all means, let us strive after simplicity. But let us not slip from simplicity into imbecility.[13]

By 1926 his scholarly pursuits had been noticed, and the editor of the *Banner* chose him as the new contributor to a column titled "Our Doctrine." The column was advertised as "Doctrine [that] may in general be defined as the permanent conviction of the [Christian Reformed] Church concerning matters which Scriptures teach. Sherda will start with a series on the 'delightful subject of Church Government.'" Sherda did not disappoint. Over the next ten years, in some 225 articles, he logically and cogently explicated Reformed doctrine. The articles ranged in topic from Anabaptists (nine articles) to the sacraments (six articles) to Socrates.

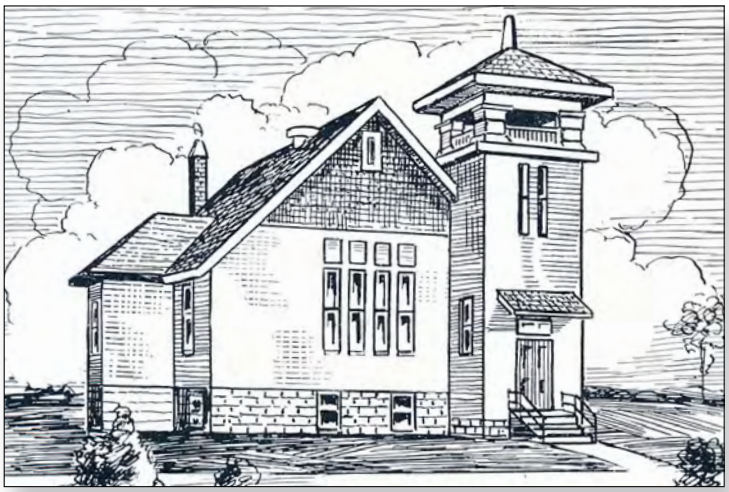
The 1920s very possibly may have been the peak decade for reading in American life.[14] Christian Reformed people read the *Banner* religiously, and Sherda's articles found a receptive audience that in later years would turn more and more to reading tabloid newspapers, watching newsreel films, and listening to the radio.[15] Sherda's own flock also turned to radio, enjoying not only baseball games, but also the sermons of Paul Rader.[16] These sermons produced unrest in the congregation, resulting in the dismissal of four Sunday school teachers because they had come under the influence of this radio pastor's theology, and the council feared that they would influence their pupils negatively. At its 24 October 1927[17] meeting, the Evergreen Park Council discussed the issue:

> Art. 4: The council, being convinced that the named [Sunday school] teachers, are influenced more by the teachings of Paul Rader than is desirable, and because of the influence they have, or already have had, leading them away from the Reformed confessions in the Sunday school, the council has chosen to accept their resignations as Sunday school teachers.

Slowly the "world" encroached on the congregation. Chicago in 1927 was the second largest city in America and the fourth largest in the world. Only New York, London, and Paris were grander. The "Windy City" was also famous, in the words of an editorial in the *Chicago Tribune*, for "moronic buffoonery, barbaric crime, triumphant hoodlumism, unchecked graft, and a dejected citizenship."[18] Yet, Sherda rarely commented on "worldly affairs." However, in a three-part series titled "The challenge of the new paganism," he mentions living on the edge of a major city and watching the sports madness happening in the summer of 1927, when 29,000 people turned out on a Friday afternoon in Chicago to watch the Yankees play the White Sox.[19] He wrote that he was no enemy of outdoor games and took delight is seeing a manly game of some sort played, but bemoaned the fact that physical strength was appreciated above intellect. "One should," he wrote, "take a stand against living only for selfish pleasures."[20]

In June of 1928 Sherda attended the CRC Synod, held in Holland, Michigan. Quite appropriately, he served on the Publication and Education Committee, which dealt with radio preaching and Sunday school lesson material.[21]

During his years at Evergreen his popularity with his readers is reflected in the number of calls he received and declined. He was placed on a trio thirty-four times, and of those he received ten calls, all of which he declined until in May 1930, when he accepted the call to Cutlerville, a suburb of Grand Rapids.[22]



The architect's (J. & G. Daverman) drawing of the First Cutlerville church building, many of whose members were employees of the Christian Psychopathic Hospital (now Pine Rest). Sherda served the congregation for twenty-three years until retiring in 1953. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.

The Cutlerville Period

In February 1930, the Cutlerville congregation called Sherda, offering a salary of $1,800 with three Sundays off for vacation. At the April council meeting, $100 was designated to fix up the parsonage. He was to preach three times on Sundays; however, to placate the older Dutch members, a very early Dutch service was added at 8:30 a.m.[23] In April 1939 all the services were changed to English. When he retired in 1953, after preaching four sermons most Sundays for forty years, he never mounted the pulpit again!

The Sherdas arrived in May, and immediately Sherda began making improvements by purchasing a mimeograph machine to duplicate the bulletins. Half a year later, in December 1930, it was decided to do away with the old custom of an elder shaking the pastor's hand before and after the service to indicate approval of the sermon. Apparently Sherda was not bound to tradition and, in order to make the services more meaningful, was willing to incorporate changes. He encouraged the congregation to stand while singing the first hymn and the doxology, a practice which was inaugurated on the first Sunday of 1940. In a time when the CRC worship order was dictated by its synod, he worked out a more suitable worship service and suggested that the Apostles' Creed should be spoken in unison by the congregation, not just recited by the pastor.[24] This was received with shock, and the council members initially opposed it. Yet in the end they voted for it, with the caveat that anyone who had objection to this change should discuss it with the pastor. Likewise, using the common communion cup was replaced by the use of individual cups.

Sherda's two decades, from 1930 to 1950 at Cutlerville, were two of the most dramatic in United States history—the Great Depression and war years that affected the lives of all Americans—yet very little mention is made of these outside forces in the consistory minutes. The only reference to the fact that the Depression had also affected Grand Rapids was an entry in June 1934 that, due to the financial situation, the congregational picnic was canceled. It was years before there was an entry increasing Sherda's salary. In fact, at one meeting he was asked to defer a $200 salary payment. Sherda realized his congregants were all struggling financially and, being one with them, agreed to forego the payment.

No sooner were the hardships of the thirties over when World War II broke out. Both his sons were of an age to be inducted into the army—John, in April 1941, at age 25; and Harry, in February 1943, at age 20.[25] The Cutlerville consistory placed a blue star on its service flag in the sanctuary for a person in service and committed to writing "our boys" in service.

Love of literature

Sherda developed a love for literature in his youth. It was already evident when he walked from his home on Grandville Avenue to the Calvin Theological Seminary, all the while reading a book.[26] It came to the fore during house visitations. One member recalled that toward the end of the visit the pastor would often emphasize reading by asking, "Do you do any reading?" stressing that "you can only give to your children what you yourself know and you can't go beyond that. They will retain only twenty-five percent of what you tell them, so you'd better concentrate on good reading."[27] In order to encourage reading, he initiated a church library.

Again and again, when elderly members today recall Sherda's preaching, they mention the richness of his doctrinal and scholarly preaching. They remember with fondness their philosophical conversations with him. Yet, this philosophical bent did not lend itself easily to a warm personality. Another member recalled that Sherda often visited their home, which was near the church, and that Sherda, though well-read and intellectual, lacked social skills. He could be quite blunt with people who came to make profession of faith but whose catechism knowledge did not pass Sherda's high bar. During catechism classes, instead of remembering the children's names, he would address a student as "girl of Hyma," "son of Fennema," or "girl of Kleiboer," etc. Choosing respect over popularity, he felt that too much familiarity would tarnish his calling; he wrote:

> The minister stands or falls with his personal character and merit. The dignity of his office is not a safe refuge when he is guilty of neglecting his calling. He surely will dishonor the profession and lose his authority over the more thoughtful members of his church unless he is more or less "up" with the progress of knowledge, and practices what he preaches.[28]

Family and Retirement

Sherda was the head of his family. In August 1933 the Sherdas were visited by a committee from consistory that confronted them with the accusation that they sent their children to the public high school. The charge included a stern sentence that they were not setting a good example, because other people might say that if the pastor sends his children to the public school, they could too. Sherda bluntly told the committee that it was a matter of health. His daughter was not strong enough to make the daily trip from Cutlerville to Grand Rapids Christian High. If anyone had a problem with that, they were welcome to discuss it in his office. Case closed.

His view on marriage is succinct:

> [Man] was constitutionally so created that he feels the need of companionship. He feels the necessity of completing his life by one like himself. And so God made the woman to serve as the embodiment of the ideal. She is not a luxury, but rather a necessity inasmuch as she fulfils and elevates the life of man. If in these few words I have indicated the true relation of man and woman, then this relation is vital and of lasting importance. But it can be realized or fully expressed only in marriage.[29]

And about family life, he wrote:

> So then, the ability to rule well his own house will be a test of a man's fitness to rule the congregation. Once more, he should rule his own family gently but firmly; his wife should be an exemplary Christian lady; his children should grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

In order to do this he should have his children in subjection with all gravity. It may not be amiss to add that in all relations with the young he should manifest "that propriety of demeanor" which belongs especially to the pure and chaste.

> The reason for this qualification is given in the words: "But if a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" The Christian family, the reverent, affectionate relations between parents and children, between the master and the dependents give evidence of a man's fitness to be an elder in the church. But if his is not such a Christian family, how shall he be entrusted with duties which bring him continually in touch with the divine?[30]

The Sherda family, left to right in the back row, are: Joan, Harry, John, and Kathryn. Images courtesy of Mary Sanford Drexler.

His family did not always share these strict values. John, the oldest son, completed only the ninth grade, a disappointment for a father who set such great store on education and improving one's mind. After being discharged from the United States Army, John worked for various county agencies until his death in 1976. He remained single. The 1926 Christian Reformed Church Synod took a stance against "worldly amusement," outlawing movies, card playing, and dancing.[31] Nevertheless, in 1940 his oldest daughter, Joan, then twenty-five, left for Chicago to pursue an acting and modeling career in which she had, according to her niece, moderate success.[32] She eventually returned to Grand Rapids and graduated from Calvin College in 1961. She taught English for several years at Calvin Christian High School in Grandville. Like John, she also remained single. The second daughter,

Kate, ran a successful beauty parlor in downtown Grand Rapids until she met her husband, Arthur Sandford, who owned a string of theatres. After World War II, son Harry remained in California, where he became a successful public accountant. He married his dance instructor, Betty Martinez, in Las Vegas, Nevada. According to a granddaughter, the Sherdas' parental love enfolded the son- and daughter-in-law in spite of the differences in lifestyles.

Final Years

In the fall of 1951, Clasena fell, resulting in a hip fracture that stubbornly refused to heal, and she passed away on Christmas Eve. Sherda never fully recovered from this loss. According to neighbors, he began to wander about the neighborhood visiting with old parishioners. He wanted to complete his forty years of service so he stayed on two more years until September 1953, but at the December 1952 congregational meeting, he stated in the opening remarks that this would be his last congregational meeting, and then left the meeting. Perhaps the first anniversary of Clasena's death caused such emotional turmoil that he could not continue. He preached his farewell and final sermon on 20 December 1953. He based his sermon on 1 Cor. 3:11-15, and ended it with a tribute to Clasena:

> I should on this occasion tell you also that if I had any success, I attribute it to her who once was my wife. She helped me and influenced me considerably. Though she cannot hear me, I want to say it. Beloved, I think of the words of the poet:
>
> O World! O Life! O Time!
> on whose last steps I climb,
> Trembling at that where I stood before.
> When will return the glory of your prime?
> No more—Oh, never more!
> Out of the day and night
> a joy has taken flight;
> Fresh spring and summer, and winter hoar
> Move my faint heart with grief,
> but with delight No more—Oh, never more![33]

In retirement Sherda, like so many of his age in Dutch immigrant communities, was known to the children of Cutlerville for his prodigious cigar smoking. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.

This from a man who above all was unsentimental and had no use for idle pious talk. Yet he was familiar with poetry other than Christian hymns and texts and able to express his feelings about the joy having gone out of his life.

After his retirement at the end of 1953 at age sixty-seven, he remained in the Cutlerville area. There was no official age of retirement in the CRC until three years later, when Synod declared that sixty-five was a proper age for a pastor's retirement.[34] He had lived through some of the greatest changes in world history, from the first airplane flight to space exploration, from telegraph to radio to television, from corner groceries to self-serve markets, and much more. He lived to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the CRC. With his fellow CRC members he rejoiced that the CRC had grown from 175 congregations at its fiftieth anniversary to 495; from 116 active pastors to 392. He would have seen these positive growth patterns as evidence of God blessing the CRC and the Reformed ideal of the world belonging to God. Knowing that he had in his own way contributed to that growth gave him peace of mind.

He died at Blodgett Hospital on 8 June 1968, at age eighty-two, taking with him his prodigious mental library of Reformed knowledge. There are, and have been, many pastors in the CRC; years later people recalled Sherda fondly with, "but there was only one Rev. Sherda!"

Endnotes

1. The other four were: Albert H. Bratt, Herman Kuiper, William M. Trap, and John G. Vande Lune.

2. A Christian school had been opened in Burum in 1871 with *meester* Jan Veltkamp as principal. In 1885 the Veltkamp family also arrived to be the new school teacher for the Christian school in Grand Rapids. Once united in Grand Rapids, the Sjaardas and the Veltkamps continued their friendship.

3. The Fryling sons were Freerk (Frederick), born in 1865; Harm (Herman), born in 1869; and Marten, born in 1872. Frederick remained living in Grand Rapids, Marten moved to Missaukee County. Adrianus died in Grand Rapids on 13 April 1889, Sjoukje on 4 February 1908. After she became a widow, Sjoukje lived with Jan and Trijntje.

4. Jan's mother Geertje had emigrated to America with him, but when her daughter and husband arrived a year later, also from Burum, she moved in with them; and when they moved to Missaukee County, she moved there with them. She died in Missaukee County in 1902. Zachary's step-uncle, Marten Fryling, moved there as well. The oldest step-uncle, Freerk, became a truck farmer in Paris Township, Kent County. So, even though he was an only child, Zachary had plenty of relatives.

5. *Banner*, 31 January 1907, 4. For a complete description of the program and the speakers, see *Gedenkboek Vijftigjarig Jubileum Chr. Geref. Kerk, A.D. 1857-1907* (Grand Rapids: H. Verhaar, 1907).

6. *Banner*, 11 February 1927, 97-98.

7. He also received the call to Atwood, but not to Oskaloosa.

8. Clasena's father, Heimerik (Henry) Bosch, was born 1 June 1843 in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands. He and his family sailed on the *SS Daniel Webster,* arriving on 2 December 1847. Henry married Hannah Rensker on 30 October 1866 in Holland, Michigan.

9. Later the UBA became Blodgett Hospital and is now part of Spectrum Health System.

10. Highland, IN, CRC minutes.

11. Highland, IN, CRC minutes, 4 May 1915.

12. Kathryn was born in May 1917 and Harry in July 1923.

13. *Banner,* 3 December 1926, 761-762.

14. Bill Bryson, *One Summer, America, 1927* (New York, Doubleday, 2013) 27.

15. Babe Ruth's homers were broadcast nationally. Late in the decade (1927) Lindbergh attained world-wide fame by flying solo from New York to Paris. America was giddy with success until it all fell apart near the end of the decade in October 1929.

16. Paul Rader, 1879-1938, American evangelist and pastor, was born in Denver, Colorado. The son of a Methodist minister, he was converted to Christ as a boy and became a soloist in his father's meetings. He was educated at the University of Denver and the University of Colorado, and did post-graduate study at Harvard. During his time in college he drifted into liberalism and entered a business partnership. God spoke to him through an illuminated sign while walking near New York City's Times Square. He rented a room nearby and fell on his face before the Lord, and his life was changed. He left his business and entered the ministry. His pastorates included Congregational Church in Boston, Christian and Missionary Alliance Tabernacle in Pittsburgh (1912-1915), Moody Memorial Church in Chicago (1915-1921), Chicago Gospel Tabernacle (1922-1933), and Gospel Temple in Fort Wayne, Indiana (1936-1937). He served as president of the Christian and Missionary Alliance from 1921 to 1923. His radio broadcasts were heard on various Chicago stations as well as the CBS network. He was instrumental in sending scores of missionaries to countries all over the world, in addition to influencing hundreds of young men to enter the ministry.

17. Evergreen Park CRC Collection, Heritage Hall, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

18. Bryson, *One Summer*, 401.

19. Bryson, *One Summer*, 353.

20. "The New Paganism," *Banner,* 18 October 1929, 743.

21. This was the only time that Sherda was a delegate to synod; perhaps it was his rather taciturn nature that did not garner him votes at classis meetings, or perhaps he just could not be bothered with the mundane business of synodical meetings.

22. During his twenty-three years at Cutlerville, Sherda received no calls. Perhaps this was due first of all to the Depression and later to World War II. By the time that was over he was fifty-eight and might have been considered too old. However, it may also be that he was quite content at Cutlerville and did not encourage congregations to call him.

23. Services: 8:30 a.m. Holland service; 10:00 a.m. English (Catechism service); 2 p.m. English service; 7:15 p.m. English service. These services were not required because there were so many people; the various times gave the Pine Rest Hospital nursing staff the opportunity to attend two services on Sunday!

24. *Acts of Synod of the CRC 1928*, held in Holland, Michigan, 13-29 June, 55. The CRC Synod of 1928 allowed for the pastor *and* the congregation to recite the Apostles' Creed in unison as well as the Lord's Prayer at the end of the general prayer. At the same time

synod discouraged responsive reading of Scripture (page 296).

25. Harry served with the air crew at Santa Ana Air Base, California.

26. Oral History of First Cutlerville CRC, July 1992; the Archives, First Cutlerville CRC, Byron Center, Michigan.

27. Oral History of First Cutlerville CRC, August 1992; Archives, First Cutlerville CRC, Byron Center, Michigan.

28. *Banner*, 26 November 1926, 745.

29. *Banner,* 24 January 1930, 65.

30. *Banner,* 29 October 1926, 673.

31. *Acts of Synod of the CRC 1928,* 58. The Synod of 1926 adopted an overture against worldly amusements and published a brochure so that the delegates could take this with them to their various consistories.

32. Granddaughter Mary Drexler's email to author, 17 January 2015.

33. This poem, written by Percy Shelley, was first published in 1824. It is interesting that he does not recite a religious hymn or Bible text, as might have been expected.

34. *Acts of Synod of the CRC 1956,* 19. Until that time, CRC pastors requested retirement when they felt it necessary because of "age, sickness, or otherwise."

Letters from World War II

captions by Richard H. Harms

These letters were collected and saved by Bertha Van Belcom (neé Steenwyk) and made available to Origins *by her niece, Myrtle Steenwyk (neé) Brower. Bertha was a sister of Bernard and Hank. A genealogy of the family is available in Heritage Hall.*

Four young men from the extended families lost their lives during the war. Ben Kerkstra, from Byron Center, died in Germany; Andrew Smit was washed overboard in the Pacific returning after the war ended; and Bernard and Hank, two of Nick and Hattie's sons — Bern in the Philippines and Hank in Germany. These three were from Beaverdam.

Nick and Hattie Steenwyk raised their nine children on a celery farm near Beaverdam, Michigan (between Hudsonville and Zeeland). Active in the Beaverdam Christian Reformed Church and Christian School, they and their extended families remained close. During World War II a number of the young men from these families entered military service with whom family members kept in frequent contact via letters. The extensive correspondence from those in service has been preserved by the family and shared with succeeding generations. Pictured are back row (L-R): Bernard, Henrietta, Ben, Lucy, Hank, Rena; front row (L-R): Bertha, Hattie, Louis, Nick, Bessie. Image courtesy of the Steenwyk family.

Richard Harms is the Curator of Archives in heritage Hall and the editor of Origins. *In addition he has taught history classes at several colleges and universities and currently lectures in the Calvin Academy of Lifelong Learning. Also an author, he has numerous articles and five books to his credit.*

On 17 June 1941 Hank married Ethel Brower, from the nearby Zutphen area. Because he was married when drafted, Hank initially served in stateside bases. But on 23 February 1945 he boarded a ship for transport to Europe, landing in Scotland on 3 March. Ethel (1917-2010) did not remarry. Image courtesy of the Steenwyk family.

Bernard (8 July 1920 - 6 February 1945) and Henry Steenwyk (19 March 1916 - 20 March 1945). Image courtesy of the Steenwyk family.

Military personnel wrote on whatever paper was available as demonstrated by this sample of letterheads from mail sent by the cousins of the extended Steenwyk family. Images courtesy of the Steenwyk family.

In the United States the Office of Censorship, with as many as 14,000 staff, opened letters looking for one of 16,117 names on the official Watch List, and anything that would be of value to the enemy — such as locations, and any weakening of morale among the troops and at home. Offending information was cut out or blacked out with ink, or the entire letter might be destroyed. Ultimately censorship took too much time and effort to justify any benefit, so the military ended the practice with World War II. As a result, often letters contained family code words so that unofficial words from the front lines did reach families on occasion. On 2 March 1945, ten days before the official telegram arrived reporting that Bernard had been killed, word of his death spread among members of the Beaverdam community. Dennis Jongekrijg had written his parents that "something very serious," which passed the censors, had happened to Bern. Ed Albrecht wrote that Bern had died. The censor had cut out Bern's name, but from the two letters the family surmised that Bern had died. Images courtesy of the Steenwyk family.

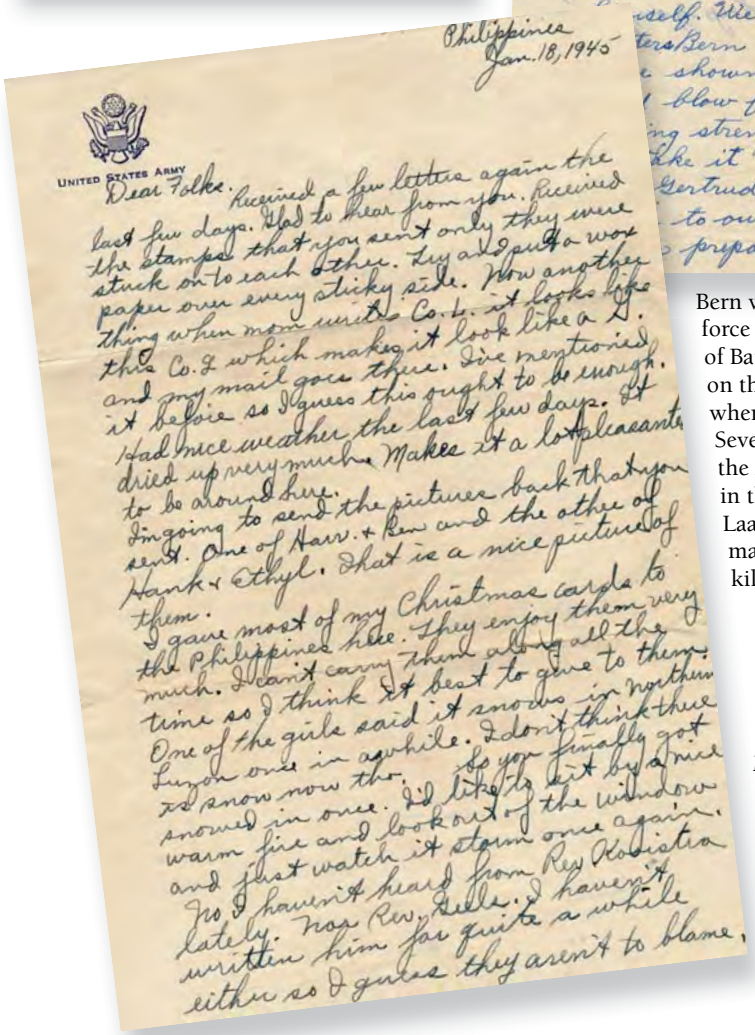
V-Mail (Victory Mail) was an effort to save on the weight of voluminous mail soldiers sent during World War II. The process photographed a standard format 7x9-inch letter, reduced the image to a microfilm negative the size of a thumbnail, the film was shipped home, and photographic prints 60 percent of the original letter were made and delivered to the addressee. The process reduced mail from thirty-seven sacks to one, and from 2,575 to 45 pounds. Images courtesy of the Steenwyk family.

March 13, 1945

Dear Hank,

The past Friday evening a week ago I was called to come to Uncle Joh When I came there they gave me a lett which Den had written Mrs. Jongekrijg an they said I should read it. Den wrote about Bern and therefrom we concluded somethi very serious had happened. It seemed to suggest that the worst had happened to Bern. The same evening Uncle Gerrit went to Ed Albrecht folks to see if they had received any word about Bern. They had received a letter with the name of the pers killed cut out. Herefrom we concluded tha Bern was killed. Ed himself had been wounde We did not dare write you what we thoug until we received official word. The past saturday (March 10) the telegram came whi said that Bern was killed the 6th of Febru on Lugon. The Official word came 8 days af Den wrote this letter.

Our God has taken our brother uni self. We may thank God for the encourag ters/Bern might send home to us. Our pare shown submission unto Gods will. C blow for our parents but God is also ing strenght to bear it. Bertha also seem like it alright. Also a very hard blow Gertrude. May we all thereby be draw to our God and may we all becom prepared to meet Him.



Philippines
Jan. 18, 1945

UNITED STATES ARMY

Dear Folks. Received a few letters again the last few days. Glad to hear from you. Received the stamps that you sent only they were stuck on to each other. Try and put a wax paper over every sticky side. How another thing when mom writes Co. L. it looks like this Co. I which makes it look like a J. and my mail goes there. Five mentioned it before so I guess this ought to be enough. Had nice weather the last few days. It dried up very much. Makes it a lot pleasanter to be around here.

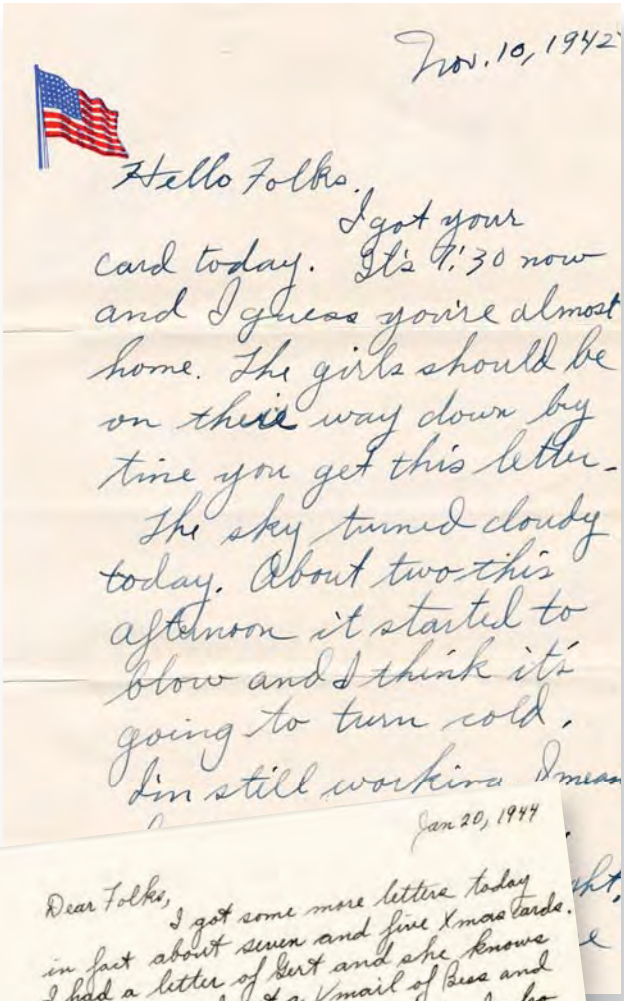
Im going to send the pictures back that you sent. One of Harv. + Ken and the other of Hank + Ethyl. That is a nice picture of them.

I gave most of my Christmas cards to the Philippines here. They enjoy them very much. I can't carry them along all the time so I think it best to give to them. One of the girls said it snows in northern Luzon once in awhile. I don't think there is snow now tho. So you finally got snowed in once. I'd like to sit by a nice warm fire and look out of the window and just watch it storm once again.

So I haven't heard from Rev Kobistra lately. Nor Rev Zelle. I haven't written him for quite a while either so I guess they aren't to blame.

Bern went into the army in August 1942 and was part of the force trained to retake the Philippines. He was part of the Battle of Bataan. On 31 January 1945 the 38th Division advanced east on the intricate maze of enemy fortifications in Zig-Zag Pass, where the Japanese took a stand against the American attack. Several days of heavy fighting resulted in high casualties for the American regiment, and all eastward progress had stopped in the mountainous jungle terrain. Bern, engaged to Gertrude Laarman, was part of a 12-man squad ordered to attack a machine gun nest. Seven of the twelve, including Bern, were killed. Image courtesy of the Steenwyk family.

Bern's last letter home was dated 18 January and it reports he is in good health and spirits. Image courtesy of the Steenwyk family.



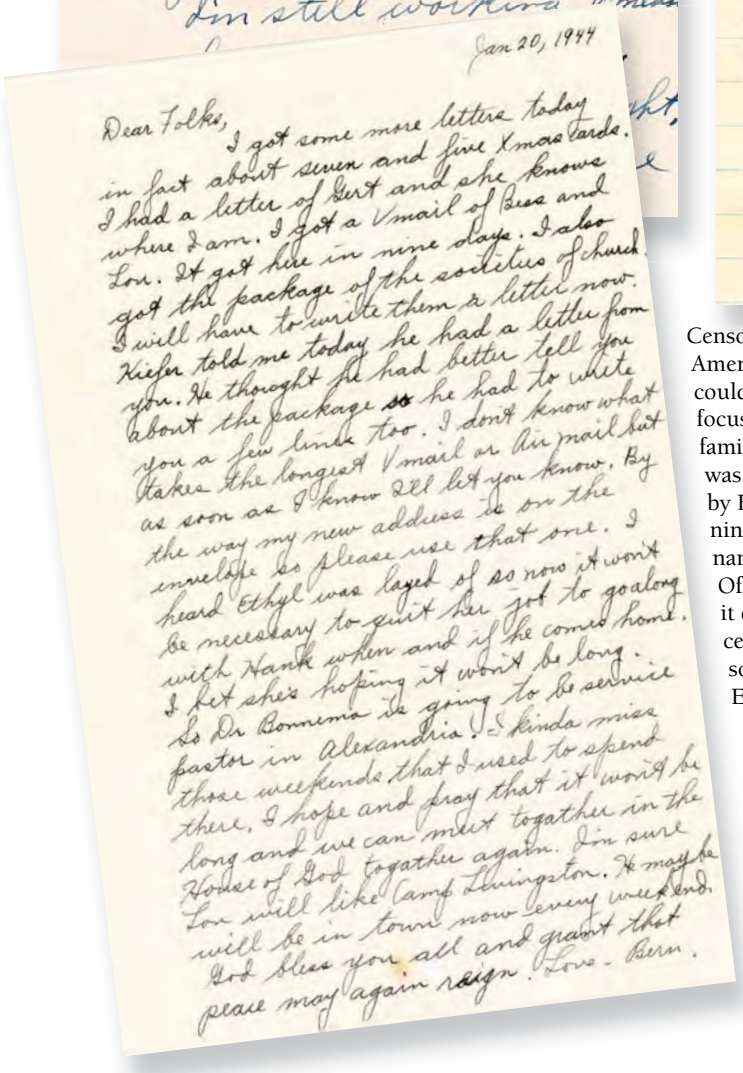
Nov. 10, 1942

Hello Folks.

I got your card today. It's 7:30 now and I guess you're almost home. The girls should be on their way down by time you get this letter.

The sky turned cloudy today. About two this afternoon it started to blow and I think it's going to turn cold.

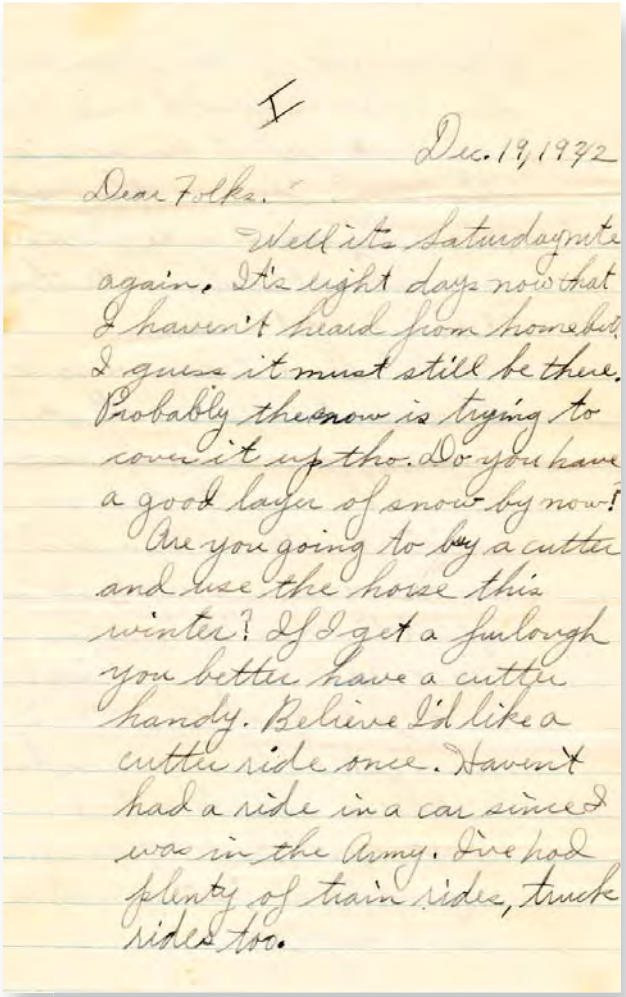
I'm still working I mean



Jan 20, 1944

Dear Folks,

I got some more letters today in fact about seven and five Xmas cards. I had a letter of Gert and she knows where I am. I got a Vmail of Bess and Lou. It got here in nine days. I also got the package of the societies of church. I will have to write them a letter now. Kiefer told me today he had a letter from you. He thought he had better tell you about the package so he had to write you a few lines too. I don't know what takes the longest Vmail or Air mail but as soon as I know I'll let you know. By the way my new address is on the envelope so please use that one. I heard Ethyl was layed of so now it won't be necessary to quit her got to go along with Hank when and if he comes home. I bet she's hoping it won't be long. So Dr Bonnema is going to be service pastor in Alexandria. I kinda miss those weekends that I used to spend there. I hope and pray that it won't be long and we can meet togather in the Yoder of God togather again. I'm sure Lou will like Camp Livingston. It may be will be in town now every weekend. God bless you all and grant that peace may again reign. Love - Bern.



I

Dec. 19, 1942

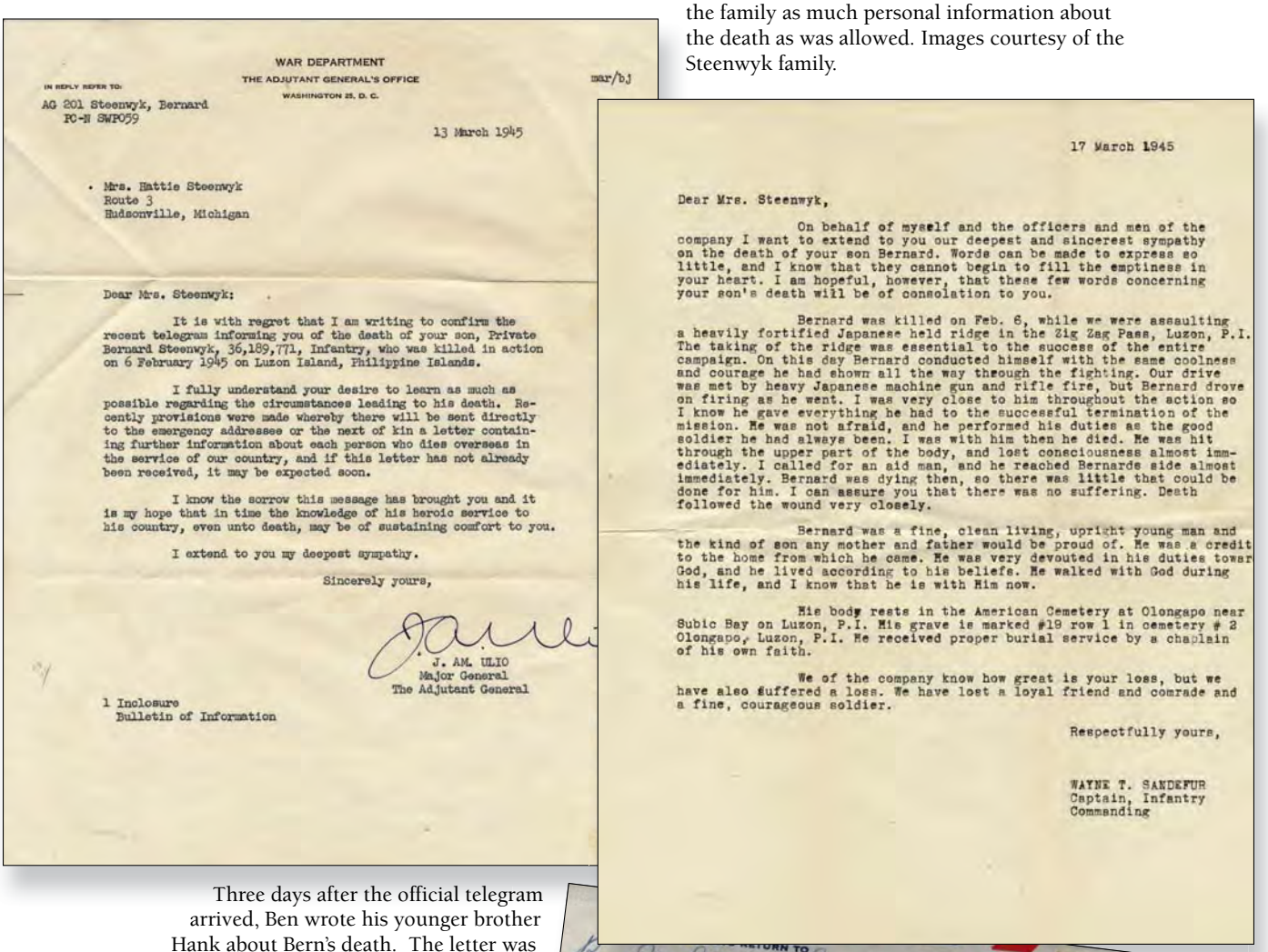
Dear Folks.

Well it's Saturday nite again. It's eight days now that I haven't heard from home but I guess it must still be there. Probably the snow is trying to cover it up tho. Do you have a good layer of snow by now?

Are you going to buy a cutter and use the horse this winter? If I get a furlough you better have a cutter handy. Believe I'd like a cutter ride once. Haven't had a ride in a car since I was in the Army. I've had plenty of train rides, truck rides too.

Censorship of military letters home began during the American Civil War. During World War II letters home could contain no information about location or action, but focused on such general topics as weather, health, spirits, family conditions, etc. The US Office of Censorship was in charge of this work and its staff rose to 14,462 by February 1943 housed in censor stations in at least nineteen locations. A black list of was generated with names of individuals who had written suspicious letters. Officially known as the U.S. Censorship Watch List it eventually contained 16,117 names. Some of the censors had to be able to read foreign languages since some family members back home could not read English.

The telegram reporting a death was followed by an official letter of acknowledgment from the Major General James A. Ulio, the Adjutant General who was responsible for the procedures affecting awards and decorations, casualty operations, and for the administration and preservation of records of army personnel. Ulio's middle name was Alexander, so the middle initial "AM" is a typo, the clerk probably having struck M adjacent to the period key on the keyboard in error. The official letter of notice was followed by a letter written by an officer who had known the deceased, offering condolences and providing the family as much personal information about the death as was allowed. Images courtesy of the Steenwyk family.



WAR DEPARTMENT
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

IN REPLY REFER TO:
AG 201 Steenwyk, Bernard
PC-N SWPO59

mar/bj

13 March 1945

Mrs. Hattie Steenwyk
Route 3
Hudsonville, Michigan

Dear Mrs. Steenwyk:

It is with regret that I am writing to confirm the recent telegram informing you of the death of your son, Private Bernard Steenwyk, 36,189,771, Infantry, who was killed in action on 6 February 1945 on Luzon Island, Philippine Islands.

I fully understand your desire to learn as much as possible regarding the circumstances leading to his death. Recently provisions were made whereby there will be sent directly to the emergency addressee or the next of kin a letter containing further information about each person who dies overseas in the service of our country, and if this letter has not already been received, it may be expected soon.

I know the sorrow this message has brought you and it is my hope that in time the knowledge of his heroic service to his country, even unto death, may be of sustaining comfort to you.

I extend to you my deepest sympathy.

Sincerely yours,

J. AM. ULIO
Major General
The Adjutant General

1 Inclosure
Bulletin of Information

17 March 1945

Dear Mrs. Steenwyk,

On behalf of myself and the officers and men of the company I want to extend to you our deepest and sincerest sympathy on the death of your son Bernard. Words can be made to express so little, and I know that they cannot begin to fill the emptiness in your heart. I am hopeful, however, that these few words concerning your son's death will be of consolation to you.

Bernard was killed on Feb. 6, while we were assaulting a heavily fortified Japanese held ridge in the Zig Zag Pass, Luzon, P.I. The taking of the ridge was essential to the success of the entire campaign. On this day Bernard conducted himself with the same coolness and courage he had shown all the way through the fighting. Our drive was met by heavy Japanese machine gun and rifle fire, but Bernard drove on firing as he went. I was very close to him throughout the action so I know he gave everything he had to the successful termination of the mission. He was not afraid, and he performed his duties as the good soldier he had always been. I was with him then he died. He was hit through the upper part of the body, and lost consciousness almost immediately. I called for an aid man, and he reached Bernards side almost immediately. Bernard was dying then, so there was little that could be done for him. I can assure you that there was no suffering. Death followed the wound very closely.

Bernard was a fine, clean living, upright young man and the kind of son any mother and father would be proud of. He was a credit to the home from which he came. He was very devouted in his duties towar God, and he lived according to his beliefs. He walked with God during his life, and I know that he is with Him now.

His body rests in the American Cemetery at Olongapo near Subic Bay on Luzon, P.I. His grave is marked #19 row 1 in cemetery # 2 Olongapo, Luzon, P.I. He received proper burial service by a chaplain of his own faith.

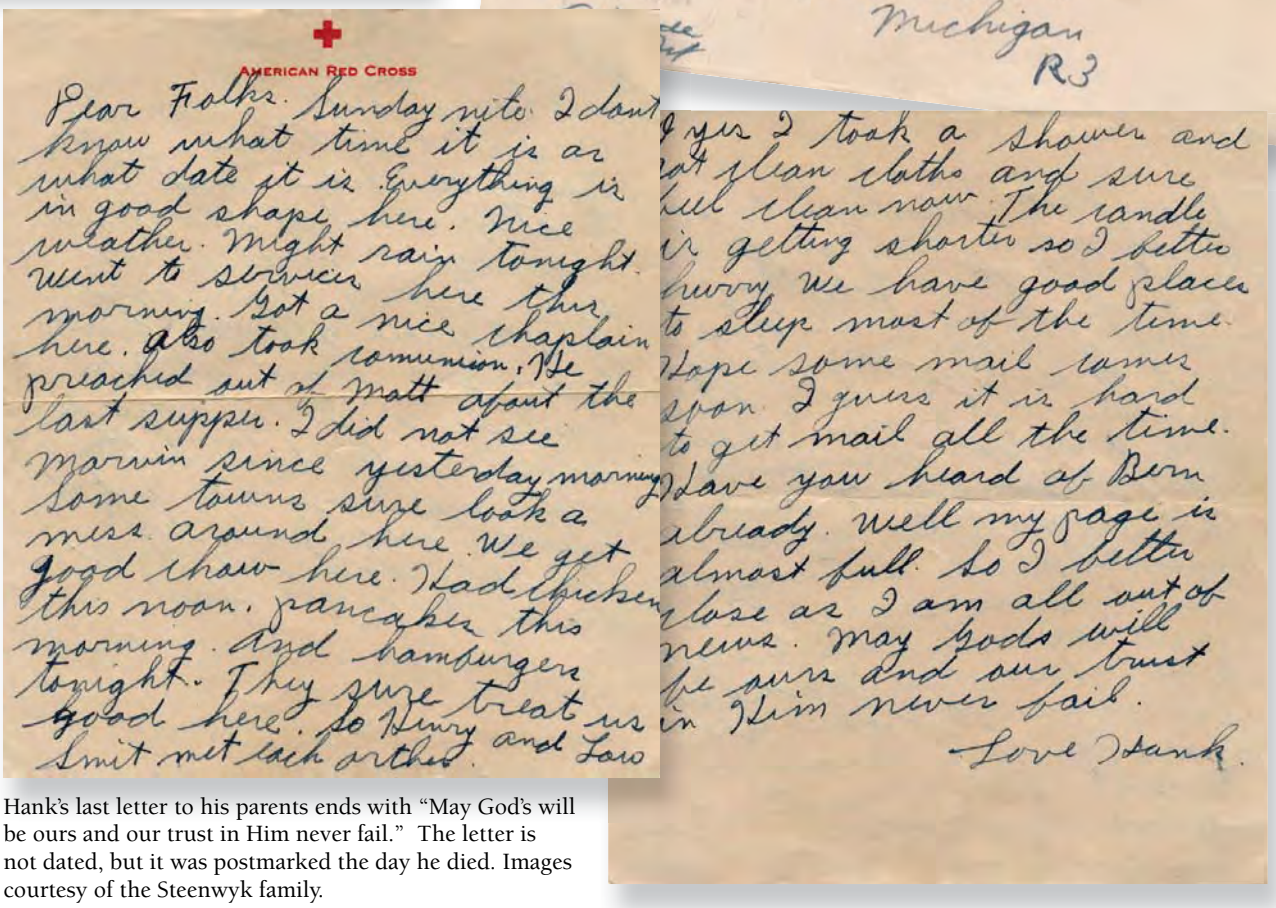
We of the company know how great is your loss, but we have also suffered a loss. We have lost a loyal friend and comrade and a fine, courageous soldier.

Respectfully yours,

WAYNE T. SANDEFUR
Captain, Infantry
Commanding

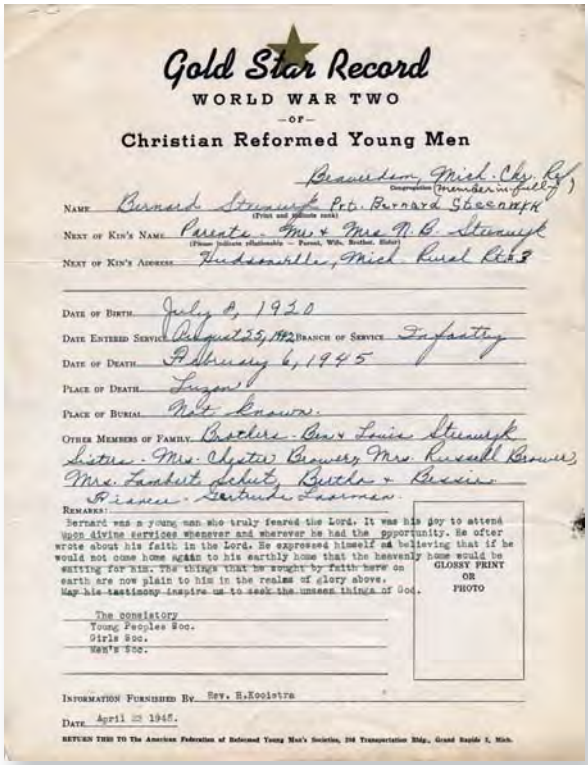
Three days after the official telegram arrived, Ben wrote his younger brother Hank about Bern's death. The letter was never delivered since Hank had died on 20 March, seven days after the letter was written. As was the practice, the letter was stamped "Deceased" and ultimately returned to Ben. Images courtesy of the Steenwyk family.

Hank died in combat on 20 March as American troops were crossing the Rhine at Remagen, Germany. On 7 March Allied troops had captured the bridge at Remagen before the Germans were able to completely destroy it. The bridge collapsed ten days later, but not before 25,000 troops, equipment and supplies had crossed. Hank was part of this crossing and died when a hand grenade landed in his foxhole and exploded as he was trying to toss it back out. Images courtesy of the Steenwyk family.



Hank's last letter to his parents ends with "May God's will be ours and our trust in Him never fail." The letter is not dated, but it was postmarked the day he died. Images courtesy of the Steenwyk family.

As was the case for battle deaths, the bodies of both Bern and Henry were buried in temporary cemeteries before being moved to their permanent places of rest. Bernard was first buried in cemetery 7747 and then moved to Block N, Row 12, Grave 19 in the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial in Fort Bonifacio, Manila, Philippines (inside the former Fort William McKinley). Henry's body was moved from cemetery 1204 to Block K-4, Row 1, Grave 16 in the Henri-Chapelle Military Cemetery in Belgium. Images courtesy of the Steenwyk family.



Gold Star Record
WORLD WAR TWO
—or—
Christian Reformed Young Men

Beaverdam, Mich. Chr. Ref. (Congregation) (Member in full)

Name: Bernard Steenwyk Pvt. Bernard Steenwyk (Print and indicate rank)
Next of Kin's Name: Parents Mr. & Mrs. N. B. Steenwyk (Please indicate relationship — Parent, Wife, Brother, Sister)
Next of Kin's Address: Hudsonville, Mich. Rural Rt. 3

Date of Birth: July 8, 1920
Date Entered Service: August 25, 1942 Branch of Service: Infantry
Date of Death: February 6, 1945
Place of Death: Luzon
Place of Burial: Not known.
Other Members of Family: Brother: Ben & Louis Steenwyk
Sisters: Mrs. Chester Brower, Mrs. Russell Brower, Mrs. Lambert Schut, Bertha & Bessie
Fiance: Gertrude Laarman.

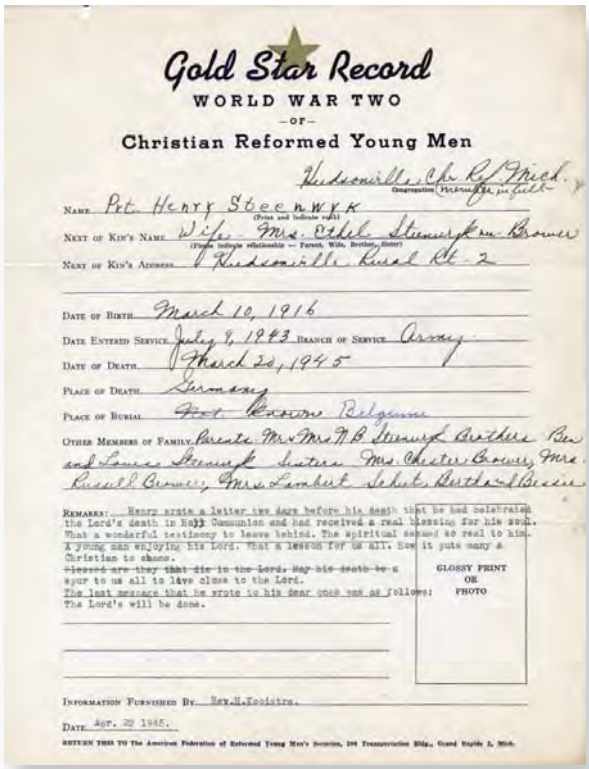
Remarks:
Bernard was a young man who truly feared the Lord. It was his joy to attend upon divine services whenever and wherever he had the opportunity. He ofter wrote about his faith in the Lord. He expressed himself as believing that if he would not come home again to his earthly home that the heavenly home would be waiting for him. The things that he wrought by faith here on earth are now plain to him in the realms of glory above. May his testimony inspire us to seek the unseen things of God.

GLOSSY PRINT OR PHOTO

The consistory
Young Peoples Soc.
Girls Soc.
Men's Soc.

Information Furnished By: Rev. H. Kooistra
Date: April 23 1945.
RETURN THIS TO The American Federation of Reformed Young Men's Societies, 304 Transportation Bldg., Grand Rapids 2, Mich.

The *Young Calvinist* gathered information about those who died in service in order to publish brief obituaries. Beginning during World War I, families and churches displayed a service flag with a blue star for each member in military service; the star was replaced with a gold star when that person died. Images courtesy of Heritage Hall.



Gold Star Record
WORLD WAR TWO
—or—
Christian Reformed Young Men

Hudsonville, Chr. Ref. Miss. (Congregation) (Member in full)

Name: Pvt. Henry Steenwyk (Print and indicate rank)
Next of Kin's Name: Wife Mrs. Ethel Steenwyk-Brower (Please indicate relationship — Parent, Wife, Brother, Sister)
Next of Kin's Address: Hudsonville, Rural Rt. 2

Date of Birth: March 10, 1916
Date Entered Service: July 9, 1943 Branch of Service: Army
Date of Death: March 28, 1945
Place of Death: Germany
Place of Burial: Not known Belgium
Other Members of Family: Parents Mr. & Mrs. N. B. Steenwyk Brothers Ben and Louis Steenwyk Sisters Mrs. Chester Brower, Mrs. Russell Brower, Mrs. Lambert Schut, Bertha & Bessie

Remarks: Henry wrote a letter two days before his death that he had celebrated the Lord's death in Holy Communion and had received a real blessing for his soul. What a wonderful testimony to leave behind. The spiritual seemed so real to him. A young man enjoying his Lord. What a lesson for us all. How it puts many a Christian to shame.
~~Blessed are they that die in the Lord. May his death be a~~
spur to us all to live close to the Lord.
The last message that he wrote to his dear ones was as follows:
The Lord's will be done.

GLOSSY PRINT OR PHOTO

Information Furnished By: Rev. H. Kooistra.
Date: Apr. 20 1945.
RETURN THIS TO The American Federation of Reformed Young Men's Societies, 304 Transportation Bldg., Grand Rapids 2, Mich.

Not Without a Struggle: The Life of Reverend J. I. Fles

Kenneth Fles

John and Johanna (neé Bokhorst) married in 1873 and immigrated to Wisconsin where they took their first call to the Dutch Presbyterian Church in Cedar Grove. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.

Ken Fles and his wife, Karen, live in Grand Rapids. He attended Calvin College, and has worked as a geologist in the oil industry, then as a tax preparer and a computer programmer. This article is the result of his investigation into his family's history.

The post-Civil War era saw much change, easier travel, dramatic economic growth, and the spreading of new ideas. Tightly knit Dutch immigrant communities were conflicted; should they stay close to God while modernizing and becoming more American, or resist change and hold to their traditional lifestyle and faith? These tensions were expressed in different ways over the years and affected many people.

One who was affected was Rev. John Isaac[1] Fles, a converted rabbi's son and a minister who played an important role in a Christian Reformed Church (CRC) evangelical mission that preached the Christian gospel to Jews. Like other Protestant congregants and ministers, Fles believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible, especially with respect to promises made to the Jewish people. These Protestants believed that either some or all of the Jews would someday realize that the awaited Jewish Messiah was in fact the biblical Jesus. Many, like Fles, were premillennialists, who believed that Jewish people would someday reclaim their holy land and eventually recognize and accept Jesus Christ, who then would reign in His Kingdom for a millennium, or one thousand years. These premillennial beliefs once divided denominations and individual congregations. Fles's sustained advocacy for CRC support for the Chicago Hebrew Mission is a little known, dramatic episode of premillennial thinking within the CRC.

Fles was born in 1842, in Aalten, Gelderland, the Netherlands, the oldest son of Isaac and Everdina (neé Geurink). The father (1799-1876) had converted from Judaism to Christianity about 1834,[2] and the son was baptized and made confession of faith when he was fifteen years old. His father taught John Hebrew and both testaments of the Bible. At the age of nineteen, John began his compulsory military service and, while serving at the garrison in Maastricht, came in contact with an evangelist who aroused an interest in him for Christian service. He received private instruction from pastors in Aalten and nearby Winterswijk, where he began to evangelize.[3] Fles then attended the *Gerformeerde* theological school in Kampen and graduated in 1873. That year he married Johanna Bokhorst and received a letter from people from the Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, Presbyterian congregation calling him to

pastor their congregation. Many of its members and those in the larger community knew him, and some of his maternal relatives already lived there. John, Johanna, and new baby Anna emigrated that fall, sailing for six stormy weeks on *SS Rotterdam*, of the newly formed Netherlands-America Steamship Company, with Johanna's mother, Anna E. Bokhorst (neé Heebink).

The Cedar Grove church had been founded in 1847 by Rev. Pieter Zonne (1802-1865), an early leader of that Dutch community. The congregation, First Presbyterian, had struggled with dissension and a schism, but then it grew remarkably under Fles's leadership.[4] He preached and wrote in their native language. Fles published a catechism, *The Doctrine of Salvation,* in 1878, and a pamphlet, "Three Bible Lessons," in 1879. Two of the texts in his lessons were from Matthew 24: 29-36, so the pamphlet's topic was the second coming. From the time his father began teaching him, Fles adopted a premillennial view of the end times. His catechism referred to the resurrection of believers and asked, "Will the Lord Jesus during the blessed time of these thousand years reign physically on Earth on David's throne in Jerusalem?" His answer was inconclusive since premillennial views differed on this question.[5]

After six and a half years in Cedar Grove, Fles accepted a call to another Dutch community, Pella, Iowa. The Pella congregants were from the church organized by the town's founder and leader, Rev. Hendrik P. Scholte (1805-1868). The original church had divided several times—some members organized a Reformed church, some joined a Baptist church, and the remainder were independent. In 1880, after Fles arrived, it became the Holland Presbyterian Church of Pella. The congregation had eighty members, and the Sunday school had

North Street CRC in Zeeland, Michigan, was organized in 1882 and Fles served as its first pastor in this building. During his pastorate the tower bell was purchased and installed. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.

about one hundred and twenty five pupils.[6] The Fles family left Pella in 1882 in response to an earnest appeal to serve in Zeeland, Michigan.

Zeeland's North Street CRC began when forty-four members left First Reformed Church and its leader, Rev. Cornelius Vander Meulen, in 1881 and organized an independent congregation. The congregation with Vander Meulen had organized before the group immigrated. The independents left the Reformed Church in America (RCA) during that denomination's debates over allowing Free Masons to be church members. When the RCA refused to bar such people from membership, a number left the denomination, with most going to the CRC, which forbade Free Masons from being members. The families joined the CRC, as North Street, in 1882.

Joining the CRC required Fles to modify his views a bit. Henry Beets reports, "In 1883, when the Rev. J. I. Fles was admitted to the denomination, he had to retract certain views connected with Chiliasm, expressed in his aforementioned catechism. Drs. A. Kuyper and H. Bavinck had condemned Chiliasm repeatedly as Judaistic."[7] Chiliasm was an early form of dispensational pre-millennialism, which divides history into different spiritual periods, or dispensations. According to the CRC's Acts of Synod 1882, a "letter from the Church at Pella, containing a protest against the pastorate of the Rev. J. I. Fles, as the minister of the Zeeland Congregation," was presented because of his unbiblical views with respect to eschatology (the study of the end times).[8] Classis Holland, of which the Zeeland congregation was a member, however, had accepted Fles's explanation of his view on the millennium and admitted him to the CRC. The Pella letter was in protest to this action. Synod concurred with the classical decision. There was another objection at the following year's synod. At that session Fles affirmed that he was "in hearty accord" with all the denomination's confessions and articles of faith "and rejected that which was in conflict with this." This synod accepted the explanation and reaffirmed the decision of Classis Holland. The South Holland, Illinois, council, however, continued to protest.[9] This council again appealed the decision in 1886, this time saying, "one of

Rev. Henry Beets (1869-1947), the director of Missions for the Christian Reformed Church, 1920-1939, and editor of the Banner, ***1904-1929, supported outreach to the Chicago Hebrew Mission, among other efforts. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.***

The denominational criticism of the Chicago Hebrew Mission resulted from the fact that it was not a Christian Reformed program.

his three lectures uses an expression which might lead to the conclusion on non-recognition of the divinity of Christ . . . all such expressions [are] out of order, and dangerous besides, and though they were not meant to be taken amiss, they were nevertheless stated so they might be." Synod replied, "Since the Rev. Fles has even stated very clearly at this session, that he believed in the divinity of Christ with all his heart, and as his preaching has always shown; the consistory of South Holland should now rest in this explanation."[10] The minister who objected, Rev. Ede L. Meinders, and the church eventually left the CRC denomination.

According to Beets, those seven years at North Street flew by and were blessed and enjoyable.[11] Their youngest child, Benjamin, was born in 1884. The congregation installed a church bell in 1885 that still rings every Sunday. In 1887 he struggled with the decision but finally accepted the next call to serve as a pastor of First CRC in Muskegon. That was also the year he had prepared a sermon for Zeeland's fortieth anniversary memorial celebration, and the year his mother-in-law, Anna Bokhorst, died. All three of Rev. Fles's congregations later asked him to return, which Beets considered "quite remarkable."[12]

Fles served Muskegon for eighteen years, beginning in 1890. In 1891 the church, parsonage, and school were destroyed by fire but were soon rebuilt. By 1892 the congregation had 350 families, a total of about 1,300 people. Even though three other CRC churches were later organized in Muskegon, First CRC remained large, with as many as 1,500 members.

While in Muskegon, two seminarians who had roomed together at Calvin Seminary married into the Fles family—Cornelius De Leeuw married Hermina (Minnie), and John Hiemenga married Everdena (Dena). In 1908, when he was sixty-six, Fles received approval from his church to take a "well-deserved" retirement.[13]

Throughout his ministry Fles believed Jewish salvation to be so significant, and so necessary to God's plan, that he helped persuade the Christian Reformed Church to begin a mission to the Jews. Classis Muskegon initiated a request to Synod 1892 to begin the work. Beginning in 1892, because of Fles's efforts the Mission Board contributed $500-$2,500 annually to the Chicago Hebrew Mission, a non-denominational outreach effort.[14] He served as a trustee on the Mission's board. William Blackstone (1841-1935) had founded the ecumenical Chicago Hebrew Mission in 1887 and was also active in the founding of the Moody Bible Institute. It was the largest mission outreach to the Jews in America from the 1880s to the 1910s. The impetus for the establishment of the mission was the dispensationalist theology and messianic belief of the necessity for Jewish people to return to the Promised Land. Such efforts and beliefs were the basis of the emerging Zionist movement that supported the development of the Jewish settlement in Palestine at the time, which dispensationalists interpreted as a sign that the messianic age was at hand.[15]

Fles's support was both in person and financial. The Hebrew Mission's quarterly journal, *The Jewish Era*, mentions that he and Jan Riemersma, minister at First Chicago CRC (now Ebenezer CRC in Berwyn), witnessed about Jesus at the mission on 12 September 1893 during the Chicago World's Fair. The CRC's involvement with the Hebrew Mission became the denomination's earliest effort at urban evangelism and captured the imagination of the denomination's membership.[16]

The CRC had been spreading its financial support among several Jewish missions when in 1896 the superintendent of the Chicago Hebrew Mission was given the floor by Synod.

Rev. Jacob Marcusson quoted John 4:22, "Salvation is from the Jews," and added, "They have rejected the Lord, but at some time they shall again worship Him. Therefore help us to bring Christ to the Jews." Synod's reply assured him of their support and prayers but added, "Our Church would be more in sympathy with his work if it were conducted along more ecclesiastical lines."[17] Fles replied for the pre-advice committee, "Permit us to recommend the Mission among the Jewish people very strongly." And, "Your Committee hopes and prays that the good will in this among our people shall in no way diminish, and the advice to the Synod is that it continue the course it has been following." Then he said, "Although . . . [the Jews] now are broken off because of unbelief, nevertheless God's promises and his calling remains unchanged, and they will again be grafted into one olive branch." And, "The time will come when the Lord will direct his aid to his Zion, and at that time the cities of Jerusalem shall be rebuilt,

Rev. John Fles. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.

and He will then return His people to His land and they will settle there, and then He will be a God to them, and they, His people. . . . But therefore must the Gospel be preached, so they may learn to know him, who was the hope of the fathers, the wish of the Heathen, who is the Saviour [sic] of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ."[18]

In *The Jewish Era* that year, Fles explained a key tenet of the Mission: "We preach and pray and labor to save some of them [the Jews], but they are only the first-fruits of the great coming harvest. To convert the people, the nation, is the work of Christ, the Anointed One of the Father. He shall convert Israel to Himself."[19] Beets summarized the CRC's majority view that pre-millennialism will "almost inevitably lead to developments out of line with sound Calvinistic principles."[20]

At the next synod meeting, in 1898, the denomination's leaders expressed the same concerns about the Chicago Hebrew Mission, and Fles gave another passionate speech in support of the effort. In response, the CRC drafted a statement of faith for the mission's leaders to sign and noted the mission "has consented" to put Fles and another local elder on their committee.[21] This formal arrangement seems to have been required before the CRC would focus its support on the mission.

Fles continued to advocate for the cause. He spoke in Dutch on "Our Mission to the Jews" at the 50th Jubilee Anniversary of the CRC in April 1907. He told the audience that respected Dutch Protestant theologians like the pietist Wilhelmus á Brakel and many others had long advocated that "Israel's future is always great." The publication of the celebration notes that Fles was "in many respects the soul of this work in our Church."[22]

The 1908 Synod met in Muskegon at Fles's church. Hiemenga was on

Very early in his pastorate at First Muskegon, on 16 May 1891, the church, parsonage, and Christian school in Muskegon were destroyed by fire. All three were rebuilt; the new parsonage and church are pictured here. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.

Second Pella CRC. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.

Synod's pre-advice committee that counseled exerting as much influence as possible to lead Jewish missions in "the Reformed ecclesiastical stream." Fles's three-page report to Synod quoted Romans 11:26, adding financial figures of receipts and disbursements, and declares "a mission of our own is not feasible."[23]

Meanwhile, Fourth Reformed in Pella, where Fles had served, experienced a split in 1897 over pre-millennialism. One faction was led by the Sunday school teachers, who taught pre-millennialism. The group led by the church's elders felt put upon when the teachers began to press their views. Discord and then conflict included a court injunction and the dissident group being locked out of the church building one Sunday morning. As a result, 109 dissenters, between one-half and two-thirds of the congregation, voted to leave the RCA and join the CRC as Second CRC."[24] In 1911 Fles came out of retirement to accept the call from Second CRC. The congregation's history notes, "His ministry was richly blessed of the Lord. He labored with devotion and in an able manner. The membership once more increased. It was also during his ministry that interest was awakened in the cause of Christian education."[25] While in Pella, Fles met Harry Bultema, the CRC minister in nearby Peoria. Bultema in his autobiography notes that his adoption of pre-millennialist ideas began with his introduction to Fles at a meeting in the home of Fles's son-in-law, Cornelius DeLeeuw, who was the pastor of Pella's First CRC. Bultema said Fles read Hosea 3:5 and explained Israel would return and seek God in the latter days, then receive His mercy and blessing when Christ comes again. All the other ministers there but Bultema disagreed by saying, "[Christ's] Church had now fully and finally taken Israel's place in God's plan."[26]

Nationally, Premillennialism and Zionism gained support in February 1914 at a "Prophetic Conference" held at the Moody Bible Institute, where William B. Riley, called "the chief executive of the fundamentalist movement," specifically referred to the Zionism movement and its beginning of the fulfillment of millennial prophesies. Support came from speakers such as Rev. Cyrus Scofield, Dr. James Gray, Rev. Arno Gaebelein, and others. One historian noted, "At no previous conference had the details of dispensationalism been laid out so explicitly and dogmatically."[27] Beets said Fundamentalism began then and spoke at another large conference sponsored by the Chicago Hebrew Mission the following year.

Throughout, Fles continued to support the Jewish outreach efforts. He wrote articles and had many speaking engagements about Jewish missions.[28] In the 1912 session held in Chicago's south side Roseland CRC, Synod considered beginning its own mission to the Jews because support for the Hebrew Mission had never become widespread in the denomination, and it was thought an independent CRC effort might gain such support. A separate Committee with Reference to Jewish Missions gave a long statement which described the CRC's motivations. One of the reasons focused on the fact that only a separate denominational mission could ensure that all personnel were Reformed. But Fles, who was the sole signer of the committee's minority report, noted the mission's success and asked, "Why should anyone want to disturb this work? What gain would there be to move this work elsewhere?" Jewish convert Rev. Louis Meyer, of the Chicago Hebrew Mission, a widely-traveled field evangelist who edited most of the essays in *The Fundamentals*, which was an important beginning of the Fundamentalism movement, also spoke to the 1912 Synod session on behalf of the mission. The result was the suggestion that the denomination ". . . attempt to take over the Northwest Side Branch of the Chicago Hebrew Mission."[29] The next synod, in 1914, learned that the Hebrew Mission board had rejected the offer by the CRC to acquire the

Northwest Side Branch, but Fles gave an emotional speech which described his love for proclaiming the Gospel "to that ancient people . . . with joy and zeal."[30]

Fles retired from his ministry in Pella in 1915 due to Johanna's failing health, and the two returned to Muskegon, where their two sons and families still lived. That year daughter Dena Hiemenga died from a sudden illness in New Jersey, and Johanna died in 1916—keen blows to him.

The growing Zionist movement also affected the CRC. Synod 1916 decided not to consider a request to sign a document presented by William E. Blackstone requesting the United States government to work out a plan that would place Palestine at the disposal of Jews, which some premillennialists saw as integral to the imminent end times.[31]

Fles was a pastor emeritus in First Muskegon in 1916 and recommended the vacant congregation extend a call to Harry Bultema in Peoria. Fles evidently had not forgotten the interesting debate at the home of his son-in-law.[32] Bultema accepted the call as World War I seemed to give credence to an apocalyptic interpretation of how current events were fulfilling the prophecies in Matthew 24. The Balfour Declaration, declaring British support for a Jewish home in Palestine, published in 1917, brought renewed interest to Premillennialism and the related debate to the CRC.

Both Scofield's revised Reference Bible, an influential dispensational commentary, and Bultema's book, *Maranatha,* were published in 1917. *Maranatha* argued that Christ's return was imminent. Many in the CRC agreed, including the president of Synod 1918, Idzerd Van Dellen, who said, "Brothers, the Lord is coming! Everything points to this event. The signs of the times tell us . . . (and) the bloody field of war speaks of it." But the CRC's official position on eschatology (the end times) declared Bultema's views to be contrary to those of the church.[33] As a result, Synod 1918 demanded the Muskegon council discipline their pastor. When the church refused to act, the denomination's regional body, Classis Muskegon, appointed a committee to persuade the consistory to do so. The consistory refused to suspend its minister, and Bultema refused to retract his statements, contending his reasoning was biblically based and that he wholeheartedly accepted all creeds. In 1919 the CRC sent Rev. Samuel Volbeda from Calvin Theological Seminary to preach, thereby removing Bultema. Newspaper boys worked the streets, screaming, "Will Bultema preach?" He took the pulpit early and preached, quoting John 9. Bultema and most of the council were deposed. Most of the congregation followed them to organize the Berean Reformed Church.[34]

Rev. Harry Bultema (1884-1952) got to know Fles in Iowa and succeeded Fles at First Muskegon. His premillennial views led him to leave the Christian Reformed Church and form the Berean Reformed Church. Image courtesy of Heritage Hall.

The 1918 CRC Synod considered ending its support for the Chicago Hebrew Mission and to begin its own, but ecclesiastically and confessionally different, Jewish Mission that would be called the Nathanael Institute."[35] Fles and the Mission Support Committee once again made several arguments to defend the mission. Their report pointed out that other CRC-supported missions were not ecclesiastical and were influenced far less than the Chicago Hebrew Mission. Fles also noted the number of members on the Jewish Missions Committee had declined, as had its disbursements, and said, "The Committee for Jewish Missions has entered a new phase."[36]

The committee admitted as much: "As in the past 24 years, the lion's share of the work fell on our president-treasurer Rev. J. I. Fles, who, despite his age and physical weakness, has always continued to perform his work cheerfully." They closed with Psalm 53:6, "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, then shall Jacob rejoice, and Israel shall be glad."[37] But the vote was to end support for the existing effort and launch an independent CRC effort. In spite of Fles's warning that the loss of CRC support would cause financial hardship, the Mission had substantial financial reserves and continued.[38]

In 1920, Synod divided its mission efforts into Home Missions and World Missions, with Henry Beets to lead them. Fles requested that Synod not reappoint him to the Jewish Mission Committee. The request was granted "with gratitude for the many, long, and faithful years he has served."[39] That synod also agreed to a request from Classis Illinois to give $20,000 for a new building for the denomination's newly named Nathanael Institute.

Fles spent his last year visiting his family. He was with his daughter Minnie De Leeuw and her family in Iowa at Christmas 1920 and died suddenly in 1921, at age seventy-eight, while

spending Easter with his daughter Anna Zuidema and family in Kalamazoo. He was buried next to his wife and daughter in the Zeeland Cemetery.

Premillennial views remained a key part of the thinking in some Reformed circles for years, according to James Bratt and Gordon Spykman.[40] In the denomination, both premillennialism and fundamentalism opposed liberalism and modernism—which were often considered to be a greater threat to their faith. Similar ideological debates continue today, and they still reflect differing beliefs about end-time prophecies, premillennialism, and political policies regarding Israel.

The Chicago Hebrew Mission continues and has never stopped evangelizing. Now called Life in Messiah International or AMF, it is the oldest independent outreach to the Jewish people in the United States.[41] The Nathanael Institute closed in 1965.

Endnotes

1. Also written as Johan Izak and Johan Isaak.
2. Y. Riemersma, "Rev. John Isaak Fles," *The Jewish Era* (July 1894) 70-73.
3. [Henry] B[eets], "The Late Rev John Isaac Fles," *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* (Kalamazoo: Dalm Printing Co., 1922) 165-166.
4. Rev. John Hoffman, "The Dutch Settlements of Sheboygan County," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* (1919) 465.
5. Henry Beets, *De Chr. Geref. Kerk in N. A.; Zestig Jaren Van Strijd En Zegen* (Grand Rapids" Grand Rapids Publishing Co., 1918) 231.
6. Union Historical Company, *The History of Marion County*, Iowa, Reprint of the 1881 edition at *http://books.google.com/books*
7. Henry Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church, its Roots, History, Schools and Mission Work, A.D. 1857 to 1946* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1946) 116.
8. All Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church (hereafter cited as Synod) are available at *http://www.calvin.edu/library/database/crcnasynod*; Synod (1881) 10.
9. Synod (1884) 8.
10. Synod (1886) 8.
11. Henry Beets, *De Gereformeerde Amerikaan* (May 1904) 227.
12. Ibid.
13. "De Eerste Christelijke Gereformeerde Gemeente, 1867-1917, Muskegon, Michigan" at *http://babel.hathitrust.org*.
14. Robert Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002) 140. Also see Elton J. Bruins and Robert P. Swierenga, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches of the 19th Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). Both note that Dutch Réveil leaders, like Bilderdijk, taught premillennial doctrines.
15. Yaakov Ariel. *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 25.
16. Scott Hoezee and Chris Meehan, *Flourishing in the Land: A Hundred-Year History of Christian Reformed Missions in North America* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Home Missions, 1996) 48-51.
17. Synod (1896) 5, 6, and 48 of the pdf.
18. Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*, 25.
19. J. I. Fles, "Israel's Veil," *The Jewish Era* (July 1896) 85-86.
20. Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church*, 119-120.
21. Synod (1898) 19-20 has the CRC draft of the statement; 109 has the committee's passionate speech.
Twenty-five years of blessing: historical sketch of the Chicago Hebrew Mission, 1887-1912 (1912) 14-15 at *http://babel.hathitrust.org*.
22. Henry Beets, ed., *Gedenkboek van het Vijftigjarig Jubileum der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (Grand Rapids: J.B. Hulst, 1907) 159-162.
23. Synod (1908) 30-31, 72.
24. William Zeilstra, *The Origins of Pella II* at *http://pella2crc.org//wp-content/uploads/2013/09/originsofpella2-2005.pdf*.
25. Vertical files, Archives, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
Jacob Van Der Zee's "The Hollanders of Iowa" (1912) reports "The Hollanders have subscribed $3000 for a school at Pella." So Fles was advocating for a local parochial school.
26. Harry Bultema, *Valiant and Diligent for Truth: An Autobiography* (Muskegon: Grace Publications Inc., 1987) 84-86.
27. David Rausch, "Protofundamentalism's Attitudes toward Zionism, 1878-1918." in Jeffrey Gurock, ed. *American Zionism: Missions and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2013) 139.
28. John Rozeboom, "The Christian Reformed Church in Mission to Jews," (PhD dissertation, 1973) 10.
29. Synod (1912): "Attempt to take over," 13; Fles asked, "Why," 84; the Report of the Committee with Reference to Jewish Missions, 92-97; with Rev. Meyer speaking on behalf of the Chicago Hebrew Mission, 36.
30. Synod (1914) 20, 104-105, 108-109.
31. Synod (1916) 25-26.
32. Bultema, *Valiant and Diligent for Truth*, 77, 86.
33. Synod (1918) 78.
34. For more information see: Thomas David Boslooper, "Grace and Glory Days," *Origins*, v 9 no 1, (1991) 24-30.
35. Synod (1918) 21-22, 114-115.
36. Ibid., 116.
37. Ibid., 115.
38. Paul C. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948* (New York: Routledge, 1998) 92.
39. Synod (1920)124 and 128.
40. James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism In Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984) and Gordon J. Spykman, "Fundamentalism in the CRC: A Critique," *Pro Rege*, (September 1986).
41. Historical Overview of the American Messianic Fellowship at *http://lcje.net/papers/1989/LCJE.pdf* and *http://www.lifeinmessiah.org/history*.

Fred Postma[1] and Family at the "Stink Factory," Globe Station, Illinois

David Postma

During the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, when the population of Chicago grew from one to two million people, for brief periods of time it also housed millions and millions of animals. The thousands of horses pulling vehicles—from fancy carriages to coal, ice, and garbage wagons—were overshadowed by the millions of cows, hogs, and sheep moving through the Union Stock Yards and Transit Company property and into the slaughterhouses of the city's South Side.

Along with the opening of the Chicago stockyards in 1865 came the business of rendering unmarketable remains, typically by boiling after hides and bones had been removed, to separate off animal fats. This is the first Union Rendering Co. that opened in 1868. Image courtesy of the author.

David Postma grew up in South Holland, Illinois, and graduated Thornridge Public High School, Dolton, Illinois. In 1975 he and his wife, Joyce, moved to Hudsonville so that he could attend Kuyper College, from which he graduated. He has been a piano technician since 1968 and is involved in piano sales and rebuilding grand pianos.

The remains of the city's domestic animals that had died, plus the sick and injured animals that were condemned at "the Yards," and the vast quantities of inedible remains from processing plants had to be dealt with every day to protect the city's health and continue the tremendous volume of meat production. In Chicago, various estimates suggest that an average of 25-30 horses died each day on the city's streets until teamsters switched to trucks. On 8 August 1896, when the temperature reached 98ºF, the *Chicago Tribune* notes that seventy-two people died because of the heat as did an estimated 120-180 horses, even though the amount of hauling was reduced and, if unavoidable, loads were reduced in weight, in an effort to save the animals. An accurate count was not possible, since the Union Rendering Company crews, which had the exclusive contract to remove dead animals from Chicago, were not able to keep up with the demand for removing carcasses and some were hauled away via other services.[2]

Although not a pleasant operation, the rendering of animal remains produced valuable products, including tallow, hide glue, waxes, blood and bone meal, and fertilizer. Dealing with this daily flow of dead and decaying flesh and bones was the business of the Union Rendering Company, located far south of the city in an initially rural area at Globe Station near the Indiana border. Globe Station was a stop on the Panhandle Route, the popular name for the Chicago, St. Louis & Pittsburgh Railroad.[3] During my family's time living there, it

The Postma family in the 1920s. Parents Fred and Mary behind, with children (L to R) Henry, Christine, Rena, Raymond (the author's father), and Willis. Image courtesy of the author.

had become part of the Pennsylvania Railroad system.

Union Rendering Company, commonly called "the Stink Factory," earned its nickname in an honest and very powerful way. The process of boiling and rendering decaying carcasses at the time produced a witch's brew of toxic chemicals, including ammonia, hydrogen sulfide (odor of rotten eggs), aldehydes (odor of rotting fruit), trimethylamine (an ammonia-like odor), dimethyl pyrazine (a chocolate-nutty odor), ketones (odor of fruits or nail polish remover), and hydrocarbons. Local residents probably knew nothing of these substances, but daily they were totally aware of the vast cloud of unseen, but certainly not "un-smelled," overpowering, noxious fumes emanating from the plant and drifting downwind.

In addition to processing already decomposing carcasses, rendering workers had to endure the fumes released from the cooking, grinding, straining, pressing, and screening of the remains to obtain meal and fats. Image courtesy of the author.

Union Rendering was formed in 1868 when the three-year-old firm of Brenock & Fitzpatrick was reorganized. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, Union's stockholders were the owners of the largest meatpacking operations, who ensured the early success of the operation by arranging that only one railroad would haul dead or diseased animals from Chicago, and that railroad hauled only to Globe Station. Included in this arrangement was a contract with Chicago to remove all animals that died in the city, a contract that had yielded $800,000 in revenue for the rendering operation during the twenty years preceding 1894.[4] The publication of such information and the growing anti-trust movement in the nation must have had an impact on Union Rendering and its meatpacking owners, for by 1902 the facilities were being leased to the National Rendering Company, whose owners were separate from the meatpackers.[5]

Fred Postma, my grandfather, came from the province of Groningen in the Netherlands in 1891, at age five, and lived with his parents in Roseland, Illinois, which had only recently been incorporated into the City of Chicago. He was orphaned at seventeen and went to live with his sister Jenny and her husband Fred Klooster in Munster, Indiana, where he helped out on the Klooster truck farm.[6] Around 1910 Postma went to live with and work for the Kikkert family on a large rented farm east of Thornton, Illinois. He often worshiped with them at the South Holland True Dutch Reformed Church (Netherlands Reformed Church). He married Mary Hook in 1915, who had grown up on her family's farm at Oak Glen, Illinois. Fred worked at the stone quarry, now the

vast dolomite quarry on either side of Interstate 80 on the south side of Cook County.[7]

By the time of America's entry into World War I, he, with a growing family, was working as a farm laborer in South Holland for Simon (Sam) Van Deursen. Next the family moved east to an area first called Schrumville (now Calumet City), known at that time for the large Schrum farm. The Schrum family operated a dairy and the Schrum Pickle Works Company.[8] In 1921 the Postmas moved a short distance west to Torrence Avenue and the Little Calumet River—the outskirts of South Holland. There Fred worked for the next thirteen years at Union Rendering, which had become Globe Rendering Works.

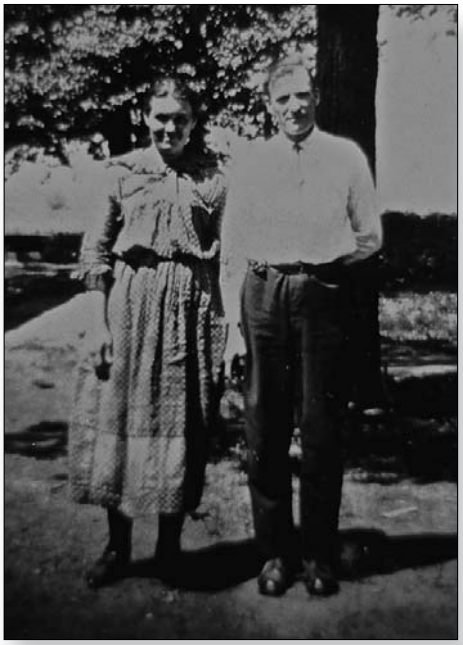
The original processing plant was built north of the river along the railroad tracks at Globe Station when the meat packing industry—primarily Armour and Swift—was in its heyday. At this time the Calumet region was little developed and sparsely settled. It was far enough from Chicago for a smelly rendering plant. When I visited the spot in the early 1960s, an old "Globe" sign was at the railroad crossing where Paxton Avenue went no further. This was truly the end of the road.

At some point the first plant was razed, likely due to fire, and around 1899 a second, larger plant was built just across the Little Calumet River to the south. Some other industries also began in this Dutch farming enclave, but the area remained a bucolic and successful farming area until the 1950s and 1960s.

The company, however, kept the old, ramshackle worker's dwelling north of the river belonging to the first plant. This house remains shrouded in mystery, because, as my mother said, it was the homeliest house in South Holland. No one took photos of it, as it was perhaps too embarrassing for the folks who had to live there. My father, Ray, was born in this house, with the assistance of a midwife, in 1921. His early boyhood memories are from this "Stink Factory" house and of the life in the atmosphere of the rendering operation.

Initially, the carcasses of hogs that had died of cholera[9] on their way to the Armour or Swift slaughterhouses arrived at Globe Station in cattle cars. There was no railroad spur but only docks on both sides of the tracks. Carcasses were moved from the rail line via horse-drawn wagons and carts. The second plant incorporated spur tracks that facilitated moving a greater volume of rail cars, and carcasses. Then in 1920 Globe Rendering Works began using five trucks that daily went throughout the area collecting dead cows, horses, sheep, and pigs. Once a traveling circus brought a dead elephant to be processed.

The bridge at Globe over the Little Calumet River, at flood stage as the lettering notes. Image courtesy of the author.



Fred and Mary Postma while living near the Stink Factory. Image courtesy of the author.

Fred's first job was unloading these trucks outside in the factory yard. He attached a line or a hook to the leg of the carcass and yelled "All right!" A man on the upper floor of the factory would engage the winch, and the carcasses would rise, dangling for a few moments for all to see. The factory winch, along with every other machine in the plant, worked as power takeoffs—a system of shafts pulleys and belts powered by a single, massive steam engine and flywheel located outside. Coal smoke from this engine added to the overall odor. Across the river to the north, Mary was pumping water from the well or hanging out her wash on the line to dry. There was much to hand launder with a young family of five children, and Fred's spattered coveralls were always taken off on the back porch before he entered the house. When Grandpa yelled "All right!" out to the man to engage the winch, Grandmother, across the river, would hear him. She would respond with "All

Raymond, left, and Willis on their way to the nearby one-room Globe School. Image courtesy of the author.

right" back to him, with their voices echoing through the dense woods and across the water.

Once a carcass was inside, workmen weighed it, removed the hide, cut up the remains, and sorted the remainder into five large cooking vats and a bone crusher. Mr. Ooms, an employee who lived in the area, could guess a dead animal's weight within a couple of pounds. Safety was never much of a concern. Grandpa said he stumbled and almost fell into the bone crusher once. The standard workweek was twelve hours per day, six days a week, from 6 a.m. until 6 p.m. There were a lot of animals to process and, no doubt as the men tired, the danger of getting hurt increased. There was always the danger of fire in a processing plant, and lard-making could be an explosive operation.

In addition to the hogs, dead horses came by the hundreds, as did maggot-infested sheep and tuberculin cows. Inspectors at the Chicago stockyards looked for swollen glands in cows indicative of bovine tuberculosis, but many infected cattle passed inspection and entered the human food supply. Dad remembers a farmer who came with his horse tied behind his Model T Ford. The sick horse had been coaxed along, and when it arrived it collapsed. Some farmers had a special bond with their horses, fondly remembered farming together, and refused to bring their faithful animals for rendering, choosing rather to bury them somewhere on their farms.

Farmers could obtain from the Stink Factory a mixture of raw manure, blood, and offal, called fusion, to fertilize their fields. The slurry would come down a chute from the third floor to be deposited in the farmer's wagon or truck. Once, with an old pickup, Dad went to get a load of fusion for a farmer for whom he worked. When the vehicle was in position, he called "All right!" The slurry came down the chute with such momentum that it hit the truck bed with enough force to blow the back window out. The stinky mixture covered the inside of the truck. Dad stood in astonishment and disgust. Arriving at the farm, the farmer fingered some of the malodorous mixture between his fingers and, smiling, looked at Dad and said, "Yust like yaam (Just like jam)."

In *The Jungle,* a classic muckraking novel reporting the corruption of the Chicago meatpacking industry, Upton Sinclair mentions Globe Station and by inference Globe Rendering:

> There was said to be two thousand dollars a week hush money from the tubercular steers alone; and as much again from the hogs which had died of cholera on the trains, and which you might see any day being loaded into boxcars and hauled away to a place called Globe, in Indiana, where they made a fancy grade of lard.[10]

In that day people were not aware of germs, so Grandpa sometimes brought a haunch of mutton home for the family to eat. A sheep might be suffering from maggot infestation only in an isolated section of the carcass; the haunch had none, and the family needed meat. Presumably the meat was well cooked. Large brown rats always infested the factory area. Dad said that when he picked up a piece of sheet metal, dozens of rats would scamper out. From time to time, rats were also in the house and outhouse.

The air was filled with swarms of flies, maggots, and the smell of bloating carcasses and raw manure. On hot days carcasses could explode from the gasses expanding within. Yet a neighbor girl, Viola Steinbach, once visited the Stink Factory at noon and saw the men happily enjoying their sandwiches while seated on the carcass of a cow.

While the remains of animals were being processed in the big cookers at the factory, neighborhoods for miles downwind would be subject to the horrible smell. It was a nasty, oily smoke, mixed with the odor of burning coal. In spite of this, Dad said they seldom smelled much at their factory house because the factory smokestack

The family dog on the "porch" of the weather-beaten company house that the Postmas rented. Image courtesy of the author.

was high enough that the stench would blow over much of the time.

The automobile age began with the twentieth century and, in South Bend, Indiana, Studebaker manufactured its last horse-drawn carriage in 1920. Fred and Mary, both, were expert at handling teams of horses, but never learned to drive a car. In the big city, vendors, streetcars, garbage wagons, etc., often substituted rubber horseshoes in place of steel. While these horseshoes did not wear well, they gave the horse more traction on concrete or brick streets, especially when the streets were wet.

The carcasses of these city horses came to Globe Rendering by the hundreds, brought there by the five trucks. Of course, before processing could begin, all rubber horseshoes had to be removed. There was always a pile of rubber horseshoes at the factory yard, free for the taking. My father used these to augment the supply of firewood for heating in the house. Full wheelbarrow loads of these rubber horseshoes would be brought to the house for the potbellied stove. Dad said that the stove got so hot when rubber horseshoes were added that it glowed red in the middle. Having sulfur content, these burned violently. The stove would murmur, "woo woo woo" and would vibrate on the floor. Outside, red and blue flames and yellow noxious smoke would jet out the chimney. There was never any buildup of soot in the chimney as a result, but Dad said it was a miracle the house did not burn down.

The factory house was originally built for two families. It was a rough, utilitarian, square–shaped, two-story dwelling with a flat roof. It was a cheaply made structure constructed without iron nails but with wooden treenails and small wooden pegs. The roof leaked so badly when it rained that numerous pots had to be put in place to catch the volume of water. Even the large copper laundry boilers had to be used to catch the leaking water. While they lived there, the other unit of the duplex remained unoccupied except for storage. Perhaps no one dared to live there since it was

Raymond Postma, freshman photo at Thornton High School in Harvey, Illinois. Image courtesy of the author.

hardly habitable. Once my dad went into the unoccupied side, and started a little campfire on the wood floor to cook a couple of purloined eggs in a frying pan. He was hungry. He said it was a wonder he didn't burn the house down.

Grandmother tried to make this house a home. It was kept clean. My mother later recounted, "Het was netjes." (It was neat.) There was always a clean, freshly ironed tablecloth on the kitchen table and cheerful curtains on the windows. The interior rooms of the house had high ceilings and plastered walls. My grandmother would stand on the dining room table to paint the ceiling with calcimine, a wash of water, glue, and zinc oxide.

The sheer number of dead animals, the smell, the cutting, the blood and entrails, and the bloating would deeply affect the life of my father as a little boy. A poem, one of several as only such a little boy (named Raymond) could compose, was written for Globe Elementary School, the one-room schoolhouse nearby:

Waymond weighs,
and Waymond winks,
And when he dies,
Then he stinks.

The well for family use was in the yard. This well, which I saw in 1963, was three feet wide, uncovered, open and dangerous, and full of water to the brim. The standpipe for suction was rusted and fell to one side as we pushed it with a stick.

In winter, my grandma would heat some bricks in the evening and place them in the beds, between the sheets, to provide warmth. The stove was not kept stoked through the night, so at times it was so cold that all five children would sleep in one bed for warmth. Some mornings, due to decrepit windows, the family woke to a dusting of snow across their covers. That region can see temperatures in January drop to minus twenty. Dad related how the pail of drinking water in the kitchen would freeze hard, with the dipper unmovable.

In summer, Grandma stapled cheesecloth across the windows in an effort to keep out flies and mosquitos. It didn't work at all. At night the pesky creatures buzzed around looking for a place to land. Sometimes, on a sultry night, they were so incredibly bothersome that my dad took his pillow and escaped into the closet and shut the door. The scheme never worked, as the mosquitos found their way in.

Spring was a wonderful time. The mother and children went to the nearby savannahs and prairie areas to scythe tall grasses for stuffing ticks. I remember the great scythe which Grandma herself would wield. Dad recalled with pleasure the wonderful smell of new mown grass and herbaceous growth. The Calumet prairies were rich and wonderful. Grandma would sew bed sheets together on three sides to form large sacks. These were stuffed full of grass after it had dried, and then stitched secure. At first the ticks were about three feet thick. The children would pounce on them from a chair. By the time a year had passed they had reduced to about five inches. When the boys turned over while sleeping, a thistle might protrude.

Not everyone living in the woods near the Stink Factory was pleasant. While he was still a boy, my father wandered to the neighbor, a bachelor, to the south. My dad saw the man standing to eat over a kitchen table piled high with dirty dishes. When the man saw Dad, he grabbed his rifle and ran outside. Dad ran as fast as his legs could carry him. A large carpenter ant hill was in the path and tripped Dad sending him sprawling. Just at that moment a bullet whizzed past his ear. Dad always credited that ant hill with saving his life.

Raised in a pietist culture and life, the family attended church regularly. At times the entire family would walk to either First Reformed Church of South Holland or First Reformed Church of Lansing, each about three miles distant. Walking along the railroad tracks was a bit shorter but still took one hour of brisk walking. My father was forced to wear shoes that were too tight. Soon his feet would be hurting. He would then remove his shoes to walk on the rail in his stocking feet. Later in life he learned that the bones of his feet had become deformed as a result of tight shoes. In winter, when the ice was thick enough, the family would walk on the Little Calumet River to save some time.

The family seldom went home between services, since the walk was a six-mile round trip. In nice weather a lunch would be made to take along, and the family would picnic and then attend the second service in the afternoon. To prevent tired children from falling asleep during long sermons, "Ma" would remove a pin from her hat and stick the offender. The preaching was modeled after Pietism in that day. The message was mostly, try harder. Good works were the way to please God.

At home there was little cheer. Life was simply tough. It was a world of hard and never-ending work, and not enough to eat. The children were often hungry and all the photos from the 1930s show everyone bony and lean. Three of the five children developed a stammering problem. Scripture was read faithfully by a child who could read well, and prayer was offered at each meal and before bed. A droning tone characterized the Bible reading in that day. Life was tough, the perception of God was tough, yet a seed of faith had been planted which would spring to life as the years went by.

Grandma's evangelizing was also tough. Once, on a Sunday morning while on the way to church, she saw the neighbor painting his house. He was on a ladder. She walked up to that ladder, shook it hard, and said, "Get down, get your nice clothes on and go to church!" This man surely had not expected that outburst, but he never forgot it. Many years later while my grandmother was visiting a relative in a nursing home, this same man, seeing her, cried out, "Mary, come

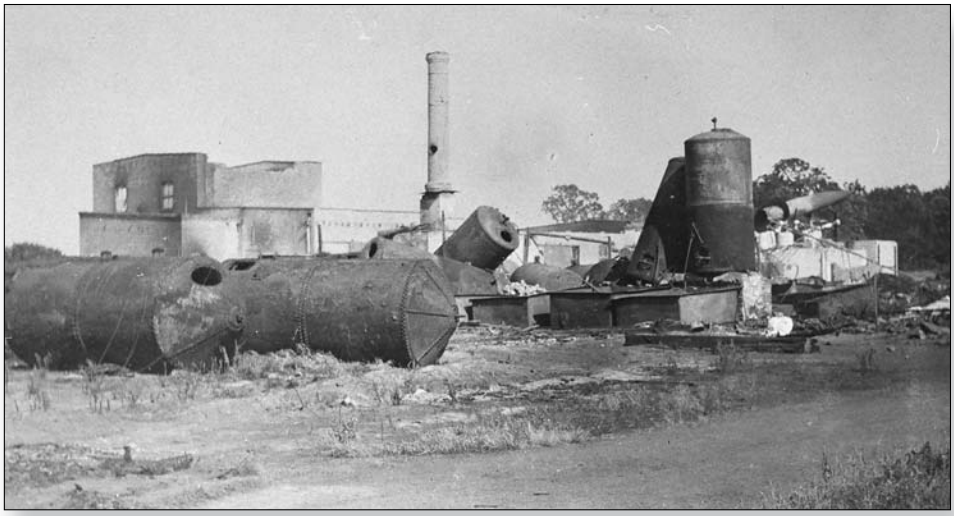
The First Reformed Church of South Holland, where the Postmas worshiped, with the Little Calumet River at flood stage in the foreground. Image courtesy of the author.

here.“ He was in a wheelchair. He said, “I wanted to tell you that I came to know the Lord.” My grandmother, overjoyed at the news, reached inside her purse and took out two dollars. She said, “I am so happy for you. Here is a dollar for you, and the other dollar is for you to put in the collection.”

Some in the extended family attended First Reformed Church of Lansing, Illinois, and had been members there since its earliest days. My father’s great grandfather, Jacob Hoek, born in a windmill in the Haarlemmermeer and raised to be its miller, was the church’s first custodian at $12 per year. Dad’s grandfather, William Hoek, succeeded his father as the second custodian and fermented the wine for communion. Grandma, as a child, was assigned the job of pumping the first reed organ for services.

Other relatives and friends, weary of Dutch legalism, came under other influences from outside the Reformed circles. The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago sent workers into the area calling door-to-door to spread the Good News of the love of God through belief. Some of the family had joined the Baptists, some the Pentecostals, and others the Plymouth Brethren. The message of God’s unchanging love by faith without the Dutch culture of works permanently affected every member of the Postma family. A quiet confidence replaced their former inward turmoil, confidence which sustained them through tough times. I remember the visits to my grandmother with uncles and aunts when relating to Christ was brought up in conversation and there would be a sudden hush. All wished to hear what was said.

In 1934, the Globe Rendering cut the workers’ wages. Take-home pay had been $12 per week for the 12-hour/6-day work week, less rent for the house, of course. Instead the wage became $9.60 and Grandfather

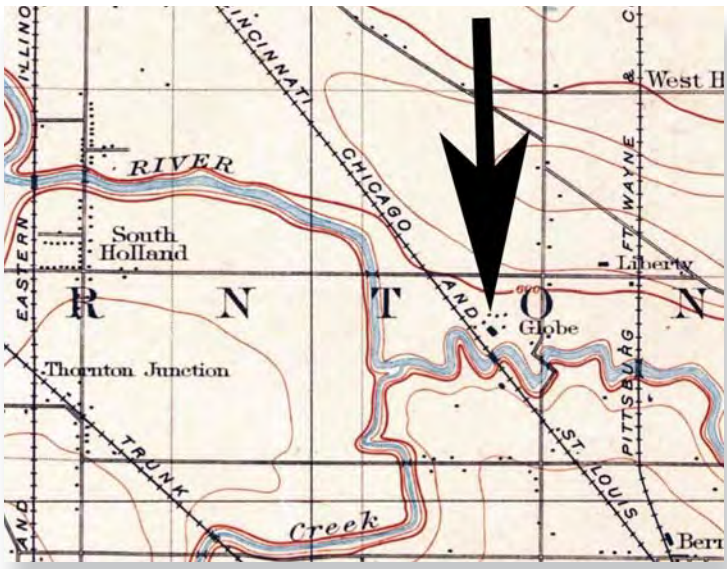


Remains of the buildings and cooking containers as the Stink Factory was razed. Image courtesy of the author.

knew it would not feed a family of seven. The workers went on strike to protest, but it accomplished nothing. All of the striking employees were locked out and the company bussed in workers from Chicago who would work for the lower wage.

Grandfather was known in the area as, “een dood geode man” (a thoroughly good man). This time Grandfather was so utterly devastated that he did something out of character. He hitched a ride with a truck driver, went to a bar in Calumet City, and got drunk. This was not well received when he arrived home staggering and singing. My grandmother dealt very severely with him. It frightened all of his children to see him in such a state. Losing his job had been almost more than he could bear.

Getting enough food was a problem. At times the children came home from school and there was nothing to eat. In such cases, my father was sent to a nearby farmer to milk his cows. A pail of milk sufficed for supper. Grandma would take the boys at night to steal melons from a farmer across the tracks. The boys would do the hard part of picking the melons, and would toss them to her as she remained on the other side of the tracks. Once the farmer caught them, but Grandma got away. She



This section of a 1901 map indicates the location of the rendering operation, about 2 miles east of South Holland, Illinois. Image courtesy of the author.

was known to take a shopping bag to wedding receptions, hiding it under her skirts. As the food was passed, she put extra in the bag to take home. No one, including the church, helped the family in this time of need.

The Little Calumet River had been a source of good fishing and wild ducks. Its sloughs and feeder streams were originally clear, and provided pike, bass, hordes of bluegill, and even freshwater cod. Dad would catch fish in the summer. Using a fish trap he would bring home plenty at times. Then one day the sewer connection came from nearby Lansing dumping raw sewage. The following day all the fish were dying, floating on the surface. The sewer added to the bad smell of the area and murk to its once clear waters.

The family was forced to move out of the house after the strike and found accommodations nearby in a house owned by the new Calumet Speedway. This establishment, owned by persons of dubious character, offered legalized gambling on greyhound, stock car, and midget car racing. The children had to work for the racetrack in exchange for the rent of the house. They spread and compacted stone on the track and sold beer, programs, and hotdogs during the races. Sometime after 1936, after a night's losses, the owners set fire to the facility for the insurance money. Dad was there to loot one of the slot machines, but the firemen turned the hose on him.

In 1934, Fred, then forty-nine, contracted colon cancer. He worked in the fields for a short time after the diagnosis, but his working days were over. He languished for two years at home since there was no treatment, and he passed away in 1936. My grandmother was a widow at age forty-five, with five teenage children. She never recovered from the loss of her beloved husband and friend, nor from the poverty. Four children went to work after graduating from the eighth grade. My father had begun high school, but dropped out in his sophomore year when his father died. His high school experience had been embarrassing. His mother could not help with his homework, and for lunches she could only provide homemade bread, cut crooked, spread with homemade grape jelly and no butter, and wrapped in newsprint. He would find a secluded place to eat what he called his "purple bread." At age fifteen, like his siblings, he began working to support the family.

When World War II began, people wondered whether Germany would bomb the United States. A local farmer said, "I wish they would come and bomb the Stink Factory." Those who remember the operation, have the same reaction to the Stink Factory—a pinched expression or a scowl. It was indescribable. Farmers would not live in the area, if they could afford it, preferring a house in town and commuting to their fields. Those who could not afford to move were forced to put up with the stench. Of course, those who lived near or worked at the Stink Factory sometimes were discriminated against by their neighbors since the stench hung in their clothes and on their bodies.

Raymond Postma at the Calumet Speedway, where the Postmas moved after a strike closed the Stink Factory. Image courtesy of the author.

The rough character of the neighborhood continued into the 1960s. My father bought a car from a farmer after returning from World War II. When he picked up my mother for a date, he asked, "How do you like my car?" She replied, "It smells like the farm." The farmer had been hauling pigs in the back seat. One family allowed a goat to have free roam of their house; a picnic table was used for dining, and they still used an outhouse. Some homes there at that time had no telephone. My grandmother never learned to use the telephone, not knowing the difference between the receiver and the mouthpiece. Joining my father on a visit to the area in the 1960s, I opened the door to a local chicken coop and the whole floor suddenly began to move when at least fifty surprised rats scampered away. The muck was at least two feet thick on the floor where they were nesting. Elsewhere, two families in that same neighborhood were known to "greet" strangers with a .22-caliber rifle or a shotgun.

Though very coarse and ill-mannered, most of these Dutch folks were hard working and usually honest. Their word spoken in a deal was as good as a written contract. Most of their threadbare homes were "spick and span." Their children were often educated in Christian schools, and the families would faithfully attend and support their churches.

In 1926 there was a newspaper report that Shell Oil Company had

purchased Globe Rendering and its 862 acres for a new refinery.[11] This never materialized and Globe Rendering closed in the mid-1950s. I was a little boy in 1955 and remember seeing the chimney still visible above the trees. By then Globe Station for many years already had been part of Calumet City. It was a conglomeration of consumer-oriented shops, restaurants, and professional buildings. Yet, the Little Calumet River still runs through it. The lush vegetation and ragweed forests that always grew along its banks are still there. Stepping into the deep, dark woods, one can still find a remnant of a train trestle and pieces of factory foundations.

Endnotes

1. Early in the 1800s the name was spelled Posthuma, from the late 1800s until 1919 it was Postuma, after 1919 it was Postma.

2. Joseph Conlin, *The American Past: A Survey of American History since 1865* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2009) 488; and "Felled by Heat" and "Horses Killed by Sun's Rays," *Chicago Tribune*, 9 Aug 1896, 1 & 5 (respectively).

3. The Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad, commonly called the Pan Handle Route (Panhandle Route later), received its nickname from its main line, which began at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, crossed the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia, and, at Bradford, Ohio, split into a northern line to Chicago and a southern one to East St. Louis, Illinois.

4. "Its Odorous Trust," *Chicago Tribune*, 13 May 1893, 10.

5. *Chicago Livestock World*, 29 Apr 1901, 1.

6. Jenny and Fred's daughter Rena married a neighbor, Cornelius (Kees) VanTil, who would earn a doctorate and become a Reformed theologian. A grandson of the Kloosters, also Fred, grew up and eventually matriculated at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia where his uncle, Kees, was the professor of apologetics. Fred became a minister and taught at both Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary.

7. Dolomite is used as ornamental stone, as aggregate in concrete, as a pH buffer in soil, and in the production of steel and plate glass. The deposit near Thornton extends 400 feet down, and began to be quarried during the 1830s. The family still has the metal protector for his work boot that Fred used when he shoveled stone by hand.

8. Magdalena Schrum married William C. Claussen, of the Claussen Pickle Company, which absorbed the Schrum operation. Claussen was purchased by Oscar Mayer in 1970, which in turn was acquired by General Foods in 1981, which merged with Kraft Foods in 1990. A 2002 effort by Vlasic Pickles to acquire the Claussen brand was blocked by the Federal Trade Commission.

9. Classic swine fever, or hog cholera, is a highly contagious viral disease of pigs.

10. Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (New York: Doubleday, Jabber & Co., 1906) 475. Globe Station was in Illinois, but very near the state line.

11. *The Pointer*, 5 Feb 1926, 1.

A Letter from a Soldier, 11 April 1865

Loren Lemmen

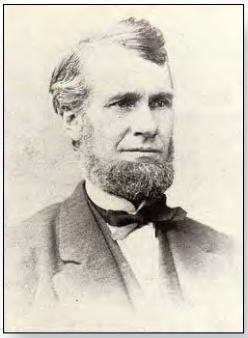
During the US Civil War the term "shebang" came to be used for crude shelters and was used for such housing in prisoner of war facilities. Origin of image is unknown.

Loren Lemmon is a student of communities, ethnic groups, the ethnology of surnames, and an accomplished genealogist. He has published articles on a number of topics, including in Origins*, and books (several with co-authors) with a specific focus on immigrants from Graafschap Bentheim. He lives in Lansing, Michigan.*

There has been a resurgence of interest in the Civil War coinciding with recent 150th anniversaries of its various events and battles. Battlefields have been upgraded to handle the increase in visitors, and many people have become involved in battlefield reenactments. More books have been written about the major battles and significant people. Less popular is the subject of prisoners of war, even though almost 400,000 Americans[1] were prisoners at some point during the four years of war. Death rates were high on both sides, as neither was equipped to handle such a large number of prisoners. Not until the end of the war approached did more information become public regarding the treatment of prisoners. This letter Frederick Rankans wrote home had both an immediate and a long-lasting effect on his family and others, including an "old prisoner of war" years later.

The Civil War years must have been hard for Hendrik and Hendrika Wedeven; her youngest son Frederick (a son with her first husband, Jan Rammelkamp) had illegally enlisted in the infantry early in the war. The Wedevens, married in 1847 after the death of Jan Rammelkamp, and her five children immigrated to Grand Rapids, Michigan, about 1853. The older siblings quickly began working for Americans and dropped the Rammelkamp name in favor of the shorter Rankes, which later morphed into Rankans. The transformation probably occurred when they worked on the railroad being constructed through Polkton Township in Ottawa County. The siblings saved their money, married, and soon bought land there alongside earlier Dutch pioneers.

After a few years, Frederick, the youngest, left home to work on the farm of an American named Lillie who lived near his siblings. When the Civil War began, Frederick wanted to enlist, although he was only sixteen years old and the minimum age for enlisting was eighteen. By this time he had apparently found work with one of Grand Rapids' leading citizens, a farmer, grain dealer, and banker, who was serving as the city's first Republican mayor—Martin Luther Sweet. Sweet went with Frederick to the enlistment office and signed a document indicating that he was Frederick's legal guardian and that



Martin Luther Sweet was a well-to-do farmer and business person in Grand Rapids and as a result his assurance that Frederick was of age allowed the enlistment to proceed, even though Frederick was too young. Image courtesy of the author.

the young man was eighteen years old, when he was actually sixteen years and six months old. He enlisted in Company B of Michigan's Third Infantry on 29 January 1862.

Although Frederick had enlisted without his parents' permission, he was not estranged from them. He wrote them throughout 1862 and 1863. They must have known that he had fought at Gettysburg, that he had been wounded at the Second Battle of Bull Run and that he was taken prisoner near Eldorado, Virginia, in January of 1864 while on picket duty. But they did not hear from him again until April 1865. Richmond, Virginia, the capital of the Confederacy, fell on 2 April and on 9 April Robert E. Lee surrendered. Then, in mid-April, a letter arrived. It had been written at Camp Fisk, near Vicksburg, Mississippi, on 11 April. Frederick had been paroled. He and thousands of other prisoners of war had been moved to a neutral site guarded by Confederate soldiers but provisioned by the federal government pending a prisoner exchange. The joy of his pending release was tempered by the words Frederick wrote of his experiences.

> Dear Parents — I should mention some details of my improvement but it brings to mind such horrors of human misery that I would rather decline if I could and banish from my memory what I have suffered and seen others suffer while I was in the Confederacy. I arrived in Andersonville, Ga. (sic, and throughout), on the 14th of March 1864. After being robbed of everything I possessed in the way of money, extra clothing and shelter, we were put into a field covering some twenty acres of ground, without a tree or shrub upon it, with a stockade built around us some twenty feet high. Within this stockade existed, at one time, 35,000 prisoners, with no shelter except the broad canopy of Heaven.[2] I have seen men die and exclaim when dying, "I starve to death!" In the agonies of death I have heard them cry to a comrade for bread or water. Should one, perchance, pause to look into the shrunken eye and view the haggard appearance of a comrade, he would say, 'He will die anyhow,' and then pass on; for it required all the ambition a man possessed to take care of himself. When a poor comrade died

Frederick's brother Geert Rankans (pictured in 1865) had the letter republished in 1892. Image courtesy of the author.

> a hundred men would fight over the body to get what little amount of clothing he possessed, and send the corpse in a nude state to our prison gate, where a negro would throw it on top of a car along with 15 or 20 others, and in that manner carry it to a grave or pit and throw it in. We scarcely could ever go to a creek which ran through our camp, to wash, without finding the water crimsoned with the blood of a comrade, shot in cold blood alongside of you, who for a moment, forgetting himself, had leaned against the "dead line" or touched it in some manner.[3] Thus I have seen 12,000 Union prisoners die, who, I imagine, cry from their silent graves to their living comrades to avenge their death.
>
> In September last we moved to Savannah, where we were treated with a little more humanity; but we were not destined to remain there long, as they moved us to Millen, Georgia. We remained there until Sherman's invasion caused us to be removed to Savannah, from there to Blackshire, Georgia,[4] then to Thomasville—traveling four days and nights on one pint of raw corn. Winter has come. Heaven help us! Without clothing or shelter the men are dying in fearful numbers; but we are sent to Albany and from there back to our old prison at Andersonville. We remained there until March 22nd, when we left for Selma, Alabama, hence to this camp, where we were paroled.[5]
>
> Were one half of the horrors of our prison life pictured to the people of the North, they would say it was false, that no civilized people could be so destitute of humanity as to treat prisoners of war in the manner we have been treated. You will ask why we did not endeavor to escape. We knew that if we did we should be caught by the bloodhounds, kept by the rebels for that purpose; for, to use their own phrase, "They could tree a d__d [sic] Yankee as quick as a negro." What do you think our feelings are toward the people of the South?"
>
> *Your loving son,*
> *Frederick Rankans*

Hendrik and Hendrika must have read the shocking news of Lincoln's assassination about the same time they received this letter. They felt the public should know what had happened at Andersonville, so they sent the letter to the local newspapers and it was printed in the 26 April 1865 edition of *De Volksvriend*, a local Dutch-language newspaper, and at the same time in the *Grand Rapids Eagle*.[6] The family must have

looked forward to more letters and Frederick's imminent return, but they received nothing more.

On 27 April the side-wheel steamer *Sultana*, overloaded with returning Union soldiers, sank near Memphis with a loss of more than 1,700 out of about 2,300 passengers; the ship bad been built to carry 376.[7] The boilers exploded during the middle of the night. The loss of *Sultana* was our country's worst naval disaster. Although relatively new, the overworked and poorly maintained boilers had failed. Later investigations showed that the boat was in need of boiler repair, but the fear of losing out on the government dollars paid for transporting troops resulted in merely a quick, insufficient patchwork repair. The boat, top-heavy with passengers, rocked back and forth while underway, resulting in insufficient water in the boilers, causing excessive pressure and heat. Although other boats were available to help take the passengers, the greed of a few people had caused the disaster. Investigations were conducted but no one was ever punished.[8] Hundreds died instantly, others drowned in the severely flooded Mississippi River, and many who made it ashore died from hypothermia or burns.

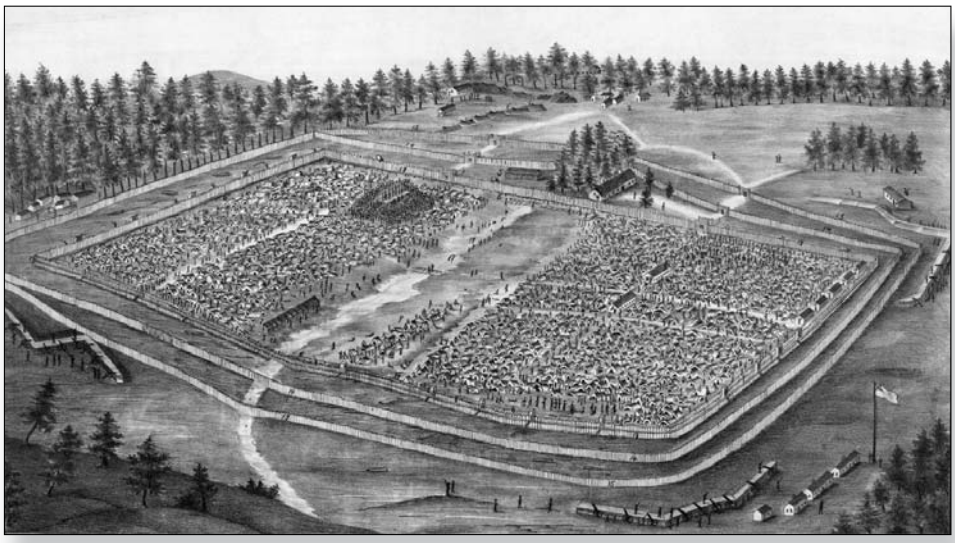
Frederick's family feared he was on this ill-fated ship. Weeks went by with no official news. They wrote the Provost Marshall at Vicksburg, and in time their worst fears were confirmed. Frederick indeed had been aboard and had not survived. The tragic loss of life never received the publicity due it. The victims were mostly from the Midwest, and so it was soon forgotten by Eastern papers. The explosion was overshadowed by the death of Lincoln the previous day and the ending of the Civil War, both of which received extensive newspaper coverage. Moreover, there had been so much death during the war that people had become weary of and hardened to such news.[9]

Frederick's family was not quick to forget him. His siblings and their growing families soon honored him by naming the newborns after him. In the baptism records of the Reformed Church in Polkton we find his sister and two of his brothers named a child after him.

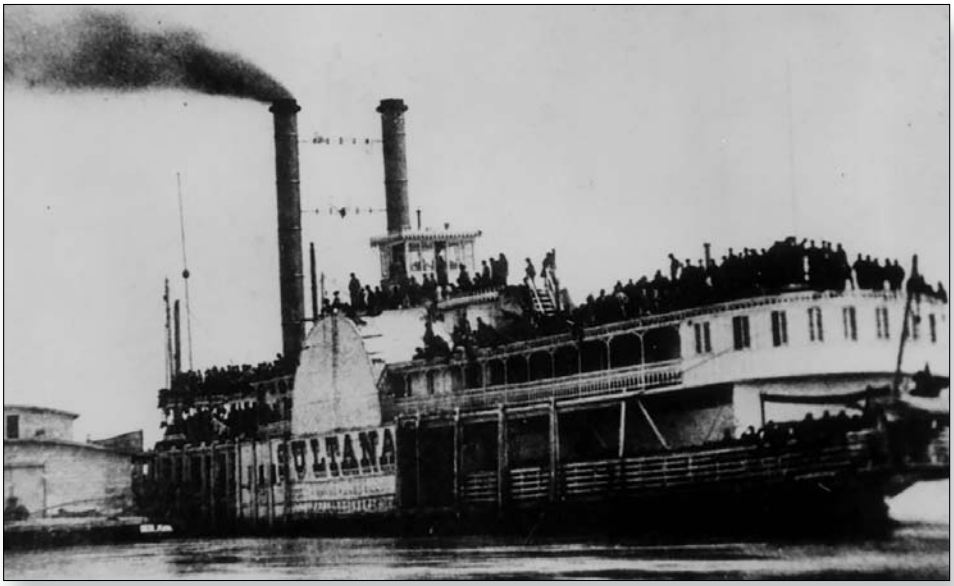
Even years later, Frederick and his letter were not forgotten. In December 1891, Frederick's brother Geert thought back to the letter and what his brother had endured. Geert had become a successful businessman and was a frequent advertiser in the Dutch-language newspaper *De Grondwet*, a Republican publication printed in Holland, Michigan. He showed the editor the letter and it was decided to reprint it as a "timely reminder" of what had happened. The story of the *Sultana* was included, even erroneously suggesting Southern agents may have been responsible for the explosion.[10]

This reprint of the letter in early 1892 bought back strong memories for some. Gerrit Lohuis of nearby East Saugatuck reacted quickly after reading it, sending a letter of his own to the editor. Lohuis had come to America in the spring of 1861 as a single young man and volunteered for the infantry the following year. He became part of the 19th Infantry Regiment formed in Allegan County. Now he wanted to share his experiences. His letter was printed on 2 February under the title "An Old Prisoner of War."[11]

> By reading Frederick Rankans' letter once again, I was reminded of the gross mistreatment suffered, now almost 29 years ago, in the year 1863. Maybe there are those who do not believe that it was all that bad, but I say that it really was very bad. I saw and heard it myself. When we were stationed in Atlantic [Atlanta] in 1864, there were some who had escaped the military prison at Andersonville, and who arrived by us, almost naked with uncovered heads and feet, and when they got good food to eat they became sick, yes, some even had to pay for that with their death. Indescribable was the treatment they endured. I also experienced it. I was in Company B of the 19th Michigan Regiment. On the 4th of March 1863 our brigade was sent out to ascertain how and where the rebels were. Four miles from our camp we found them and drove them back and on the 5th we chased them to Spring Hill in Tennessee where after having fought for 6 to 7 hours,



A drawing of Andersonville Prison indicating the "dead line" inside the palisade and the lack of shelter for the prisoners of war.



Built in 1863 for the cotton trade, the side-wheeler Sultana *regularly ran between St. Louis and New Orleans and often carried troops. Origin of image is unknown.*

we were surrounded so that we had to surrender to them. Then our real misery began. They made us march from Spring Hill to Columbia and from there to Shebyville [sic]. In Columbia we each had a small piece of bacon, nothing else, even though we had marched the entire day and had hoped that we would get something in Shelbyville, but were disappointed because we did not get anything. The next morning the inhabitants came to sell us something and we still had some money, but when that was discovered they had to stay away from us, and when we said that we were not treated well, their answer was "If we don't let you starve from hunger, we will have to shoot you." And with that we had to march to Tallahome [Tullahoma, Tennessee] where we each got a pint of flour, nothing else, not even a bit of salt. We moistened the flour with some water and that is how we ate it because we were starving from hunger. We were standing on a large hill, and were totally soaked through because of the rain and had almost no fire. It was so cold that in the morning there was ice on the water. Then we had to go to a railway station, but on the way, they stripped the clothes off our bodies, so that all that we had left was just enough to cover our private parts. We boarded the trains cold and hungry and were packed in like animals. We bunched close together to stay warm. That evening we arrived in Chattenoga [sic] and from there to Knoxville in East Tennessee, but no food. They let us drink in a creek and we washed ourselves in the same creek. There were also some houses there and a woman came crying out of one of them with food for us. We asked her what the matter was and she said that the rebels had shot and killed her husband, because he was a Union man. She gave us what she had but then was chased away by the rebels. They begrudged us the little that we got. From there we were sent to Lynsburg [sic] in Virginia, and from there to Libby, in Richmond, and there we received some food twice a day, enough so that we would not die, but not enough to live on. We were fortunate that we were soon extradited otherwise we would have died of starvation. We were approximately 1200 to 1300 persons and in 27 days they send us back across the line. Those 27 days will never leave one's memory. Many died from the consequences, and many landed in the hospital including J. H. Brinkman, and Egbert Kleefman, myself, and many others of us. And our good Brinkman died there. Almost all of us had diarrhea because of the horrible treatment by the rebels.[12]

And to which party do they now belong? They are Democrats, just like Mr. Crisp, the leader of the House of Congress.[13] Yes, they are still the same as 31 years ago, but they do not have the courage anymore. And now there are many of our Dutch people, who came here later, or who were born here, under which there are also Democrats, but if you really knew them, I would think you would not be able to be a Democrat.

Whoever doesn't believe me, talk to Mr. Theodorus Botsen or Jan Zweemer, or Tim Dekker, of Saugatuck. We were all in the same company and always stayed together. Slotman from Overisel can also tell you much, and Cornelis Bouman from Fremont. Yes, even Hendrik Kok died from starvation in Andersonville.

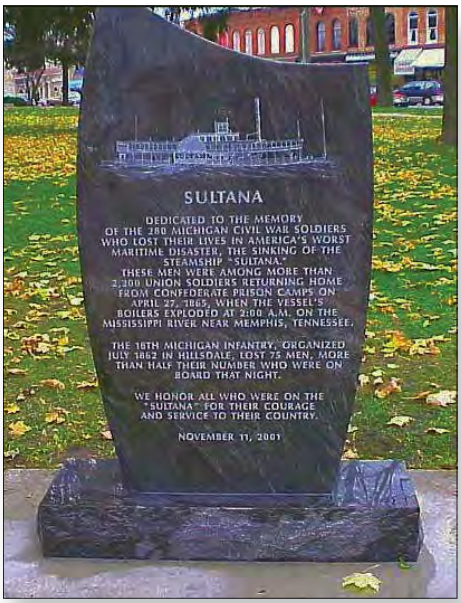
Enough, No Democrat! No, No, Far from it!

Gerrit Lohuis
East Saugatuck, Allegan County, Mich.
27 January 1892

It must have been especially hard for Kleefman and Botsen, who were both forty-five years old when they enlisted in 1862. After being exchanged they were sent west to Ohio and then back to Tennessee.[14] They were fortunate to have been caught at a time when prisoners were still being exchanged. Lohuis, Brinkman, and Kleefman spent much of the rest of 1863 in the hospital at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and Brinkman died there on 28 December 1863.[15] Kleefman and Lohuis returned to duty and both were wounded in Georgia in May 1864.[16] Kleefman was still hospitalized at the time of his discharge at the end of the war.

It is ironic that it was Crisp's election as Speaker of the House that brought back the memory of what Frederick and others had suffered. He undoubtedly would have stories of

The connected former warehouses that became the Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia, noted for overcrowding, disease, malnutrition, and a high mortality rate. From a postcard.



Because many of the Michigan men who died in the Sultana *explosion and fire were from eastern Michigan, this marker was erected in Hillsdale, Michigan, in 2001.*

his own to tell, having been a prisoner of war himself. He and other officers were placed on "retaliation rations" to protest what had happened at Andersonville and elsewhere. Crisp served as Speaker of the House until his death in 1896.[17]

It was important to both the Rankans family and to Gerrit Lohuis that people remember what had taken place. For decades voters would be reminded that it had been the Democratic Party that had caused the secession that led to war and the resulting deaths, injuries, and suffering; these reminders were referred to as "waving the bloody shirt." Today the former Confederate prison at Andersonville is a National Historical Site containing Andersonville National Cemetery and the National Prisoner of War Museum, a memorial to all of our nation's prisoners of war. Frederick's letter is now part of their archives. Many states have markers at the Andersonville National Historical Site commemorating their citizens who lie there in unmarked graves.

There is no national memorial for Frederik Rankans and the hundreds with him who perished on *Sultana*. There are however, several state monuments. The most recent one was erected in 2001 in Hillsdale, Michigan. The 18th Michigan Infantry, organized in Hillsdale, lost seventy-five men that night. Interest in *Sultana* has grown over time. Its remains were recently discovered deep under a farmer's field along the Mississippi. The tragedy is the subject of a number of books published in recent years. The events surrounding Frederick's life and death are not forgotten, and Frederick's words still have an effect 150 years later.

Endnotes

1. James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850: 1864-1866*. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1904) 507-508.

2. Statistics indicate that about 45,000 Union troops were held in Andersonville (actually Camp Sumter), of whom 13,000 died. Henry Wirz, commander of the camp, was one of only two Confederate soldiers executed for war crimes. Prisoners fashioned temporary shelters, called "shebangs," from branches, saplings, and later canvas.

3. The term "dead line" originated from Union and Confederate prison camps during the Civil War and referred to a physical line, often marked with stakes and twine approximately nineteen feet inside the wall. Prisoners were forbidden to cross this line to prevent attempts to climb over the stockade or tunnel under it. Guards would shoot any prisoner who crossed the line which came to be known as the "dead line."

4. The town was Blackshear, Georgia.

5. Rankes's moves as a prisoner resulted from Confederate forces responding to invading Union forces led by William T. Sherman—"The march to the sea." Fort Pulaski in Savannah was a transit camp, not a permanent prison; Camp Lawton, in Millen, existed for three months in the fall of 1864 on 42 acres and held about 10,000 prisoners, of whom about 725 died; the camp at Blackshear existed only during December 1864 and held 5,000 prisoners of whom 27 died thanks to supplies provided by civilians in the area; Albany was another transit camp; and Cahaba Prison in Selma was a converted warehouse designed to house 500 prisoner which held as many as 3,000. Estimates indicate that more than 15 percent of Union prisoners died while just under 13 percent of Confederate prisoners died. Both sides were not prepared for the large number of prisoners after 1863, before which most prisoners were paroled soon after being captured.

6. *Grand Rapids Eagle*, 26 April 1865, 1: "Letter from a Soldier." Copies of *De Volksvriend* are not extant. The story in *De Grondwet,* 5 January 1892, 1, is the source of this information.

7. Gene Eric Salecker, *Disaster on the Mississippi: The Sultana Explosion, April 27, 1865* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996) appendix A.

8. Ibid., 191-202.

9. An estimated 620,000 Americans died during the Civil War, almost one-half of the nation's war deaths in all its wars.

10. *De Grondwet*, *5* January 1892, 1.

11. *De Grondwet*, *2* February 1892, 1. Translation by Janet Sheeres.

12. Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia, was three connected structures, three stories high, formerly used as tobacco warehouses. Hunger and disease were ongoing problems at the prison initially designed for 700 but at times holding as many as 1,200. For many, Libby was the processing point for prisoners of war.

13. Charles Frederick Crisp (1845-1896) was a Democratic congressman elected from Georgia in 1882, and from 1890 until his death served as leader of the Democratic Party in the House, as either the House Minority Leader or the Speaker of the House.

14. William M. Anderson, *They Died to Make Men Free–A History of the 19th Michigan Infantry in the Civil War* (Dayton: Morningside House, 1994) 186-202, details the trip to prison. It took them seventeen days to get to Libby Prison in Virginia. That included ten days in railroad cars. Some reported that Confederate soldiers tried to show kindness to them but were prevented by their officers.

15. Records of the Michigan Military Establishment. Regimental Service Records, 1863-1864, RG 59-14. Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan.

16. Records of the Michigan Military Establishment. Nineteenth Michigan Infantry Monthly Returns 1864. RG 59-14, Ovs. 29 Folder 06. Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan.

17. Charles Frederick Crisp from the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, *http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=c000908*, retrieved on 14 May 2015.

book review

Shades of White Flight

Mark Mulder
(Rutgers University Press, 2015)

This important book is a case study of the role of religion and structural racism in the flight of Dutch Americans from the Chicago neighborhoods of Roseland and Englewood in a period from the late 1950s to early 1970s. This is an uncomfortable topic that many Dutch Americans would prefer not discussing. But the author, an associate professor of sociology at Calvin College, makes quite a serious indictment that deserves to be heard. In short, Mulder argues that the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA) were "co-conspirators and accomplices" in a pattern of white flight (p. 3). He contends that religion played a contributory role in actually abetting the exodus from old neighborhoods. Before I continue, let the charge ring clear. Mulder believes he has found an example in which "White evangelical religion . . . has functioned to perpetuate racial barriers and systematic injustice," and where "religion has fostered alienation and segregation" (pp. 6, 18).

Mulder proposes two main reasons why religion was able to play such a role in this situation. First, he asserts that the "traditional Dutch community had no aversion to high mobility" (p. 34). And he argues that Dutch Americans had historically demonstrated a pattern of fleeing from conflict and danger. As a corollary to this, they were not especially rooted in any place. Second, Mulder states that the *de facto* congregational nature of the CRC churches enabled these churches to relocate to the suburbs more easily than could RCA churches or territorial Catholic parishes. This first is essentially an empirical claim that can be checked by historical research. The second point rests on empirical foundations, but is ultimately a sociological abstraction.

Let me take these two points in order. Again, Mulder's first point is that Dutch Americans were especially mobile. He portrays Dutch immigrants as a "people only too willing to rupture social ties and remove themselves" (p. 19). He imagines Dutch-American congregations ready "to detach and move easily when events and surroundings became unsavory" (p. 7). Those of us who study Dutch-American history should surely find this a surprising claim. Every study of Dutch-American migration that I am aware of sees Dutch immigrants as reluctant migrants who overwhelmingly sought to establish themselves in fixed communities. Although Mulder references James Bratt's work from 1984, he does not cite Van Hinte's classic study, or other more recent major works by Swierenga, Krabbendam, Sinke, and others. In any era, overseas immigration was for many a last straw, a necessary consequence of a combination of religious persecution, economic inopportunity, poor harvests, and a rigid social structure that did not provide room for advancement. The nineteenth-century Dutch had essentially no overseas migration tradition and, after the difficulty of travel across the ocean, many Dutch Americans did not want to move again.

By what standard, then, can Dutch Americans be seen as an especially mobile people? Surely immigrants of any of nation, or native-born Americans living in other Chicago suburbs, were equally mobile. Certainly, many Dutch Americans in Roseland and Englewood struggled mightily with leaving their homes and communities. This book shows little sympathy for those struggles. If Mulder seeks to explain Dutch-American white flight from this angle, I am afraid he has his work cut out for him.

Mulder is more convincing when explaining the effect of the structural composition of the CRC and RCA on patterns of white flight. Chapters eight, nine, and ten are his best work. They tell the story of seven CRC churches (three in Englewood and four in Roseland) and six RCA churches (two in Englewood and four in Roseland). Although his sample size is small, Mulder demonstrates an obvious pattern. By 1972, all of the CRC churches had relocated to new suburbs, along with only one of the RCA churches. RCA churches then followed in the later 1970s. Mulder identifies the greater autonomy enjoyed by individual CRC churches as the main variable in this pattern. CRC churches decided early to seek self-preservation, while in the RCA, synod and classis slowed individual congregations from making such decisions.

Sociologists are of course never happy with particulars but want to

find some constants of social behavior to justify their research. For his academic readers who are not Dutch Americans, Mulder proposes that he has contributed to complicating our understanding of white flight. Previous studies of white flight gave little space to the influence of religion, but religion, Mulder says, must be a contributing factor. That it must be a factor, of course, no one can really deny, but the extent to which it is a salient factor is the real question.

Mulder's argument here has something of a social-scientific straw man, whereby a non-existent opposing argument is set up merely to be knocked down. When Mulder says that churches ***can*** do this or that, it is as if a previous thinker has said they cannot do those things. But of course there are very few if any sociological constants, so in fact churches can have just about any effect on society imaginable. What is the contribution of saying that "sacred machinations of the church can be utilized to either integrate or disintegrate the local neighborhood"? (p. 12). Of course they can. In the flight of Dutch Americans from Roseland and Englewood, religion was certainly a factor, but was it a cause? Perhaps in some ways the churches stymied the flight to the suburbs. Had the Dutch Americans not been churchgoers, maybe they would have been less motivated to remain in their communities as long as they did. Despite Mulder's impressive research, I am not entirely convinced.

Mulder is careful to avoid using proper names. The nameless participants in Mulder's story are hidden behind social and institutional forces. He charges the church with wrongdoing, but is it the church as a social institution that is to blame, or is it individuals who are ultimately responsible? If the latter is the case, Mulder has weakened the argument by avoiding the entanglements and controversy that would arise from charging particular individuals with racism.

Michael J. Douma

for the future

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

Richard Harms examines the career of Dr. Garrett Heyns (1891-1969), educator and penologist, and recipient of the first Calvin College Distinguished Alumni Award in 1966.

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