

# Origins

## Origins

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

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres  
Editor

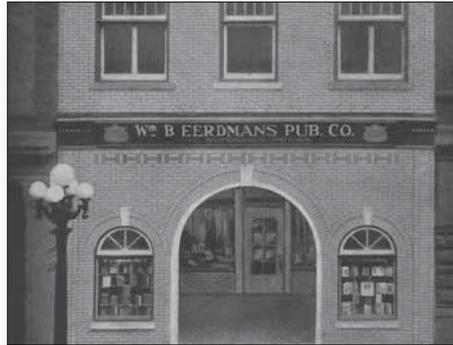
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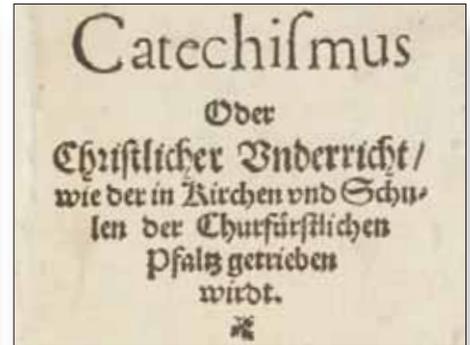
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*Cover photo:*  
Old Woman Reading (circa 1631),  
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## Filling In

In view of the recent retirement of Dr. Richard Harms as curator of the Calvin Archives and editor of *Origins*, I have been asked, as associate editor, to take his place temporarily until the arrival of our new curator, Dr. Denice Fett. Because of my involvement with this magazine for the past twenty years, I am delighted to take on this temporary assignment.

## This Issue

With the Protestant world commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation this fall, the articles in this issue of *Origins* reflect a Reformation theme. Because the invention of the printing press played an enormous part in the Reformers' abilities to get their message out, my article describes how the four large and a number of smaller publishing houses were founded by Dutch

immigrants in Grand Rapids and their influence on Reformed thought in North America. Dr. James De Jong follows with an article describing how the Dutch brought their beloved religious reading material with them and how the church weeklies of the two major Reformed denominations in North America were read by members of both denominations. In "And now a little news from Lark," Rev. Paula Vander Hoven continues her series of "ghost" congregations. This story fits the Reformation theme as well. The roots of the CRC are in the Dutch Reformed Church founded in the Netherlands after the Reformation and the subsequent Synod of Dort (1818-1819). This Synod wrote up a set of ecclesiastical rules, among them the famous Church Order of Dort. These rules were to be followed by all congregations seeking admission to the Dutch Reformed denomination. Even those congregations that split off, like the Christian Seceders, adhered to them. Even out on North Dakota prairies, in bitter winters and scorching summers, the little group in Lark faithfully elected elders and deacons, kept minutes, administered

*censura morum*, held *huisbezoek*, applied discipline, and administered the sacraments. And finally, a delightful story of two young persons, children of the Reformation, growing up in separate countries and on separate continents, finding each other as a result of their involvement with the Reformed ecumenical movement, now serving a church with Reformed roots in Canada.

## Staff: Our New Curator

Denice Fett comes to Calvin from the University of North Florida, where she has served as assistant professor of history. To complete her graduate work at Ohio State University, she focused her dissertation on diplomatic information, intelligence, and communication in Western Europe during the Reformation era. She has continued this research, and it has found publication in various outlets. These writing and editing skills will be of great help as she edits *Origins*. Having presented frequently through invited talks and conference presentations, Denice will be very comfortable with presentation and speaking opportunities as curator. She will also bring

prior outreach experience. Finally, her years of experience in the classroom are valuable as she continues the work of bringing classes into Heritage Hall to instruct students in the use of primary sources and archival research—an area of expertise that she received strong commendations for from her faculty peers and students.

#### **News from the Archives**

Cemetery and obituary records from Allegan, Ottawa, and Muskegon counties, and some from surrounding areas, have been alphabetized and are now available in card files in the reading room of Heritage Hall. The collection, named the Irene Reidsma Collection, contains over 72,500 cards in twenty-six drawers. The Heritage Hall reading room has a subscription to Ancestry Library Edition ([www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)) that may be accessed by the public. The reading room is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Summer hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) The Archives volunteers are currently cross-referencing surnames for the years 1845 to 1915 found in the Family Histories collection.

#### **Books for Sale**

The Calvin Archives has a number of books for sale, and since this issue highlights books and reading, we are adding a list of these books. See pages 43 to 45.

#### **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 2018. The subscription rate is the same as when we started in 1983. 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.

*Janet Sjaarda Sheeres*

# Of Making Many Books . . .

## Dutch Immigrant Book Publishers in Grand Rapids: The Early Years

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

This fall, Protestantism commemorates the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther's publication of his ninety-five theses against Roman Catholic indulgences in October 1517 is considered to be the determining demarcation date. However, well before that 1517 date, Reformers were actively spreading a new message across Europe, namely, that not only clergy but laity should have access to the Bible. Johan Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in 1448 significantly advanced the spread of the printed page and thereby played a key role in the success of the Protestant Reformation. While leaders like Luther and Calvin could preach to only small numbers of people, their printed messages reached thousands of people. Before the printing press, books were copied laboriously by hand; the printing press could do so faster and cheaper.

The Reformers used this miraculous invention to spread their ideas across Europe using pamphlets, and thereby removed control of written materials from the Roman Catholic Church to the Protestant movement. By 1519, Luther had already gained considerable influence in the Netherlands, but it would still take much of the sixteenth century, after much persecution, torture, and executions, for the Reformation to be a *fait accompli* in the Netherlands.

The famous Synod of Dort held

in Dordrecht, the Netherlands, from 1618 to 1619, resulted in the formation of the Dutch Reformed Church, which led to the publication of the first State-sponsored Dutch Bible



Cover plate of 1690 Dutch Staten Bijbel. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

in 1637—the Staten Bijbel. It soon became apparent, however, that the laity needed help in understanding the Bible. Thus, the Dutch Reformed Church adopted three tools: the 1561 Belgic Confession, a clear statement of

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the Reformed faith; the 1563 Heidelberg Catechism; and after the Synod of Dort (1816-1819), the *Canons of Dort*, which explained the “Five Main Points of Doctrine in Dispute” in the Netherlands. These publications became the basis of education for the Dutch Reformed laity. Even so, there was also a huge demand for additional devotional literature by Protestant believers, leading to a brisk business in the printing industry.<sup>1</sup>

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) have their roots in the Reformation as it unfolded in the Netherlands. Their members did not leave their thirst for inspirational and theological knowledge behind; instead, emigrants from the Netherlands brought their Bibles and religious literature with them to America.

By 1900 these Dutch immigrants constituted 40 percent of the population of Grand Rapids, with one-third of all Dutch-born in the United States living in Western Michigan. This mostly Protestant population base, of whom the majority belonged to a Reformed denomination, opened up a fertile market for a Dutch-language and religious material publishing company. The first decades of the 1900s were a prime time for reading—very possibly the peak decades for reading in American life. Before radio became a distraction (and the CRC forbade movie attendance), books not only served to educate but to entertain as well. Pastors, professors, and avid lay readers needed more and more shelves in their studies as their collections grew, and their bookshelves sagged under the weight.

The second wave of Dutch emigrants arriving after 1880 brought with them views shaped largely by the great Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). Men's Societies, Ladies' Aids, and Young

People's groups all studied the Bible in light of the Reformed faith, and books on the subject were eagerly read and discussed.

Several immigrant families, Baker, Eerdmans, Kregel, and Sevensma, stand out in providing religious literature. The two others, Hulst and the Zondervan brothers, were American-born. Their combined book-publishing output over the course of the early twentieth century continued bringing religious materials into the homes of the Dutch in the United States. The fact that these booksellers were Dutch immigrants, and initially CRC members, added to their standing as being trustworthy; they were “our own kind of people.”

However, when early in 1930 Rev. Martin R. De Haan split off from Calvary Reformed to found Calvary Undenominational, he took many RCA and CRC members with him, including Louis Kregel, one of the Grand Rapids booksellers. After WWII the world, including Grand Rapids, changed when television was added to the radio, bringing evangelical and fundamentalist pastors' voices into Reformed homes.<sup>2</sup>

### Brant Sipkes Sevensma

Brant Sevensma, born in the province of Groningen, the Netherlands, in 1867, was the son of Frisian parents.<sup>3</sup> His father, Rev. Sipkes B. Sevensma, accepted a call from Eastern Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids in 1887 and in July of that year arrived in the city with his family. Four years later, in 1891, at age twenty-four, Brant is listed in the Grand Rapids City Directory as teacher at the Holland School, boarding with his parents in the parsonage on East Street (now Eastern Avenue).<sup>4</sup> He continued teaching until 1898, when the Directory lists him as bookseller and publisher doing business on 347 East Street and still living at home. One of Sevensma's first

publications was a slim paperback published in 1910 describing the CRC's mission to the Zuni Indians.<sup>5</sup> This mission, founded in 1897 by the CRC, was supported throughout the denomination and a booklet on



Brant Sevensma. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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Sevensma Publishers advertising in the *Banner*. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

it would, at least in CRC families, be well received. For many years Sevensma provided the Dutch in their settlements in the northern states and Canada with books, all the while serving his denomination with distinction as catechism teacher, president of various church organizations, and as clerk for Classis Grand Rapids East for twenty-six years, never missing a meeting, and taking meticulous minutes.

Down the street at 318 S. East Street, young Frisian-born Emma Fopma was working as a bookkeeper at the Holland Tea Company. She caught Brant's eye, and, in November 1909, forty-two-year-old Brant married the fourteen-year-younger Emma. With a growing family at home and his involvement in church and community affairs, Brant, whose health had never been robust, decided to give up publishing and sold his share in the partnership to Eerdmans in 1922. He continued to provide for his family by working as treasurer for the Pine Rest Christian Hospital (founded in 1910). In 1923 his beloved Emma passed away at age thirty-eight; Brant followed six years later in 1929, at age sixty-two. His obituary credits him with a "broadminded view of life, and sincerity of purpose."<sup>6</sup>

**Johannes Bernardus Hulst**

Less than a year after Sevensma's birth, Johannes B. (J. B.) Hulst was born in Vriesland, Michigan, in 1868, while his parents were traveling from the Netherlands to Holland, Michigan, where his father, Rev. Frederick Hulst, was to take up his ministry. Growing up in parsonages, both Brant and J. B. were taught the value of reading and books.

At an early age J. B. had hopes to enter the ministry and in 1889 enrolled in the CRC's Theological School. Unfortunately, he became

seriously ill during this time, recovered, and then suffered a relapse resulting in a nervous breakdown. Unable to finish his studies, he nevertheless received a



J. B. Hulst. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

license to preach under the Church Order of Dort (Art. 8, Exceptional Gifts), and preached regularly throughout the city and the state until he was well into his seventies. In order to make a living, J. B. combined his love for books and theology and in 1894 began selling books, first at 247 South Division. Three years later, he moved his business to 936 5th Avenue, (now Franklin Street) near the Theological School. He was the first to import Dutch books and sell them. Later he also authored and published books. He loved and collected rare books, at one time owning the 1492 publication of *Tractatus de Reformatione Virium Animae* by Gerhard Zerbolt of Zutphen, a 1556 Dutch Bible translated from the Latin, and

a 1560 Dutch translation of *Calvin's Institutes*.

J. B.'s talents also included a love for music. With churches providing much of the musical entertainment for their parishioners, it is not surprising that he is listed as the president of many singing school programs held in Grand Rapids from 1894 to 1909.<sup>7</sup> He published much sheet music, including the Calvin College Song, written by William Kuipers and set to music by William B. Eerdmans. Price: 50 cents.

When the young, energetic, and talented William Eerdmans arrived in Grand Rapids and began selling books out of his home and bicycle basket, J. B.'s sales may have slipped, and when Eerdmans and Sevensma joined forces in 1911, he sold his business to them and continued his career as a lay preacher. In 1940, he donated a collection of his books and manuscripts to the CRC's Synodical Historical Committee, some of which are now housed in Calvin's Rare Book Collection while others formed the beginnings of the Meeter Center Rare Book Collection.

Like his contemporary Dutch publishers, J. B., a member of First CRC, was active in his church but also in the larger community, providing leadership to the Dutch-Americans in various functions; however, the one



J. B. Hulst New Books Advertisement. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

he enjoyed most was his involvement in the CRC's Publication Committee, on which he served for thirty-two years and chaired for seventeen.

He passed away on 18 February 1948, leaving his wife, and two children.<sup>8</sup> Such was his esteem in the CRC community that his obituary took up an entire page in the *Banner* of 12 March 1948.

### Eerdmans

In 1901, a newly arrived young immigrant, William (Wiltje) B. Eerdmans, joined the Eastern Avenue congregation. William and Brant, two educated men with Frisian roots, soon struck up a friendship. William shared Brant's love for books, and a decade later the Eerdmans-Sevensma partnership came into being.



William B. Eerdmans Sr.  
Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Eerdmans was born in 1882 in Bolsward, a city in the province of Friesland, the Netherlands, the seventh of eleven children of Bernardus D. Eerdmans (1844-1901) and Dirkje

Pars (1848-1929). Father Eerdmans owned a textile factory that employed about fifty workers, selling its products throughout Europe. Several of William's older siblings emigrated to the United States, where one brother, Dirk, had set up an import-export business in Paterson, New Jersey, later moving to Grand Rapids. Here he continued the business and branched out by selling Bibles and religious books, which he ordered from a publisher in Franeker, also in Friesland.

After his father passed away in 1901, William also emigrated. He had enjoyed an excellent education in the Netherlands and was fluent in German, English, Dutch, and Frisian. Unlike most emigrants who came financially empty-handed, William had enough resources to allow him to attend Calvin College. He graduated in 1908 and, perhaps as a precursor to his career, was one of the *Chimes* editors. During his Calvin years he peddled books to his fellow students and professors, as well as to pastors. In the Netherlands, William, like his parents, had belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church. In Grand Rapids, he joined the Christian Reformed Church, probably because, unlike his father, William was a fan of the great Dutch statesman-theologian Abraham Kuyper. William fully planned to graduate from the CRC's Theological School and become a pastor, but, after one year, he began to have doubts about his vocational choice. In a 1909 trip to the Netherlands, he visited with Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), another one of his heroes. Bavinck's advice: "Honestly, you know what they really need in Grand Rapids and in America? So many Dutch people having emigrated need a man to publish good books. We don't all have to be ministers and evangelists." Subsequently, by the summer of 1910, William began his book-publishing career.<sup>9</sup>

In 1911, he partnered with Brant Sevensma, an already established bookseller and publisher, each contributing \$10,000 to the partnership, a rather impressive amount for the time. Most of their books were reprints of Dutch books that, because of their public domain status, could be reprinted. Western Michigan, and Grand Rapids in particular, with its large population of Reformed and Christian Reformed church members, proved to be a fertile market. The first book they published was B. K. Kuiper's biogra-

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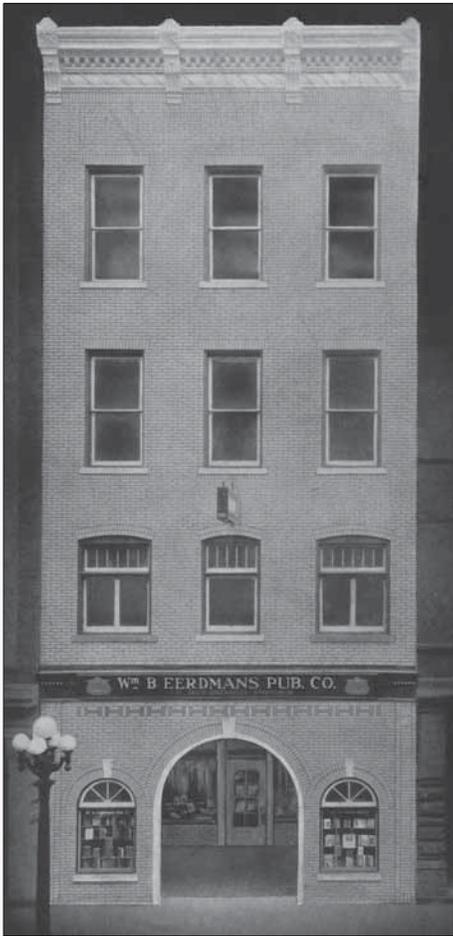
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**GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.**

Titanic Book advertisement 1912. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

phy of Martin Luther.<sup>10</sup> William was also quick to see a publishing opportunity in a broader market. In order to reach a larger audience, he wrote *The Ramp van de Titanic* (The Disaster of the Titanic) immediately after the sinking of the Titanic.<sup>11</sup> He also used his language skills by translating some books and was known to ghostwrite others.

In 1922 the Eerdmans-Sevensma partnership was dissolved, and Eerdmans carried on as the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. The offices and warehouse were located at 234 Pearl Street, in the heart of Grand Rapids. By this time, Eerdmans had married and was the father of three children. The youngest of them, William B. Eerdmans Jr., born in 1923, would eventually follow in his father's footsteps.<sup>12</sup>



The William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company building at 234 Pearl Street, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Image used by permission of William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.



Current Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. building. Image courtesy of the author.

Over his long career, Eerdmans published books by such well-known authors as C. S. Lewis, Karl Barth, Richard J. Neuhaus, Nicholas Wolter-

storff, Richard Mouw, Martin Marty, Mark Noll, Dorothy Day, and many others. The company sold thousands of Abraham Kuyper's books, including the Kuyper biography *Leven en Arbeid van A Kuyper* (1919). Other bestsellers were Matthew Henry's Bible Commentary, books by Dr. H. Bavinck, Dr. B. Wielenga, etc.

He carried on the Reformation tradition of educating the laity, including children with instructional books on language.<sup>13</sup> He did not particularly appreciate dissension in the church, but when in 1924 Rev. Herman Hoeksema was deposed as pastor of the Eastern Avenue CRC, he published Hoeksema's books without hesitation. Women authors, like Marian M. Schoolland, Catharine F. Vos, and Aleida Pieters, also found a home at Eerdmans.

As the company grew, so did the subject matter: Biblical Studies, Commentaries, Theology, Philosophy, Ethics, Church and Ministry, Faith and Life, Religion and Society, Religion and Science, Religious Studies, History, Social Sciences, and Humanities, all graced the shelves or were shipped to buyers.

Once asked if he had a mission statement, Eerdmans replied, "... a pledge to sow the seed of faith and culture *sub specie aeternitatis* (under the aspect of eternity)."<sup>14</sup>

It is impossible to gauge the effect Eerdmans has had on the religious thinking and spiritual development of the public he served, but in an obituary in the *Banner*, Henry Stob rightly referred to Eerdmans as "Dean

of Religious Publishers."<sup>15</sup> Eerdmans died on 12 April 1966. Three years earlier, his son William Jr. had taken over the leadership.

### The Zondervan brothers, Peter and Bernard

Eerdmans's sister, Nellie, had emigrated to America in 1909 and, after a failed first marriage, married Louis Zondervan. Her two sons, Peter (Pat) and Bernard (Bernie), by her first husband,



P. J. Zondervan. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

adopted the name Zondervan. The two brothers were American-born



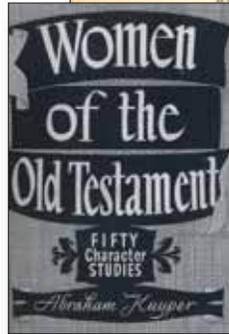
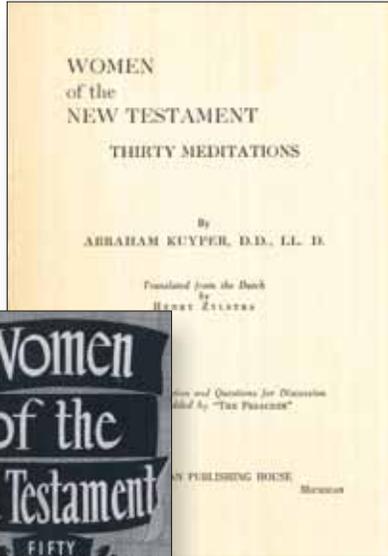
B. D. Zondervan. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

to Dutch immigrant parents. The family belonged to the Jenison CRC, where solid Reformed theology was instilled in them.

In the late 1920s both men were work-

ing for their uncle, William. They learned the trade, but were ambitious and set up their own publishing house, often competing with their uncle. Without a proper place of business, they worked out of their parents' home. They traveled to New York to visit various publish-

ing houses to purchase books they thought would sell well to their Dutch clientele in West Michigan. After a year they were successful enough to be able to open a bookstore in Grand Rapids and, shortly after, in 1933 published their first book, *Women of the Old Testament*, by Abraham Kuyper.<sup>16</sup> The translation of this Dutch book was done by Henry Zylstra, a Calvin theology student at the time, for \$50.00.<sup>17</sup> The success of this volume led to the next volume, *Women of the New Testament*. The following year the brothers published their first bestseller, *John and Betty Stam: Martyrs*, in November 1935. Trained at Moody Bible Institute, John and Betty were young



Rev. A. Kuyper's book, *Women of the Old Testament*. First book published by Zondervan. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Lee Huizenga (1881-1945), a CRC medical missionary in China, quickly wrote the story and submitted the manuscript to Zondervan. The first printing of five thousand sold out, and by February 1936 ten thousand more copies were printed, with a third printing in May of 1937. With these solid successes, the Zondervan Publishing House was on its way.

The brothers traveled far and wide across the country to contact students and booksellers. They copied contacts from denominational yearbooks and compiled a list of two thousand names for their first four-page catalog. They made these trips pay by selling books out of their car trunks, and buying up used books from ministers' libraries to reprint.

By the early 1940s fundamentalist and evangelical movements had made considerable inroads into the Dutch Reformed community. Both brothers were initially CRC; Bernie attended Burton Heights CRC, where he often served as elder and Sunday school superintendent. Pat was a member at Seymour CRC. Both were active in the Gideons International, promoted the Reformed Bible Institute, and actively encouraged Christian education. Nevertheless, unlike the CRC's official stand, the broth-

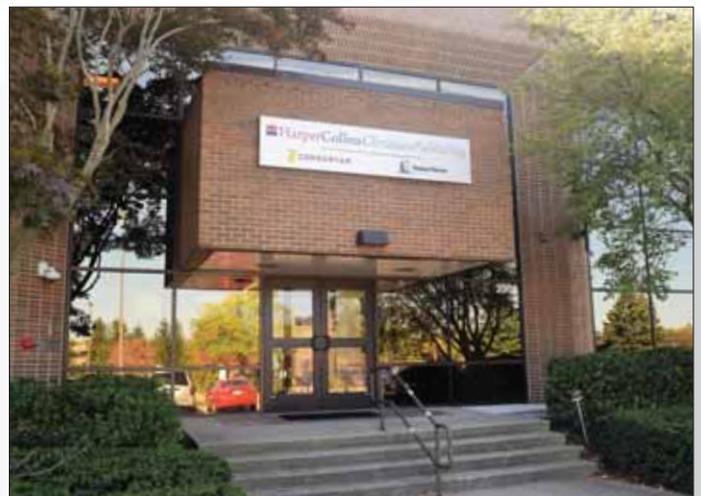
missionaries to China who were taken captive by communist guerrillas and held for ransom. Two days later, the Stams were beheaded.



Zondervan Building at 847 Ottawa Avenue NW, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Image used by permission of Zondervan. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com).



Inside Zondervan's first store. Image used by permission of Zondervan. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com).



Current Zondervan building. Image courtesy of the author.

ers held a premillennial viewpoint, which was reflected in the materials they published, many of which crossed denominational lines.<sup>18</sup>

Bernie died at a relatively young age of fifty-six on 3 July 1966, leaving his brother Pat to carry on. After he retired, Pat moved to Florida, where he became a member of the Boca Raton Community Church. He passed away in February 1991 at the age of seventy-nine, leaving behind his wife, Mary; a daughter, Mary Schouter; and two sons, Robert and William. Such was his national recognition at the time that his obituary was published in the *New York Times*.<sup>19</sup>

**Louis Kregel**

While Eerdmans was selling books to students, preachers, and professors during his college days and his one year in the seminary, Louis Kregel began selling used books in 1909 from his parents' home on Jennette Avenue. Louis (Lubbertus) Kregel was born on 14 September 1890 in Meppel, Drenthe, the Netherlands, to Harm Kregel and Henrikje Lucas, making him a contemporary of William Eerdmans.<sup>20</sup> Like Eerdmans, he arrived in the United States at a young age in 1907,



Robert Kregel. Image courtesy of the Kregel family.

his contemporaries Eerdmans and the Zondervans, also saw a niche in Dutch-speaking Grand Rapids for Dutch-language books and started

importing Dutch-language religious books from the Netherlands. Strictly speaking, Kregel, by starting his business in 1909, was the first publisher in Grand Rapids, because even though Eerdmans had been peddling books for years, he did not officially go into publishing until 1911. Like the Zondervan brothers, Kregel began by selling books from his parents' home, but soon realized he needed more space and opened up a bookstore, first at 1155 Alpine, and by 1916 at 947 Leonard. The start-up business apparently did not bring in enough to support his young family because by 1917 Kregel is listed as "County Supervisor" on his WWI Registration.<sup>21</sup> The same registration also listed "poor eyesight" that probably exempted him from service. An astute businessman, Kregel realized that paying full price for books was often prohibitive for Dutch immigrants, so he began gathering used books to sell at a lower price. He canvassed pastors, professors, and churches for used books, so that at one point his used books inventory exceeded his new books.

His business grew to be one of the country's largest dealerships in used books. Like the Zondervans, Kregel also traveled around the country and to Europe to purchase books, which often included special editions for valued customers. Sometime after his marriage, Louis followed Rev. Martin De Haan to



Louis and Lena Kregel. Image courtesy of the Kregel family.



Kregel Book Store, 947 Leonard NW, Grand Rapids. Image courtesy of the Kregel family.

Calvary Undenominational, where he served on the board of trustees. Rev. De Haan preached a dispensational theology, personal conversion, adult baptism, and moral separation from the world.<sup>22</sup>

With more evangelical and



Current Kregel Bookstore. Image courtesy of the author.

fundamentalist readers as customers, Kregel began to branch out to meet the spiritual needs of these readers as well as the professional needs of pastors, missionaries, teachers, and Christian leaders. In spite of adhering to a non-Reformed theology, Kregel kept a close friendship with Rev. Jacob P. Smith, pastor of the Evergreen Park CRC, who preached the sermon at Kregel's funeral.

Kregel passed away at the rather young age of forty-nine years in 1939. His son, Robert, only twenty, took over and in 1949 changed its name to Kregel Publications, initially publishing only classic reprints. Their used books section remained highly popular and a boon to budget-minded theology students and pastors.

### Herman Baker

A latecomer to the industry, Herman Baker, Louis Kregel's nephew, had immigrated to Grand Rapids in 1925 when he was a teenager.<sup>23</sup> Like the Zondervan brothers who got their start by working for their uncle, Herman Baker went to work for his uncle Louis Kregel, where he devel-

oped a love for books, especially religious classics. This fueled his desire to go into the book business as well. This dream became a reality when in 1939 he began reissuing older classic religious texts, as Eerdmans had been doing. Baker was only twenty-eight in 1939 when he opened his bookstore at 1019 Wealthy Street. He filled his homemade shelves with almost five hundred used books he had collected over the years. The business flourished so that a year later, in 1940, Baker Book House released *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, by Dr. William Hendriksen, a Calvin Seminary New Testament professor. Biblical, conservative, and scholarly, *More than Conquerors* was the type of book Baker loved to publish.

In the 1940s, his intuitive business sense led him to add new and used fiction for women whose husbands were away from home due to the war and wanted a lighter fare. By 1949 Baker Book House was the leading

distributor of new and used religious books in the United States and abroad, shipping books to such far-flung places as South Africa, Korea, and Hungary. Baker also had a mission statement, namely, "Our mission is to publish high-quality writings that represent historic Christianity and serve the diverse interests and concerns of evangelical readers."<sup>24</sup> Another decade later, in 1959, Baker Book House listed 175 active titles.

The bookstore hummed with activity on Mondays, the traditional ministers' day off, when pastors would browse for the latest book on a subject, or meet fellow pastors to discuss and debate theological issues.

Pastors who were in the city for meetings, or visiting family, would soon find it necessary to visit the Baker Book House. Well-known religious figures found at times in the aisles included D. James Kennedy, David Otis Fuller, and J. I. Packer.

But, it wasn't just in-house sales that led to its growth; Baker Book House carried on a huge volume of



Herman Baker. Image courtesy of Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Baker Book Store, 1019 Wealthy SE, Grand Rapids. Image courtesy of Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Current Baker Book House building. Image courtesy of the author.

mail-order business, shipping books to such unlikely customers as Ezra Carter, June Carter Cash's father.

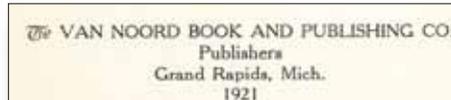
Richard Baker, Herman's oldest son, became president upon Herman's retirement in 1987. Even so, Herman continued to play a role in the book business as publisher-at-large, until his death in February 1991 at age seventy-nine in Stuart, Florida. He and his wife, Angeline Sterkenberg, whom he had married in 1932, had divided their remaining years between Florida and the Holland Home in Grand Rapids, where they were members of Calvin CRC.

#### And One More—Robert Van Noord

Another young man who saw a livelihood in the publishing business was Robert Van Noord. Van Noord's parents had arrived in the United States from the Netherlands in the 1860s, settling in the Vriesland, Michigan, area, where Robert was born in 1880. At age nineteen he enrolled in the Grand Rapids Business School and began working for several businesses in

the city, including several years at the Kent County Savings Bank, moving up to become its manager. According to Ernest B. Fisher, editor of *Grand Rapids and Kent County Historical Account*,

Van Noord had bought an interest in the Eerdmans-Sevensma Company in December 1912 and began working at the company as secretary and treasurer.<sup>25</sup> Sometime around 1918 he struck out on his own and published under the name The Van Noord Book and Publishing Company, listing his address at 513 Eastern Avenue. Van Noord belonged to the Christian Reformed Church, and the books he published reflect his faith. Four such are: Ymen P. De Jong, *Mede Erfgenamen van Christus*, published in 1919; Goffe Elzenga, *Comfort for the Suffering*, translated from the Dutch by Anna Top Haan, published in 1919; Henry Danhof, *De Idee van het Genadeverbond*, published in 1920; and in 1921, John Dolfin's *Bringing the Gospel in Hogan and Pueblo*.<sup>26</sup> All four of these authors were pastors. At



Logo in books published by Van Noord Publisher. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

some point, Van Noord decided that the publishing business was not for him and returned to banking, in 1924 becoming the manager of the Eastern Avenue branch of the Commercial Savings Bank. In 1930, he was book-keeper for an excavating company living on Bates and in 1940 Van Noord was selling insurance in Los Angeles. He later returned to Grand Rapids, where he died in December 1967. He was married to Ella Lindemulder in 1905, and the two had five children.

#### Conclusion

Even though these early founders have passed on, their companies (except for Sevensma and Hulst) remain in the hands of second- and third-generation family members. They have branched out and undergone mergers, acquisitions, and diversifications. The computer and with it the internet have exploded information technology that would have seemed like science fiction in the early 1900s. Nevertheless, the sheer output of Bibles, scholarly books, commentaries, Bible dictionaries, concordances, devotionals, etc. over the years is almost unimaginable. Unimaginable as well is the lasting positive effects these immigrant men had on the faith and spiritual well-being of the Reformed community in North America by publishing quality religious materials to an eager reading public. 📖

## Endnotes

1. Louis D. Petit, Willem P. S. Kluyt, Willem N. Du Rieu, *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van den Nederlandschen boekhandel* (Amsterdam, Van Kampen, 1896), 290. The most noted of these were Elzeviers, Willem and Johannes Blaeu, Janssonius-Waesberge, and Wetsein. Their combined efforts resulted in a book printers, binders, and dealers guild as early as 1662.

2. Unless otherwise noted, the information on the Eerdmans, Zondervan, and Baker families is from: Ann Byle, *The Baker Book House Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014); James E. Ruark & Ted W. Engstrom, *The House of Zondervan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981); John B. Hulst, *A Doorkeeper in God's Household* (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2005). Larry ten Harmsel and Reinder van Til, *An Eerdmans Century 1911-2011* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

3. 28 June 1867 in Loppersum, Groningen, the Netherlands.

4. Small one- and two-room schools on Alpine Avenue and Crosby Street were begun in the 1880s by the CRC to instill in the children of Christian Reformed parents the faith of their church. Unless one was a principal or had a teaching certificate, which Sevensma did not have, the salaries were very low, and Sevensma probably saw a better future in book publishing.

5. Henry Walkotten, *De Zuni Indianen: een deel van het zendingsveld der Chr. Ger. Kerk* (Grand Rapids, Sevensma, 1910).

6. *Grand Rapids Herald*, Sunday, 6 October 1929, obit article on page 3. Anniversary booklet of Eastern Avenue CRC, Semi-Centennial Celebration of Eastern Avenue CRC, September 17, 1929, 36-38. Calvin Archives. After the death of his wife, Emma, Brant married Hattie Beekman, a Zuni Mission matron.

7. Winsemius Ledger at the Grand Rapids Public Library.

8. His first wife, Wilhelmina Smmitter,

died in 1933; he then married her sister, Elizabeth Smmitter, who died on 17 August 1945. J. B. is the grandfather of John B. Hulst, the president of Dordt College from 1982 to 1996.

9. *Ibid*, 20.

10. Barend K. Kuiper, Martin Luther, *The Formative Years; Being the story of the First thirty-four Years of his Life* (Grand Rapids: MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, *The Reformed Press*, 1933).

11. William B. Eerdmans, *De ramp van de Titanic* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans-Sevensma, 1912).

12. Eerdmans married German-born Paula Install (1890-1988) on 31 August 1911 in New York City. The two other children were Ilse, born in 1920; she married Reynold Weidenaar; and Eleanor, born in 1921, who died of strep throat in 1930.

13. In 1916 Eerdmans-Sevensma published Henry J. G. Van Andel's *Holland grammar with exercises, elementary course for schools and colleges*. In 1944 the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company published Van Andel's Dutch grammar, with conversations, rhymes, drills, modern Dutch-spelling rules and English-Dutch vocabularies.

14. Larry ten Harmsel and Reinder Van Til, *An Eerdmans Century 1911-2011* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), x.

15. Henry Stob, "William B. Eerdmans, Sr. 1882-1966" in the *Banner*, 20 May 1966, p. 21.

16. Abraham Kuyper, *Women of the Old Testament; fifty meditations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House [c1933]).

17. Zylstra would go on to become an English professor at the college.

18. Premillennialism refers to the belief in an earthly millennial reign of Christ as well as a rapture of the faithful coming before (dispensational) or after (historic) the Great Tribulation preceding the Millennium.

19. *The New York Times*, 12 May 1993.

20. Parents Harm Jans Kregel (1851-1913) and Hendrikje Lucas (1861-1926); siblings: Herman (1892-1929); Johan (1896-1929). On 15 May 1917, he married Lena Vander Ploeg (1896-1992, in Cook, Illinois), born in Cook County, IL. Their sons were Charles Edward, born on 19 Aug 1924; Harold James, born on 23 June 1929; and Kenneth Lloyd, born 7 Feb 1939. The elder Harm and Hendrikje Kregel were members of Alpine Avenue CRC.

21. WWI Registrations on Ancestry.com

22. James D. Bratt and Christopher H. Meehan, *Gathered at the River, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and its People of Faith* (Grand Rapids: MI, Eerdmans, 1993), 135-136.

23. Herman's parents were Richard Bakker and Jenny Kregel Bakker; Jenny was a sister to Louis Kregel. The family dropped the second "k" from their last name.

24. Ann Byle, *The Baker Book House Story* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2014), 11.

25. Ernest B. Fisher, ed. *Grand Rapids and Kent County Historical Account of their progress from first settlement to the present time*. (Chicago: Robert O. Law Company, 1918), 381-382. In the material I researched on Eerdmans-Sevensma, I found no reference to this partnership buy-in.

26. James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America; a History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 103. Rev. Henry Danhof's book was a lecture he gave on the Covenant of Common Grace held at a Christian Reformed Ministers' conference held in June 1919 in Grand Rapids. Bratt states that Danhof and Herman Hoeksema were friends and that this lecture may have been the first attack on the doctrine of Common Grace.

# Kindred Spirits and a Common Origin

## Recapturing Material on a Reformed Legacy

James A. De Jong

If you could turn the clock back a hundred years and peruse your grandparents' and great-grandparents' reading materials, you might be surprised what you would find. And, if you could read through archived issues of *De Wachter* and *De Hope*, you would discover that in the early twentieth century both periodicals appealed to many of the same Dutch readers, whether Reformed or Christian Reformed. The former was the religious weekly of the Christian Reformed Church that began appearing in February 1868 and was edited by Rev. Douwe Vander Werp until his death in 1876.<sup>1</sup> The later was the comparable paper of the western wing of the Reformed Church in America that first appeared in December 1865 and emanated from its leadership based in Holland, Michigan.<sup>2</sup> Both papers initially cited with some regularity the more confessional and devotional writings from earlier eras in the Netherlands. By the 1880s they both also began following and discussing with keen interest material generated by the Neo-Calvinist movement led by Abraham Kuyper.

This appeal to the same and kindred sources in the Netherlands can be understood only in terms of the common origin of both denominational immigrant groups. Both were overwhelmingly, although not entirely, products of the 1834 secession movement known as the *Afscheiding*. The majority of the first generation of immigrant pastors educated in the Netherlands were trained at the movement's theological school in Kampen, founded in 1854. The ones ordained earlier were usually prepared by leaders who established that school. Understandable, therefore, is that these immigrant leaders read and relied on the same sources in their ministries. It explains why, from the 1850s until they retired, such men rather readily

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Theological School, Kampen, the Netherlands. Image from *Sola Gratia* 1854-1894. Hekman Library, Calvin College, Grand Rapids Michigan.

moved from serving congregations in the one group to serving those in the other. Prior to leaving the Netherlands, they often served in common capacities, as did Vander Werp and Bernardus De Beij, prominent Chicago RCA pastors after immigrating, when they planted their feet under the same boardroom table together in Kampen in the late 1850s. But in America, these two disagreed fiercely on the legitimacy of joining the older, eastern RCA and aired their cases in the two church papers noted. But theologically and devotionally, they and their colleagues were essentially kindred spirits.

The purpose of this article is to review recent attempts to recapture in English translation important parts of that shared legacy. Understanding its spiritual origin and profile contributes to clarifying and deepening for those who have inherited what it is that has shaped them. For despite subsequent divergences among them, they still share many convictions and practices from a common background.

### Heidelberg Catechism Commentaries

From the early days of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, it was mandated that the Heidelberg Catechism guide preaching on a weekly basis. That imperative was largely respected and followed well into the twentieth century, both there and in Dutch immigrant settlements globally. Literature on this queen of Reformation confessions continues to appear regularly in our own day. This includes study guides, interpretations, academic analyses, sermons in English and in translation, and commentaries—all with fresh insight and application. The document itself and literature about it can now be found in numerous languages. It is found in the confessional collections of churches beyond the Dutch Reformed

tradition, including the Presbyterian Church USA, some Baptist groups (doctrinally sanitized!), and even the United Methodist Church.

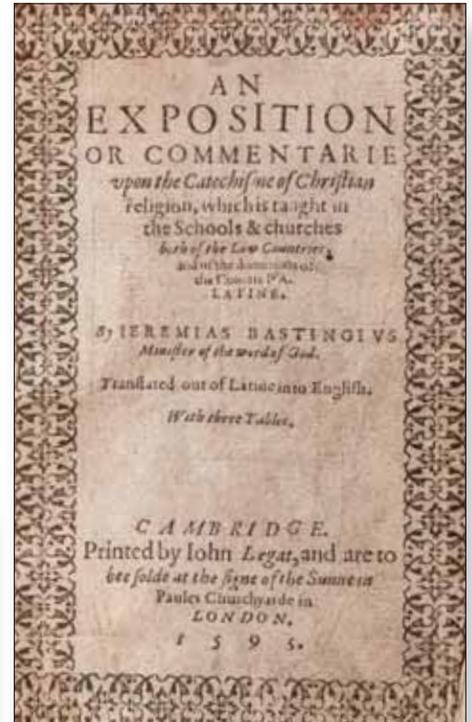
Google and learn!

What has been missing in the contemporary context has been Heidelberg Catechism material in English on which the nineteenth-century immigrant pastors and thoughtful parishioners relied. So when the Dutch Reformed Translation Society's board deliberated on what to choose



Heidelberg Catechism. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

to plug this lacuna, it considered a number of options,<sup>3</sup> it considered Jeremias Bastingius's highly praised and widely used exposition of the catechism, published in 1588, the first one to appear in the Dutch language. It might have done that of the seventeenth-century giant Gijsbert Voetius that was published in 1662 and reprinted with notes in two volumes by Abraham Kuyper in 1891. Both works were known and respected by



Bastingius Exposition. Image courtesy Dutch Reformed Translation Society, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

contributors to *De Wachter* and *De Hope*. Both give insight into how the catechism was understood and applied when they were written. Other options existed, since popular and respected ministers in the Netherlands often published collections of their Heidelberg Catechism sermons. But the society decided ultimately to put money into translating that of Theodorus van der Groe, a late-eighteenth-century pastor.

The dust jacket of this recently published translation describes him well:

Theodore van der Groe (1705-1784) is one of the last and most well-known representatives of the Dutch Further Reformation.<sup>4</sup> He devoted fifty-four years of his life to faithful preaching and pastoral ministry, serving two Reformed churches in the Netherlands: Rijnsaterwoude for ten years and Kralingen for forty-four years. His numerous books convey a healthy balance of Reformed doctrine



Theodore van der Groe. Image courtesy Dutch Reformed Translation Society, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

combined with a biblical form of pastoral spirituality. His involvement in various ecclesiastical controversies led him to write extensively on the essence and assurance of faith, justification, and the relationship of law and gospel. His sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism, published here for the first time, have long been regarded as his most important work.<sup>5</sup>

The van der Groe material is significant because it reflects what was actually heard from the pulpit and what shaped the preaching of the many who read and echoed him. He was regularly acknowledged in the immigrant papers. His commentary could be polemical, as when he remonstrated against Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Anabaptist emphases. The sermons were couched in a rigidly prescribed format. They were doctrinal on fine, technical points of Reformed theology that have been lost or ignored as overly conjectural in our own age. But it contained much explicitly, extensively practical and helpfully reflective material on how heart-felt Christian faith should be lived on a daily basis. His sermon on the seventh commandment is a good example.<sup>6</sup> In eight detailed points it explains on what

terms marriage ought to be entered. This amounts to detailed pre-marital counseling from the pulpit. It laments and warns against ungodly attitudes and practices on marriage in his day. He explains the biblical admonitions against incest, polygamy, divorce, fornication, extra-marital sex, and sodomy. It advocates a wholesome, chaste spirit as an essential expression of godliness. He rejects practices rife in pornography today and specifies proper sexual decorum for married couples. It is the kind of sermon that holds peoples' attention.

Van der Groe reflected, shaped, and perpetuated the spiritual legacy of the people who read *Origins* (and even those who don't).

### Doctrinal Resources

Doctrinal theology organized topically and logically what the Catechism taught. It did so using a variety of organizational models. The one that most shaped the earliest nineteenth-century immigrant pastors was a simple, question-and-answer approach to major themes: revelation, God, the person of Christ, his work, salvation in its various dimensions and sequence, the church and sacraments, the second coming and final judgment. It was not scientifically reflective on the nature and history of theology as an intellectual enterprise. By the end of the nineteenth century, immigrant pastors and those born and educated in America but who were still reading and shaped by Dutch sources were using more analytical and intellectually sophisticated approaches to this material.

An example of the former type is the writing of Aegidius Francken (1676-1743). In 1857 the synod of the Christian Secession Reformed Church went on record that his *Kern der Christelijke Leer* (The Core of Christian Doctrine) was to be

the mandatory textbook for teaching doctrinal theology at Kampen. Both Vander Werp and De Beij were molded by it, and both supported that decision as Kampen board members. G. E. Boer, the first teacher appointed to the emerging CRC theological school at its founding in 1876, studied Francken as a Kampen student and used his book in the same way in his own teaching in Grand Rapids.<sup>7</sup> While advocated by some as a candi-



Aegidius Francken. Image courtesy Dutch Reformed Translation Society, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

date for being translated, it is eclipsed in size, detail, and practical or ethical application by the slightly earlier work of Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711).

The *magnum opus* of à Brakel is *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, a title he based on Romans 12:1. Its four volumes saw daylight in English between 1992 and 1995.<sup>8</sup> The author organized his material according to the loci method similar to Francken's: the doctrines of God, man, Christ, the church, salvation, and the last things. But where à Brakel excels is in his

detailed treatment of the Christian faith in the context of sanctification. Sanctification is manifest in observing the ten words of the law and as living the Lord's Prayer.<sup>9</sup> It is further identified in some twenty-five Christian virtues that he explains at length.<sup>10</sup> This material presents the Christian life clearly and as entirely devoted to the Lord. There is no cheap grace here. And there is no mistaking what is expected. It is caricatured as legalism only by those whose heart is not into such material. "Father" à Brakel is respectfully, authoritatively cited in the Dutch-American religious press written in his language. Now we have him in ours.

The most significant of the later, more analytical doctrinal sources to appear in English translation are the writings of Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). A son of the Christian Seceding Reformed Church, he began his training in Kampen but soon transferred to the liberal theological faculty in Leiden, to the dismay of his father



Herman Bavinck. Image courtesy Dutch Reformed Translation Society, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

and other Secession leaders. There Bavinck contended with the sophisticated, analytical and rationalistic approach to theology he met there, and he learned to meet and respond

to it with equal or superior intellectual heft shaped by loyalty to his Reformed confessional convictions. After a brief pastorate, he was appointed to teach dogmatic theology at Kampen while still a ministerial youngster. He quickly rose to denominational prominence and gained wide respect. His approach to theology was thorough, perceptive, balanced, and fully informed on the issues of the time. His influence was magisterial, also in the Dutch-American community, where in time he was cribbed by Louis Berkhof. On several occasions he resisted Abraham Kuypers' overtures to woo him to the Free University faculty to teach dogmatic theology as his successor. Bavinck finally relented in 1902, and by then had already eclipsed Kuypers in that field. William Hendriksen began a translation of the definitive edition of Bavinck's work in the 1930s but never completed it. The Dutch Reformed Translation Society assumed that role in the 1990s, and that massive project was completed in 2008.<sup>11</sup> The society has also funded the translation of Bavinck's self-selected, definitive essays on a range of burning issues. These essays are still penetratingly relevant for thinking Christians today.<sup>12</sup>

John Bolt, general editor of Bavinck's dogmatics, has since been engaged with an international team in creating a critical edition and translation of Bavinck's manuscripts in the field of ethics. This work will eventually appear under the Baker Academic imprint. This work and other Bavinck projects can be followed on the website of the Bavinck Institute created by Bolt and associates.<sup>13</sup> A translation of Bavinck's monograph on the Holy Spirit's role in calling and regeneration, for example, has been sparked by this rekindled attention to the Herman Bavinck legacy.<sup>14</sup>

The English translation of the Bavinck dogmatics has become the

basis for translations into the Korean, Indonesian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian languages. The English translation has taken the Bavinck legacy global in the last fifteen years.

A second example of the more sophisticated approach to doctrinal theology is that of Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949). Vos was a younger contemporary of Bavinck. He emigrated as a teenager when his father, a leading Secession pastor trained in Kampen and shaped by the preaching of



Geerhardus Vos. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Bavinck's father, accepted the call in 1881 to become pastor of the Spring Street (or First) Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Having completed high school in the Netherlands, the younger Vos enrolled in the recently established Theological School of the CRC (later renamed Calvin College and Seminary). Within two years he so distinguished himself that he was offered a part-time position while still a student to assist G. E. Boer by training his fellow students in preparatory and language courses. After graduate studies in Europe, he was given a full appointment to the school. His brilliance in biblical studies and dogmatic theology was soon noted more widely. He declined an invitation to teach Old Testament

courses at the Free University and deflected several similar overtures from Princeton Seminary before accepting one there offered in 1893. He was succeeded at Calvin by his mother's brother, Henricus Beuker, who had edited the leading *Afscheiding* theological journal, *De Vrije Kerk* (The Free/Liberated Church), for twenty years before emigrating to Grand Rapids in 1895.<sup>15</sup>

Geerhardus Vos taught biblical studies at Princeton until retiring in 1932. He produced landmark monographs in biblical theology, but never returned to the discipline of systematic theology. His Grand Rapids notes in that field have existed in stenciled form for over a century. Their translation into English by retired Westminster Theological Seminary Professor Richard Gaffin was completed with the appearance in print of the fifth, last volume, in 2016.<sup>16</sup> Whether Vos's work would have ever equaled or excelled that of Bavinck in dogmatic theology is an open question. What its availability in English does provide is exposure of the doctrinal underpinnings of his biblical studies. It is another window into the nineteenth-century, loyally confessional Reformed legacy now injected into the wider American theological stream.

### The Old Devotional Authors

The devotional Dutch writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to a significant degree shaped the religious practices and dynamics of the Bavinck, Vos, and Beuker homes. These authors were usually successful, respected pastors like Francken and à Brakel. But sometimes they were also university professors of theology like Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) or Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617-1666) who respectively taught at the universities in Utrecht and Leiden. Another was Herman Witsius (1636-1708) who successively

taught at the universities of Franeker, Utrecht, and Leiden. The output of their devotional or edifying (*stichtelijk*, in Dutch) literature was substantial. It kept alive confessional and experiential Reformed faith through the bleak years of the Enlightenment that permeated the Netherlands religious establishment in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The people who fed on it often neglected official worship services and met in conventicles for praise, prayer, and hearing an appropriate sermon read to them. Conventicle leaders were readers and discerning thinkers. The conventicles frequently constituted the nucleus of a new Secession congregation in the 1830s. No surprise, then, that a great deal of this so-called Further Reformation material was republished in that era and read in Secession circles. No surprise then, that the conventicle model was replicated in Dutch immigrant communities, led by devout lay leaders, before a congregation could be established in the American Midwest and an ordained minister could be afforded there.

But that kind of uplifting, soul-replenishing material had deeper roots. It was the continuation, in a form modified by the Reformation, of a legacy inherited from the Middle Ages. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-

1153), a French abbot in the Cistercian order, contributed to it with his spiritual mysticism expressed in writings like *On Loving God*, a work that articulated seven stages or steps toward closer union and communion with God. Similarly, Thomas à Kempis (1379/80-1471), a product of the Brethren of the Common Life movement, enriched it through his devotional classic *The Imitation of Christ* that frequently transforms everyday experiences into spiritual oases. The contributions of both figures to the spirituality of the Further Reformation in the Netherlands are investigated honestly and appreciatively by Arie de Reuver.<sup>17</sup> De Reuver illustrates how this works out in the edifying writings of Willem Teellinck (1579-1629), Theodorus à Brakel (1608-1669, father of Willhelmus), Guiljelmus Saldenus (1627-1694), Wilhelmus à Brakel, and Herman Witsius. A chapter is devoted to each of these figures.

The de Reuver translation was subsidized by the Dutch Reformed Translation Society as a contemporary scholarly introduction to the "old spiritual writers" in the Netherlands that it features in its Classics of Reformed Spirituality series. A list of the authors and titles in that series offers a sampling of the range of topics these writings covered:

**Jean Taffin**, *The Marks of God's Children*. Translated by Peter Y. De Jong, edited by James A. De Jong (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003). Taffin (c. 1529-1602) was a Franco-phone Reformed pastor driven out of the southern Netherlands by the Spanish Inquisition who served as court chaplain to William the Silent and was one of the architects of the emerging Dutch Reformed Church. His book treats how to handle persecution as a child of God.

**Willem Teellinck**, *The Path of True*



Arie de Reuver. Image courtesy Dutch Reformed Translation Society, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

*Godliness*. Translated by Annemie Godbehere, edited by Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003). In nine “books,” this Zeeland pastor explains the nature, enemies, promotion, expression, instruments, and motives of godly living.

**Godefridus Udemans**, *The Practice of Faith, Hope, and Love*. Translated by Annemie Godbehere, edited by Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012). Udemans (c. 1581-1649) was a pastor in the province of Zeeland who explains here the cardinal virtues of faith as professing the Apostles’ Creed, hope as praying the Lord’s Prayer, and love as keeping the Ten Commandments.

**Gisbertus Voetius** and **Johannes Hoornbeeck**, *Spiritual Desertion*. Translated by John Vriend and Harry Boonstra, edited by M. Eugene Osterhaven (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003). This volume contains an essay by each man on how to understand and cope with a sense of being abandoned by God, a common spiritual malady in their circles.

**Jodocus van Lodenstein**, *A Spiritual Appeal to Christ’s Bride*. Translated by Bartel Elshout, edited by Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010). The book consists of nine sermons by this mystically inclined pastor and poet (1620-1677). He emphasized that church members need to practice self-denial and submissiveness to the Lord, spiritual revitalization, genuine conversion, freedom from spiritual excuses and laziness, and intimate fellowship with Christ.

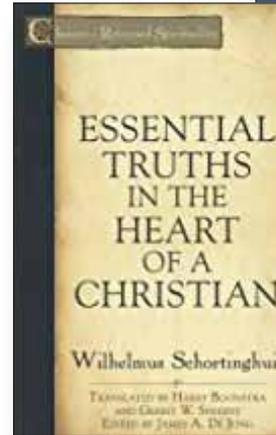
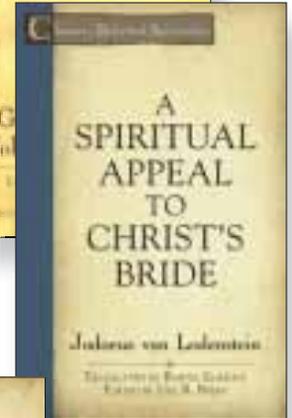
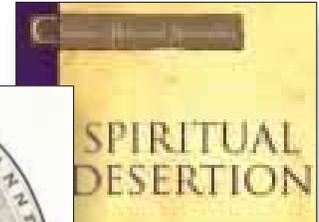
**Guilelmus Saldenus** and **Wilhelmus à Brakel**. *In Remembrance of Him: Profiting from the Lord’s Supper*. Translated by Bartel Elshout, ed-

ited by James A. De Jong (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012). The two essays here instruct people how to prepare for, approach, participate in, and benefit from the Lord’s Supper. Saldenus (1627-1694) and à Brakel were both respected pastors.

**Jacobus Koelman**, *The Duties of Parents*. Translated by John Vriend, edited by M. Eugene Osterhaven (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003). Pastor, prolific author, and translator of much Puritan devotional material, Koelman (1632-1695) was controversial and defended the early conventicle movement. Here he offers advice on godly child rearing.

**Wilhelmus Schortinghuis**, *Essential Truths in the Heart of a Christian*. Translated by Harry Boonstra and Gerrit W. Sheeres, edited by James A. De Jong (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009). This book by pastor Schortinghuis (1700-1750) is a succinct doctrinal primer in question-and-answer format that was widely used to instruct people in the faith.

Collectively, these reprinted materials by Dutch devotional writers of the Further Reformation are representative of a much wider body of literature. These writers were sometimes referenced with respect in the early Dutch American religious press. Some of their material continued to be read and referenced in sermons and published meditations on this



Clockwise from top:  
Voetius book.  
Van Lodenstein book.  
Schortinghuis book.  
Taffin book.  
All images courtesy Dutch Reformed Translation Society, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

side of the Atlantic. The names of the most prominent ones appear in the index of Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*, the English translation. They are also referred to by name and with appreciation, sometimes qualified, by Abraham Kuyper in his religious weekly *De Heraut* (The Herald) from 1877 until his death in 1920. Occasionally Kuyper quotes them there at some length.

**Abraham Kuyper Translations**  
Speaking of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), the ambitious translation project of his main theological works currently underway deserves to be highlighted. A well-funded team of excellent translators and capable editors is working on a seventeen-

volume collection in English of his major works. The endeavor is being marketed as the “Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology.” The volumes are being published by Lexham Press in collaboration with the Acton Institute in Grand Rapids and the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society. It is under the general editorship of Melvin Flikkema and Jordan J. Ballor.



Abraham Kuyper. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Kuyper, of course, was a very public figure in the Netherlands between 1865 and 1920. He endeavored to reintroduce Christian principles and leadership into all aspects of Dutch life in those years. He did so in journalism by creating a Christian newspaper called *De Standaard* (The Standard) that initially included a weekly religious insert before it began appearing separately as *De Heraut*. He labored tirelessly for the cause of education, a mantle he assumed from the aging Christian patrician Groen van Prinsterer. As a legislator in the 1870s and 1880s, he worked for the legal reforms that would give Christian schools breathing room and a just share of the Dutch economic pie. To give scientific stature and expertise to his envisioned reforms, he created the

Free University of Amsterdam in the early 1880s. He assumed the chair in dogmatic theology at that school, and in that capacity he generated a number of noteworthy theological works. Many of these are multi-volume works and most of them were reprints of series of articles first published in *De Heraut*. He pursued a political agenda as leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, on whose wings he soared to the level of Prime Minister of the Netherlands. There he crafted a new colonial policy and dealt with major labor, business, and economic issues. He was in tune with major social changes and showed deference to the common folk and the problems they faced in a rapidly urbanizing and industrializing society.

Five volumes of “Abraham Kuyper: Collected Works in Public Theology” have so far appeared in print; they are also available electronically. These five include *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto*; the first two of the three-volume work *Pro Rege: Living under Christ’s Kingship*; volume one of *Common Grace: God’s Gifts for a Fallen World*, to be followed by two more; and *On the Church*, an anthology of seven Kuyper addresses and essays on the church. Slated yet to appear beside those on common grace and Christ’s kingship are four anthologies: one on charity and social justice, a second on Islam, a third on business and economics, and a fourth one on education. When complete, this collection will give English-language readers more comprehensive access to Kuyper’s broader thought than has so far been available to them. His *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* has existed in English for several generations, as have a sizeable portion of his weekly meditations and his famous *Stone Lectures* on Calvinism delivered at Princeton Seminary in 1898.

Another current but independent Kuyper project underway is the

publication of his first collection of meditations. Underwritten by the Dutch Reformed Translation Society, its translation into English opens windows into the man’s soul. The collection exposes the spirituality that undergirded his public agenda. It does so from a wide range of biblical passages and topics. This collection is important in that it reflects Kuyper’s spirituality at the dynamic early stages of his public career.<sup>18</sup>

Kuyper’s following in the Netherlands faded over the next two generations, and his descendants have abandoned his strategy of “pillarization” in public life. In his own time he was read and his ideas debated in the Dutch-language religious press in America, especially at the pinnacle of his political career. This included some of his devotional material that was even translated and printed in their English-language papers. But, Americanization had set in. It advanced to the point of no return in many Dutch-American quarters; his public theology and political agenda seemed unworkable in their new context. In other quarters, immigrants attempted to implement his public strategy. It was significantly successful with respect to separate Christian schools, but a failure in the areas of beginning viable Christian daily newspapers and founding a Reformed political party. Kuyper’s enduring legacy, however, is that he shaped a deep conviction that Christian discipleship involves discerning, redemptive engagement in all areas of human life. Rereading his material in the English language today will inspire initiatives relevant to today’s situation. The widespread new interest in Kuyper’s thought that sparked these translations is important and exciting.

### Retrospect and Prospect

In the Christian Reformed Church, subscriptions to *De Wachter* were

surpassed in number by those to the *Banner* in the mid 1920s. The magazine, which had garnered new readers after the post-World War II immigration, finally ceased publication in the late 1980s. In the Reformed Church in America, *De Hope* folded during the Great Depression, largely since that denomination did not experience a great, new infusion of Dutch-speaking and Dutch-reading members. Smaller Dutch Reformed modern immigrant denominations shared much or most of the legacy reflected in the literature surveyed above. Loss of Dutch-language periodicals in their circles has also distanced them from access to it.

We cannot and would not want to return to the days when this body of material was produced and to the circumstances that generated it. What translations of a cross-section of it can do is put us in touch with a shared legacy. That will help us understand better what has shaped us and who we are. It might even fortify a common spirit. ☞

### Endnotes

1. On Vander Werp see Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, *Son of Secession: Douwe J. Vander Werp* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006).

2. Useful background on Steffens's editorship of this periodical appears in chapter 9 of "We live presently under a waning moon": *Nicolaus Martin Steffens as leader of the Reformed Church in America in the West in years of transition* (1878-1895), George Harinck (Holland, MI: The Van Raalte Press, 2013), 81-90.

3. Information on this organization can be found on its website: [www.dutchreformed.org](http://www.dutchreformed.org).

4. Dutch Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*) is a Dutch term that refers to a period of church history in the Netherlands following the Reformation from roughly 1600 until 1750. The period and its representatives are known for their desire to apply the principles of the Reformation to their day—their homes, churches, and, indeed, all sectors of Dutch society in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

5. Theodorus van der Groe, *The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism*, 2 vols. Translated by Bartel Elshout, edited by Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books and the Dutch Reformed Translation Society, 2016), dustjacket.

6. Van der Groe, II, 327-41.

7. See James A. De Jong, "Sometimes 'buried treasure' lies in plain view: G. E. Boer's Copy of Aegidius Francken," *Origins* 30/2 (2012), 37-42.

8. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 4 vols. Translated by Bartel Elshout (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992-1995).

9. À Brakel, all of volume III.

10. À Brakel, most of volume IV.

11. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. Edited by John Bolt, translated by John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003-2008).

12. Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*. Edited by John Bolt, translated by Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

13. Follow this work at <https://bavinckinstitute.org>

14. Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration*. Edited with an introduction by J. Mark Beach, translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008).

15. For insight into the intimate connections between the Bavinck, Vos, and Beuker families and the type of spirituality and preaching that characterized them, see James A. De Jong, Henry J. Kuiper: *Shaping the Christian Reformed Church, 1907-1962* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 1-3.

16. Geerharus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5 vols. Translated and edited by Richard C. Gaffin (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012-2016).

17. Arie de Reuver, *Sweet Communion: Trajectories of Spirituality from the Middle Ages through the Further Reformation*. Translated by James A. De Jong (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007). This translation has been reprinted this year by Reformation Heritage Books.

18. For a comprehensive review of Kuyper's meditations, see James A. De Jong, "The Heart and Soul of Abraham Kuyper: Reflections on His Meditations," *Calvin Theological Journal* 52/1 (April 2017), 37-61.

# Finally, A Little News from Lark, North Dakota

Paula K. Vander Hoven

The short-lived Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Lark, North Dakota, may well have owed its existence to some union bosses and thugs operating on the south side of Chicago in 1905.<sup>1</sup>

Rentze Nicolay was a painter and decorator, and his sons, Sjoerd and Hendrik, worked beside him in the Roseland area of Chicago. For reasons of conscience, Rentze refused to join the union and for several months worked under the strain of

having his completed work damaged or destroyed by union thugs.<sup>2</sup> Other non-union businessmen were being injured or even killed.<sup>3</sup> He received permission to own a weapon, so he carried a concealed revolver and posted his sons as lookouts while he worked. But none of these efforts could allay his legitimate fears. After an especially close call and fervent prayers, Rentze, along with Willem Vogel, Peter van den Burg, and one other man from the Roseland CRC,

accepted an invitation from a land agent to consider homesteading in North Dakota.<sup>4</sup> In November 1905, they traveled there by train and purchased land for \$8 an acre. Eventually they built sod houses for their families near what became the small community of Lark.

Other members of the Roseland CRC had different reasons to seek a new location and livelihood. Peter van den Burg, Willem



Roseland CRC. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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Peter and Johanna van den Burg. Image courtesy of Grace Nicolai Droog.

Vogel, Gijsbert Den Besten, Johannes Meijer (and perhaps Hendrik van den Burg), as well as hundreds of other Dutchmen were all employed by the Pullman Palace Car Company.<sup>5</sup> In 1886 and again in 1894 the workers went on strike against the union. The Dutch for the most part opposed the unions, and some of them even helped break the strikes, but the confrontations were bloody and brutal and future employment was uncertain.<sup>6</sup> Back in Chicago for the winter, the men tried to encourage other members of the Roseland CRC to join them in establishing a Dutch colony near Lark. The pastor thought the idea was absurd: “All there are is Russians and Indians and the winters are so severe that the jack rabbits freeze stiff on the prairies.”<sup>7</sup> He was right, at least about the Russians, the Indians, and the severe winters, and he may have been right about the jack rabbits as well.

The winter of 1906-1907 was severe; on 3 January 1907, the average temperature in North Dakota reached no higher than 20 degrees below zero. But the cold was not the only culprit. Heavy snow made it impossible for the railroads to transport coal and other necessities. People suffered

terribly, with some of them staying in their beds to keep warm. The low temperatures that winter killed livestock, while the blizzards made farm chores extremely difficult. Homes on the prairies were not well insulated, and when even the indoor temperatures dropped below freezing, people burned wood from their barns, fences, and furniture to keep warm.<sup>8</sup> There was another stretch of brutal weather in the winter of 1911-1912. The temperature plunged to 43 degrees below zero in some places in North Dakota on 11 January, while the average temperature that month remained at minus 9 degrees.

Their Roseland pastor could not have known either about the hailstones in May and the omnipresent rattlesnakes. He also failed to mention the threat of prairie fires when warning his parishioners. In November 1906, the Nicolay and Vogel families were barely settled when a raging fire that shot flames twenty feet into the air destroyed everything in its path for eight miles. Grietje and her daughters survived by hunkering down in the firebreak outside their home with Grietje holding the family Bible in her lap.

In Chicago, Gijsbert Den Besten had been a carpenter, and Willem Vogel, Peter and Hendrik van den Burg factory were workers. They did not know how to ride horses,

build sod homes, plow fields, plant wheat, or care for livestock. Nevertheless, in Lark they became farmers. In Chicago, their wives—Grietje (van Keulen) Nicolay, Clara (Vogel) Den Besten, Adriana (Bos) Vogel, and Johanna (Cousing) van den Burg—were accustomed to running water, plumbing, electricity, gas stoves, and actual bedrooms in their homes.<sup>9</sup> They enjoyed a large church family, grocery stores, and many friends who spoke their language. On the North Dakota prairie they had none of these amenities. Over the span of the following two decades at least fifteen children were born to these Dutch families. Without a physician or midwife nearby, the women depended on each other when delivering babies in their sod houses far away from their families.<sup>10</sup>

There were few community services in Lark when the first Dutch settlers arrived. The first school opened in 1902, the post office was



Den Besten children: Neil, Jennie, Nelle, Marinus, and John. Image courtesy of Ben Peters.



Lark, North Dakota. Image courtesy Donna Vanden Burg.

established in 1906, and the Presbyterian Church was founded the same year. Two more schools were built in 1908, which served some of the newly arriving Dutch children. The town was officially established in 1910 when the railroad made its way to Lark. Later came a blacksmith shop, real estate office, hardware dealer, livery barn, and lumber company. There was a combination dry goods and grocery store with a very popular soda fountain, as well as books loaned out by the proprietor. There was even a restaurant in the early years. Telephones came to Lark in 1915.<sup>11</sup>

By June 1907, most of the new Dutch arrivals had transferred their church memberships from Chicago to the CRC in Hull, North Dakota, a one-hundred-thirty-mile distance by today's roads. In March 1909, the little group petitioned Classis Orange City to become a branch of the Hull CRC.<sup>12</sup> That request was granted, and at the September classis meeting the folks in Lark were given permission to organize as a congregation. Rev. Peter Van Vliet, home missionary for Classis Orange City, was assigned to

preach in Lark for three Sundays and was also authorized to execute the organization. The church numbered six men, four women, and twenty-one baptized children.

Den Besten and Nicolay were chosen as elders, and Vogel as deacon; immediately after their election, they signed the CRC's Form of Subscription.<sup>13</sup> Nicolay became clerk recording the minutes continually until the church was dissolved in 1929.<sup>14</sup> Den Besten was chosen president of council and continued in that capacity through January 1919, when he and his family moved to Hancock, Minnesota. Early on, brothers Sjoerd



Nicolay Sears Roebuck kit home. Image courtesy of Beth Vanden Berg.

and Hendrik Nicolay were asked to coordinate the Christian education efforts of the church. The 1911 *CRC Yearbook (Jaarboekje ten dienste der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord Amerika)* reporting for the previous year noted twenty students enrolled in Christian education classes. As the church was being formed, Jennie Vogel and Johan Nicolay petitioned the council for permission to organize a young peoples' group to be called "Uw wil geschiede" (Thy will be done). They met once a week to present essays and recitations from a Christian point of view. Council also approved their request to conduct their meetings in English as a way of improving their children's facility with the language, and, because many of the adult leadership spoke sufficient English, they were able to supervise the young people properly.<sup>15</sup> In 1912 the group had nine members.

Classis Orange City and later Classis Sioux Center regularly and faithfully sent pulpit supply pastors (sometimes for two consecutive Sundays) as well as "church visitors" from as far away as Iowa and South Dakota, sometimes a distance of more than four hundred miles.<sup>16</sup> They stayed in the "Prophet's Room" in the home of Rentze and Grietje Nicolay. These men led worship, conducted baptisms, and administered the Lord's Supper. They watched over the spiritual health of the members,

and sometimes brought advice from Classis. When there were no ordained pastors present (which was most of the time), Gijsbert Den Besten read sermons in Dutch for the gathered



Early Lark CRC building. Image courtesy of Rev. G. I. Williamson.

faithful. Families traveled to worship in horse-drawn buggies in the summer and in horse-drawn sleighs in winter. They bundled up in fur blankets and heated irons or rocks to keep themselves warm.<sup>17</sup> The elders and deacons met frequently when there was business to conduct or when visiting pastors were present. They usually met in the home of one of the members but sometimes at the local school. They held elections on a regular basis and rotated the leadership positions in the church among the available men. They conducted *censura morum* and *huisbezoek*.<sup>18</sup> They recognized and dealt with issues in the congregation such as conflicts between members, problems in families, and concern for some who strayed a bit into the local Grange or the Presbyterian Church, the latter an act that suggested disloyalty to the CRC. These matters were always taken seriously and settled—at least once with the advice of Classis. The minutes reflect the care given.

As early as 1911, the group began to discuss purchasing land and erecting their church building. Over time they considered several plots of land as well as other options. They held discussions with the local banker, but each possibility was eventually abandoned. Sometimes, as noted in

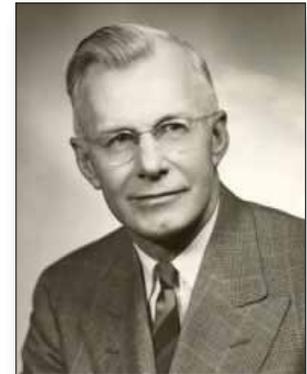
the minutes, the reason was due to the poor financial situation of the congregation. Finally, in 1918 they were able to build their sanctuary and adjacent horse barn.<sup>19</sup>

met with council to make profession of faith and, in June of the following year, after their youngest son had been born and a visiting pastor could be present, Antje and the four Meijer children were baptized. Their coming swelled the membership to thirty-seven members in five households and two single men.

Late in 1911 Johannes and Antje (de Leeuw) Meijer With the arrival of the Meijers, the core of the Dutch enclave in Lark and the church was complete. Others came and were welcomed, but these offered their contributions only briefly and left again. (There were also a few Dutch in the area who apparently did not join the church.) These five families and two single men constituted the group that weathered harsh prairie storms, serious illnesses, brutally cold weather, poor or non-existent harvests, devastating hailstorms, precarious times financially, a few internal conflicts, and a world at war. They lived among their Russian, Native American, and other ethnic neighbors. These people were Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Baptist. Their children attended local schools along with the children from these other backgrounds. All the while, the Dutch worshiped and conducted their meetings, recorded their minutes in the Dutch language. They wore wooden

shoes, ate Dutch food, and celebrated Dutch holidays. With one or two exceptions, their young people found Dutch mates in distant Dutch communities and brought them to Lark or moved to join their spouses in their locations.<sup>20</sup> They supported Christian Reformed causes like the Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Indian missions.

With a number of small, far-flung, vacant churches under its care, Classis Sioux Center arranged for seminarians to minister during the summer months. Most of them served two or three churches, spending a few weeks in each. Their travel expenses were covered and their salary was \$10 a week.<sup>21</sup> Richard Veldman was the first student to serve in Lark in 1913.<sup>22</sup> The most notable among these summer student pastors



Rev. Henry Schultze. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

was Henry Schultze, who served Lark and two other small churches in the summer of 1916.<sup>23</sup> He later served on the faculties of Grundy College, in Grundy Center, Iowa, and Calvin Theological Seminary. From 1940 to 1951 he was the president of Calvin College. For twenty-three years he wrote a weekly column in the *Banner* and was radio pastor of the CRC's *Back to God Hour*. Schultze was raised on a farm near Prairie City, Iowa,



(right) John and Anna Meijer with children in front of their sod home, circa 1910.

(above) Meijer family sod home in 1925. Images courtesy of Trudy Mann.



and in all likelihood understood and could sympathize with his parishioners in Lark. In May 1914, the congregation welcomed the membership of Marten van der Heide and his wife, Antje Jansma, from Ferwerd, Friesland, the Netherlands. The van der Heides soon discovered that conditions on the Dakota prairie were not what they had anticipated, and two months later they requested that their membership be transferred to the CRC of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. At the same time, Hendrik van den Burg's baptismal records were also sent to the Edmonton church.

Sometime in 1915, the Toney and Rulie (Smith) Sturwold family arrived in Lark from Sheldon, Iowa.<sup>24</sup> Their coming with three young children (and the birth of another daughter in Lark) must have energized the small church. By December of that year, Toney was elected deacon. But their stay in Lark was also short-lived. By July of the following year, the family had relocated to Neerlandia, Alberta, and in August 1916 their membership papers were transferred to the CRC there. About that same time, the membership papers of Hendrik Nicolay were sent to the Sioux Center, Iowa, CRC, while a year later Cornelius Den Besten transferred his

membership back to the church in Roseland.

Even as the above families were leaving, Gerhardus and Nellie (van der Sluis) De Jong and their six children, ranging in age from thirteen to a few months, and Peter and Christina (Bolt) De Vries and their two young children arrived in Lark.



Peter and Christina De Vries. Image courtesy of Janet Erdman.

By 1916 both the De Jong and De Vries families had joined the congregation.<sup>25</sup> In 1917 Teunis van den Berg was received into membership. He soon fell in love with Elizabeth Nicolay, and the two were married

the following year. This brought the membership of the small church to its highest point, with fifty-nine members in eight households.<sup>26</sup> Despite the fact that the winter of 1916-1917 was another severe one, it must have been a time of great joy and hope for the little Lark church. Christina De Vries played the organ for their services, and her husband Peter directed the choir, which under his leadership numbered sixteen members. Johan Nicolay played the violin and mandolin and led the singing in worship.

In April 1918, a correspondent (most likely the clerk, Nicolay) wrote an article in *De Wachter*. He began by writing, "Finally, a little news from Lark, North Dakota." He described an Easter service presented by the choir and Sunday school students, which included anthems, solos, and instrumental numbers. He praised the singing and the good instruction they were able to provide for their children and young people. He boasted about the \$7.55 collected in a mission offering. He noted their gratitude that a young mother in the church had recovered from a serious illness.<sup>27</sup> He was excited about the plans to build the sanctuary that summer with the lumber waiting on the church property, and the stables were already

built. He wrote of anticipating another seminary student, and made a short reference to the war in Europe. He wrote of blizzards in winter and peaceful days in the summer. He also wrote of “entrusting our expensive seed to the soil” and waiting for their crops, and also professed that “and all along, we are in the Lord’s hands.”

As the “correspondent” had anticipated, after seven years of hopeful planning, certainly prayer, repeated disappointments, and after consideration and rejection of several options, the church was built. It measured 28 by 40 feet and the stable was almost as large at 24 by 36 feet.

The little congregation received a \$500 loan from the Church Help Fund of Classis Sioux Center. The members raised funds through pledges from the congregation. Other churches in the Classis and the denomination sent small amounts: \$2.65 from Denver, Colorado, and \$2.15 from Everett, Washington. The Lark church reciprocated. That same year they took up a collection to assist the Ogilvie, Minnesota, church in building its parsonage.<sup>28</sup>

But a few months after that optimistic report, and very shortly after the completion of the church building in August 1918, real hardship struck. The expensive seed that they had entrusted to the soil came up bountifully and they anticipated a record wheat crop. But it was not to be.

Two major hailstorms ravaged a large swath of south central North Dakota, one in early August and one at the end of the month, just when the wheat was ripe and ready to harvest. Homes at Mandan near Lark were heavily damaged, electrical wires were downed, and six inches of rain fell in two hours. The wheat harvest was almost a total loss, and other crops were similarly affected.<sup>29</sup>

And, while the hail was pelting the precious wheat crop in Lark,

the council minutes detail dissension between the elders and deacons which, because the membership of the church was so small, reverberated throughout the entire congregation. The minutes also note that both parties had forgiven each other, but forgiving is not necessarily forgetting, and there may well have been lingering hard feelings among the group.

Whatever their individual reasons may have been, four families left Lark over the next several months—all for Minnesota. Newlyweds Teunis and Elizabeth (Nicolay) van den Berg moved to Brooten in January 1919. The De Jong family left for Edgerton in the fall of that year, and by January 1920, the De Vries family had resettled in Ogilvie. Perhaps the biggest blow to those who remained was the departure of their long-time council president and worship leader, Gijsbert Den Besten and his wife, Clara, for Hancock, also in 1919. The departing members and their fifteen children seriously depleted the church’s Christian education program, leaving the little church with only five families—the faithful core of the early membership. Those who were left must have been heartbroken with the departure of their president, Sunday morning worship leader, choir director, and organist along with their families.

The council minutes between

February 1919 and March 1928 are missing and with them a great many details of the congregation. But from the minutes of Classis Sioux Center we learn that the church continued to receive regular pulpit supply even though it failed to send a delegate or even an explanatory letter to classis meetings (which was duly noted).

Then, in March 1922, Classis made the decision (certainly based on reports from visiting pastors) that the congregation of Lark would no longer exist as an independent church, and that for their spiritual wellbeing the membership certificates of the folks in Lark should be transferred to the Hull CRC in North Dakota. A committee of three from as far away as Iowa and Minnesota was delegated to travel to Lark, implement this decision, and arrange for the sale of the buildings. At subsequent meetings they cited their reasons, namely, the membership was too small to properly exercise the offices of elder and deacon, most of the members were part of one extended family, and it was not realistic to hope for new members in the future.<sup>30</sup> They wrote, “This congregation lives so much by itself in a worldly environment.” The little band at Lark did not settle into this decision easily.

Over the next several years, pastors continued to make the long trek to Lark to preach and to interpret



Current Lark building. Image courtesy of Rev. G. I. Williamson.



Holland Center CRC, Lodgepole, South Dakota. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

this decision to the group there, and bring back reports. Finally, in September 1926, four years after the initial decision, and after diverse committees had been entrusted with various instructions from Classis, a compromise of sorts was reached. The membership certificates of the remaining members were to be sent to the Holland Center CRC in Lodge Pole, South Dakota, rather than the Hull, North Dakota CRC, and an elder and a deacon would remain in the Lark congregation to continue to hold services. Elders and deacons continued to be chosen for service in Lark, assuming the offices on a rotating basis. But still the membership certificates were not transferred. Still pastors continued to travel from all over classis to preach. Still, the buildings were not sold. The folks in Lark voiced their objections: the church building is not suitable for any other use, and if the building was to be sold, the monies that churches belonging to classis had contributed would be foolishly lost. They reported that two new families from elsewhere had joined the church and they had hopes of expansion. Indeed, Hendrik and Elizabeth van den Burg and four young sons returned to Lark in early 1926.<sup>31</sup> What they apparently did not report, which might have impressed the elders and pastors of classis, was that they were continuing to hold catechism classes with an

average of fifteen students per year from 1923 to 1928. While the membership had not grown, it had held its own through the comings and goings of several families, and the number of members in 1929 was actually a few more than when the church had been founded. This was the core group who had founded the church some nineteen years earlier. There were several new wives and young children in the group, and as they became adults some of the original children made their way to other places.

Finally, in 1929 the membership certificates of Johan and Christina van den Burg Nicolay and four baptized children, Rentze and Grietje (van Keulen) Nicolay, Sjoerd and Maria (Den Boom) Nicolay and four baptized children, Johannes and Anna (de Leeuw) Meijer and four baptized children, and Willem and Adriana (Bos) Vogel and two baptized children were received by the Holland Center CRC in Lodge Pole. In July of that year the Lark congregation was declared to be dissolved. At the final meeting of the church council on 24 July 1929, the membership rolls of the congregation were handed to Rev. John Rubingh, pastor in Holland Center, representing classis. Sjoerd Nicolay offered the closing prayer and Rentze Nicolay, as always, recorded the minutes. As promised in the classis meeting of September 1926, their erstwhile president, Peter van den Burg, was chosen as elder, and Willem Vogel was chosen as deacon; he also served as treasurer.

Even though the congregation was dissolved, elders and deacons continued to serve in Lark, and pulpit supply pastors from Classis Sioux Center continued to visit and preach and conduct family visits on a regular basis. Still catechism classes were offered to about twenty students every year, and the Young People's group counted ten members. The men of

the church carried out a discussion of whether to hold services in Dutch or in English, the latter being more helpful to the young people. In the end, they compromised and held Dutch services in the morning and English in the evening.

The Holland Center church with Rev. John Rubingh continued its oversight of the members in Lark for another ten years, ending in May 1939. At that time the membership papers of Hendrik and Elizabeth van den Burg and Johanna van den Burg were sent from the Holland Center CRC to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Carson, North Dakota.<sup>32</sup>



Original Lark CRC pulpit. Image courtesy of Rev. Bruce Prentice.

In the mid-1980s the original Christian Reformed Church building, at that point owned by the Lark Orthodox Presbyterian Church, was moved nine miles to Carson. There it was renovated and enlarged and is used to this day by the Bethel Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Ronald Vandenburg, a grandson of Peter and Johanna van den Burg, and his wife, Marion, and daughter, Cynthia Swimley, are members of that church. The pulpit of the Lark CRC is now in the Bethel church and is still used by that congregation.<sup>33</sup> The Lark settlers would be happy to know that the Word of God is still being preached from their pulpit. ☞

## Endnotes

1. Much of the material for this article was drawn from the church's minutes from 28 March 1910 to 29 January 1919, and March 3, 1928 to September 24, 1929. The minutes from February 1919 to February 1928 are no longer extant. Unless otherwise noted, Gerrit W. Sheeres translated the minutes. His help is much appreciated.

2. As is often the case, the spellings of first and last names of the members of the Lark Christian Reformed Church became more Americanized over the years. It is hard to know when they made the transition, and the task becomes more complicated because public records often misspell the Dutch names. In this article I have used the spellings used in the minutes of 1910-1929. Children's names seem to have been Americanized faster, so those are sometimes used.

3. As early as 1881 the Christian Reformed Church struggled with the issue of union membership for its members. Interestingly, it was Classis Illinois that raised the question. In subsequent Synods (1883, 1886, 1888, 1890) there was no hard and fast rule against it, but the Synods warned strongly against CRC members joining. Finally, in 1904 Synod (Article 119) adopted: 1. "Synod decide and determine that members of present Unions cannot be members of the Church, with grounds. At the same time Synod provide solution for the working man." This decision may well have motivated the families to leave.

4. Later called the First Christian Reformed Church of Roseland, and still later the Lynnwood Christian Reformed Church; in 1992 it withdrew from the CRC to affiliate with the United Reformed Church.

5. According to Johan Nicolay in his remembrances of the event, he does not name the men from the Roseland church who accompanied his father, and the identity of the third man has not been verified. He notes that there were six or seven men from Roseland who accompanied the land agent. Nicolay

does not mention the land agent's name either.

6. Robert Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of Hollanders in the Windy City* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2002) 640-642.

7. The pastor at the time was Rev. B. H. Einink. He was correct about the Russians: the USFC lists 15,000 Russianborn settlers compared to 320 Dutch-born in North Dakota. The Russians were ethnic Germans who had lived in Russia for several generations. They were Lutherans and Roman Catholics, rather than Russian Orthodox.

8. Daniel James Fischer, "Fierce Winds and a Blank Whiteness: The Culture of Dakota Winter, 1870-1915". MA Thesis in History from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA, 2011.

9. Hendrik van den Burg was not married.

10. The 1910 United States Federal Census lists 10 midwives (none Dutch) and 46 physicians in all of North Dakota, none in Grant County. Immigrant women depended on each other during these critical times. For more on Dutch immigrant midwives, see: Janet Sjaarda Sheeres "A Dutch Midwife in Missaukee County, *Origins*, Spring 2016, Vol. XXXIV, #1, 4-13.

11. Information regarding the early years in Lark's history is derived from the following sources: *Carson, Centennial: The First 100 Years: 1910-2010*, on file at the North Dakota State Library, Bismarck, ND; Kathryn Peters's essay, *History of Lark*; audio tapes on file with the State Historical Society of North Dakota Oral History Collection, 10157—Grant County, in which Mr. and Mrs. Ernest and Kathryn Peters are interviewed on 12 June 1974. See also William C. Sherman and Playford V. Thorson, eds, *Plains Folk: North Dakota's Ethnic History*, North Dakota Centennial Heritage Series (Fargo, ND: Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, 1986), 363-36, and *Prairie Pioneers of Grant County*, Bicentennial Edition, 1976, provided by James A. Davis.

12. A classis is a governing body in certain Reformed churches consisting of the minister and representative elders from each church in a district.

13. All CRC office bearers are

required to sign the Form of Subscription, in which they declare that they agree without reservation to all the doctrines contained in the standards of the church, as being doctrines which are taught in the Word of God.

For more on this matter, go to: <http://network.crcna.org/elders/form-subscription>

14. The minutes from February 1919 to March 1928 are missing, but because Nicolay recorded the minutes before and after this period and according to the CRC Year Book, he filled that role in the intervening years as well.

15. Translation by Janet Sheeres.

16. When the classical boundaries were re-drawn, Lark was assigned to Classis Sioux Center. "Church visitors" are council members from a church within the same Classis who oversee that everything in the congregation is done in agreement with the denomination's ecclesiastical rules and regulations.

17. Grace Nicolay Droog.

18. "Examination of Conduct." Before the observance of Holy Communion, the elders scrutinized themselves for evidences of how they were discharging their office. Since the Lord's Supper was normally celebrated four times a year, this ensured that this mutual censure would happen that often. *Huisbezoek* was the regular visiting of the families of the congregation by pastor and an elder, or by two elders.

19. Interestingly, when that time finally came, the minutes do not include it. The correspondent writing in *De Wachter* in April 1918 expresses the hope that the sanctuary will be completed "this summer." A local history of Carson, North Dakota, notes that the Christian Reformed Church was built in Lark in 1918. A horse barn was added because although cars were coming into use they were not yet in general use.

20. By 1908, the Reformed Church in America had organized four congregations in North Dakota: 1885: Hague in Emmons County; 1905-1908: Mapes in Nelson County; 1906: Litchville in Barnes County; and 1908: Marion in LaMoure County. Emmons and LaMoure were neighboring counties to Grant County, where Lark is located, so there may have been some fellowship with these churches; also in Stark County,

## Note:

The story of the Nicolay family's move from Chicago to North Dakota was documented by Johan Nicolay in *Origins*, Spring, 1995, Vol. XIII, #1. It is available at: <http://www.calvin.edu/hh/origins/Spring95.pdf>

another neighboring county, a group of Dutch immigrants briefly settled near Belfield between 1910 and 1920.

21. Later raised to \$15.

22. Richard was born 16 April 1889 as Derk Veldman. In America he anglicized his first name to Richard.

23. Spelled Heinrich in the minutes; later he changed his first name to Henry. The family originated from Germany.

24. There is no mention of their arrival in the minutes or of the transfer of their membership.

25. Once again, their arrival dates and membership transfer are not included in the minutes. The men are mentioned for the first time in the 30 November 1916 minutes.

26. Data from CRC Yearbook.

28. She is not named, but very likely she was Nicolay's daughter-in-law, Maria De Boom Nicolay, who had come from Sheldon, Iowa.

28. There was a special tie between the Lark and Ogilvie congregations. Rev. Henry De Vries, brother of Lark's Peter De Vries, was pastor in Ogilvie.

29. US Department of Agriculture Bulletin 901-928.

30. They must have been referring to the Nicolay-van den Burg family.

31. The second family cannot be accounted for. There were other Dutch in the area, but conversations with their descendants suggest that they were not members.

32. This appears to be an error in the minutes of the Holland Center CRC in Lodge Pole, SD. Rev. G. I. Williamson, former pastor of the Lark Orthodox Presbyterian Church, reports that the memberships were received by that church, which seems more likely.

33. Present-day members of the Carson church recall that the noted theologian Dr. J. Gresham Machen, founder of the Orthodox Presbyterian denomination and of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, preached his last sermon from this pulpit before he became ill. He was hospitalized in nearby Bismarck, ND, where he died on 1 January 1937.

# Two Continents, Three Countries, and Many Generations of Reformed Faith Come Together

Anthony Elenbaas and Femke Visser-Elenbaas

“So, how did you two meet?” is often one of the first questions Anthony and Femke receive after they introduce themselves—Femke with her lovely Dutch accent and Anthony with his distinctive American accent—to someone they meet for the first time. Over the past three and a half years that they have lived in Canada, they have come up with an unromantic and unpredictable answer, “At church!” A surprised look from the new acquaintance invites them to explain it a bit further. “We met each other for the first time at an international church conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan,” they start out, and if the new friend is a “churchy” person, and maybe even Reformed, they might go on explaining that they were both stewards at the Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches that was held on the Calvin College campus in 2010.<sup>1</sup> Since they understand that this is a lot of information in one sentence to digest for someone not familiar with the

work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, they sometimes go on explaining what this organization is all about and that they were part of a group of volunteers from all over the world sent by their respective churches. Little did they know at the time that they each had met the love of their lives at that international church meeting in Grand Rapids. They both had grown up in small rural communities—Anthony in McBain, Michigan, and Femke in Kollum, a town in the northern part of the province of Friesland, the Netherlands. Today these two are serving the church in yet another country—in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

A love for the church, locally and globally, and an interest in the

*Anthony and Femke Elenbaas are presently serving the Immanuel CRC in Hamilton, Ontario. They are expecting their first child early next year.*



Anthony and Femke on the Calvin College campus. Image courtesy of the Elenbaas family.

ecumenical movement as a movement working toward unity of the church of Christ led them both to go to seminary and caused their paths to cross in the summer of 2010. For Femke it was the first visit to the

United States, where she encountered the legacy of Dutch immigrants on the campus of Calvin College. For Anthony, who had grown up in a Dutch-American community thinking that he knew everything about being

Dutch, it was the first time he met an actual Dutch, as in “living in the Netherlands-Dutch,” person.

Here, in their words, is the story of these two “children of the Reformation” from different continents.

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*Anthony:*

I grew up in McBain, Michigan. McBain is farming country, rolling with hills of lush corn stalks and alfalfa, dotted with dairy farms, and filled with interesting smells. We lived in the city proper, which boasts about 650 people and one blinking four-way stop light. Growing up, I was instilled with the knowledge, pervasive in the community, that “we are Dutch,” and in fact that’s largely correct. Well over 50 percent of the population of McBain, together with its surrounding communities, is of Dutch descent. Aside from a few older folks in the community who still speak the language, most of the cultural and linguistic realities of “being Dutch,” together with any living connection

with the country known as the Netherlands, have long since passed from collective awareness. Most residents of the community do not keep any contact with far distant cousins in the “old country.” That being said, the institutional evidence and a bit of cultural residue remain.<sup>2</sup> For instance, a few recipes like *banket* and rice covered with butter, cinnamon and brown sugar, and a few words like *preuts* (prudish), *vies* (dirty), and *benuwd* (humid/stifling) are still in use.

There are eight Christian Reformed Churches (CRC) sprinkled throughout the greater McBain community, and a few Reformed Church in America (RCA) congregations as well. Within the city limits, on the

west side of the railroad tracks, lies Northern Michigan Christian School, founded by members of the CRC. McBain Rural Agricultural School is on the east side of the tracks—which is the public school I attended. Both schools are K-12, and both are filled with an overwhelming majority of students with some degree of Dutch Reformed background. Aside from Bible classes, Reformed worldview application, and community perceptions, they are not so different. While in more recent years this has begun to change, it is still fair to say that the fabric of the community and depth of Dutch Reformed heritage colors the different school communities to a greater extent than the curriculum.<sup>3</sup>



McBain, Michigan. Image courtesy of the Elenbaas family.



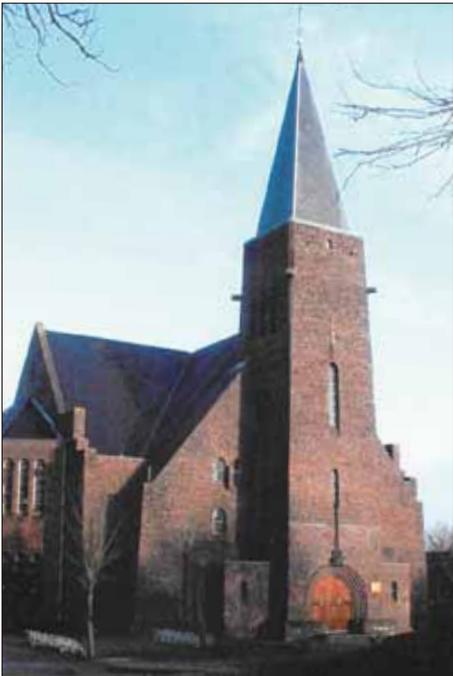
Calvin CRC, McBain, Michigan. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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*Femke:*

I grew up in Kollum, a small city in the northern province of Friesland, the Netherlands. Kollum had the reputation of being “*streng gereformeerd*” (strict Reformed). The congregation has its roots in the *Doleantie* of 1886, when a large number of conservative congregations in the *Hervormde* Church (Dutch Reformed) and the Christian Seceders fused into a new denomination—the *Gereformeerde Kerk* (Christian Reformed in the US). Kollum became one of the first five churches in the new denomination.

When my parents, Johan Visser and Fenna Zuidersma, moved with their four children (Jelmer, Hidde, and twins Sjouke and Femke) to Kollum in 1990, they immediately became active members in the *Gereformeerde* church. Our family would often attend both the 9:30 a.m. and the 2 p.m. services, occupying half a wooden pew in the beautiful, large



Oosterkerk Gereformeerde Kerk. Image courtesy of the Visser family.

church building that seats well over a thousand people. It was built in 1925 by the well-known Groninger architect, Egbert Reitsma, who designed many *Gereformeerde* church buildings in the Netherlands. It happened several times on special occasions, like a baptism service, that there was not enough space to seat all the people. If we arrived too late, we would not even be able to find a spot for our family of six on the large balcony, and we would have to sit in the building

connected to the church to watch the service on television.

My roots go deep in this rural community and in this community of faith, in which people sought to be faithful to the Gospel, living out their faith in very practical ways, worshipping weekly and being nourished by the teaching of many well-trained pastors. Although both school and church have been very formative for me in my faith journey, it is especially the example set by my parents

and my oldest brother at home that has taught me from my youngest years that faith, belief in God, and his love ultimately shown in Jesus Christ are basic to how we live life and how we engage with others.



Kollum, Friesland, the Netherlands. Image courtesy of the Visser family.

*Anthony:*

Like Femke’s, my church roots also go deep in the history of the *Gereformeerde* church, but mine were uprooted and transplanted to the United States.

In 1847, the year after Albertus Van Raalte settled Holland, Michigan, Josua Elenbaas, together with his brother, Antoni, set out from Baarland, a small town in the Dutch province of Zeeland, on their way to America. They left from Antwerp aboard the *Wilhelm von Wolgast*, the first of three ships carrying Zeeuws passengers to America that year. Together with about 450 others, they were part of the “Zeeland Association for Emigration to the United States of America” formed by Jannes Van de Luyster and Reverend Cornelius Vander Meulen. Not surprisingly, this group of Zeeuws immigrants decided to call their new settlement on Michigan’s west coast “Zeeland.”

It was another relative who helped found the Dutch settlements in Missaukee County, where McBain is located. A man by the name of John Vogel married Betje Herweyer, the sister of my ancestor, Jacob Herweyer. The Herweyers had emigrated in 1866 from Strijen in the province of South Holland. It was through their connection with John Vogel that they made the trip north to Missaukee County. According to his memoir, John Vogel and his brother-in-law, Jacob Herweyer, along with a few others, moved to Missaukee County, arriving in 1868 from the West Michigan area, having surveyed and secured homesteads in Missaukee County the year before. In John Vogel’s recollection, they were “the first



Josua Elenbaas. Image courtesy of the Elenbaas family.



Johanna Rookus Elenbaas. Image courtesy of the Elenbaas family.

white people to do so.” They founded what would become Vogel Center.<sup>4</sup> In the fall of 1869, Jacob Herweyer’s parents followed. Other Dutch settlers continued to arrive, and other settlements, like Falmouth and Moddersville, popped up in the county as well. Eventually, in 1882, the village of Lucas was founded. The second wave of settlers who came to Lucas soon after its founding included Josua Elenbaas, my great-great-great-grandfather.

With these settlers came the church. In 1872 the first CRC in Missaukee County was organized in Vogel Center—the church building followed in 1877. In Lucas, the oldest church was also a CRC, with an RCA soon to follow in 1890. Both churches remain to this

day, and both churches have played a role in my story and our (Femke’s and my) story along the way. Vogel Center CRC is a church connected to my story of call as well as one of the churches that lovingly endured some of my early seminarian sermons, and Lucas CRC is the church where Femke and I formally celebrated our marriage.

My story within this community of Dutch immigration, and particularly my story with the church begins with my great-grandfather, Richard Elenbaas. In one of the few deviations



Main Street, Zeeland, Michigan. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Vogel Center CRC, Vogel Center, Michigan. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

married my mother, who was born and raised in the CRC, most of my growing up years were spent in the CRC, with a few in the Baptist church, and a number of Sundays in the



Theological University, Kampen, the Netherlands. Image courtesy of the Visser family.

in my family tree from Dutch exclusivity, my great-grandfather married a woman of German descent, Otilia (Tillie) Gloff, and they began worshipping at the Lutheran church. My father grew up in the Lutheran church, Missouri Synod. After he

Lutheran church as well.

It was perhaps this particular wrinkle that accounts for at least part of my ecumenical bent now at this point in life, having experienced

worship in a few other traditions growing up. Add to that the Methodist devotional we read at the dinner table, and the Presbyterian Church USA affiliated school, Alma College, where I did my undergraduate studies, that account for my being comfortable with the different ways that various Christian traditions express

and live out their theology and faith, recognizing God's hand and the faithfulness of His people in each.<sup>5</sup> With that said—the CRC is my home. With its theology, with its worship, with its rich posture of Christian engagement



Lucas CRC, Lucas, Michigan. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

in the world, the CRC is my native accent, and the church in which my membership will remain (for as long as we live on this continent anyway).

*Femke:*

Being an inquisitive child, I often had conversations with my parents about life and about faith. I loved going to church and followed my oldest brother by joining the praise and worship movement that had found its way also into our church in the mid-1990s. Being intrigued by what happens in worship, curious to come to a better understanding of the Bible and Christian traditions, eager to find a profession that would “help people,” and having a sense of being called to Christian ministry (whatever that would look like), I ended up studying theology for my undergraduate training at the Theological University in Kampen. Both in my family and in my circle of friends this was an unusual decision; nevertheless, I received support and understanding. I was the first one of my generation in both my extended families to enter academic studies and was the first one in my family to leave the parental home permanently. Most of my friends were not so much “into church.” My secondary school, although Christian in name, had a very secular character. So, the way was not exactly paved for me, and there was much for me to learn and to discover.

By 2003, when I had stopped attending my home church regularly because of my theological training at Kampen University, church attendance had dropped dramatically.

It would take another five years for the *Gereformeerde* and the *Hervormde* denominations, both of which were losing members, to complete the *Samen-Op-Weg* (Traveling Together) process and unite into one denomination, the *Protestantse Kerk Nederland* (PKN) that in my hometown would alternate services in the beautiful old twelfth-century Maartenskerk, formerly the *Hervormde* church building, and the large auditorium of the Oosterkerk, formerly the *Gereformeerde* church building. While the town of Kollum grew to over 6,000 inhabitants, the number of church members went down to about 3,000 members.

I started my theological education at a wonderful time in 2004 when both the *Gereformeerde Vrijgemaakte Theologische Universiteit* and the *Gereformeerde Theologische Universiteit* celebrated their 150th anniversaries together. Interactions and discussions with *Vrijgemaakte* (an orthodox branch of the *Gereformeerde* Church, also called *Liberated*) students invited me to also think about the question of “women in office.”<sup>6</sup> For me this had never been an issue, since I

had always known female elders and deacons, and although I had never heard a female pastor preach, the church tradition I grew up in had ordained women since the 1980s. The world opened up for me as I engaged with a variety of students from different church traditions and countries and encountered a wide spectrum of theological ideas. At times this was overwhelming; at other times it did not go fast enough for me to develop my own theology, my understanding of the world around me, and my role in it. A long period of theological studies, which included lots of traveling, different internships, and living in Christian communities, marked my vocational journey. Without realizing, it was on that journey that my path crossed with that of my future husband—first in the summer of 2010 on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids.



Anthony and Femke on their wedding day. Image courtesy of the Elenbaas family.

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*Anthony:*

The more particular story of how I entered into ordained ministry starts in 2001 when my uncle, Terry Dieterman, passed away at the age of thirty-two. The McBain Dutch Reformed community, still shaped perhaps by some immigrant (or at least small-town) habits, surrounded our family in prayer, food, and support—holding a huge benefit auction that helped to sustain my aunt and her four children in the difficult years that followed. I was amazed at how so many people were willing to give so freely and generously of their time and money. As I pondered that fact, I came to realize that it was the Christian character of this community that motivated people to show such love and support. I was moved by this early experience of the body of Christ in action, and I began to look into my faith more intentionally because of it. I began reading my Bible every night, a practice that I still follow today.

A few years later in high school at

McBain public, I found myself feeling called to the ministry. At about the same time, opportunities arose for me to sing or speak in different local congregations—one of those was the Vogel Center CRC. After each service I found this calling confirmed by the support of my community and the local churches I was involved with, namely McBain CRC, (Falmouth) Prosper CRC, and McBain Baptist, and by the end of my sophomore year of high school, I had surrendered my life to God's will, knowing from that point forward that I was headed into pastoral ministry.

In college I became a religious studies major and was heavily involved in the Christian community on campus, made up of a diverse spattering of people from Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, Baptist, and other Protestant backgrounds. That time together in Bible study, service trips, and worship was formative.

Then, as I wrote my senior thesis, I discovered the World Council of Churches, as well as many other similar fellowships that pursued the cause of Christian unity. This discovery quickly captured my attention and steered my research in an ecumenical direction. I discovered the global Reformed ecumenical bodies and further found that two of them would be merging that summer following my graduation in 2010. So, I checked to see if and how I could get involved. Through connections within the Presbyterian Church USA, I was given the opportunity to serve the organizing body as a steward in the Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, at Calvin College.

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*Femke:*

When I first arrived at the Calvin campus in 2010, I was totally surprised by all the Dutch last names attached to the different buildings, and I knew right away that a neglected aspect of Dutch history was going to come alive for me in this place. Of course, I knew about people who had immigrated from the Netherlands right after WWII. I remember reading about it in a study book for a history class in high school. Also, a brother of my grandfather had emigrated to Australia and another brother to the United States, but growing up I never heard much about them.

Before going to Grand Rapids, I met with my grandparents, who immediately told me that the son of a former minister in their town, Lutjegast, had moved to the United States shortly after the war, had studied there, and now lived in Grand Rapids as a retired CRC pastor. His name was Gerrit W. Sheeres. I found that quite intriguing, since my grandparents had never left their rural area in the province of Groningen, and, being farmers, they had never traveled much. Now here was someone of their generation who had left the confines of that community in order to build a life in the United States of America. A curiosity had taken root, and something in me resonated with that story. I was going to make sure to meet this man while being in Grand Rapids and

relay the greeting of my grandparents, who still remembered him.

At the conference I met people from different backgrounds, among them a fellow steward by the name of Anthony Elenbaas. He told me he was Dutch-American. He was one of the few Dutch-Americans of my generation that I had ever met. He immediately shattered all my stereotypes about Americans based on what we see on television in the Netherlands through Hollywood movies, shows like Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Phil, and whatnot. I discovered that America does not mean exclusively California. When Anthony invited me and a new Swiss friend of ours to McBain for an evening, I met some down-to-earth folk who reminded me a lot of the people in my hometown. I remember my future mother-in-law (although I did not know it at the time) bringing out a family book of the Dieterman (her maiden name) family to show to me. While Anthony was enjoying the bonfire in the backyard with some friends, roasting hot dogs and playing ladder golf, I was reading all about the immigration history of his ancestors who came over in 1860s. I recognized the Dutch names and places, often misspelled as people remembered them through the stories, but written down using English spelling. Five years later I would walk with Anthony and his mother through grave-

yards in the province of Groningen, the Netherlands, searching for the gravestones of ancestors and distant relatives. But a lot had yet to happen for that to come about.

We kept in contact. Anthony even visited me in Utrecht in 2011 with our Swiss friend after spending time in Geneva as a steward for the World Council of Churches Central Committee meeting. It came as a total surprise to me when I found out that both of us were selected to be part of the Global Institute of Theology, a 3-week study program of the World Communion of Reformed Churches in Indonesia in the summer of 2012. I asked Anthony whether he would be interested in joining me for a week of vacation in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, prior to the study-program. Since I did not feel comfortable traveling by myself in that faraway land, I had arranged with the general secretary of a worldwide Roman Catholic brotherhood, in the Netherlands known as “the Brothers of Tilburg,” who was a board member of the Christian community, Ki Tov, in Utrecht to which I also belonged, to stay with a community of Roman Catholic brothers in Yogyakarta.<sup>7</sup> Anthony was eager to join me, and it would appear that we both were beginning to wonder what this study trip might hold more for us relationally.

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*Anthony:*

It was at the 2010 conference in Grand Rapids, in the summer between my undergraduate studies and Calvin Theological Seminary, that I first met this beautiful Dutch woman, Femke Visser, who would become my wife. On that score, I did not have any profound thoughts about church connections or Dutch connections, other than being excited to meet a real, live Dutch citizen in person, the first one I had ever met who wasn't a KLM flight attendant or Schiphol employee. I liked her immediately, and within a week or two I was pretty well convinced that we would be getting married, although, for the life of me, I did not know how to make that a reality. Meeting Femke has not only enlivened my interest in what a fifth- and sixth-generation immigrant

community looks like; it also sparked some genealogical research into the history of how these connections came to be.

After coming home from my study program in Indonesia, I was ready to complete my seminary training. Calvin Theological Seminary assigned me to a 10-week internship in Iron Springs, Alberta, after which I would be ready for candidacy in the CRC. The people of the Iron Springs church, composed mainly of recent Dutch immigrants, were thrilled that I was dating a girl from the Netherlands. Congregational members encouraged me to learn Dutch, and the first Dutch Bibles, *Bijbelsdagboekjes* (daily devotionals), and *Psalmboekjes* (psalters) were delivered to my office. Femke

and I had daily conversations via Skype, with Femke sitting in her room in a nineteenth-century monastery in Utrecht where she had found a room and where she lived.

She had transferred to the Protestant Theological University of Utrecht to finish her seminary studies. During our Skype sessions, I showed her how, in the Canadian west, summer storms swept over the prairies making the branches of many a tree around the parsonage almost touch the ground. A year of long-distance relationship followed that summer in which we were also both finishing up our seminary training.

In the fall of 2012, I had a chance to visit Femke and her family and friends in the Netherlands for a couple of weeks, and soon plans were made for her to come study at Calvin Seminary for the J-term in 2013. We could count on the support of Calvin Seminary staff, while in the Netherlands there was funding available from some very old funds for theology students preparing for ministry who wanted to study abroad, and, within a month, everything, including a study visa, was arranged. Housing was still an issue, but, with the help of Pastor Sheeres, who had placed an advertisement in the church bulletin of his church, that was also provided for those cold winter months of 2013.



Iron Springs CRC, Iron Springs, Alberta. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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*Femke:*

It turned out to be a few eventful months of getting to know my future family-in-law, American (or better, West Michigan) culture, life and studies at Calvin Theological Seminary, doing research for my MA thesis at the Hekman Library, experiencing the cold winter weather, and, of course, getting to know this boyfriend, who would become my fiancé at the end of this “study trip.” The months that followed were focused on graduating, discerning our calls to ministry, and daily Skyping. We decided that, if possible, this long-distance relationship should not take too long. So, when we both graduated and did not have positions lined up on either continent—we were open to going anywhere, but were especially looking at the Netherlands and Canada—we decided that for the time being, while we were waiting for a call, I would move to McBain, to temporarily live with Anthony’s family while Anthony would work as a cabinetmaker for his cousin. In early fall of 2013 we were in conversation with Immanuel CRC in Hamilton, Ontario, a church and city that we both felt would be a good community for us to start out as an international ministry couple.

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*Anthony and Femke together:*

In late August 2013 Femke graduated from the Protestant Theological University in Utrecht with an MDiv, as well as from the Utrecht University with an MA in religious studies. It was early September that conversations with Immanuel CRC started to unfold, and an uncertain transitional period of six months followed in which she moved from Utrecht and spent three weeks in South Korea with a study program of the World Council of Churches. Before moving to the United States, a move that included a lot of paperwork and saying farewell to loved ones, she also preached her candidacy sermon and had her “*colloquium*” (classical examination) with representatives of the Classis of Zeeland, the Netherlands (interestingly on the same island where Anthony’s ancestors came from), which led to her candidacy in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

While, at the same time, a few possible opportunities had arisen in the Netherlands, it was eventually an opportunity in the first- to third-generation immigrant community in Hamilton, Ontario, that we discerned as our call. We had been looking at Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia, recognizing these provinces as places with enough recent Dutch immigrants that could provide a “middle way” between our two cultures and backgrounds, people who

still spoke the Dutch language and knew the culture, yet within a largely North American, English-speaking context (although Canada has a more European feel to it than does the United States). The conversation with the Immanuel CRC of Hamilton provided a middle milieu exactly like that. The call was for Anthony to be an associate pastor working with youth, outreach, discipleship, and preaching—a call fittingly as diverse as our story. It was not a simple decision to make—pressed for time in mid-January with the expiration date of Femke’s visitor’s visa drawing near, with questions about how she would find a position in Hamilton, questions about immigrating to a new country, and questions about marriage. In early 2014 we visited Hamilton for a couple of days, getting a feel for the city and the people of Immanuel. Although this call aroused some anxiety, we felt a peace settle in about it. It would not be easy, but it was right. We accepted and set the start date for March 1, eager to arrive and get started. Back in Grand Rapids, we made arrangements to get married, but a few days later realized that, due to complex immigration laws, our pending immigration meant that we needed to get married immediately. Having made this discovery with exactly one week left on Femke’s visitor’s visa, we quickly made arrangements to have our wedding

in the home of the pastor who had agreed to do our “planned” wedding in August. So, just four days later, on Friday, February 14, we were married in Grand Rapids in the Sheeres’ living room, with Anthony’s parents present, while Femke’s family Skyped in. A heart-shaped Valentine’s cake from Meijers, a bouquet of tulips, and Dutch organ music playing softly in the background added ambiance.<sup>8</sup> Femke flew home to the Netherlands the following Monday to begin her immigration to Canada process, while

Anthony moved to Canada two weeks later on his own.

While Anthony kept busy with church and community work, Femke worked toward her goal of becoming a chaplain. In the fall of 2014, about half a year after her arrival in Canada as a landed immigrant, she found the timely and perfect opportunity to receive part-time chaplaincy training (Clinical Pastoral Education), which she followed up by a full year of CPE residency and a year of working on her candidacy in the Christian

Reformed Church through the EPMC program (Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy) at Calvin Theological Seminary via online studies.

She was approved at this year’s synod for candidacy in the CRCNA. She will continue to serve as a chaplain (in the hospital and possibly in a college campus environment) for the coming years, and, in God’s time, hopefully as an ordained chaplain. There is no telling where our journey will lead us in the future, but for now we are happy and being blessed in Canada. ☺



Immanuel CRC, Hamilton, Ontario. Image used by permission of the Immanuel CRC, Hamilton, Ontario.

## Endnotes

1. For more information on this organization, go to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_Communion\\_of\\_Reformed\\_Churches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Communion_of_Reformed_Churches)

2. History doesn’t give McBain a very prominent role in the early days of these Dutch settlements. It rose in prominence slowly as rail use grew and rivers (which connect with and flow out through the Muskegon River) waned as a means of transporting lumber to market. McBain pops up in the history with the main rail line that connects with Cadillac and Detroit, still in service today.

3. The Christian Reformed Church in North America is the largest denomination in the county, with 2,010 members and seven congregations. Almost 50 percent of the county’s population are members of the CRCNA, followed by the Reformed Church in America, with three congregations and 830 members; the

third is the United Methodist Church, with three churches and 500 members; the PC (USA) has two congregations and 200 members, but the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Lutherans (ELCA), Baptists are also represented with one congregation each. Missaukee County is part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Gaylord and has one congregation of 800 members.

4. For the full story see: Henry S. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), ii, 255-165.

5. Alma College, situated in Alma, Michigan, was founded in 1886 by the Presbyterian Synod of Michigan.

6. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) are an orthodox Reformed, Protestant federation of churches. This church body arose in 1944 out of the so-called Liberation

(Vrijmaking), when many pastors and members that refused to go along with the General Synod’s demand to hold to “presumed regeneration of infants” at their baptism. Prof. Dr. Klaas Schilder played an important role in the Liberation. There are currently 270 affiliated local congregations with a total of about 120,000 members in 2016. In the USA they are called American Reformed and in Canada, Canadian Reformed.

7. Ki Tov is a Hebrew word meaning “How Good,” based on the creation refrain of Genesis 1, “and God saw that it was good.”

8. A formal church ceremony followed in August of that year in the Lucas CRC, Lucas, Michigan. All of Femke’s Dutch relatives were able to attend as well as all of Anthony’s American relatives.

## GEBED VAN EEN KIND



Cornelis was het oudste kind en de eenige zoon van het gezin; 16 jaar oud, was hij tot nu toe voor onderwijzer opgeleid geworden maar thans sinds enkele maanden in een groote handelszaak geplaatst, in de stad U.

Vader was met die verandering zeer ingenomen, Cornelis toch was een flinke, vlotte jongen en zou zóó allicht beter vooruitkomen dan als schoolmeester. Moeder echter was er niet vóór geweest. „Ik mis hem zoo noode”, zeide ze, „en hij is daar zoo aan zichzelf overgelaten in die groote stad, te midden der verleiding”.

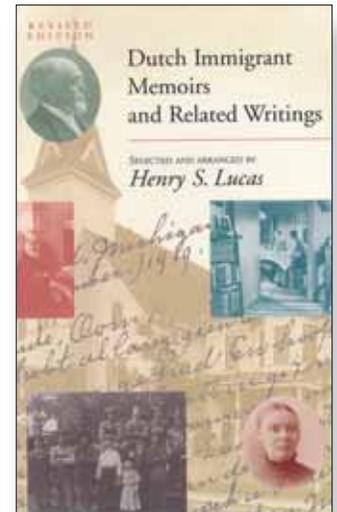
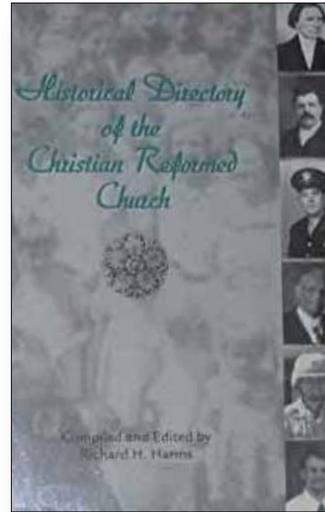
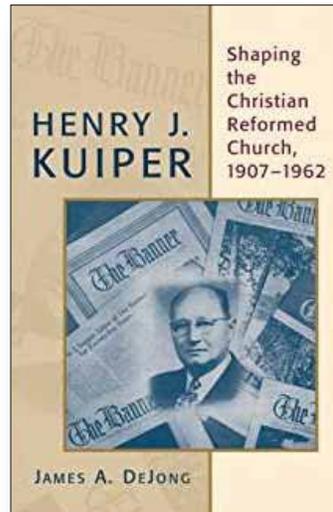
Doch in het gezin was er zeker geen, die het gemis van Cornelis dieper voelde dan de kleine Betje. Ze had 't moeder hooren zeggen, en hoewel ze dat woord „verleiding” niet begreep, voelde ze wel, dat het een zeker gevaar was, waarin Kees verkeerde en ze werd stil en neerslachtig als ze daaraan dacht.

Nu was Cornelis al bijna een half jaar weg en in al dien tijd was hij nog maar eenmaal thuis geweest. Elke

Godsdienstige Bladjes. 65e jaargang. No. 3. Js. BOOTSMA-Den Haag.

A sample of Dutch devotional literature from the Elenbaas family records. Image courtesy of the Elenbaas family.

# Books for Sale by the Archives




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## Boonstra, Harry.

*Our School: Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001. \* **\$5**

This short volume chronicles the development of Calvin College, focusing in particular on the interaction and mutual influence between the college and the church.

---

## DeJong, James A.

*Henry J. Kuiper: Shaping the Christian Reformed Church, 1907-1962.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. \* **\$20**

This biographical study will interest readers wanting to better understand the Christian Reformed Church during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, particularly in comparison with the Reformed Church in America.

---

## Harms, Richard H., compiler.

*Historical Directory of the Christian Reformed Church.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. \* **\$20**

This valuable resource lists all the Christian Reformed Church's pastors, chaplains, evangelists, and congregations, as well as its specialized ministries, from the beginning of the denomination until its publication in 2004.

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## Lucas, Henry S.

*Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997. **\$40**

This collection of 114 first-person accounts describe the immigrant experience as no historical study can do. The writers penned their captivating stories of the struggles, hardships, and triumphs of migration as a testimony to succeeding generations.

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## Sheeres, Janet Sjaarda, editor and annotator.

*Minutes of the Christian Reformed Church: Classical Assembly 1857-1870, General Assembly 1867-1879, and Synodical Assembly 1880.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013. \* **\$40**

This book gives insight into the early years of the Christian Reformed denomination. Anyone interested in the CRC's roots will find this book an excellent resource.

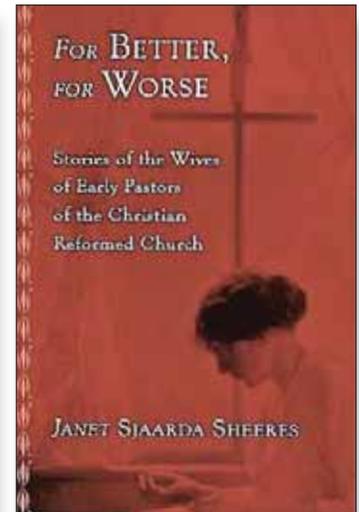
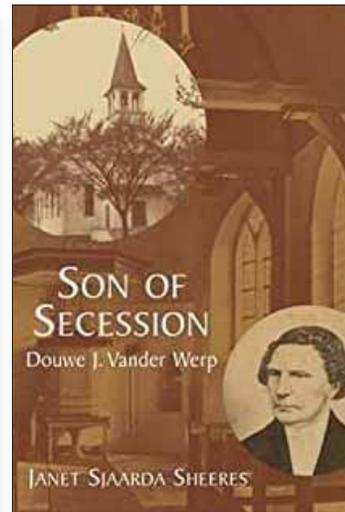
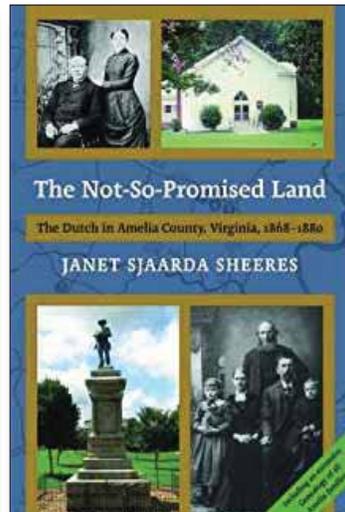
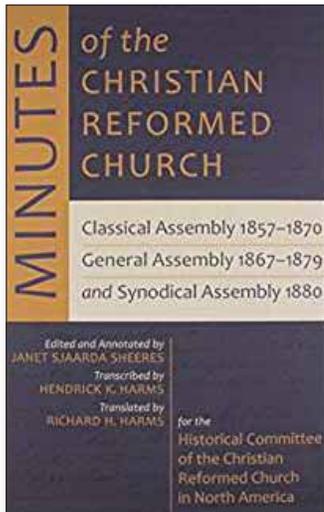
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## Sheeres, Janet Sjaarda.

*The Not-So-Promised Land: The Dutch in Amelia County, Virginia, 1868-1880.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013. \* **\$20**

This is an excellent account of a little-known episode in the history of Dutch settlements in America. Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte's attempt to repeat in post-Civil War Virginia his

## Books for Sale by the Archives, continued



earlier success in Holland, Michigan, did not go well. Sheeres follows the arriving settlers, their disappointments, and their resettlement elsewhere. She also states the reasons for the failure of this Dutch colony to thrive.

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**Sheeres, Janet Sjaarda.**

*Son of Secession: Douwe J. Vander Werp.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006.\* **\$20**

Douwe Vander Werp was one of the key figures in the Secession of 1834 in the Netherlands and a principal minister in the early development of the Christian Reformed Church in the United States. Credited with having founded ten congregations, Vander Werp was a man zealously committed to his understanding of God's Word and its implications for his life, even when it required the painful sacrifice of three secessions.

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**Sheeres, Janet Sjaarda.**

*For Better, For Worse: Stories of the Wives of Early Pastors of the Christian Reformed Church.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017.\* **\$25**

Absent from the histories of early Christian Reformed Church pastors are the stories of their wives. Using thorough research skills, Sheeres has given these women their own identities.

---

**Smidt, Corwin, Donald Luidens, James Penning, and Roger Nemeth.**

*Divided by a Common Heritage: The Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America at the Beginning of the New Millennium.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006.\* **\$10**

This book is an important sociological study of two denominations that share a common heritage. It is very useful in helping us to understand our past separate existence.

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**Swierenga, Robert P., editor and Walter Lagerwey, translator.**

*Iowa Letters: Dutch Immigrants on the American Frontier.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004.\* **\$40**

Iowa Letters provides a unique insight into the experiences of nineteenth-century Dutch immigrants on the North American prairie. The letters were written between 1840 and 1870 between family members who remained in the Netherlands and those who settled in Iowa.

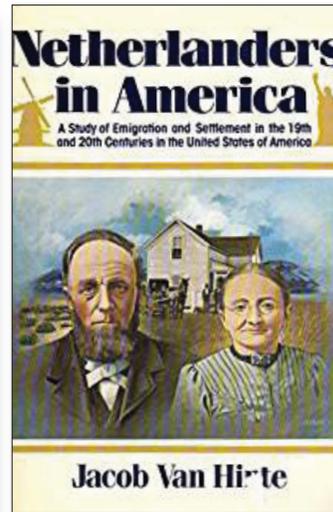
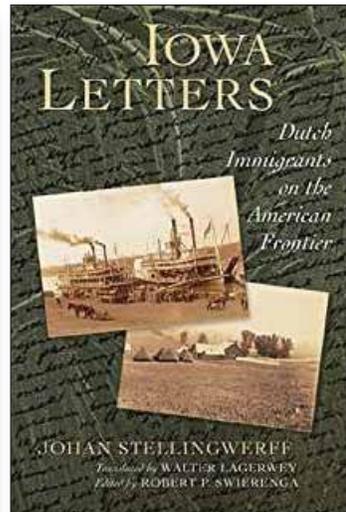
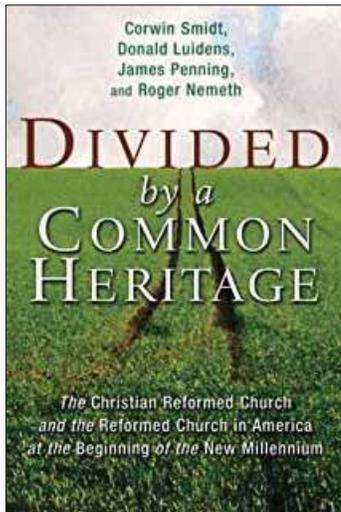
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**Van Hinte, Jacob.**

*Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the United States of America.* Grand Rapids, MI: The Historical Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, 2003. **\$25**

This 1150-page volume is the definitive work on the Dutch in the

## Books for Sale by the Archives, continued



United States. The book does not only cover the major colonies in Michigan and Iowa, but describes the lesser-known areas the Dutch settled. Anyone studying Dutch migration to America and migration of the Dutch from one area to another in America will benefit from the copious information in this book.

\*Part of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America.

*Please note:* These books may be purchased directly from the Calvin College Archives located in Heritage Hall, Hekman Library. Shipping fees will be added to the price if ordering by mail.

# for the future

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

A Woman's Voice from the Plains:  
The Diary of Gertrude Vande Riet  
*by* John Timmerman

The CRC and Women's Suffrage  
*by* Nicholas Huizenga

Dutch Immigrant Women Writing History  
*by* Rachel Hekman

Before God and These Witnesses:  
Five Cases of Contested Marriages in the  
RCA and CRC  
*by* Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

The Daughters Tien: Mothers in Israel  
*by* James A. De Jong

Maartje's Story:  
from Polderland to Heartland  
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Roseland CRC in 1896. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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