

Origins

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(616) 526-6313

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

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres
Editor

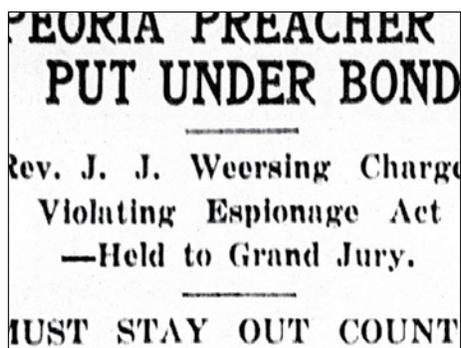
Hendrina Van Spronsen
Circulation Manager

Tracey L. Gebbia
Designer

James C. Schaap
Robert P. Swierenga
Contributing Editors

InnerWorkings
Printer

Cover photo:
WW1 Victory Plate purchased by Venna Eeling Lemmen in 1919 at the end of the war. It came from the general store in Crisp, MI, that was owned by W. Nienhuis. Note the flags of the various Allied Nations. Image courtesy of Lemmen and Lemmen PLC.



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from the editor . . .



John Telling, a young second-generation Dutch man, was drafted into the US Army on 2 October 1917 and shipped off to France, where he served until the fighting ceased on 11 November 1918, a hundred years ago this fall. In 1983, when John was ninety years old, he still could not mention the war without shedding tears. There are no more World War I veterans alive today; it took a century to wipe away all the tears from those four years in world history. But even though their tears have dried, we should not forget their sacrifice; hence this issue features stories about young men of Dutch extraction, the Christian Reformed Church's involvement in the war, the reactions to the war by the Dutch community in the United States, and the work done on behalf of the sol-

diers by women of Dutch extraction. Over the years, *Origins* has published several excellent articles about WWI; however, it is not remiss to visit this part of our past again and look at it from other angles.

The Great War, as it was called, was one of the deadliest conflicts in human history. The total number of both civilian and military casualties is estimated at around thirty-seven million people worldwide. America mobilized four million soldiers; 116,708 American military personnel died during the war from all causes (combat, wounds, and influenza). Over 204,000 were wounded, and 757 US civilians died due to military action.

In the fall 1989 issue of *Origins*, Dr. Robert Schoone-Jongen wrote about the patriotic pressures experienced by the Dutch in southwest Minnesota during WWI, while Garret Pothoven wrote about Peoria's anti-Dutch harassment; these articles can be found here: <http://www.calvin.edu/hh/origins/Fall89.pdf> In this issue Schoone-Jongen revisits Peoria,

Iowa, this time looking at the cause of the intimidating threats there from another angle, including naming the perpetrators of the arson.

The article "Bringing Calvinism to Camp Custer" shows the concern of the CRC for its young men in the military. In the spring 2005 issue of *Origins*, Dr. Richard Harms described in detail the CRC's struggle initiating a chaplaincy program to serve those young men of the denomination who had been drafted. This article is well worth a second read and can be found here: http://www.calvin.edu/hh/origins/Spring05_23_1.pdf

Loren Lemmen's grandparents were directly affected when his grandfather, Bernie Lemmen, was drafted. Saved letters and diaries from his grandparents form the basis for the article "Love Interrupted by War." Lemmen is not the only one who has documented his grandfather's involvement. Robert Yonker wrote an article on his grandfather, Nicholas Jonker, who was one of Michigan's famed Polar Bears. The article appeared in the fall 2009 issue

and can be accessed at <http://www.calvin.edu/hh/origins/Fall09.pdf>

Already at the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1914, CRC members struggled with whose side to take. Their memory of British behavior against the Boers in South Africa was still very fresh in their minds. Then there was the problem of being called Dutch, which sounded a lot like Deutsch, and therefore suspect of Germany sympathies. Nevertheless, when the war came home in 1917 by drafting their sons, brothers, and husbands, American women rose to the challenge by uniting and bringing comfort and aid to the men; many of these women included those of Dutch extraction. Julia Bouwkamp's excellent article gives us a detailed account of how the war was fought on the home front by deeds of mercy and kindness.

The Dutch may sometimes have been mistaken for Germans; however, the German male immigrant had to register as an enemy alien, but the Dutch did not. In April 1917, when the USA declared war on Ger-

many, a new label "enemy alien" was coined. President Woodrow Wilson's proclamation stated that "all natives, citizens, denizens, or subjects of the hostile nation or government, being males of the age of fourteen years and upwards, who shall be within the United States, and not actually naturalized, shall be liable to be apprehended, restrained, secured, and removed as alien enemies." The number of these enemy aliens amounted to half a million.

The Archives received two new books—*In Peril on the Sea*, by Kenneth Schaaf, and *A Commentary on the Minutes of the Classis of Holland, 1848-1876: A Detailed Record of Persons and Issues, Civil and Religious, in the Dutch Colony of Holland, Michigan*, edited by Earl William Kennedy. Book reviews on both appear on page 44 and 45 of this issue.

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 2019. 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*.✉

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

Flames in the Night: World War I Flares Up in Peoria, Iowa

Robert Schoone-Jongen

S ometime between eleven o'clock and midnight, on 13 June 1918, as Tillie Van Gorp awoke to tend to a sick child, she spotted an orange glimmer through the farmhouse window. With only a half mile of prairie between her and the fire, there was

Peoria CRC burning.
Image courtesy of
the Archives, Calvin
College, Grand
Rapids, MI.



no doubt about what she saw—the Peoria Christian Reformed Church and the neighboring Christian school were ablaze. Despite the late hour, she phoned her brother-in-law Nick, to alert him. He sped to the scene, assessed the situation, and summoned help. The church and school were beyond help. And only a shift in the wind spared the recently built parsonage that stood next to the church. Providence may have saved the house, but humans had started the fire. So the sheriff pronounced after he inspected the site in the morning, along with his assistants—the local postmaster and a member of the Mahaska County Defense Council.¹

The arson assessment came as no surprise to anyone familiar with Peoria's recent past. For years tensions had been rising between the Dutch families that increasingly dominated the local population and the displaced descendants of the area's original settlers. American involvement in World War I and the incendiary rhetoric it inspired only stoked the fever. The recent state proclamation against conducting any public meetings in anything but the English language added more fuel. In truth, the Dutch Americans and their Yankee neighbors, despite their proximity, inhabited different worlds. And this alienation led to the torching of the buildings. It was neither the first nor the last incendiary incident that pitted neighbor against neighbor in Mahaska County during 1918 and 1919. There is a cautionary lesson here: fear and hatred leave lasting scars.

Peoria being ten miles northeast of Pella, it took decades for the Dutch colonists to reach that far in their search for farms. In the 1860s there were none. With the resumption of Dutch immigration after the Civil War, the Dutch percentage increased to about 10 percent of Richland Township's population in 1870. The majority were predominantly of Scots-Irish descent, families that came to Iowa from Ohio and Illinois during the 1840s, with roots traced back to the Appalachian regions of Virginia, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania.² Over the years these inhabitants had

Robert Schoone-Jongen recently retired as Associate Professor of History at Calvin College. He has been researching and writing about Dutch-American immigrant experiences for many years, with special emphasis on communities in Minnesota, New Jersey, and Iowa.

organized themselves into a community, complete with a township government and school district. The Methodists built a church, as did the Disciples of Christ. There were stores, a wagon shop, a blacksmith, a creamery, a tavern, and a Masonic lodge. For several years a grist mill on the Snake River processed the local crops. The locals believed they had enough of a future to plat a townsite. In up-to-date fashion, it included sixty-six-foot-wide streets to accommodate the farm wagons that would roll into town on business.³ When the railroads bypassed the village, Peoria's dream of commercial significance died. The post office that gave the place its name closed in 1906, its traffic diverted to Pella.⁴

By the 1880s Pella's Dutch residents were pinched for land. As many farmers found opportunities elsewhere in Iowa, Nebraska, and Minnesota, many looked to buy closer to home. That brought them to Peoria. They found willing sellers among the Yankees.

Richland Township's ethnic transformation, while dramatic, was hardly unusual. Ethnic farmers, like the Dutch, tended to take the long view, one measured in generations, not crop cycles. Their English-speaking neighbors were more impatient, anticipating bigger returns in smaller time intervals. The Dutch viewed farming as a heritage, more than as a scheme to gain wealth. Of course,

they hoped to earn profits; they had to. But the bottom line meant more than money in the bank.⁵ When the English-speaking holdouts saw the successes of their new neighbors, a spirit of envy descended upon the land. The last version of Peoria's plat map, drawn in 1913, told the tale and set the stage for what happened that June night. The 1913 town site was surrounded by farms owned by Dutch Americans. To the English speakers this meant "being squeezed" by foreigners.

The Dutch ascendancy in Richland accelerated. By 1894 their numbers warranted organizing separate congregations. That year a Christian Reformed formed in Peoria, and a Reformed one in nearby Taintor. In a little over ten years the Peoria congregation included 50 families, 113 communicants, and 303 souls. Seven years later those numbers had all increased by about 25 percent or more. The total number of Dutch households in the township jumped from 32 percent in 1900 to 46 percent in 1910. By 1920 the percentage would stand at 68 percent. While the Dutch presence swelled, the township's total population dropped, mirroring the county-wide trend. In 1900 Richland had 1,213 residents; in 1920 the number stood at 909, a 25 percent reduction.⁶

Such coma-inducing statistics struck fear in the hearts of the old settler families. The remaining families increasingly found themselves tenants

or hired hands, while the Dutch became owner-operators. When a Dutch farmer did rent, his landlord was generally a relative, usually his father. In other words, generations of Dutch Americans formed an economic covenant with each other to promote the well-being of their particular family. Intermarriages created an even more knotted skein in which in-laws and cousins interlocked to complicate what appeared to be a simple linear fathers-to-sons line of succession. And they were prospering during a period of unprecedented prosperity in rural America.

The years 1910-1914, adjusting for inflation, were the most profitable years American farmers ever enjoyed. A majority of the nation's population still resided in rural areas, meaning there were a large number of rural people doing well as stewards of the land. A closer look at the numbers shows one major division—ethnic (immigrant) farm communities were outpacing communities dominated by families from "American" backgrounds. The immigrant communities tended to rest on deep religious roots as well. In Richland Township, that contrast between the Dutch and their American neighbors was particularly stark. The 1915 Iowa State Census asked each respondent to identify their religious affiliation. The Dutch respondents overwhelmingly pronounced themselves members of either a Reformed or a Christian



Peoria, IA. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

Reformed congregation. The non-Dutch residents, also overwhelmingly, professed no religious affiliations at all.⁷ And when the increasingly marginalized old families looked for signs of Dutch presence, and prosperity, they only needed to look to a few acres on the north edge of Peoria at the collection of buildings the Dutch congregation began building during the summer of 1894.

The first Peoria Christian Reformed Church was a simple balloon frame building commonly found on the plains. A crew with a few hammers, a plan, and a foreman could erect one of those structures in a matter of days. They also built a modest parsonage, a house indistinguishable from any of the houses standing on the surrounding farmsteads. The congregation could afford this in the face of a time of severe national depression and regional drought. By November 1894, the congregation began the search for a minister. One arrived before the end of the year. With a pastor in place and services being held twice each Sunday, more residents that were Dutch arrived in the community. In 1904 the congregation expanded the building by purchasing, and moving, half of the defunct Peoria Creamery building. In 1909 a school building rose on a site next to the church. During 1911 the church building was remodeled and expanded, the better to house the crowds on Sunday and to accommo-



Richland and Prairie townships in Mahaska County. Image courtesy of Hixson Plat Map Atlases of Iowa, University of Iowa Libraries, Map Collection.

date the pipe organ the congregation had purchased in 1909.⁸

A new minister arrived in 1914, a newly minted dominee who very quickly became a household name in the Christian Reformed denomination, Rev. Harry Bultema. Between writing sermons, leading societies (including the new singing society), and visiting those in need by car, Bultema spent hours writing intricate theological tomes and numerous articles on the Bible's prophetic themes. With war breaking out in Europe, the thoughts of many turned to apocalyptic visions of the present and the belief that the Second Coming might be imminent.⁹ Bultema proclaimed these ideas both near and far in the pages of *The Banner* and *De Wachter*, and in

pamphlets and books. His notoriety brought him attention and a call to a much larger congregation in Michigan. His successor in Peoria, Jacob J. Weersing, quickly proposed that the congregation seriously consider building a newer, larger parsonage. When the replacement structure burned during construction, the congregation simply built another one early in 1917.¹⁰

Clearly, the Peoria Christian Reformed Church stood as a thriving symbol to the decline of Richland's old order. And that hurt. And it hurt even more when they could hear the sounds of the church's services, especially during the summer months when the church windows were open. The services were exclusively in the Dutch language. Compounding the alienation, the Christian school existed, in part, to keep the Dutch language alive for another generation. When it expanded into a full-fledged day school, the public school population suffered a noteworthy decline, jeopardizing its future. The Dutch spoke their own language during their weekday visits in town. They intermarried exclusively within their own circle. And they seemed to think of themselves as a superior lot, given



Peoria CRC. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

how their version of the community was grounded in their church.¹¹ God was prospering their efforts, or so they liked to think, and say. And they *were* prosperous, on land that had failed its previous owners. That hurt.

Then, in April 1917, the United States of America declared war on Germany. President Woodrow Wilson's war message to Congress caught the apocalyptic spirit that Rev. Bultema's books and sermons exuded. "It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people in war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance."¹² Earlier, in this same speech, the President addressed an obvious fact, that the United States was an ethnically divided country. There were "millions of men and women of German birth and native sympathy, who live among us and share our life. . . ." Most of them will do the right thing and support the American effort against their relatives. But, "[i]f there should be disloyalty, it will be dealt with a firm hand of stern repression. . . ." The disloyal would be a ". . . lawless and malignant few." To make that point absolutely clear, the United States Government unleashed a torrent of propaganda, promoting loyalty by portraying the enemy as beasts and barbarians.

For Dutch Americans the war posed some very real problems. The British allies recently had brutally suppressed the Boer Republics in South Africa. Dutch Americans had rallied to the cause of their distant cousins during the Anglo-Boer War, with mass rallies and fundraising, some of it taking the form of Thanksgiving Day offerings in Christian Reformed churches.¹³ Dutch immigrants had heard school lessons in the Netherlands, had heard the stories of what the French had done to their homeland when Napoleon created the Batavian Republic during the

1790s. To those Dutch who belonged to the dissenter churches, French Enlightenment ideas had irredeemably corrupted the Hervormde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church), which had inspired the secession of 1834.¹⁴ For the folks in the Pella area, the persecution that followed the *Afscheiding* had literally driven their parents and grandparents to these prairies under the leadership of Rev. Scholte in the 1840s. Now, as Americans, could they be expected to defend the very nation that had corrupted their European homeland? Many Dutch Americans asked these questions, sometimes publicly. One of them, in Minnesota, stated he would rather return to the Netherlands before fighting on the side with the French.¹⁵

Rev. Jacob J. Weersing was among those who wondered about such things. He considered becoming a lawyer before opting for the ministry. When the government promoted Liberty Loans to finance the war, Weersing allegedly referred to the funds as "blood money." When the federal government allowed draft exemptions for young men working in agriculture, Weersing (allegedly) advised members of his congregation how they could take advantage of this provision in the law.

Among the English speakers, these legal subtleties were lost. What they heard was a foreign language being spoken in a place where English had once prevailed. And, as for that language, who could tell the difference between Dutch and German anyhow? If Dutch-speaking young men stayed home, and Dutch farms continued to prosper, while English-speaking young men did their duty and submitted to the draft, well, where was the justice in that? And farmers were thriving in the wake of the war. Grain prices in the United States had soared since the outbreak of the war in Europe. While Europeans set about

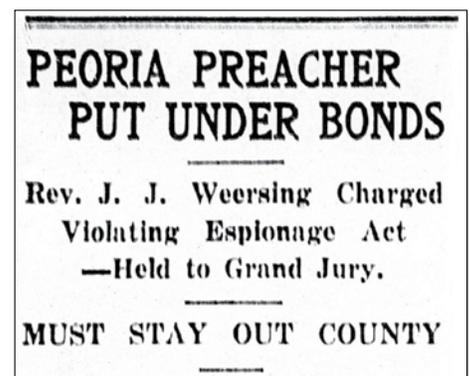
killing each other and dragooning their young men in military service, someone had to feed those soldiers. And American farmers did just that, at least for the British and French soldiers. The Germans were cut off from the world markets by the British



Rev. Jacob Weersing. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

blockade. That new parsonage the Peoria Christian Reformed Church built, twice, in 1916 was being paid for by the profits farmers earned from European sales. World War I was good for business on American farms.

All the disappointments of the decades that the English speakers had endured turned into fear and resentment of these foreign speakers in their midst. Those fears and resentments



Pella Chronicle, 21 May 1918. Image courtesy A Digital Archive of the Pella Public Library, Pella, IA.

began to boil as American involvement in the war entered its second year during the spring of 1918. A year's worth of government anti-German propaganda took a toll on the entire nation. Public figures like Theodore Roosevelt inveighed against all things "foreign." He even said that if a minister did not place the flag above the cross on the church steeple, his church should be closed. And American churches, overwhelmingly, rallied to the nation's colors. Billy Sunday's revival meetings would begin with the "Star-Spangled Banner." Churches, including those attended by Dutch immigrants, began sprouting American flags in their sanctuaries. Pious Protestants, including Billy Sunday, regularly sang "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" during church services, words that had been penned during the Civil War by a devout Unitarian. But in Peoria, and elsewhere, a few devout souls questioned these trends.¹⁶

The broader Christian Reformed church fell into line with the spirit of the time, in a sort of "yes, but" way. Rev. Henry Beets, *The Banner's* editor, featured presidential proclamations on the front cover at Thanksgiving

**ONLY ENGLISH TO
BE USED IN PUBLIC**

Governor Harding Issues Drastic Proclamation Against Foreign Languages.

TO PREVENT SUSPICION !

Pella Chronicle, 30 May 1918. Image courtesy A Digital Archive of the Pella Public Library, Pella, IA.

and Decoration (now Memorial) Day.¹⁷ He published a lengthy lecture by Calvin College's history professor, R. B. Kuiper, with the unsubtle

title "Christian Patriotism."¹⁸ The denomination recruited ministers to serve as chaplains to the armed forces, in cooperation with the Young Men's Christian Association. Each week *The Banner* featured reports from the chaplains about how "our boys" were being shepherded through the brambles of military life. What was not published is worth noting. Nowhere did Beets espouse pacifism, or advocate for conscientious objection to the war. He used his editorial columns to push churches to switch services to English as soon as possible. He specifically denounced consistories that hid behind arcane voting requirements in their articles of incorporation to throttle the members who wanted English services. And when the denomination's synod met in June 1918, the first vote approved of support to President Wilson, whose secretary, Joseph Tumulty, sent a telegram acknowledging its receipt.¹⁹

In Iowa that spring, Governor William L. Harding decided to do his part to enforce national unity. On 23 May 1918, he issued an executive order banning the use of any foreign language in any public meeting, including church services, anywhere in the state. This "Babel Declaration" even banned telephone calls in foreign languages. To the zealous, the governor's decree became a license to inflict retribution on those who dissented.²⁰

In Peoria, the governor's decree further poisoned an already toxic situation. Rev. Weersing's questioning of the war and the Liberty Loans and his alleged assistance in providing advice about draft deferments aroused some in the English-speaking community to issue threats against both him and the Christian school. Some threats arrived in writing. But Rev. Weersing regarded them seriously enough to take precautions for his personal safety. Decades later, Hermina De Leeuw, the daughter of the pastor of Pella's First

Christian Reformed Church, remembered the sound of the secret knock on the front door that signaled Rev. Weersing's furtive arrival. Her parents opened the door without turning on the lights, to hide their visitor from curious eyes. For three days he remained in the Pella parsonage, his horse hidden in a trustworthy parishioner's stable. The De Leeuw children were sworn to secrecy, lest the wrong people discovered the Peoria pastor's whereabouts.²¹

As for the Peoria Christian School, the rumors became even more ominous. Apparently, during its early years the school had flown the Dutch flag, rather than the American flag. When the English speakers voiced their objections to that, the school board relented and replaced it with the American flag. During the spring of 1918, when the time came for the annual school picture, Rev. Weersing allegedly banished any patriotic insignias from the group portrait. With their minister disappearing before threats of tar and feathers, the school board voted to suspend classes for the remainder of the school year, lest some vigilantes raid the town during the day.

Word of the threats and rumors spread beyond Peoria to the county seat, Oskaloosa, and from there to state officials in Des Moines. In this atmosphere, during March 1918, Weersing publicly defended himself against disloyalty charges in a letter to the editor submitted to the newspapers in Pella, Oskaloosa, and New Sharon. In it he exhorted his fellow Dutch Americans to buy Liberty Bonds and obey the draft laws, ". . . since the USA is involved in the war and we are enjoying the benefits of the flag that floats over this nation it is your duty to protect that flag, and we must do it and will."²²

The Peoria church council considered preventative measures, just in

case something bad happened to the community. Already in 1917, even before the United States entered the war, the elders and deacons discussed increasing the insurance coverage on their building. One day after President Wilson asked for a declaration of war, the consistory voted to buy ten fire extinguishers. To mollify the local demands to support the war effort, the elders and deacons voted to cooperate in the Red Cross activities in the vicinity and mandated that Rev. Weersing spearhead the effort. But the Richland Township Red Cross was split between Dutch and non-Dutch, prompting the consistory's decision to affiliate with the chapter in Oskaloosa.²³

Then the sheriff came for Rev. Weersing during the latter part of April 1918. The warrant stated he had violated the Federal Espionage Act. Pella's newspaper editor recited the list of accusations against Weersing, things that led the English speakers to prefer charges against him. Several weeks earlier, Weersing had appeared before the state Defense Council to defend his less than zealous reactions to the Liberty Loan appeals. The Council warned him to be careful, and loyal. The editor opined, "From reports we get in one way or another, Mr. Weersing appears to be a regular little *Kaiser* (emperor) over around Peoria." After noting that Weersing was of German stock, the editor continued, "A pastor of a church ought to feel a responsibility upon him to lead his people to the most active and zealous support of the government in the war, and one who fails to do so . . . is unworthy to hold the office of pastor." America was under attack from within by foreigners who bring ". . . their un-American ideas with them, and we must insist that they either become Americans in fact or return to their home lands." If the people of Peoria could not support the public school,

then they should leave the United States.²⁴

Weersing was remanded to the courthouse in Ottumwa, charged, and then released on bail with the stipulation that he stay out of Mahaska County. He remained in hiding, apparently at the parsonage of the Prairie City Christian Reformed Church in Jasper County.²⁵ The local zealots rode into Peoria one night, intent on having their way with the minister. But they found the parsonage empty. The consistory granted Weersing an extended vacation, which he used to visit his relatives in Zeeland, Michigan. They also voted to defend themselves and their *dominee* in writing. Clerk Charles Stuursma's letter appeared in *De Wachter* on 12 June 1918. Stuursma asserted that the tensions arose from envy. The Dutch farmers prospered, while their English-speaking neighbors wallowed in debt. Jealousy was the issue, not patriotism. "Regarding the duties of good citizens our people are the equals of all the others." When local "rowdies" tried to bully the Dutch into conforming to their 'higher' standard of patriotism, Rev. Weersing had complained to the authorities. His public defense had further incensed the "rowdies," inspiring them to level even more accusations against him to those same authorities, and increasing the threats again Dutch speakers. Through it all, Weersing had always been open with the authorities, affirming his loyalty to the nation. "For the accusations were based on lies and had no basis." Weersing was arrested for his own protection. "We readily concurred that the authorities had reason to worry about the so-called 'mob' that had no regard for the law." The consistory anticipated their minister's return when the situation calmed at bit.²⁶

In the middle of Weersing's exile, on 23 May, Iowa's governor issued his

proclamation against public use of foreign languages in public meetings. This gave the anti-Dutch crowd yet another excuse for hating the Peoria congregation. Only now, their hatred had the governor's own sanction. His proclamation enjoyed widespread support, especially in those areas of the state where immigrant farmers had been replacing native-born farmers. The proclamation sent sheriffs and deputies into churches on Sundays to enforce compliance. Some congregations simply ceased services. The edict even countenanced wire-tapping, since only English would be permitted on public utility lines. Here was executive authority expanded to the max, in the name of patriotism and loyalty. Governor Harding reveled in the positive response. There was pushback about church services, leading him to gradually relent on that clause.

Then, with Dutch banned from worship services, the Peoria Christian School standing empty, and Rev. Weersing exiled to Michigan, on Thursday, 13 June 1918, under the cover of darkness, someone doused the school building's exterior with kerosene and lit it. There was a quarter moon that night, enough for the arsonist to see without a lantern. As the school burned, the church ignited as well, the buildings being located within yards of each other. The new parsonage Rev. Weersing had asked for stood on the other side of the church. But the wind shifted while the church and school burned, sparing the house. The sheriff arrived in the morning, investigated the scene with two assistants, and declared the fire arson. The intensity of the blaze had obliterated any evidence pointing to who the assailants might have been. However, the Peoria fire proved to be the first of several attacks on Dutch-associated buildings and individuals in the area. On 16 October the Sully

**PEORIA CHURCH
AND SCHOOL BURN**

**Fire Thought to be of Incendriary
Origin Due to Feeling on
War Questions.**

WERE IN TROUBLE BEFORE

Pella Chronicle, 20 June 1918. Image courtesy
A Digital Archive of the Pella Public Library,
Pella, IA.

Christian School caught fire. It stood ten miles north of Peoria in Jasper County. Damage to the building was limited. During February 1919, when a Dutch farmer purchased a farm near New Sharon, the house burned to the ground. On 27 February 1919 the New Sharon Reformed Church was destroyed by fire. During the following May, someone tried to bomb that congregation's parsonage. During July a local elevator, owned by a businessman known to be on good terms with the Dutch, caught fire under suspicious circumstances. Then, in September 1919, arsonists torched a straw pile on a Dutch-owned farm near New Sharon. That blaze spread to the nearby barn, destroying it.²⁷

The farm fire provided the break the fire marshal needed to solve the case. During December 1919 the arrests and indictments began, and the trial dates set. These headlines turned to spectacle when Iowa's flamboyant Attorney General H. M. Havner arrived in Oskaloosa to assume ownership of the investigation. He announced his bid for governor three days after the indictments were announced. Amid the excitement, a legal case emerged. Eight men in the northwestern part of Mahaska County had conspired to rid their area of Dutch neighbors, by intimidation if possible, by force if required.

The conspirators all came from old American families. Most of their families had come to Iowa before the Civil War, established themselves in the Mahaska County area, and stayed there for several decades. The conspirators had agreed among themselves that a road two miles west of New Sharon should form the border between "real" Americans and their Dutch competitors. Any Dutch person living east of that line must be removed, "burned out" if needed. Hence, the attack on Gysbert Vos's barn. One final distinction among the conspirators: none of them claimed any religious affiliation.²⁸

Charles Gosnell, Luther Howell, Roy Steen, Chanley Lundy, John Calvin (yes, John Calvin!) Jarard selected the targets, wrote threatening letters, hired the arsonists, and paid for their services. Jarard, Gosnell, and Steen were brothers-in-law. Howell and Steen were tenants; Lundy, Gosnell, and Jarard were owner/operators. Jarard owned in excess of three hundred acres in Prairie Township. Other than his brother-in-law, Jarard found himself literally surrounded by Dutch neighbors—Vermeer, Pothoven, Van Gorp, and Kloosterman.²⁹ Luther Howell seemed to be the leader. He hired the arsonists, Tom Davis and Roy Eflin, transported them to the scenes of the crime when needed, and paid them in cash provided by the other conspirators.

Davis and Eflin were in their twenties, both veterans of the armed forces, and both scratching a living as landless laborers in the community. Eflin had arrived in Mahaska County a few years before, when his mother divorced her second husband in Missouri and moved to a modest house in New Sharon. Roy had apprenticed in the navy before the United States entered the Great War. Between spans of unemployment, he worked as a farm laborer. Davis was a Mahaska County

native. By 1918 he had already been in and out of a marriage, fathered a child, sustained a head injury while helping build a mausoleum in the New Sharon cemetery, driven a dray wagon, and served a four-month stint in the army. Howell had hired Eflin, who hired Davis to assist him. They

**PELLA CHURCHES
ALL CONFORMING**

**Dutch Services Now Held Only
for Those Who Cannot Un-
derstand English at All.**

Pella Chronicle, 27 June 1918. Image courtesy
A Digital Archive of the Pella Public Library,
Pella, IA.

all admitted their involvement in the Sully Christian School fire, the burning of the Reformed Church in New Sharon, the burning of Vos's barn, and the attempted bombing of the Reformed parsonage in New Sharon. In Sully they used papers in a teacher's desk as the accelerant. Coal oil did the dirty work in New Sharon and on Vos's farm. And coal oil had been used in the abortive bombing. None of them admitted to the fire in Peoria. However, the fire marshal believed the same substance had been used for the first fire. The same hand that had written threatening notes to people like Gysbert Vos had penned letters sent to people in Peoria. While circumstantial, the evidence seems convincing.

By the spring of 1920, the powers that be in Mahaska County had lost their zeal for finding the final truth. They had a conviction and several confessions. Roy Eflin was serving a ten-year sentence in the Anamosa State Penitentiary. Tom Davis had escaped that fate by first turning state's evidence against Eflin, then convincing a jury that his head injury

KERK EN SCHOOL VERBRAND
 Des Moines, Ia. Staats autoriteiten onderzoeken naar de oorzaak van de vernieling der Hollandsche kerk en school te Peoria, Iowa, verleden Donderdag nacht, met een verlies van \$25,000. Geschil onder de burgers over het gebruik van vreemde talen in beide inrichtingen, en dreigingen, lelden tot de gedachte dat de brand van opzettelijken oorsprong is.

"Church and School Burned," *Volksvriend*, 20 June 1918. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

had rendered him incapable of thinking for himself. The judge directed the jury to acquit him. Howell was also declared not guilty in his trial. The rest of the conspirators either pled guilty or had their charges dropped for lack of evidence. In truth, 1920 being an election year, the county judge and state's attorney had little reason to keep the proceedings on the front pages of the newspapers. By April 1920, the matter had disappeared from view.³⁰

But the "Hollander Fires" did not disappear from the memories of those who experienced them. The Peoria congregation built a new, more elaborate, church in 1919. The school was rebuilt and reopened that same year. Only a month after the fire, the congregation held its annual Mission Fest and raised hundreds of dollars for various causes, including the denomination's ministries to the troops in the armed forces. The

Reformed congregation in New Sharon rebuilt in short order, as well. Both congregations have lived to their centennial years, and beyond. Rev. Weersing never returned to Peoria, accepting a call to a church in Hull, Iowa. After a stop in Chicago, he migrated to California, where he remained a fixture in the Christian Reformed church until his death in 1976. For a time Gysbert Vos remained on his farm by New Sharon. But he eventually relocated to another one nearer Pella, where had been born. The conspirators all lived to old ages. Several of them were buried in the Friends Cemetery in New Sharon, ironically given their non-Quakerish behaviors as adults. H. M. Havner did not become Iowa's governor. Roy Eflin was pardoned by the governor after serving just over a year for his crimes. The Dutch "takeover" of farmland to the east of Pella did not end with the fires. In that sense, they won the argument, and the fight.

Nevertheless, the hatreds, bigotries, and fears that sparked the fire in Peoria and Sully and New Sharon have not disappeared. Immigrants are still seen as "others" by many and treated as lesser beings for being others. And politicians still say things about the "others" that encourage intolerance and hatred and even violence. The struggle that burned in Peoria still smolders. ❧

Endnotes

1. Oskaloosa Herald, as quoted in *The Pella Chronicle*, 20 June 1918. 1913 Plat Map of Richland Township, Mahaska County, Iowa, at: <http://www.beforetime.net/iowagenealogy/mahaska/platmap1913/PartOfRichlandTWPPlat-Map1913.png> <6 July 2018>
2. Ninth Census of the United States (1870), manuscript schedules for Richland Township, Mahaska County, State of Iowa.
3. <http://cdm270701.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p270701coll6/id/67> <30 July 2018>
4. Dahm, James P., and Dorothy J. Van Kooten. *Peoria, Iowa: A Story of Two Cultures, With an In-Depth Look at the "Holland Fires," 1853-1993* (Pella, Iowa: Pella Printing Co., 1993), 18-42.
5. Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Pages 319-25 focus on events in Peoria.
6. *Jaarboekje ten dienste der Christ. Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord Amerika, seven en twintigste jaargang* (Grand Rapids: J. B. Hulst, 1907), 25. Eleventh (1890), Twelfth (1900), and Thirteenth (1910) Censuses of the United States, manuscript schedules for Richland Township, Mahaska County, State of Iowa.
7. Iowa State Census of 1915, index cards for Richland Township, Mahaska County.
8. Dahm and Van Kooten, 66-9.
9. James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in America: The History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 95-6.
10. Dahm and Van Kooten, 69.
11. Jacob van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the 19th and 20th Centuries in the United States of America*. (Robert P. Swierenga, ed.). (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 753, 761, 796.
12. Woodrow Wilson, War Message to Congress, 2 April 1917 <https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/?dod-date=402> <30 July 2018>
13. Henry S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America: Dutch Immigration to the United States and Canada, 1789-1950* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1955), 565-70.
14. This secession was led by Rev.

Hendrik De Cock in Ulrum, in the province of Groningen, the Netherlands, forming a new denomination, the *Christelijke Afgescheiden (Christian Seceders)*. A large percentage of Dutch immigrants in the latter part of the nineteenth century belonged to this group.

15. Robert Schoone-Jongen, "Patriotic Pressures: The Dutch Experience in Southwest Minnesota during World War One." *Origins*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Fall 1989), pp. 2-8. The local newspaper reported, ominously, "His neighbors are taking up a collection for him."

16. Richard M. Gamble, "Together for the Gospel of Americanism: Evangelicals and the First World War," in Gordon L. Heath (ed.), *American Churches and the First World War* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 22-28.

17. *The Banner*, 22 November 1917, 23 May 1918.

18. *Ibid.*, 6 June 1918, 13 June 1918, 20 June 1918, 4 July 1918.

19. *Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church held from June 19 to 29, 1918 at Grand Rapids, Michigan* (official English translation of the original Dutch minutes), Art. 9, 26.

20. <http://www.iowapublicradio.org/post/reflecting-anti-immigrant-sentiment-babel-proclamations-centennial> <30 July 2018>

21. Hermine De Leeuw Terpstra to Herbert J. Brinks, 6 March 1989, in Calvin College Heritage Hall Collection.

22. Quoted in Dahm and Van Kooten, 82.

23. Dahm and Van Kooten, 83.

24. Quoted in Dahm and Van Kooten, 82.

25. Dahm and Van Kooten, 83.

26. *De Wachter*, 12 June 1918, 5 (author's translation).

27. Dahm and Van Kooten, 84-89.

28. Iowa Census, 1915: Card files for Prairie and Richland Townships, Mahaska County.

29. Plat maps, 1913 for Prairie and Richland Townships. The background materials on those charged with the crimes was culled from online sources found via searches on ancestry.com.

30. *Pella Chronicle*, 13 November 1919, 1; *Booster Press*, 31 December 1919, 15 January 1920, 28 January 1920, 5 February 1920, 18 February 1920, 24 February 1920.

Being a Calvinist at Camp Custer during WWI

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, who selected, edited, and introduces this account

Introduction

Even though the United States did not enter the first world war until 1917, the Dutch immigrant community in the United States became drawn in already during the early months of the war in 1914 when Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands ordered all her male subjects of serviceable age home to the Netherlands to serve in the Dutch army in the event the Netherlands would also be forced to defend

report. Most of them were unwilling to go, citing that they were unable to pay the travel costs. Vice Consul Steketee, however, assured them that the Dutch government would pay for their passage.³ In its 15 August 1914 edition, *De Calvinist* ran a much longer article and listed the names of forty-two men from Grand Rapids as well as names of those from Muskegon, Kalamazoo, and Zeeland, Michigan. Fifteen hundred Dutch nationals from all over the United States found themselves on board ships bound for the Netherlands to serve in the Dutch army by mid-August 1914.⁴

With so many of their sons, brothers, fellow church members, and friends serving overseas, albeit in a neutral country, the Dutch-American immigrant community kept itself well informed about the war. Added to that was the barrage of opinions for and against the war published in the newspapers, including such CRC weeklies as *The Banner* and *De Wachter*, keeping the news about the war in Europe on the front burners in America.⁵ Nevertheless, when in April 1917 young American men of Dutch origin were called up to serve in the United States army, most of them were ill informed about army life. The Christian Reformed (CRC) men came from protected church, school, and family environments. They seldom swore or heard swearing and were not in the habit of visiting prostitutes. Dancing and movies were forbidden by the CRC. The Ten Commandments



Map of various camps, forts, and one airfield regularly visited by CRC chaplains. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI

itself against Germany. These were men who had not yet become citizens of their chosen countries and were therefore technically still her subjects.¹ The *Volksvriend* reported these summons (*oproepings*) from various parts of the United States including South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan.² The *Grand Rapids Press* reported that at least thirty-five from Ottawa County and thirty-eight from Kent County were ordered to

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres is a researcher, author, editor, and frequent contributor to *Origins*. She has authored three books and edited and annotated one. Her current research is centered on Dutch immigrant women working as midwives in Dutch colonies in the United States.

were drilled into them from childhood. Suddenly they were thrust into an environment totally foreign to them. As Richard Harms noted in his article on the first chaplains, “the prospect of sending its [CRC] young men into the world and possible death without proper spiritual care was frightening.”⁶ And although the CRC had no army chaplains at the time, it soon realized the importance of such and began looking for ways to meet the spiritual needs of the men. In all, some twenty-three ordained and lay people would serve full time and part time at various camps and airfields during the war.

To its credit, the CRC kept excellent track of its members who served in the United States military during WWI.⁷ In the 1920 CRC Yearbook, there is a classis-by-classis and congregation-by-congregation count of the men who had served, who were wounded, and who had died.⁸ In the Calvin College Archives’ WWI Collection, there are two sets of letters that give us a glimpse into spiritual life at camp as experienced by young CRC men.

The first set was written by Joe Nieboer, who served with the US Army Company B, 310th Supply Train. Joe was a member of the Sherman Street CRC, and his letters to

the Young Men’s Society of Sherman Street describe life at Camp Custer as experienced by a serious Christian young man. Camp Fort Custer, near Battle Creek, was the only training camp for Michigan and Wisconsin men during the First World War.⁹ After military training began there on 26 August 1917, more than 90,000 men would pass through it en route to France and Germany. Joe was one of forty-two men from his congregation who served, two of whom died. Because these letters were written a full year ahead of the Wierenga letters, they set the stage for what life was like at camp.

The Wierenga letters were written during the final months of the war by Wobbe Wierenga, a seventy-one-year-old Dutch-born farmer, who wrote

from his home in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to his son, Jacob Wierenga, stationed in Camp Fort Custer and waiting to go overseas.¹⁰ The letters reveal a father’s concern for his son during the waning months of the war and the impact of the flu epidemic on the soldiers and the home front. In the month of October 1918, when these letters were written, six hundred and sixty-three soldiers died of the Spanish flu at Camp Custer; in the state of Michigan there were 6,336 flu-related deaths.

The Wierengas belonged to the Kelloggsville CRC. Besides Jacob, there were ten other men from the congregation at the camp. The church sent devotional booklets to the men. Their pastor, Rev. Martin Schans, wrote to them faithfully and in April

CHURCH NEWS.

ATTENTION!

All young men who expect to go to Camp Custer next week, please take notice of the following:

Rev. Leonard Trap, who is there to minister to your spiritual needs, can be found in Camp Custer every WEDNESDAY AND SATURDAY AFTERNOON from 2 till 4 O’CLOCK, in Y. M. C. A. Building No. 605. Look him up there and tell him to which regiment and company you have been assigned. Unless you do this it may be a long time before he finds you among the 14,000 new men who are expected to arrive next week.

Consistories, please have this announced from your pulpits Nov. 18.

The Banner, 15 November 1917. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

SOLDIERS’ LUNCHEONS AT BATTLE CREEK.

We thankfully acknowledge the receipt of supplies for Sunday evening suppers from the following parties:

Ladies’ Aid, Rusk, Mich.; Congregation and Y. P. S., Third Kalamazoo; Mr. John Kos and Miss Henrika Kos; S. S., Third Zeeland, Mich.; Mr. C. Luyendyk, Kalamazoo, Mich.; Y. L. Sewing Circle, LaGrave Ave., Grand Rapids, \$15; Y. P. S., 9th St., Holland; Y. P. S., 16th St., Holland.

We dare not take the space in *The Banner* to give an itemized list of all the goods that are sent us. It would take columns. To all who send money, we would suggest that it be sent to the treasurer, Mr. G. J. Haan, 1022 Jefferson Ave., who will then acknowledge it in *The Banner* and forward it to us when we send word that we are ready for it. But be sure that you state expressly that this money is to be used for the Battle Creek Luncheons. If you wish to send canned fruit, smoked meat, home-made cookies, preserves, jellies, candy, apples, oranges, etc., correspond directly with the undersigned.

LEONARD TRAP.
285 Cherry St., Battle Creek, Mich.

The Banner, 13 December 1917. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

1918 Schans was given a three-month leave of absence to work as a camp pastor.¹¹

Camp Custer, Oct. 17, 1917

Joe Nieboer to the men of the Sherman Street Young Men's Society, Grand Rapids, MI

Dear friends,

I was very pleased this past week to hear from several of the boys. I am very grateful to George van Wesep, John Olthof, Ben Osinga, James De Vos, and Henry Nieboer for their letters and John Sluiter for his cards. I am particularly grateful for the letter from Henry Nieboer containing an essay presented at one of the recent meetings, and also a report of that meeting. If I am not mistaken this is the official letter from the society, since you decided to send me such each week as I noticed from an article in a recent Calvinist. I wish to thank you all for this decision and for this letter. I would be very grateful to hear from more of the boys.

I was very glad to hear that Rev. [Rienk B.] Kuiper has accepted the call to serve our church. I trust and pray that he may be of great benefit to our people and to our Y.M. Society. The weather today is very wet, and consequently we are not training. I would be very happy to tell you something about a soldier's life in this letter, but I prefer to leave that go until a later date, writing more today about the religious accommodations here for the Holland boys. Of course, you know that Rev. Trap is here, and boys, it's almost impossible to tell what a blessing he is to us.¹² Without the light of such a Shepherd it would be like groping in the dark. It is simply



Rev. Leonard Trap. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

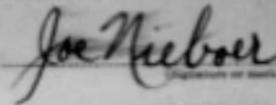
frightful what a small amount of true religion exists in the average American young man. For the first week here, I was convinced that there was not a single other Christian in our company of sev-

enty men; you can just about understand how discouraged I felt. Now after nearly a month here, I have found three and possibly four who might be termed Christians and all of those excepting possibly one, are pretty weak in their faith. It was a week ago last Sunday that I first met Rev. Trap. This was the Sunday that he held his first services in Battle Creek. The four visitors that I had with me, and myself formed about a third of the audience. At that time few of the boys knew about the services and very few knew how to find the G. A. R. [Great Army of the Republic] Hall, where the services were held. It was on that day that I got very well acquainted with Rev. Trap. The five of us were invited to his house for supper that night, and I can assure you that I never experienced a pleasanter visit in my life. The

Holland young men of the camp are indeed blessed in having such a pleasant God-fearing man for their Shepherd.¹³

I again attended services last Sabbath day. The text on which he based his

Joe Nieboer's WWI Registration Card. Image courtesy of US World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, on Ancestry.com, provided in association with National Archives and Records Administration.

Form 1		1237 REGISTRATION CARD 67 No.	
1	Name in full	JOE NIEBOER	Age in yrs. 22 31
2	Home address	1030 Center St. SE GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN	
3	Date of birth	November 29 1894	
4	Are you (1) a natural born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (X) or have you declared your intention (specify which)?	Natural born	
5	Where were you born?	Chicago Ill	
6	If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?		
7	What is your present trade, occupation, or office?	Machinist	7
8	By whom employed?	Widmarth & Norman	
	Where employed?	Grand Rapids Mich	
9	Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, wholly dependent on you for support? (specify which)?	No	
10	Married or single (which)?	Single	Race (specify which) Caucasian
11	What military service have you had? Rank	None	
12	Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)?	On account of occupation	
I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.			
			

sermon may be found in II Timothy 2, verse 3, which reads, "Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

Undoubtedly you can guess that he compared the life of a soldier in the U.S. Army to a soldier in the service of Jesus Christ. His speech made me feel proud to know that I was a soldier in both. After the services we had an informal meeting to discuss different plans for the services, etc. Hereafter there will be a meeting at 3:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. every Sunday, the G.A.R. Hall being open to the soldiers and friends and visitors from 9:00 a.m. to about 10:00 p.m. Deacons for the church were appointed in a hurry, yours truly being the first appointed. Being a deacon of a church is an honor that I hardly expected to be placed upon me in such a hurry, you can imagine.

Well the most interesting part of that discussion, to me at least, was the discussion concerning a Y.M. Society. It was decided to leave the forming of this society in my charge. Now there are many difficulties to be overcome in this. To have it on Sunday would be the most convenient, if it were not for the fact that many of the boys either go home on Sunday or have visitors over to see them.

We could have it in town any night, but there is the question of additional expense and a great waste of time. Remember that Battle Creek is about five miles distant from the Camp and 25c is needed for car fare and poor service at that. To have it here at Camp we face the difficulties of finding a place centrally located and of finding a place at all. The Y.M.C.A.s are too busy and

practically all the other buildings are barracks. To find some mess hall in a barrack centrally located where they will allow us to hold a meeting, seems to be my task. But we'll have Y.M. Society soon, I can assure you. Another thing arranged for was to have supper for the boys at the G.A.R. Hall Sunday nights, it being too far to go back to the Camp for supper. This will be arranged for soon.

Well, I believe I've written about enough for this letter and I'll soon write again. If there is anything in particular that anyone would like to know about the life of a soldier or this Camp life, I will be very glad to write about it in the next letter. All I can say now is, may God be with you and cause you to grow strong, not only in number but also in faith.

Your fellow member,
Joe Nieboer

Camp Custer, Oct. 29, 1917

To the boys of the Sherman Street Y.M.S.

Dear friends,

It's about 8:00 a.m. Sunday morning. The Christian Reformed boys

don't hold services Sunday mornings because it is quite hard for some of them to get away in the morning, but we hold services at 3:00 and 7:00 p.m. Consequently, I have a lot of time on my hands, that I thought I could spend to best advantage writing letters. I have received quite a few letters from more of the boys and I sure do thank them for them, but I haven't heard from all yet. And another thing, I hope none of you will wait till you get answers from me before you write again. You know it is quite easy for each of you to write a letter apiece to me, but for me to answer each one, besides keeping up my other correspondence is no easy matter. Undoubtedly all of you read a great deal and hear a great deal about Camp Custer, and anything that I might add would very likely be no news to you particularly not if you read the splendid articles written by Jacob De Jager for the Calvinist.

It is very quiet in Camp this morning because so many of the boys have gone home over Sunday. Where we are accustomed to having about forty or fifty for

meals, last night we only had fifteen for supper. I expect there will be considerably less than that for supper tonight.



Sherman Street CRC. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

I hardly know what to write today because I know so little that would interest you. I have made practically no progress with the Y.M.S. since I last wrote to you, and I haven't attended our church since then, having been in G.R. last Sunday. Possibly you would like to know a little about the routine of Camp life so here goes.

At 5:45 the sergeant blows his whistle. In fifteen minutes' time we must stand, completely in uniform, and in ranks in front of the barrack ready to answer present to roll call. This is no easy task with our fancy pants and leggings, particularly not when a fellow like myself loves to wait till the last minute to crawl out of bed. Between 6:05 and 6:30 we get ready for breakfast, that is, clean our teeth, wash up, and do anything else necessary, and believe me by that time most of us are pretty ready for breakfast too. Meals are about the only thing most of us are ready for all the time anyway. Right here I want to say that our company at least gets very good food. If any other company complains, I can blame it on nothing, but their cooks. Each man is allotted 41 cents a day for his meals and we are very lucky in having two cooks who know how to make the most of that 41 cents. At 7:30 we again fall in ranks for drill. We do drill work then till 11:30. Dinner at 12:00. Drill again from 1:00 till 5:00. The drill work consists of the following: calisthenics or as it is termed here, sitting up exercises, for about one hour a day; squad drill, platoon drill, marching, manual of arms, bayonet drill, trench work, hikes, and lectures on various subjects, etc. comprise the work for the rest of the time. Sometimes the work is



Two WWI soldiers showing the uniform leggings. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

interesting, sometimes it is not. The program changes every week, but never changes much. At 5:10 p.m. we have Retreat Roll Call and supper at 5:30. From then on until 11 p.m. your time is your own unless, ah yes, unless we have night drill, unless you are on guard duty, unless a lot of other things, but usually your time is your own. Although you are not requested to be in bed until 11 p.m., at 9:00 o'clock out goes the glim and at that time usually you will find yours truly comfortably tucked under the woolens. One of the most enjoyable parts of life at Camp are its special duties. For instance, kitchen mechanics, guard duty, latrine guard, waiter, etc. are some of those that fall to a man quite regularly. I had the extreme pleasure a few days ago of assisting in the unloading of a 50-ton car of coal and that in a blustery cold rain. Outside of that and a little fire-fighting some time ago, I've been pretty lucky about getting special duties, but some poor fellows who can't get up in the morning in time for roll call or who can't help getting

saucy to their superiors at times, are floundered in special duties.

I suppose now from this letter you would suppose that life at Camp Custer is quite dark and dreary, but you know "every cloud has its silver lining" and so life here also has its pleasures, but I'll reserve that for another time.

Meanwhile may God bless you all, and keep you, and cause our society to grow not only in number, but in spirit and in the amount of Good it may do toward assisting a bad world to repentance. For that primarily should be the only motive of our lives and our societies. May we pray to become first, last, and all the time for Jesus Christ, who died for us on Calvary's Cross.

Your friend,
Joe Nieboer

Camp Custer, Nov. 11, 1917

To the Y.M.S. boys,

Well, I am writing this on Sunday morning. This will be the first Sunday in a long time that I've

not seen the inside of a church. This afternoon at 3:30 I go on guard duty for 5 hours out of the 24 from 11:30 this morning to 11:30 tomorrow morning. You know that Rev. Trap holds services only at 3:00 and 7:00 p.m. so it would be impossible for me to attend them. I might have attended the Presbyterian Church in B[attle] C[reek] this morning, but for the fact that I had to be present at the guard mount this morning at 11:30.

Today I believe I will write you something of the character of the average soldier as I find them here in Camp Custer. Of course there is a very large variety and to even try to describe a few of them would be a task that I would not care to undertake. But then there are a few characteristics that are found in a great many. Characteristics both good and bad, mostly bad.

Their good characteristics are very well worth mentioning, characteristics

Jacob Wierenga's WWI Registration Card. Image courtesy of US World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, on Ancestry.com, provided in association with National Archives and Records Administration.

from which I and all of you may learn many lessons. One of the things that I find among the boys here that I do not find among the average Holland group of people is generosity. Everybody seems always ready to do something for somebody else. Little favors, little loans, little kindnesses are always apparent, everybody seems to have the fever. If anyone wants to go home over Sunday and is assigned to some special duty, it is not a difficult thing to find someone to take his place. If someone is short on cash it is not difficult to find someone to let him have something till pay day. When someone gets something good to eat from home he does not eat it all alone some place in a corner. As far as using other peoples' articles are concerned one is always borrow-

ing from another. It seemed to be a common idea that the army was a bunch of thieves. I find that nothing is ever stolen here. All of us always have a lot of our goods lying around loose, hanging on the wall, on shelves, etc. and I never had my suitcase locked or my money in any other place beside my pants pocket and at night my pants usually hang on the wall, although sometimes I'll admit I put it under my mattress, and I never missed anything or heard of anyone else missing anything except perhaps a few cigarettes or an apple or something of that type.

Well, now as their bad characteristics, possibly the main cause is their absolute lack of religion. The only religion I've seen in our company is of such a vague sort that I've almost decided that it can be no religion at all. It seems to be the type "If I try to do what doesn't bother my conscience I'm all right." I'll say right here that the best boy in our company both with regard to treating his fellow man and with regard to religion is a Roman Catholic, one of our two cooks. The other average man is the type that abhors and ridicules religion. Can you all imagine what a hard time a fellow has living with and confessing Christ among such a group of men? With the lack of religion of course comes swearing, lying, drinking, and adultery. Boys I would say that the worst crimes of the day are swearing and committing adultery and the worst of it is the average young man does not consider either of these a crime. It doesn't bother their conscience you see; in fact, they brag about how they can swear, and the conquests they've made with girls and sexual intercourse.¹⁴ Only a very, very few claim that they have

Form 1 <u>1717</u> REGISTRATION CARD		No. <u>181</u>
1	Name in full <u>Jacob Wierenga</u>	Age, in yrs. <u>24</u>
2	Home address <u>RR No 1 Grand Rapids Mich</u>	
3	Date of birth <u>May 13 1893</u>	
4	Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? <u>A natural born citizen</u>	
5	Where were you born? <u>Wyoming Twp. Mich. U.S.A.</u>	
6	If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?	
7	What is your present trade, occupation, or office? <u>Farmer</u>	
8	By whom employed? <u>Father</u>	
9	Where employed? <u>Wyoming Township</u>	
10	Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? <u>No</u>	
11	Married or single (which)? <u>Single</u> Race (specify which)? <u>Caucasian</u>	
12	What military service have you had? Rank _____; branch _____; years _____; Nation or State _____	
12	Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? <u>B</u>	
I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.		
<u>X 7/50 a Jacob Wierenga</u>		

been immune from this last crime as far as the actual practice is concerned. Of course, when it comes to the desire to commit adultery none of us are immune from that. Christ says, “He who looks upon a woman and desires to commit adultery unto her is already in his heart an adulterer.”

Well, I believe I’ve said about enough for this letter and I’ll write again just as soon as I get an opportunity. In the meanwhile, if anyone wishes to know anything in particular about me or camp life, or anything else I’d be glad to write it in my next letter. I’m always very glad to get the letters from the different boys telling about the different meetings, and I wish more would write.

Yours truly,
Joe Nieboer

Joe Nieboer served only six months. He was discharged in March 1918 and returned to Grand Rapids, where he worked as a toolmaker. He remained faithful in his love for the church. In the 1940 United States

Federal Census he is listed as an evangelist in Cook County, where he was born. He married Evelyn Hassink and had three children. He died on 31 March 1959 in Erie County, Pennsylvania.

Letters from Wobbe Wierenga to his son Jacob at Camp Custer

Grand Rapids, Michigan,
October 13, 1918

Jacob, Dear Son,

We learned from your writing that you may have to leave soon. We hope not, but if so, seek strength from the Lord. He is the hearer of prayers. Trust Him in all your walk and ways and do not be discouraged. God’s will and ways must be accomplished and He does what is right in His eyes.

Pray much, as that will comfort you. Please come home first if at all possible, Jacob—and if not, let us know as soon as possible so that some of the family can come to see you before you leave. The newspapers write much about peace but what is going to happen we don’t know. Only God knows,

therefore, trust Him and He will make peace. Can you not telephone us?

W. Wierenga¹⁵

At camp, Jacob Wierenga can tell from whom the letter is by the handwriting on the outside of the envelope. His father writes faithfully each week—always in Dutch. Even though Jacob was born in Michigan, the language in his home and church has been Dutch, so he has no trouble reading the letters. The war in Europe is still raging, and he expects to be shipped to France soon.¹⁶ Jacob is thankful for the daily mail call. Letters from home ease the loneliness—especially now that all leaves have been canceled due to the Spanish flu epidemic that has struck the camp.¹⁷

Grand Rapids, Michigan,
October 1918

Dear Son Jacob,

I am taking my pen in hand to write you a few words to let you know we are all still in good health and hope you are also still well. The last we heard from you



Midweek CRC services at Camp Custer. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

was that you were still in good health which made us happy. We cannot visit you and you cannot visit us as long as the sickness is so rampant—it is a dangerous sickness, and therefore, Jacob, lift up your eyes and heart and pray to God about all your work and walk and also thank God for His blessing to you and us all. We are each moment aware of our dependence on God's blessing and this sickness is again a warning for us to turn to God and remain in Him to protect us from this dangerous illness and from war wherever it rages. Is the illness still as bad as it was over there? It is here also and starting to get worse. In our congregation there are already fourteen families down with it we heard yesterday, Sunday. Also, we did not have a sermon. Piet Heyboer's family has seven down sick and most of Jan Vander Schuur's family. The dominee is somewhat better and there are more, but I don't know who all.

W. Wierenga¹⁸

Jacob, reading his father's latest letter, learns that, just as the flu has hit the camp hard, it has broken out at home as well. He is not allowed to go home to assess the situation. All leaves have been canceled. No one is allowed off base without special permission. Those who do leave have to wear a red arm band to signify they have been exposed to the flu. The camp surgeon, Colonel Creighton, has ordered all bunks to be enclosed with mosquito netting. He also ordered the men to sleep in alternate positions of head to toe so that no one breathes on his neighbor. There are instructions on the proper use of towels and mess kits, and each man has his throat sprayed twice a day. No doubt, Jacob is comforted by his father's unwavering faith in time of war and epidemics.

Grand Rapids, Michigan,
October 18, 1918

Dear Son,

We are still on the land and have received no money [from the government]. They say that we will soon get it, but I don't know. Pieter works in the plant for \$5.00 per day. We don't have all the potatoes out of the ground. Our new potatoes froze so that isn't much. Well, Jacob, guard yourself against temptation which is so dangerous in the camp. Pray God to be spared against it and acknowledge Him in all your ways because we are dependent on Him alone. I must end. Keep your eyes on God.

W. Wierenga

Jacob reads his father's latest letter with interest. Especially the part about the government still wanting the family farm property on Clyde Park between 44th and 52nd streets (at the time R R 6 Grand Rapids).

Rumor had it that there were plans to build a picric acid plant to manufacture munitions.¹⁹ Hopefully the government will soon pay his father so he can start looking for another place to farm. Not so much for father—the old

The Banner,
1 August 1918.
Image courtesy
of the Archives,
Calvin College,
Grand Rapids, MI.

man is seventy-one—but for Jacob and his brothers.²⁰ Jacob wonders if father really knows what is going on in a camp this size when he talks about guarding against temptation. Does his father know about the movies and dances regularly held to entertain the soldiers? Or has his father heard about the trips off base, before the quarantine, to the bars of Muskegon, Grand Haven, Holland, Grand Rapids, and Kalamazoo on the interurban coaches?²¹ Well, father doesn't have to worry about him. He has taken to heart the lessons learned in catechism and church about shunning evil and he spends his off-duty hours reading or playing chess and checkers with likeminded friends.

Grand Rapids, Michigan, December
10, 1918

Dear Son Jacob,

We received your letter in good health and understood from it that you are also still in good health which made us very happy,

A Special Appeal to Ministers to Volunteer for Spiritual Work Among the Boys Overseas.

The Central Committee, appointed by Synod to look after the Spiritual work among the boys overseas and to act as a clearing house for all concerned, comes to you with a special appeal to offer yourself for this great and important work.

Some of the requirements are:

Applicants must be:

- a. Over draft age.
- b. Must be able to pass the physical examination.
- c. Must not be of German ancestry either from own or from wife's side, for Red Cross or Y. M. C. A. service.

Three ways for the work are open, viz.: Through the Red Cross, Y. M. C. A. or Army Chaplaincy.

Correspond with and send application to

R. VAN NOORD, Secretary,
515 Eastern Ave., Grand Rapids, Mich.

Further information gladly furnished.

but we had expected you to come home on furlough so were disappointed. Especially now that you don't know when. Maybe the leave will still take place. Anyway, we hope so. Maybe you are also disappointed in your expectations but lift your heart upward to Him from Whom our help comes, because you must not put your trust in people. The weather is not very nice here--it is raining quite a bit. How is the weather over there? Do you still have to go on training exercises in this weather? Well, Jacob, keep your eyes and heart lifted up. I have to end. Greetings from all of us and write back soon. Here is the address of Rev. Trap cut out of the paper.

W. Wierenga

The winter weather has slowed much of the camp's activity. Also, peace reduced the urgency of training. Ever since the Armistice between Germany and the Allied Forces went into effect at 11:00 a.m. on 11 November 1918, the world has finally been at peace. Father's prayers have been answered. Even though Jacob has not been discharged, there is much reason for gratitude. His life has been spared from those twin Old Testament scourges—war and pestilence. He knows it is only a matter of time now before he will be discharged and allowed to go home. He is as anxious to go as his father is to have him home again.

Grand Rapids, Michigan, January 11, 1919

Dear Son Jacob,

I take the pen again to write you a few lines to let you know we are all in reasonably good health and hope you are well also, otherwise

it would grieve us. We already read in the newspapers that many of the soldiers are allowed to go home and we hope you can too. However, we fear not and we dare not register a complaint, because then we have to swear an oath. But if it gets a bit closer to spring we may try it. We read in the paper that the government will pay for the land which would be nice, wouldn't it. And now Jacob be satisfied with your lot. God will make all things the way they should be. Maybe not always the way we want them to be. Pray much for God's help and comfort. Your time will come also, as long as we are in agreement with God's will. He comes when we least expect it, so be not discouraged but commit your ways to the Lord and He will bring it to pass. Pray much for His grace and nearness. Write back soon. We hope to receive letters a bit more regularly. If the government takes the land away from us, then we will have to look for something else and we will have to move, and if so, we will work on your immediate release. Receive our friendliest greetings and we wish you are soon free and home.

W. Wierenga

After the sale of their farm to the government, the Wierenga family moved to Paris Township, where Jacob, upon his discharge, continued farming with his parents and siblings. He remained single and died on his seventy-sixth birthday 13 May 1969; he is buried in the Grandville Cemetery. His niece, Thelma Ondersma, who donated the letters to the Calvin Archives, testified to Jacob's sterling Christian character, and said that he was one of her favorite uncles. 

Endnotes

1. This summons also affected the Dutch who had emigrated to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, etc. This action was needed because the Netherlands had only 200,000 men in their military, which was woefully inadequate. I have not been able to trace where and how these men served, but they were probably incorporated into Dutch army units. Because the Netherlands remained neutral, these men were safer than the Dutch-American boys who served in France from 1917 until the end of the war. A quarter century later, Queen Wilhelmina repeated this summons when Germany again threatened the Kingdom. All young Dutch men born between 1 January 1904 and 1 January 1921 living in various countries around the world, and who were not already in service in those countries, were required to register for service in the Netherlands. This recruitment was not very successful; together, Canada and the United States produced only five hundred men.

2. *De Volksvriend*, 13, 20, and 27 August 1914 and 3 September 1917. The *De Volksvriend* (1874-1951) was a conservative, Dutch-language, Republican weekly printed in Orange City, IA.

3. *Grand Rapids Herald*, 5 August 1914. English-language daily newspaper printed in Grand Rapids, MI.

4. *De Calvinist*, 15 August 1914. *De Calvinist* (1911-1918) was a Dutch-language weekly published in Grand Rapids by the Calvinist Pub. Co. It represented a sustained effort to embody Calvinistic-Kuyperian principles and to discuss the implications of Christianity for life.

5. James D. Bratt: *A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 83-92.

6. Richard Harms, "The First Chaplains," *Origins*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, 2005, 3

7. *The Banner*, 5 September 1918. Beginning already in September 1917, when troops began arriving at various US military camps, *The Banner* kept track weekly of CRC soldiers and their situations, in one issue even listing all the CRC men that were stationed at Camp Pike, Little Rock, AR, by name and if they were a full member or baptized member.

8. The final denominational tally was

3,036 men who served, of whom 105 were wounded and 87 died.

9. All information about Camp Fort Custer from: Faye Clark, *As You Were: Fort Custer* (Galesburg: KAL-GALE Printing, 1985).

10. Jacob was one of eleven men of the Kelloggsville CRC to serve. He was born on 13 May 1893 in Muskegon, MI.

11. Kelloggsville CRC Centennial 1875-1975 Anniversary Book.

12. Dominee Trap is Rev. Leonard Trap, one of the first CRC chaplains during WWI, stationed at Camp Fort Custer. He was ordained in 1914, served Third Zeeland, MI, from 1914 to 1917, and as USA Chaplain at Camp Custer 1917-1918; Chaplain, USA 1918-1919. Being a young man himself, he was eminently suited for the position. After the war he served the CRC until his death in 1950.

13. In the 29 November 1917 issue of *The Banner*, Rev. Trap reports on the Sunday evening suppers. By the end of November the number attending had grown to nearly fifty soldiers. Apparently Jacoba Robberts, wife of Rev. Jan

Robberts, had suggested that church people send supplies for these suppers, and the ladies of Rev. Robbert's church at Rusk were the first to provide a complete chicken supper. The address where the food was to be sent is given, and Mrs. Trap and another woman then would deliver the food to the GAR Hall. A system was worked out whereby different CRC churches and societies would be responsible for the Sunday evening suppers.

14. Robert Lopresti, *When Women Didn't Count* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2016), 207. During WWI Congress created the Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board to prevent and treat venereal disease. The major concern was the increase in such illnesses among the armed forces. The federal government created a five-mile sanitized zone around military camps. Suspected prostitutes could be forced to be examined and, if venereal diseases were found, sent to a facility. The program lasted twenty-seven months and prevented some 260,000 infections.

15. Although Jacob's mother and

several siblings were also living, father Wierenga signed his name only. Unlike most other letter writers, he does not include greetings from the rest of the family.

16. The soldiers scheduled to be shipped to France were given French lessons.

17. Jacob would have had no problem obtaining stationery, as various organizations such as the Red Cross and the Knights of Columbus provided free paper and envelopes to all soldiers, and stamps could be bought on base.

18. The family belonged to the Kelloggsville CRC. The pastor at the time was Rev. Martin M. Schans.

19. Z. Z. Lydens, Ed. *The Story of Grand Rapids* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1966), 599. A picric acid plant was in the plans to be constructed southwest of the city but, with the end of the war, was abandoned. The acid is an explosive used for military purposes.

20. Wobbe Wierenga died at age 74 on 20 August 1921 of heart failure.

21. Lopresti, *When Women Didn't Count*, 595.

Love Interrupted by War: Venna Eelman's diary and Bernie Lemmen's letters, 1916–1918

Loren Lemmen



Bernie's and Venna's wedding photo. Image courtesy of the author

On the fifth of June 1916 the *Grand Rapids Press* reported that forty-one Calvin men were getting their diplomas.¹ This included five from the seminary, eleven from the college, and twenty-five from the preparatory school. Among the “men” in the latter group was a young woman named Venna Eelman. Venna was the eighth of the ten children of William and Henricka (Dam) Eelman. The family lived in Olive Township of Ottawa County, where her father farmed. Her graduation must have been exciting for Venna, as education had always been important to her. She left her rural Ottawa County, Michigan, home at the age of fourteen to live and work at the home of a lawyer in Holland named Frederick Miles, who had a young family.² She did this

in order to be able to attend Holland High School, which she completed in 1914.

After graduating from Calvin, she spent the summer of 1916 at Kalamazoo Normal College, more commonly known today as Western Michigan University. While there, she began capturing her new life on film with a camera and afterwards with a diary as well. She received her grades on 9 August and was soon preparing for her first teaching assignment, which was to be in Pearline, just east of Allendale, near the modern-day Grand Valley State University. When Labor Day came, it was time for her to sign her school contract and move into the house where she was to board. She had to report to school and be ready for her first day of teaching



Venna Eeling's 1916 Calvin College class. She is the one in the broad banded hat in the back row. Image courtesy of Wayne and Helene Lemmen.

Loren Lemmen is an avid local-history researcher; the joint author with Swenna Harger of *The County of Bentheim and Her Emigrants to North America*. For the past fifteen years Loren has been the editor of *The Bentheimer International Society Newsletter*. This is his sixth article for *Origins*. He is a resident of Ada, Michigan.

the following day. Public school was a little different in those times. She described her first day as follows:

Went to school at 7:35. Had opening exercises of Bible Reading, song, prayer and a story—Roll call and class recitations. Got thru the day quite well. Had quite a time straightening up matters, but finally succeeded in getting it straightened out. Awfully nervous recesses and noon hour, am tired. Swept the school and went home at 5 o'clock.

She rested well that night, but sometimes it was difficult being twenty miles from her parents' home, which was in Crisp, north of Holland. Already during her first week at school she had to return to attend her cousin's wedding. Her brother picked her up in his car; however, she had to return that night on horseback.

Went back to Pearline with C.V.D.B. at 11:30. Changed horses at his place. Nice weather until a dark sky came over us and we nearly lost our way. Some exciting experience. Arrived home at 2:30 A.M.

The next day she rose at 6:10 to start another day of teaching. And so the days passed. She made new friends, and things were going well. One Sunday she went to church services at night and began walking home.

Refused a couple of offers to ride—Then M. R. introduced me to Mr. B. Lemmen and I had a nice ride home. Spent an enjoyable evening. Little bashful but very polite. No date- but "see you later."

Bernie Lemmen was the third of Bertus and Johanna (Aalderink) Lemmen's seven children. Father Lemmen was an implement dealer in Allendale. It did not take long before Venna could report,



Bernie and Venna in 1916 Ford. Image courtesy of Wayne and Helene Lemmen.

Call up S.W. and we go the Revival meeting on Center. Met B. Lemmen and he turned around and gave us a ride out there. Wanted me to make a date for after meeting—I gave him a return ticket.³ He's right there so I went out for a ride (2 hours). Some long and nice ride. Try to run the car but was too nervous. Got home at 11. Had a dandy time. Wants to make date for Sunday night— and I promise yes, if I stay here over Sunday. Says he'll take me home to Crisp but I don't bite. Went to bed and slept fine.

So began their romance. Two weeks later she writes,

Bernie Lemmen called up and asked me to go for an auto spin. Too cold! But finally consent- Went with his Loy Saxon. Some car! Rode more than two hours. Talked for two more at home. A very enjoyable time. Can't even guess what time I turned in. Wants me to help initiate another new car Friday or Saturday eve and I promise, so will make a date over the phone Friday night.

Bernie had a certain advantage over many young men his age. His father, Bert, had been in the farm machinery business in Allendale for nearly ten years. His business included selling several different types of automobiles. Venna was quite fond of cars and often took note of them in her diary. In

late November she reported he gave her a ride home in "his new Ford."⁴ Up until the day she died she kept a picture of herself and Bernie in this car on her bedroom wall.

Dates often involved church and school functions. On Election Day they drove to Herald Square in Grand Rapids to watch the election returns, which Venna deemed "important." Bernie was teaching her to drive, and she took the opportunity to drive on the way home. Through the winter her diary entries became less frequent. Sometimes she took note of world events. On 6 April 1917 she reported the ominous news, "U.S. declares war on Germany." School was over in late May, and it was time for her to return to her parents' home. She was "loathe to leave," but her time was up. Bernie continued to call on her, but now letters and postcards were much more common.

Dates were simple events. On the Fourth of July, Bernie came in a "new Ford" and took her and a couple of her siblings to Reeds Lake in Grand Rapids. She reported having "a grand time"—a nice respite from rural life and studying for her upcoming teaching exams in Kalamazoo. Meanwhile Bernie's mind was starting to turn towards the military draft. He wrote, "All the people are talking about the

draft. I have not seen my number out yet and so expect to live a few years.”

On 12 August, Venna reported with great relief that she had passed her exams and received her Teaching Certificate. She now began to prepare for her new teaching job at West Olive, which was much nearer her parents’ home and much farther from Bernie.⁵ She was to have thirty-seven students of all ages, but she felt confident that she would like it. She decided to get involved locally and joined the Red Cross and another civic group called “The Alliance.”

Bernie and Venna were becoming more serious, and, in November of 1917, they had a long discussion on the future. Venna summed it up succinctly in her diary: “My future is decided. Bernie and I are engaged.” Bernie wrote more expressively, “I am the happiest fellow alive.” For Venna there was more than love to be considered. In those days being a married woman could mean the end of a career in teaching.

Bernie’s opportunities to see her became less frequent. His days consisted of working at his father’s business and playing *Flinch* at night.⁶ His parents noticed his unhappiness:

Dad told me I could hire a rig of someone if I wanted to go see you. I would but the weather and the roads are not very pleasant, are they? I guess I have been worrying about you lately, one day Dad told me I must be in love and Mother said I am not eating much now days.

The winter of 1917-1918 was bad weather-wise, and they often found themselves snowbound. “Enough snow to last till June. Snowbanks a dozen feet high some places. Worst winter I’ve ever experienced,” lamented Venna. Bernie wrote from his father’s store and sometimes found that the ink froze while writing.

Spring eventually came and with it somber news. Bernie received his notice to report for induction into the army. He was to report on 29 May. When the day arrived, Venna wrote,

Wednesday—Rose early. Bernie’s last morning at home. Quiet breakfast, leave Allendale at 7 o’clock. Bernie and I ride in Saxon to Grand Haven. B. reports at armory at 8 o’clock. Have family pictures taken and one of Bernie alone. Officer gives him 5 minutes to do this. Auto’s from Holland come to take him to Holland. Parade of 53 auto’s for the 67 drafted men. I ride with the Lemmens, get to Holland at 11:15 to City Hall, where boys get dinner. March in parade to depot. Try to bid Bernie good bye near depot No chance as he is on the train. A mob of about 5,000 out. Boys leave on 1:15 train to G. Rapids where they will have another lunch. Off for Camp Custer! Won’t describe how I felt. Home again.

Bernie wrote her regularly, but he was soon under quarantine and could not go home or have visitors for most of the month of June.

Camp Custer, Battle Creek, Michigan

His first letters show the serious nature of his thoughts.

I don’t know much about how I am going to like it here yet, but I feel it is our duty to sacrifice all we can until our struggle is over so I shall try to make the best of it. Us soldiers certainly need prayers and everybody does, sooner or later we all must give up our lives. If God be with us we will win this war. Hope that if I have to give up my life for this country that it will be a blessing to my salvation and not an account against it. Just had a talk with a Y[MCA] man and one of our pastors while I was writing this letter to you.⁷ You can probably imagine what the talk

was about. He asked me if I was a face member of our church.⁸ You know the answer I had to give. Asked me if I had thought some of becoming a member, some I said. He said maybe you will go overseas soon and better take this opportunity to take Christ as your savior before people and should not be a bit backward about it. But you know how a person can feel about it. I know it would be good news to you and everybody back home. These men want to me to meet tham [sic] at 7 o’clock tomorrow night. Sometimes I feel though that I don’t know anything about the Bible.

His thoughts were not all on heaven, though; he enclosed something he had read in the newspaper.



Bernie in WWI uniform. Image courtesy of the author.

A girl risks every joy in life on love. If she loves a good man who loves her, she is the happiest being in the world and would not exchange her happiness with the angels in heaven; but if she gives her love to a coarse or vulgar or unclean man, her love turns to poison which pollutes her body and stains her soul.

He ended with this postscript:

“PS—I love you 80 bushels, 40 pecks, and 100 hugs around the neck.”⁹

He did not mind boot camp too much but was put off by his first exposure to violence.

This afternoon we hiked about 6 miles and then got some gas-mask practice, we are supposed to put this mask on in 6 seconds. I like the drilling and I think it does a person good. Say a number of soldiers, probably 50 of them came to this building and mobbed another soldier; they are going to punish him; they are going to punish him for something—I kind of pity him.

He received a pass for the Fourth of July. He and Venna took the opportunity to discuss the possibility of marrying secretly before he was shipped overseas. Afterward he wrote,

You know such as we talked of seems so good that it seems almost impossible. But my Dear I am afraid that a secret would not keep very long. Would your Father care if he knew it? You know I don't want to get in trouble with anybody. I know several boys ask their bride's father if they have any objects as to their marriage. It sometimes makes a little better feeling, but if such a secret would hold I am willing or even if it don't I am willing also. I am just writing my idea of it. My father thinks generally what I do is alright, but he may think it better for you to wait. My Dad knows I don't

go into an undertaking of any kind very hastily, when I was home he left almost everything to me – even more than he should have I think. I suppose we can try to keep it a secret if you want to. Is it possible that you are going to be my wife soon? You know I don't even want you to do it now, just for my sake. You have got a heart as well as I have and a far more dear one.

It was soon apparent that no such plan would work.

My dear, sorry to say, but I think our departure for a while has come, kinda hard I'll say, so can't work out our plans either. Just think what these times could be and what they are going to be. I feel as though I am coming back to you. Does it seem possible that we won't see each other for some time to come? Soon you will be teaching school again so you will have something to be busy about. But I wish we could have tied the knot before I had to leave, but you know what we want to do is not always the best thing. Maybe it would have been better if I had enlisted, but we got to take things as they happen don't we?

Soon he left for Long Island, New York as part of the 338th Ambulance Company of the 85th Infantry. They arrived safely despite an attempt to sabotage their train.

While passing along these places in Penn. we just happened to meet an-

other train which notified the motor-man to halt; brakes were put on at once. Ahead of us was an obstacle of iron was laying across the track about 200 rods ahead, just at a turn where it probably could not have been sighted by the motorman in time. I saw a carman take it off the track—so it is alright. It was iron, probably would weigh 150# or 200# and about three or four feet long. As luck would have it we met another train before we got to the turn.

Camp Mills, Long Island

The next stop was Long Island, New York. He reported things such as the following back to Michigan.

Some of the soldiers haven't any money. I just loaned a fellow a \$1. I can't hardly turn anybody down as long as I have some money. I want to get to some town to buy something. I made an allotment of \$15 a month home, they say we haven't a chance to spend much across and the Gov't. don't give us all our money anyway. I think we get \$6 more a month across. I would just as soon give this allotment to you, but as we are not married the Gov't would not put any with it and if I send it home my Dad may double or triple the amount when I get back, even if he don't it will be alright won't it?

Everything is OK here, there is every precaution taken for us soldiers that there can be, very strict discipline here, everything is very neat and



Troop review at Camp Custer, MI, 8 June 1918. Image courtesy of the author.

clean, orderly, sanitary and physical inspection every day and they are very precise as to what we eat and even the water we drink. So don't worry about me not feeling as I should, anyway I think I am blessed with good health that I have had all my days. I seem to feel the same every day. Thank God.

Sundays seemed to be a hard day for him.

Well it is Sunday isn't it? I suppose you have kept God's day better than I have. The only way I have heard God's name used today was in vain.¹⁰ Sunday Evening tonight—wish I could spend it with you, but it seems God has given me other work, which makes it impossible for me to see you. We don't want to feel discouraged do we? I try not to and don't want you to.

His mind often went to the upcoming assignment overseas.

I don't fear very much to think about crossing the ocean. Soldiers are coming in and going out of this camp by the thousands every day. In one week 90,000 cross to France.

Well Dear, I pray that God will let me return home to you sound, but if he wished to take my life while gone I pray that my name may written there and my soul saved. You know that after all or maybe before all that is what we want or anyone should want isn't it?"

France

After a brief stop in England he arrived in Brest, France, on 10 August. Mail was heavily censored, and at first he was not allowed to use a place name or even a date sometimes. The Allies were starting their final offensive against the Germans. He spent the first three months at Veaugues, a small town in central France. He was safe from the fighting and even admitted, "You are probably working harder than I am," but still he had to report, "I understand our water has been poi-

soned by a German civilian, probably a spy. The water has been shut off so we can't get a bit of it."

He described the French countryside,

Buildings here are made of brick mostly the same style and in groups of villages, some straw roofs, but very little lumber: everything is very neat; many bicycles, seldom see an automobile. Mostly sheep and cattle raising here. Towns seem to be dead; no young men around; people don't seem to invent anything, stick to the old; people have just a little accent to their words, but can understand them. This morning I saw several girls and old women in wooden shoes and they had a basket like on their back, it is carried by the shoulders similar to the way we carry our pack.

In October he was moved close to the front, near the disputed area of Alsace-Lorraine. The Allies had just finished the battle at nearby St. Mihiel. Talks of an armistice were rampant in early November, but Bernie later noted that he saw a Boche plane shot down on 5 November and could hear "cannons to the last one at 11 bells" on November 11. Bernie was near Nancy in eastern France at this time.



Street in Blénod-les-Toul in France where Bernie got his "chow." It is located in the department of Meurthe-et-Moselle in the French region of Lorraine. Image courtesy of the author.

The same week Venna wrote in her diary,

Nov 7—News of Ger's surrender—nearly insane! Tickled. We went out and celebrated.

Nov 8—Just heard it was a false report, heart went down to my toes.

Nov 11—Woke up early and lay thinking of war and our boys then heard whistles hurrahing. Peace has really come. Thank God! Very happy, no school. Went to Holland in auto in P.M. rode up and down street and heard 2 speakers at C[entral] Park and then came home. Had a mass meeting at night. March thru the streets of West Olive. Did we celebrate! Went to bed with a very thankful heart.

Mail was slow in coming and Venna had just received her first letter from France on November 1. She was "tickled" by the photo and silk scarf she received. Letters from Bernie arrived irregularly, many times not at all.

Nov 23—No news yet from B. worried! Went to Holland with Anton Bruinsma and saw Ada who lay dead from a broken heart.¹¹ Very sad! Seems to me I shall never forget it all.

Nov 24—Sunday eve. A year ago??? Am very happy and do not regret it, just getting late I believe I shall retire. "Good night" little book.

The Spanish Flu

For many, this disease was as big a concern as the Germans. Millions died of the flu in 1918. As a school-teacher, Venna was directly affected in the fall of 1918.

Oct 24—This month has been a bad month—Sickness, Spanish influenza, 300 deaths a day in Chicago, seven around here. All churches meet, area movies closed. Schools are being closed, but I'm still at it. Enuf for tonight.

Nov 27—Wed. morn feel sick but go to school, chills! Excuse pupils at 11:30. Doc Bruinsma at 3 o'clock. Fevers, I have the flu. Expected to go home, brother Aris comes but Dr. says I can't be moved, no Thanksgiving dinner for me at Till's in G.R. as expected, but in bed. Sis Sena also has flu. Aris has recovered. Spent nearly a week in bed- moved home.

Dec. 5—Rest until Dec 9. Go back to teach 2 boys and school closed on account of flu for more than 2 weeks. Get my pay, visited G.R.

She wrote to Bernie about all of this and he reported that many in his company had a touch of it, but not he. He was not aware of anyone dying of it.

Winter 1919

Now that Venna didn't have to worry about the Germans anymore, Bernie sought to reassure her about the French girls.

Say, these French girls don't trouble me any so don't let them trouble you either. I think they love the Yanks but a little too well and I don't believe a true love. I will let you know more about them when I get back.

Bernie stuck close to the Y. "Here at the Y tent, just heard the services. It was a nice sermon. The sermons we hear in the army are real short and snappy and that is what I like."

They were all allowed a certain amount of leave time.

I and nine others of our co. went to Domremy, about 40 kilometers from here. Kind of a historical place, there were many visitors there. Have you read the story of this girl Jeanne d'Arc? We visited several real old buildings. We enjoyed ourselves quite well. Kinda hard to find much to eat in these French towns. For dinner we had rabbit, potatoes and bread, which cost us 80 cents each. For supper we bought beefsteak and pork steak at a butcher shop and took it to a private home and had the lady of the house cook the meat and she also fried potatoes for us, the French fries are real good. We also had coffee and salad and bread. The supper cost us each \$1.10.

Shortly after they started the long trip from the eastern extremities of France towards Tours. Bernie was disappointed to find out that he was then assigned to drive an ambulance back east as part of a convoy. In the end, however, he enjoyed the trip.

Marac, France, 1/29/19

Tuesday 3 p.m. left Conlie, entrained 2nd class, spent Tuesday night in Tours, entrained Wednesday to Romerantum and then we got some Ford ambulances. About 30 men drove these machines to where we are now. Our Captain led us and he knew the way or found the way just as though he had been over this road several times. We certainly had a fine trip. Started on the tour Thursday morning, spent Thursday evening I don't remember where, but we were driving five days and besides the 24



Venna with her graduate students. Image courtesy of Wayne and Helene Lemmen.

ambulances there was 4 large trucks and 4 motorcycles. I feel kinda to home in one for these Fords, say I wish you could have taken that trip, I enjoyed it very much and I know you would have enjoyed it a lot more than I did. I have seen a whole lot more of France than I have of Michigan. I have seen enough and am ready to go home. Presume I'll have to quit



Community Service Flag that Bernie's father, Bert Lemmen, had hanging in his car dealership in Allendale, MI. Image courtesy of the author.



General Pershing's Message in Bible. Image courtesy of the author.

thinking about going home for a while. Last night almost froze stiff-got some stoves in the building today to so I guess I will set pretty tonight. Oh, yes we spent Thursday night at Veaugeues, where we spent our first 3 months in France. The people were very glad to see us again. Friday night we stayed at Verneil where we got trucks and motorcycles. Saturday night at Autun. Sunday night at Dijon. Monday we arrived at Marac.

Once back Bernie made a short trip to Chaumont, General Pershing's headquarters, but the general was elsewhere. Bernie commented, "I would like to have had the chance to salute him." A trip to Langres made him deal again with the subject of French girls.

I am perfectly willing that you should send a warning in every letter that you write to me. I know I need it more than you do because I am with all kinds of people. The French people live a clean life as we do in the states. If a fellow sees his girl he does his flirting in the presence of the

old people. In the states we would be quite backward if our parents were looking on wouldn't we? I don't think they keep Sunday as well as we do in the States, they are mostly Catholic.

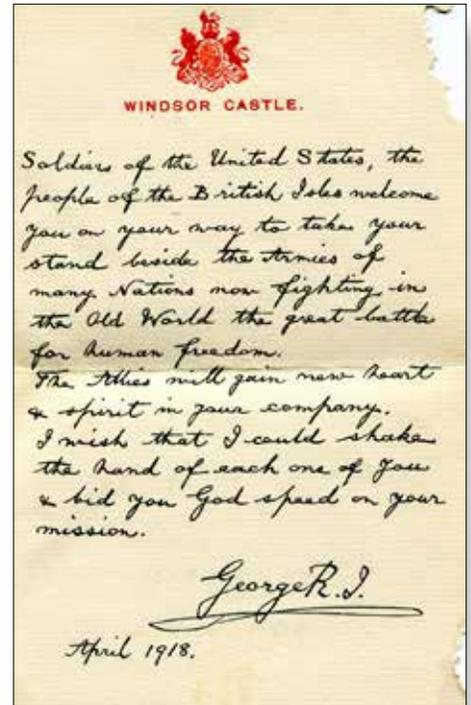
Venna heard from Bernie frequently now but did not expect him back until the summer. In February, woman suffrage became a reality and she was quite pleased to be the first woman in Olive Township to register. The 7th of April was an Election Day, and she was again pleased when she was the first woman to vote. She voted "no" on the Wet Amendment. The same day, on the other side of the world Bernie boarded a ship in Brest, headed for home. A week later, while on the Atlantic about four hundred miles from New York, he wrote:

Dear, I can't begin to explain to you in this letter of the most joyful feeling I have in my heart. To think of the happy days we may spent together in the near future, how is it possible? After so many dreary days I hardly thought at times that I would see sunshine again and so I will try to make the rest of my life be a life that you will be most worthy of. There is so much noise and excitement here that I can hardly get my mind on this letter that I am trying to write, we are getting near N.Y. and everybody is anxious to see the Statue of Liberty again.

Camp Merritt, New Jersey

A short time in New Jersey was all he had left before being discharged.

Yesterday, I was on a pass to New York City and Coney Island. I could go again today if I wished to, but I have seen so much I don't care to see any more. Never do I want to be away from you so long again. In the last year I have went through a great deal, seen much excitement, but all of this time, my heart has been longing for you. And thinking of you back here waiting for me I have been able to keep up my spirits, I shall try to reward you for all of this.



A note from his Majesty King George V to the soldiers of the United States. Image courtesy of the author.

Venna could not have been more pleased.

April 18, 1919—Hurrah! Telegram for me arrived, from Bernie, stating he has arrived at New York, is feeling fine. Good Friday today—Supper at church but don't care about going—Singing School too. Last evening we had our Liberty Loan meeting at the church—Harold Golds who has been wounded twice- and went through Chateau Thierry—spoke and told of his experiences. Very interestingly told—war is awful.

A few days later Bernie arrived at his parent's home late at night. He stayed for only a few minutes. Against his parents' advice, he hopped in the car and made the long drive to see his "kind-hearted and true girl."

Venna wrote:

Saturday April 26. The morning after the night before- To bed early- Awakened from our slumber @ 12:30 or nearly one—Bernie walks in—am

surprised beyond speech—Some scramble—Get dressed and have a long talk with him. Go to bed @ 4:30 A.M. B. stays overnight.

They married in late July. Thus they began their life together. Things changed quickly for them. Venna did not return to teaching and was soon pregnant. Bernie's dad, Bert, was killed in an accident in October of 1920. He then took over the business Bert had started in Coopersville. A few days later their first child was born.

Their life together ended when Bernie died at age seventy-four on 29 July 1969, just two days before their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Venna passed away the following year, also at age seventy-four. ❧

Endnotes

1. Calvin College did not offer a four-year degree program until 1920 and did not take the name Calvin College until 1931.

2. Miles (1877-1975) was later well known as a Circuit Court judge (1930-1947). He gave Venna a leather-bound copy of the book on love titled *The Greatest Thing in the World*, by the Scottish missionary Henry Drummond. He inscribed it as follows: "A Friend, To Fannie Eelman [sic] on her 18th birthday. Please read carefully three times before you criticize this. F.T.M." She kept the book all her life and always remained friends with Miles.

3. Venna, who changed her name from Fenna, picked up a certain amount of slang while away from home, e.g., "stuck some boys the crazy on" is one of the more mysterious phrases in her diary.

4. Some readers will be surprised to know the Lemmens once sold Fords. The family sold Chevrolets in Coopersville for ninety years, from 1918 to 2008. See the *Grand Rapids Press* of 31 July 2008.

5. West Olive is about fifteen miles from Allendale Center, where Bernie lived.

6. Flinch is a card game that was invented in 1901 by A.J. Patterson.

7. The Lemmens were members of First Allendale CRC. The Eelmans were members of South Olive CRC. Rev. John C. Schaap was pastor at First Allendale at the time. It is not sure whether Bernie means his pastor or by "our pastors" one of the CRC chaplains.

8. By "face member" is meant that he was just attending church without having made public profession of his faith and thereby becoming a "full" member.

9. Frank Loesser later wrote a song with the lyrics "I love you, a bushel and a peck, a bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck." Published in 1950, it was part of the Broadway show *Guys and Dolls*.

10. Bernie was not one for using bad language. The story is told that he once took a car full of young men to Flint to pick up some new cars. Along the way he had four flat tires. He didn't say a word until the fourth flat, when he said simply, "darn."

11. Ada Bruinsma was Anton's sister. She was born on 30 May 1897 and died on 22 November 1918 in Holland, Michigan. Michigan State Death Records state cause of death as bronchial pneumonia. She must have been engaged to a soldier who died in the war.

Deeds of Love and Mercy: Dutch-American Women's Volunteerism during the Great War

Julia Bouwkamp

In her book, *What the War Meant to Women*, Anna Howard Shaw, Chairperson of the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense, recalled the eagerness with which women offered their time and services as the United States entered World War I. To her memory, women needed no persuasion to do their patriotic duty; instead, "women from all over the United States, in organized groups and individually, came with such a demand asking that they might serve that the government was swamped by this desire."¹ But what motivated this pervasive desire to serve? Certainly, women wanted to win the war, but, for many, war work also meant the opening up of new opportunities in society and, potentially, as enfranchised citizens.

This general narrative about women and war work holds true when broadly studying women's involvement in war work at the national level, but it is less useful when encountering the more complex experiences of immigrant women and their descendants. For those women, the interplay of their newer identities as American residents or naturalized citizens and their existing ties to their countries of birth and or transplanted ethnic networks layered their experience of war service with a mix of motivations and expectations. Such was the case with Dutch-American women. This article seeks to uncover and describe the

war work in which Dutch-American women took part and the varied



Anna Howard Shaw. Image courtesy of Albion College (Albion, MI) Historical Photograph File.

meanings it held for them.

Dutch Americans generally felt the nativist pressures brought on by the onset of WWI. Prevalent anti-German sentiment and the similarity of the Dutch and German languages contributed to perceptions that the Dutch were anti-American.² That, and the general ill will that many Dutch harbored against the British after the Boer War, placed Dutch Americans in a tenuous position within their new American communities. Such suspicions manifested themselves in myriad incidents during the war years. Refusal by a Christian Reformed Church (CRC) pastor to place the American flag in the church sanctuary or by farmers to contribute to patriotic

Julia Bouwkamp is a recent history graduate of Calvin College. She has put her degree to use as a historical interpreter at Fort Michilimackinac in Mackinaw City, as an AmeriCorps member working in historic preservation, and as a researcher and archivist with both the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council and Froebel USA. Bouwkamp is applying to graduate programs in material culture and public history.

causes like the Liberty Loan or the Red Cross were met with extreme censure and at times destruction of property.³

These suspicions were by no means limited to men. One very high-profile incident involved Cornelia Steketee Hulst, a prominent Dutch woman, author, and English teacher at Grand Rapids Central High school.⁴



Cornelia Steketee Hulst. Image courtesy of Robert Worden.

Fascinated by world affairs, Steketee Hulst had studied Britain's involvement in the war and published her skeptical account in a book entitled *Our Secret Alliance*.⁵ In it she argued that Britain's motivations were "imperialistic" and that American leaders had secretly allied with Britain and supported their policies. Despite qualifying her work as a patriotic critique, Steketee Hulst faced much public criticism and negative consequences for her publication. Published in 1917, rumors about her pro-German sympathies circulated at the start of that year and culminated in March of that year with the banning of her book and a request from the school board for her resignation.⁶ Steketee Hulst complied but accompanied the news of her resignation with an open letter in the

Grand Rapids Herald in which she defended herself, asserting that she was not "anti-English" but rather "anti-Imperialist."⁷ Her patriotism in doubt, Steketee Hulst found herself in need of how to demonstrate her loyalty to cause and country.

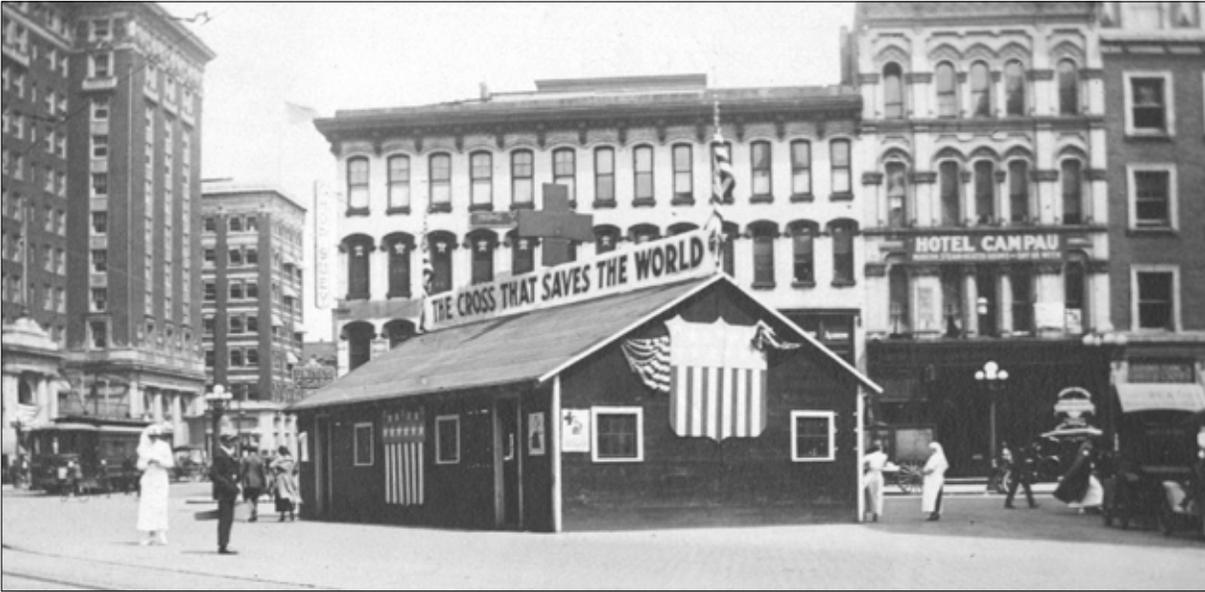
About one month after her resignation, she registered with the Grand Rapids division of the Woman's Committee of the Council of the National Defense. In April 1918, the Grand Rapids' division of the Woman's Committee registered nearly twenty thousand women volunteers in Grand Rapids and surrounding areas recording important personal information and skills on cards especially printed for the purpose.⁸

Registration locations had been set up throughout the greater Grand Rapids area, but the location Steketee Hulst chose was perhaps the busiest and most public. Located in Campau Square, the registrars at "The Hut," as it was fondly known, processed a little over 25 percent of the total registrations. A thorough process, registrars spent at least twenty to thirty minutes with each woman. It is not possible to know whether or not Steketee Hulst considered these facts before

her registration, but choosing such a public and busy location likely warded off some of the suspicion she had garnered. Her responses also reflect an eagerness to provide information somewhat inconsistent with her previous comments that she conserved food and contributed to war charities but that her health prevented her from "public Red Cross work." Rather than appearing to avoid war work with excuses that many might question, Steketee Hulst made a point in offering volunteer war work at anytime, anywhere, and for "as much time as possible."⁹

This strategic use of patriotic acts as a means of warding off nativist suspicions proved common in the Dutch-American community, even on a large scale. In a massive parade described as "the Grand Rapids melting pot," eleven different nationality groups marched on the Fourth of July 1918 as a tribute to America and liberty. Following the Swedish, the "Holland delegation" included, among other groups, the Young Men's and Young Women's societies from various churches and congregants from Reformed and Christian Reformed denominations, both of which included

WOMEN'S DEFENSE CARD											
MICHIGAN DIVISION											
Name in full <u>Cornelia Steketee Hulst (Mrs. Hulst)</u> Address <u>100 East Fulton St. Grand Rapids, Mich.</u> Age <u>36</u> Married or single <u>Married</u> Color or race <u>White</u> Country of birth <u>U.S.</u> Citizen: By birth <u>Yes</u> By naturalization _____ Person dependent upon you, if any <u>None</u> Service offered (specify whether volunteer, registered, or paid) <u>V</u> Time pledged for service <u>as much time as necessary</u> If training is wanted, specify time _____											
Present occupation <u>High School Teacher</u> By whom employed _____ Where employed _____ References _____ Education (graduate or length of time attended): Doctorate _____ College <u>Yes</u> _____ High or Specialized training <u>English</u> Emergency service (specify whether volunteer, registered, or paid) <u>V</u> Will you go anywhere? <u>Yes</u> Home town only? _____ In United States? _____ How soon can you start? <u>Any time</u>											
ENROLL NUMBER TO LEFT OF OCCUPATIONS IN WHICH YOU HAVE HAD EXPERIENCE OR TRAINING. UNDERLINE THOSE IN WHICH YOU WISH TO SERVE.											
I. Agricultural	13 Cooking	25 Factory—Cand'd	37 Dentist	49 Publicity	61 Social Service	73 Postmaster	85	97	109	121	133
1 Teaching	14 Baking	26 Machinist	38 Mechanic	50 Stationery	62 Camp work	74 Stationer	86	98	110	122	134
2 Farming	15 Dressmaking	27 Bookbinding	39 Tailor	51 Typewriter	63 Unemployed	75	87	99	111	123	135
3 Fruit raising	16 Sewing	28 Paper and printing	40 Wood trades	52 Handwriting	64	76	88	100	112	124	136
4 Gardening	17 Knitting (knives)	29 Textiles	41	53	65	77	89	101	113	125	137
5 Poultry raising	18 Knitting (wool)	30	42	54	66	78	90	102	114	126	138
6 Stock raising	19 Sewing	31	43	55	67	79	91	103	115	127	139
7	20	32	44	56	68	80	92	104	116	128	140
8	21	33	45	57	69	81	93	105	117	129	141
9	22	34	46	58	70	82	94	106	118	130	142
10	23	35	47	59	71	83	95	107	119	131	143
11	24	36	48	60	72	84	96	108	120	132	144
12	25	37	49	61	73	85	97	109	121	133	145
13	26	38	50	62	74	86	98	110	122	134	146
14	27	39	51	63	75	87	99	111	123	135	147
15	28	40	52	64	76	88	100	112	124	136	148
16	29	41	53	65	77	89	101	113	125	137	149
17	30	42	54	66	78	90	102	114	126	138	150
18	31	43	55	67	79	91	103	115	127	139	151
19	32	44	56	68	80	92	104	116	128	140	152
20	33	45	57	69	81	93	105	117	129	141	153
21	34	46	58	70	82	94	106	118	130	142	154
22	35	47	59	71	83	95	107	119	131	143	155
23	36	48	60	72	84	96	108	120	132	144	156
24	37	49	61	73	85	97	109	121	133	145	157
25	38	50	62	74	86	98	110	122	134	146	158
26	39	51	63	75	87	99	111	123	135	147	159
27	40	52	64	76	88	100	112	124	136	148	160
28	41	53	65	77	89	101	113	125	137	149	161
29	42	54	66	78	90	102	114	126	138	150	162
30	43	55	67	79	91	103	115	127	139	151	163
31	44	56	68	80	92	104	116	128	140	152	164
32	45	57	69	81	93	105	117	129	141	153	165
33	46	58	70	82	94	106	118	130	142	154	166
34	47	59	71	83	95	107	119	131	143	155	167
35	48	60	72	84	96	108	120	132	144	156	168
36	49	61	73	85	97	109	121	133	145	157	169
37	50	62	74	86	98	110	122	134	146	158	170
38	51	63	75	87	99	111	123	135	147	159	171
39	52	64	76	88	100	112	124	136	148	160	172
40	53	65	77	89	101	113	125	137	149	161	173
41	54	66	78	90	102	114	126	138	150	162	174
42	55	67	79	91	103	115	127	139	151	163	175
43	56	68	80	92	104	116	128	140	152	164	176
44	57	69	81	93	105	117	129	141	153	165	177
45	58	70	82	94	106	118	130	142	154	166	178
46	59	71	83	95	107	119	131	143	155	167	179
47	60	72	84	96	108	120	132	144	156	168	180
48	61	73	85	97	109	121	133	145	157	169	181
49	62	74	86	98	110	122	134	146	158	170	182
50	63	75	87	99	111	123	135	147	159	171	183
51	64	76	88	100	112	124	136	148	160	172	184
52	65	77	89	101	113	125	137	149	161	173	185
53	66	78	90	102	114	126	138	150	162	174	186
54	67	79	91	103	115	127	139	151	163	175	187
55	68	80	92	104	116	128	140	152	164	176	188
56	69	81	93	105	117	129	141	153	165	177	189
57	70	82	94	106	118	130	142	154	166	178	190
58	71	83	95	107	119	131	143	155	167	179	191
59	72	84	96	108	120	132	144	156	168	180	192
60	73	85	97	109	121	133	145	157	169	181	193
61	74	86	98	110	122	134	146	158	170	182	194
62	75	87	99	111	123	135	147	159	171	183	195
63	76	88	100	112	124	136	148	160	172	184	196
64	77	89	101	113	125	137	149	161	173	185	197
65	78	90	102	114	126	138	150	162	174	186	198
66	79	91	103	115	127	139	151	163	175	187	199
67	80	92	104	116	128	140	152	164	176	188	200
68	81	93	105	117	129	141	153	165	177	189	201
69	82	94	106	118	130	142	154	166	178	190	202
70	83	95	107	119	131	143	155	167	179	191	203
71	84	96	108	120	132	144	156	168	180	192	204
72	85	97	109	121	133	145	157	169	181	193	205
73	86	98	110	122	134	146	158	170	182	194	206
74	87	99	111	123	135	147	159	171	183	195	207
75	88	100	112	124	136	148	160	172	184	196	208
76	89	101	113	125	137	149	161	173	185	197	209
77	90	102	114	126	138	150	162	174	186	198	210
78	91	103	115	127	139	151	163	175	187	199	211
79	92	104	116	128	140	152	164	176	188	200	212
80	93	105	117	129	141	153	165	177	189	201	213
81	94	106	118	130	142	154	166	178	190	202	214
82	95	107	119	131	143	155	167	179	191	203	215
83	96	108	120	132	144	156	168	180	192	204	216
84	97	109	121	133	145	157	169	181	193	205	217
85	98	110	122	134	146	158	170	182	194	206	218
86	99	111	123	135	147	159	171	183	195	207	219
87	100	112	124	136	148	160	172	184	196	208	220
88	101	113	125	137	149	161	173	185	197	209	221
89	102	114	126	138	150	162	174	186	198	210	222
90	103	115	127	139	151	163	175	187	199	211	223
91	104	116	128	140	152	164	176	188	200	212	224
92	105	117	129	141	153	165	177	189	201	213	225
93	106	118	130	142	154	166	178	190	202	214	226
94	107	119	131	143	155	167	179	191	203	215	227
95	108	120	132	144	156	168	180	192	204	216	228
96	109	121	133	145	157	169	18				



Red Cross hut in Campau Square, Grand Rapids, MI. American Red Cross Headquarters & Buildings. Image courtesy of American Unofficial Collection of World War I Photographs, 1917 – 1918; Record Group 165: Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, National Archives, Washington, DC.

men and women marchers.¹⁰ But the central feature of the event was the showcasing of America’s “adopted daughters.” Marching as a group, ten women of different nationalities donned the traditional dress of their respective countries of heritage as a way to celebrate their culture in the context of a patriotic American celebration.¹¹ Among their number was Anna Van Dommelen, a graduate of Calvin College and teacher at Oakdale Christian School. Described by her Women’s Committee registrar as a “cultured young woman,” she indicated an interest in training for YWCA

religious and social work on her defense card and, in fact, later trained as a nurse at the Blodgett School of Nursing.¹² Wearing the provincial costume of Zeeland, Van Dommelen presented a positive representation of Dutch Americans to crowds of onlookers.¹³

A similar event took place in August of the same year among Kalamazoo’s Dutch population. Designed to check accusations of disloyalty, Dutch Americans in Kalamazoo planned “a monster patriotic demonstration.”¹⁴ The parade, wholly made up of Dutch Americans, included an estimated “eight thousand men, women and

children” marching with flags and banners to enthusiastic crowds. While not the central focus of the event, four floats showcased “Holland mothers knitting for their boys overseas,” and “teaching their daughters to knit for patriotic service.” Such an image would prove immediately relatable to most women watching, as war service, particularly knitting, was an activity in which many American women participated, regardless of their descent. Though not the primary planners of these performances, the images of patriotic celebration and war work displayed by Dutch women at such



Left to Right—Mrs. Lena Agos, Greece; Mrs. Raymond Cavagnaro, Italy; Miss Mamie Swanson, Sweden; Miss Ruth Hogan, Ireland; Mrs. T. C. Irwin, Columbia; Miss Anna Zubrickas, Lithuania; Miss Sophie Klukowski, Belgium; Miss Anna Van Dommelen, Holland; Miss Geneva Bashara, Syria; Miss Lottie Klukowski, Poland.

Patriotic parade. Anna Van Dommelen is third from left in her Dutch costume. Image courtesy of the *Grand Rapids Press*, 4 July 1918, page 4.

Women's Committee of Council of National Defense
 (U.S. Dept. of War) (U.S. Dept. of Labor) (U.S. Dept. of Justice) (U.S. Dept. of Education) (U.S. Dept. of Agriculture) (U.S. Dept. of Commerce) (U.S. Dept. of Health) (U.S. Dept. of Interior) (U.S. Dept. of Navy) (U.S. Dept. of State) (U.S. Dept. of Transportation) (U.S. Dept. of War) (U.S. Dept. of Work Administration)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF WAR
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF NAVY
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF WAR
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF WORK ADMINISTRATION

Michigan Division

Name in full: Anna Van Dommelen
 Address: 711 S. Union
 City: Grand Rapids
 State: MI
 Zip: 49503
 Age: 22
 Color or race: White
 Country of birth: U. S. N. A.
 Present occupation: Teaching
 Where employed: Grand Rapids Christian Ch.
 Education: Prof. M. Baker, 737 Benjamin
 College (give name): 2 yrs. Calvin College
 High or private: Teaching
 Emergency service (specify whether volunteer, reserve only, or paid):
 Will you go anywhere? Yes Home town only? Yes In United States? Yes
 How soon can you start? See below

INDUSTRY GROUPS TO LEFT OF OCCUPATIONS IN WHICH YOU HAVE NO EXPERIENCE OR TRAINING. SPECIFY THESE IN WHICH YOU WISH TO OBTAIN SERVICE.

I. Agricultural	11 Tailoring	21 Dressmaking	31 Domestic	41 Domestic	51 Domestic	61 Domestic	71 Domestic	81 Domestic	91 Domestic	101 Domestic	111 Domestic	121 Domestic	131 Domestic	141 Domestic	151 Domestic	161 Domestic	171 Domestic	181 Domestic	191 Domestic	201 Domestic	211 Domestic	221 Domestic	231 Domestic	241 Domestic	251 Domestic	261 Domestic	271 Domestic	281 Domestic	291 Domestic	301 Domestic	311 Domestic	321 Domestic	331 Domestic	341 Domestic	351 Domestic	361 Domestic	371 Domestic	381 Domestic	391 Domestic	401 Domestic	411 Domestic	421 Domestic	431 Domestic	441 Domestic	451 Domestic	461 Domestic	471 Domestic	481 Domestic	491 Domestic	501 Domestic	511 Domestic	521 Domestic	531 Domestic	541 Domestic	551 Domestic	561 Domestic	571 Domestic	581 Domestic	591 Domestic	601 Domestic	611 Domestic	621 Domestic	631 Domestic	641 Domestic	651 Domestic	661 Domestic	671 Domestic	681 Domestic	691 Domestic	701 Domestic	711 Domestic	721 Domestic	731 Domestic	741 Domestic	751 Domestic	761 Domestic	771 Domestic	781 Domestic	791 Domestic	801 Domestic	811 Domestic	821 Domestic	831 Domestic	841 Domestic	851 Domestic	861 Domestic	871 Domestic	881 Domestic	891 Domestic	901 Domestic	911 Domestic	921 Domestic	931 Domestic	941 Domestic	951 Domestic	961 Domestic	971 Domestic	981 Domestic	991 Domestic	1001 Domestic
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Women's Defense Card for Anna Van Dommelen. Image courtesy of the Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, MI.

demonstrations were compelling contributions to attempts at shifting negative wartime perceptions. The task of warding off suspicion and proving oneself patriotic required more than a one-time grand gesture, and much emphasis lay on what women could do day to day to support the war. The pressure to knit, sew, contribute, and generally offer patriotic service throughout the war's duration was by no means limited to Dutch women or other immigrant women for that matter. "Women slackers," as they were derisively called, were often described as frivolous and uncaring, women who "in face of the immense demand for sweaters, mufflers, socks, and the like, and who, gifted with the knowledge and skill to knit, still persists in knitting sweaters for herself." Such women could be recognized by the color of their yarn. "If it is grey or khaki, the true patriot is seen—if any other color we have a specimen of the genus knitter slacker." But for Dutch women, a lack of support would not just earn them slacker status; they might also be seen as pro-German. Their contributions were motivated

by more than just fear of relatively benign accusations of selfishness and "slackerism." Yet to characterize Dutch women's war work as solely motivated by fears of accusations would be overly simplistic. Discerning authentic love of country, however, from wartime patriotic statements and acts can be tricky. That said, examples of remarkable dedication to the cause by many Dutch women point to motivations beyond nominal patriotic performances. Hailed as a "Red Cross Champion," Mrs. William Braskamp of Holland, Michigan, reportedly knitted and sewed 339 articles for the Red Cross, working forty-eight hours a week and "often sewing from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m."¹⁵ Further north in Muskegon on 18 June 1917, the women of the Second Reformed Church Ladies' Aid and Missionary Society unanimously voted to take up war relief work and planned the first of their all-day work meetings.¹⁶ These all-day work meetings continued on a sometimes weekly basis throughout the war's duration, and a July report of their work in the *Muskegon Chronicle* noted around forty to fifty women working from 9:30

Bids to Reunion For Nurses Sent To Places Afar

Invitations to a reunion to be held here June 14 and 15 have been received by the 737 graduates



MRS. MARINUS SCHERPHORN.

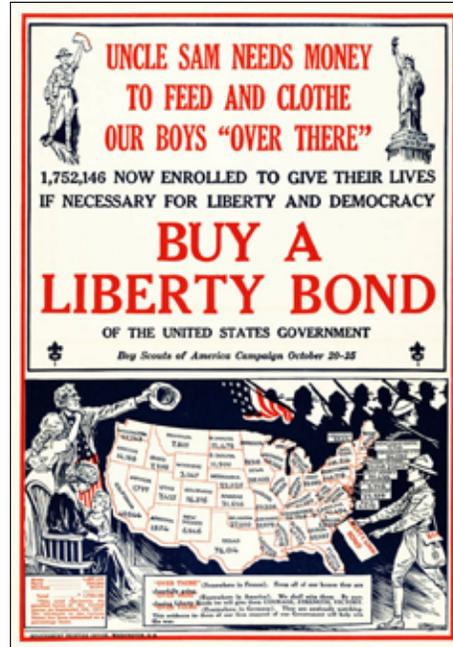
of the Marion Louise Withey School of Nursing of Blodgett Memorial hospital. The invitations went to 23 states, to the Canal Zone, Alaska, the Philippines and Bermuda and to Canada, China, Egypt and Austria. Mrs. Marinus Scherphorn, general chairman of the reunion, reported more than 100 responses have been received and that about 300 nurses are expected to attend. Arrangements which have been made by Mrs. Scherphorn and her assistants, Harriet Jansma and Cassie Dickinson, provide for two full days of activity. On June 14, following registration, they will attend a luncheon at the Lagrave Avenue Christian Reformed church. John Wood Blodgett will be host at a tea at Brookby house later that afternoon and a banquet in the hall room of the Pantlind will be held that evening. A memorial service for Mary Welsh, late supervisor of nurses, will be held on the morning of June 15 in the nurses' lodge. Class luncheons will be given at noon and an informal picnic that evening will close the two days' activities.

Article and photo of Anna Van Dommelen (Mrs. Marinus Scherphorn) in the newspaper "Bids to Reunion For Nurses Sent To Places Afar." Image courtesy the Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, MI, Collection 267, series XII.

to 5:30 and that a total of “six sewing machines were kept busy” throughout the day.¹⁷ All the way west, in Lynden, Washington, the Young Women’s Society of both the Reformed and Christian Reformed churches joined the Red Cross, dedicating themselves to roll bandages.¹⁸

A further motivation for some Dutch women was the personal nature which the war had taken for them. Of the many Dutch women who registered with the Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense in Grand Rapids, at least thirty-five listed a family member drafted, planning to enlist, in training, or in service.¹⁹ Additionally, the 1918 parade in Kalamazoo described earlier in this article mentioned the participation of two hundred Dutch soldiers from the nearby Camp Custer marching in the parade.²⁰ For Dutch women with brothers, husbands, and or sons “over there,” war work was infused with concrete familial motivations.

While Dutch women as individuals supported their loved ones in service, backing Dutch soldiers could also become a community cause. Organized already by October 1917, the Pella



Liberty Bond poster. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

Knitting Club was established by local women to complement the work of the local Red Cross. Red Cross groups in Pella sent their work to France for general distribution, but the Pella Knitting Club chose to send knitted articles directly to Pella soldiers as they received training at Camp Dodge. They solicited donations from

the community to fund their efforts, receiving seven hundred dollars in total, six hundred of which was spent on yarn for sweaters, socks, and other knitted articles. They spent the remaining money on a porch swing for the YWCA Hostess House at Camp Dodge.²¹ Soldiers, happy to receive gifts from home, wrote thank you letters to Leonora Scholte, wife of Henry Peter Scholte and the Knitting Club’s treasurer, who regularly shared them with the community by submitting the letters to local newspapers for publication.²² Their thanks were likely quite genuine, as several soldiers at Camp Dodge in January 1918 had returned with frostbitten ears after long hikes wearing only regulation hats to protect their heads and ears. Pella boys who had received knitted helmets to wear during their training were spared that suffering.²³ Not limited solely to knitting, the club also remembered their “boys at Camp Dodge” by coordinating an effort to send Dutch cookies at Christmas time. Motivated by a desire to support those they were connected to by heritage and community, the Pella Knitting Club stepped up its efforts with the personal touches that

must have made their contributions all the more comforting to Pella soldiers as they prepared for war.

Similarly motivated by



Liberty Loan parade in 1918. Image courtesy of Myron Van Ark Photo Collection, Hope College Archives, Holland, MI.

Volksvriend,
6 September 1917.

ORANGE CITY, IOWA, DONDERDAG, 6 SEPTEMBER, 1917

Wij Vragen U Persoonlijk om Aanstands te Breien

Dit is zeer dringend. Wij kunnen niet wachten totdat onze jongens in lijden komen, voordat wij beseffen wat onze Christelijke roeping is. De jongens gaan dezen herfst naar Frankrijk; zij **MOETEN** hebben sokken, polsmoffen, sweaters en halsdoeken, en Sioux County's aandeel hieraan is 200 stuks van elk genoemd kledingstuk. Wilt ook **GIJ** niet helpen? Er zijn vrouwen, die al bezig zijn aan haar derden sweater; en het is niet eerlijk, dat eenige weinigen alles doen. Mrs. John De Vries heeft het toezicht op dit werk. Bezoek haar en toon uwe bereidwilligheid om te helpen. Het Roode Kruis werk-lokaal is open elken namiddag, behalve Dinsdag en Zaterdag. Kom en gij krijgt naaiwerk mee om thuis af te maken.

HET ROODE KRUIS, ORANGE CITY

We are Personally Asking You to Start Knitting ASAP

This is urgent. We can no longer wait until our boys are suffering, before we realize what our Christian duty is. The boys are going to France this fall; they **MUST** have socks, mittens, gloves, sweaters and scarfs, and Sioux County's share of this is 200 pieces of each named item. Don't **YOU** want to help? There are women who are already working on their third sweater; and it is not fair that a few do all the work. Mrs. John De Vries is supervising this work. Visit her and show your willingness to help. The Red Cross work station is open every afternoon, except Tuesday and Saturday. Come and receive sewing projects to finish up at home.

THE ORANGE CITY RED CROSS

personal connections and a fair deal of patriotism, female students at Hope College threw themselves into war relief efforts as their male counterparts shipped out for service. The women at Voorhees Hall voted to observe a wheatless and meatless day once a week in an effort to save food for the soldiers.²⁴ Hope coeds also organized within the YWCA that supervised perhaps the most important contribution to the war effort—the Patriotic League.²⁵ Enthusiastically patriotic in rhetoric, the League participated in Red Cross work and Liberty Loan fundraising, but they also dedicated themselves to the more personal act of writing letters to “all the boys who have left [college] either for work on the farm or for active military service.” These letters were then published in Hope College’s student newspaper, *The Anchor*, in the “Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Department,” an ongoing section to which the Patriotic League regularly contributed. It was for their efforts in keeping track of and writing letters to Hope College men in service that the League received national attention.²⁶ In a pamphlet titled “War Work of Women in Colleges,” issued by the Committee on Public Information in

FOR LADIES' AIDS AND GIRLS' SOCIETIES.

Won't you do something for the soldiers? Surely you will. What is it? Just something that suits your taste, while it will be greatly appreciated by the boys. Knit as many pairs of wristlets as you can within the next two or three weeks. They are needed very much. Also a large number of sweater-vests or “hug-me-tights.” These articles should be made of a dark red or light brown heavy yarn. Also four or five dark red sweater coats for our religious workers in the camps.

Pin a paper with your name and address to the articles that you send. The boys will send a card, thanking you for your kindness.

Send all articles to Mr. Ralph Van Noord, 513 Eastern Ave., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Act quick, please, the winter is coming.

Don't send to other organizations, let charity begin at home.

Yours for the soldier boys,
P. J. HOEKENGA,
Corr. Sec. of the “League of Chr. Ref. churches for the Welfare of the Soldiers.”

The Banner, 18 October 1917. Image courtesy of the Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

Washington, DC, the Hope women were specifically praised for their card index that recorded all the addresses of Hope men serving.²⁷ With this attention to those they were connected to by heritage and education, the women of Hope College banded to-

gether to personally support each male student in service.

But it was not simply fear of being considered unpatriotic or personal connections to the men serving that motivated Dutch women to contribute. For some the war meant new opportunities. This is evident by the numerous cards they filled out in Grand Rapids for the Woman's Committee of the



Leonora Keables Scholte. Image courtesy of the Pella Historical Society and Museums, Pella, IA.

Council of National Defense. In these cards women not only listed what they could offer and were skilled at but also, at times, their aspirations and any training they might desire. Marie Stroosnyder, a seventeen-year-old first-generation Dutch American, requested training in clerical work, and Maude Bergers, sixteen years old, was “anxious to get instruction in stenography.”²⁸ Other training interests included practical nursing, telegraphy, business, bookkeeping, typewriting, hospital work, fruit growing, reconstruction work, and automobile repair work, among other occupations. This impulse to use war work as an opportunity for self-betterment was more common among Grand Rapids’ younger and single Dutch registrants whose families did not require their help at home. Their lives were not yet full of the responsibilities that took up the time of their married counterparts.

The responsibilities which prevented some Dutch women from seizing new opportunities could also make taking part in war work difficult. For many married Dutch women, home life was full of duties and expectations. Dutch women, as historian Suzanne Sinke has

argued in her book *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States*, were not only responsible for care of children, household management, and food preparation; they also contributed in numerous ways to the household economy. Some worked outside the home, but even for those who did not, work that furthered the family's economic survival was common. Many contributed their fair share of farm labor and money-saving strategies like darning or selling eggs, helping the family's bottom line.²⁹ This general trend is reflected in the often densely completed skills section in which many of these immigrant women indicated their proficiency in housekeeping, care of children, knitting, sewing, and cooking among others areas. For many, the skills they excelled in were also the reasons they had little time to give for service. Lyda Demmink, a thirty-nine-year-old mother of four children, told her defense card registrar that her time was "fully taken up at home work."³⁰ Similarly, Alberdina Tell, a thirty-six-year-old mother of children of her own in addition to three stepchildren, had "very little time for outside work" but was "very willing to help if she could spare the time."³¹ Dutch women with the desire to help but the inability to find time away from their homes and duties demonstrated a clear preference for work that they could take home and fit into their few-and-far-between moments of spare time. This preference made Red Cross work, particularly sewing and knitting, popular among the busiest Dutch women. Janet Maat, for example, had four children and a sick husband to care for but still did "a little Red Cross sewing and knitting."³²

Enabling Dutch women like Maat to take up Red Cross volunteer work required coordination. National and local networks had developed throughout the war to mobilize and provide for women's war work. Not

simply receivers of work to be done, many Dutch women took on roles as organizers and developed the strategies that made war relief work possible within their communities.

Perhaps the largest and most prominent organization mobilizing women's war work at the time was the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense. Chaired by prominent suffragist Anna Howard Shaw, the Woman's Committee operated as a branch of the Council of National Defense and focused its efforts on women and their work on the home front. The Woman's Committee's efficiency lay in its ability to subdivide. The national Woman's Committee divided into state divisions which then divided into

county divisions that could organize and oversee city branches.³³ It was at the local county and city levels that Dutch women were most likely to participate. The list of female officers for the Woman's Committee of Sioux County, Iowa, and its city subdivisions indicates a strong Dutch presence in Orange City, Maurice, Sioux Center, Hospers, Hull, and Rock Valley. Each city had an appointed division chairperson in addition to leadership positions focusing on child welfare, food production and conservation, educational propaganda, and the US Student Nurse Reserves. These areas reflect the general goals of the Woman's Committee during the war. Because defense of the home front involved more than



Grand Rapids Knitters. Image courtesy of the *Grand Rapids Press*, Grand Rapids, MI, 26 February 1917, page 8.

knitting and sewing, the goals set by the National Woman's Committee, as Anita VanOrsdal pointed out in her PhD dissertation, "There shall be no Woman Slackers," were those that would protect American families, and said goals would be achieved using strategies developed by social reformers.³⁴ Given the age of Progressive Reform with which World War I coincided, it is not surprising that the Woman's Committee used their mandate for domestic defense as an opportunity to fund and implement the reforms that many involved in the organization had for long been advocating. For their part, the Woman's Committee in Sioux County encouraged food conservation, the saving of pits and shells for carbon extraction necessary to gas mask production, and child welfare initiatives, among their other wartime efforts.³⁵

But it was not just as officers and workers in larger organizations that Dutch women took part in war work. For many, war relief took place within the church. Ladies Aid and Young Women's societies had become common fixtures within Reformed and Christian Reformed churches by 1917. As already organized bodies of church women, they served as obvious mediums for Dutch women's war relief work. Knowing exactly how many churches participated in war work is not possible, but the Women Defense Card collection at the Grand Rapids Public Library provides some insight. The cards, collected by the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense in Grand Rapids, included, among others, areas for remarks by the registrar and also a section where women could indicate if and where they had registered before. References on the cards indicate at least twenty-five Reformed and Christian Reformed churches were actively involved in relief work, some of which were listed as locations for

war service registration. Not all of the churches listed represented the work of Ladies' Aid or Young Women's societies. When it came to Red Cross work, many Dutch women demonstrated a preference for contributing within their churches, where they formed their own Red Cross auxiliaries.³⁶ For instance, *The Banner* of 19 July 1917 reported that "About ninety women were present last Tuesday night, July 10, in the church parlors of the Broadway Chr. Ref. Church [now Westview], for the purpose of organizing a Red Cross Society. . . . [S]everal ladies of the Burton Heights church are rendering valuable services of this kind in connection with the Red Cross Society."³⁷ It may be that these CRC women preferred meeting with their fellow church members simply because of the language they spoke. Many Dutch immigrant women living in the Dutch neighborhoods of Grand Rapids never learned to speak English and might have felt more comfortable having their own Red Cross chapters.

Finally succumbing to the force of the Allied Powers, the Germans signed an armistice agreement on the morning of 11 November 1918. World War I had come to an end, but the relief work for many Dutch women, and likely American women as well, had not. European countries, violently scarred by the war, desperately needed aid, and soldiers in active service when the armistice went into effect could not immediately travel home upon hearing the news. Told to "carry on" by Mrs. Dudley E. Waters (née Florence Eliza Hills, 1868-1956) of the Grand Rapids chapter of the Red Cross, Reformed and Christian Reformed Red Cross auxiliaries found themselves among a published list of auxiliaries pledging to continue with postwar work until needs lessened.³⁸ Similarly, the Second Reformed Red Cross auxiliary

in Muskegon kept active until at least January 1919 by making garments for refugees.³⁹ And the women of the Hope Patriotic League dutifully corresponded with and published letters from Hope soldiers still engaged in service until at least February 1919.⁴⁰ War relief work would continue for a little while longer, and Dutch women took their part in it. Thus, their motivations and methods colored by their identities and experiences, Dutch women carved out their place in America's "second line of defense."⁴¹

Endnotes

1. Anna Howard Shaw, *What the War Meant to Women* (New York: League to Enforce Peace, 1919), 6.

2. Robert P. Swierenga, "Home Front: Holland Michigan, in the World Wars," in *Dutch Americans and War: United States and Abroad*, eds., Robert P. Swierenga, Nella Kennedy, and Lisa Zylstra (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2014), 141.

3. Swierenga, "Home Front," 143; see also James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 89. "A group of vigilantes in the [Grand Rapids] city perpetrated 'paint raids' by night upon the homes of men of suspect loyalty. One victim, the prominent CRC publisher J. B. Hulst, awoke on 2 April 1918 to find the colors of the German flag painted on his porch."

4. Although born in the United States, Cornelia Steketee Hulst's father was the noted Dutch-born Vice-Consul of the Netherlands, Jan Steketee; her husband, Dr. Henry Hulst, was born in the Netherlands.

5. Cornelia Steketee Hulst, *Our Secret Alliance* (Chicago: League to Enforce International Justice, 1917), 3.

6. "Mrs. Hulst Asked to Quit School; Her Book Banned," *Grand Rapids Press*, 20 March 1918, 1.

7. "Mrs. Hulst Asks Leave from Duty for School Year," *Grand Rapids Press*, 26 March 1918, 1-2.

8. Today, these 20,000 cards are housed in the Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department at the Grand Rapids Public Library.

Genealogists, academics, social historians, or those who are just curious to learn about the women of that era in Grand Rapids will find it enormously valuable. These cards may be accessed at: <https://grpl.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16055coll5>; see also: <http://michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/greatwar/exhibits/show/homefront/preparedness/women-s-committees>

9. Women's Defense Card for Cornelia Steketee Hulst, 27 April 1918, 174-9-805, Grand Rapids Public Library.

10. "Americanism is Keynote of Big Liberty Parade," *Grand Rapids Press*, 4 July 1918, 1-2.

11. Ibid.

12. Women's Defense Card for Anna Van Dommelen, 4 May 1918, 174-20-200; Van Dommelen married Marinus Scherphorn in 1923; she died in Grand Rapids in 1981.

13. "Americanism" in *Grand Rapids Press*, 4 July 1918.

14. "Holland Folk to Check Lie of Disloyalty," *Kalamazoo Gazette*, 10 August 1918, 8.

15. "Holland Woman is Red Cross Champion," *Kalamazoo Gazette*, 22 March 1918, 5. This is Driesje Top, who was born in the Netherlands in 1858, married John De Koeper, and, after his death, married William Braskamp in Holland, Michigan, 21 December 1915.

16. "Second Reformed Ladies Aid Society to Aid in War Relief," *Muskegon Chronicle*, 19 June 1917, 5.

17. "Fifty Members Aid Society Making Red Cross Supplies," *Muskegon Chronicle*, 3 July 1917, 5.

18. "News from Lynden," *De Volksvriend*, 20 June 1918.

19. Women's Defense Cards. The number of Dutch women with close family members in service is likely higher than 35. The number cited is based on Defense Cards for women who could be easily verified as Dutch. This was done with search terms that identified women born in the Netherlands and those born in the USA but

who could speak the Dutch language and were of Dutch ancestry. Identifying women who could not speak the language but who did have Dutch ancestry would have required time and resources beyond the scope of this article.

20. "Kazoo Hollanders in Loyalty Fete," *Kalamazoo Gazette*, 27 August 1918, 4.

21. "Report of the Pella Knitting Club," *The Booster Press*, 9 April 1919, 1.

22. "The Knitting Club Doing Good Work," *The Booster Press*, 23 January 1918, 1.

23. "Letter of Gratitude Received at Home," *The Booster Press*, 23 January 1918, 1.

24. "Campus News," *The Anchor*, 31 October 1918, 3.

25. "Patriotic League Organized by Hope Co-eds: Girls will Render Valuable Service in Various Way," *The Anchor*, 30 May 1917, 1.

26. "Soldiers' and Sailors' Department," *The Anchor*, 2 October 1918, 3.

27. "The Hope Patriotic League," *The Anchor*, 20 February 1918, 2.

28. Marie Stroosnyder (1901-1996) [Women's Defense Card, 3 May 1918, 174-18-934] did, in fact, become a bookkeeper and typist in Grand Rapids. She remained single. Maude Bergers [Women's Defense Card, 4 May 1918, 174-2-221] was born in 1902; married Thomas Orr in 1920; was divorced by 1940 and earned her living by working as a seamstress in a knitting factory; died in 1979 in Indianapolis, IN.

29. Suzanne Sinke, *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 57-58.

30. Women's Defense Cards, Lyda Demmink, 2 May 1918, 174-5-328. Alida Hesselink married Henry Demmink. She was born in 1878. She died in 1940 in Grand Rapids, MI.

31. Women's Defense Cards, Alberdina Tell, 2 May 1918, 174-12-740. Alberdina Ehman was born in 1886 in the Netherlands; she married widower

William Tell in 1908. She died in 1982 in Grand Rapids, MI.

32. Women's Defense Cards, Janet Maat, 5 May 1918, 174-12-740. Janet (Jennie) Huijser was born in 1882 in the Netherlands; she married Adrian Maat. She died in 1983 in Grand Rapids, MI.

33. Anita Anthony VanOrsdal, "There Shall be no Woman Slackers": The Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense and Social Welfare Activism as Home Defense, 1917-1919," PhD dissertation (Michigan State University, 2016), 59-60.

34. VanOrsdal, "There Shall be no Woman Slackers," 3-4.

35. "An Entire Week for Conservation," *Rock Valley Bee*, 29 November 1918, 4; "Iowa People Asked to Make Gas Masks for Our Soldiers Who are Fighting the Hun," *Alton Democrat*, 26 October 1918, 7; "Orange City News," *The Sioux County Index*, 14 June 1918, 8.

36. Women's Defense Cards Digital Collection, Grand Rapids Public Library Digital Collections, Grand Rapids, Michigan, <https://cdm16055.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16055coll5>. In the course of my research, I counted at least twenty-five war relief efforts organized within Reformed and Christian Reformed churches from examining 1,994 cards. The number cited is based on defense cards for women who could be easily verified as Dutch. This was done with search terms that identified women born in the Netherlands and those born in the US but who could speak the Dutch language and had Dutch ancestry.

37. *The Banner*, 19 July 1917, 465.

38. "Red Cross Workers Agree to Carry On," *Grand Rapids Press*, 1 November 1919, 2.

39. "Second Reformed Red Cross," *Muskegon Chronicle*, 27 January 1919, 5.

40. "Soldiers' and Sailors' Department," *The Anchor*, 19 February 1919, 3.

A WWI Postcard Essay

Edited by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

In the Calvin College Archives Manuscript Collection 478 (WWI) there are ninety picture postcards that John Kobes sent home to his family in Holland, Michigan. Kobes was a Dutch national, born on 15 February 1895 in Vriezenveen, Overijssel, the Netherlands. The family emigrated in 1907 when Kobes was twelve years old. He was inducted at Camp Custer and served with Company A-338th Infantry, 85th (Custer) Division traveling to England, then to France and the Western Front as a supply sergeant.

On his WWI Draft Registration Card, John Kobes's address was 188 W 19th Street Holland, MI. He listed his occupation as student (Hope College Preparatory School). Upon his

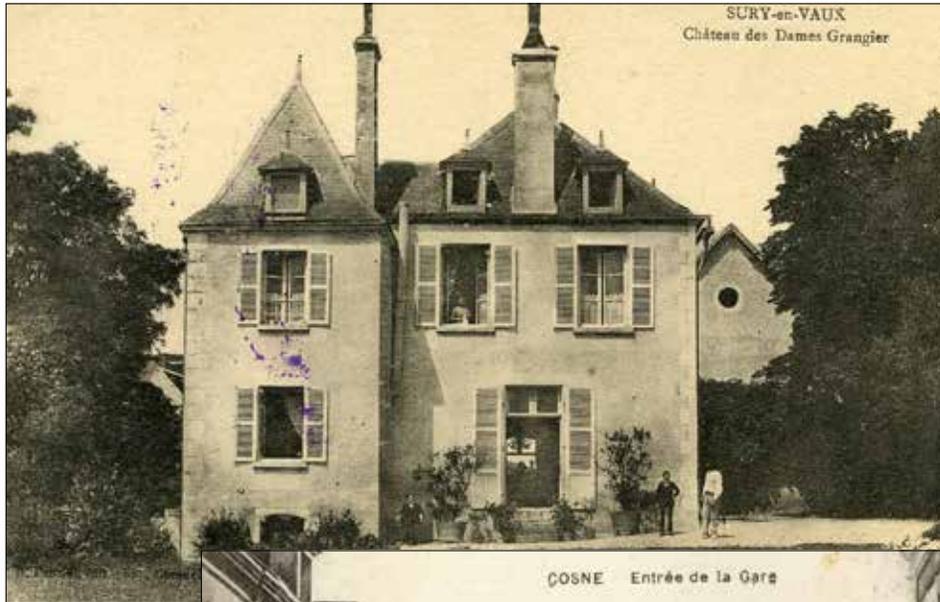
return he married Ella Westra; they had two children, Ronald (1926) and Joyce (1932). John worked as a salesman in the Lokker Rutgers Co. (men's clothing store) on East 8th Street. By 1940 he was part proprietor of the store. Kobes died 1 January 1987 at age ninety-one and is buried in the Pilgrim Home Cemetery.

The postcards are addressed to his parents, William and Jasperdina Kobes, and his younger siblings: Jennie, John, Fred, William and Jasper. Kristin Kobes Du Mez, chair of the Calvin College History Department is John's great-granddaughter!

The following postcards from France are courtesy of the Calvin College Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 

21 August 1818. Dear brother,
I suppose you're busy with
your lessons when you receive
this card. Don't waste your
time. So long. Your
brother John.





8 August 1818. Dear folks,
A picture of one of the
homes in this village. The
pictures [of the houses]
look better than they are in
reality. So long, John.

2 September 1918. Am
sending you a postcard
from Cosne which a few of
us visited yesterday. It is
eight miles from here and
we walked it both ways
something like 16 miles.
Started at 2 a.m. and
returned at 9 p.m.
A beautiful country
indeed.



2 September 1918. Dear
folks, today is Labor Day and
we are having a half holiday.
Tomorrow most of you will
start school. Am feeling fine.
The weather is great. So
long, John.

Origins

15 October 1918. Dear Sis,
Rather cool today and before
long the winter season will
start. Everything is well. Your
brother, John.



20 October 1918. Dear
friend, I suppose you are
again going to High school.
Well study hard because
then you become successful.
Best regards to all, John.

26 October 1918. Hallo Dick.
I'm still here and am feeling
fine. Regards to all.
Your brother, John.





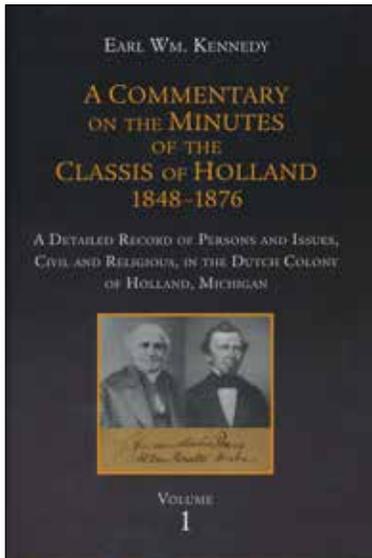
9 November 1918. Dear Bill. I suppose you're going to school. Be sure to learn all you can. Behave. Your brother, John

9 November 1918. Loving sister. Just to let you know that I am feeling fine. Received your letter yesterday. With love, your brother, John.



2 December 1918. Hello Dick. You are wondering whether I'll know you when I come back. Hope it is soon. Merry Xmas. Your big brother, John.

book reviews



A Commentary on the Minutes of the Classis of Holland, 1848-1876

A Detailed Record of Persons and Issues, Civil and Religious, in the Dutch Colony of Holland, Michigan

Earl William Kennedy

3 vols: Van Raalte Press, 2018. Available at bookstore@Hope.edu for \$200.00 plus shipping, or may be purchased directly at the Van Raalte Institute, and save the shipping fee.

The Van Raalte Institute is located in the Theil Research Center, 9 East Street, Holland, MI. Also available at Amazon.

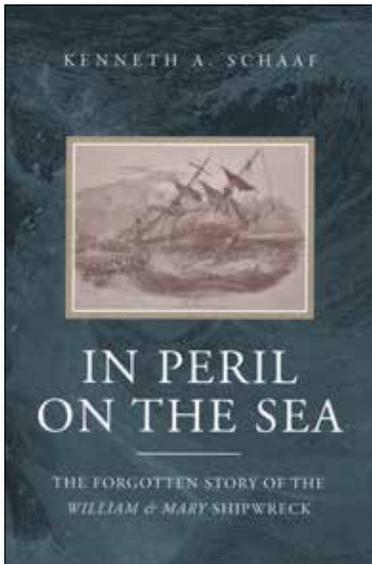
Just released, Earl William Kennedy's long-awaited critical edition, *A Commentary on the Minutes of the Classis of Holland, 1848-1876: A Detailed Record of Persons and Issues, Civil and Religious, in the Dutch Colony of Holland, Michigan*, lives up the claims in its title. Although at its core these volumes are an exquisitely detailed examination of the minutes of Classis Holland, the work speaks to issues of religious, social, cultural, and political history for the broader area. Scholars and enthusiasts alike will find value in this exhaustively researched and extensive (over 2000 pages) work.

Probably the greatest contribution is Kennedy's meticulous attention to detail in his commentary. Kennedy takes the time, space, and effort to explain many of the references to contemporary events and individuals scattered throughout the classis minutes and connects them together across the time span covered here.

Thus, the reader can encounter, for example, Jan Willem Nijsing in multiple places in the first volume, and the extensive footnotes will connect the references. This strategy provides the reader an intimate glimpse into the lives of Hollanders. He provides the reader a full picture of the social, economic, religious, and political issues that dominated the lives of the first generations of Dutch immigrants.

The index, notes, and bibliography further speak to the breadth of the research required for a work of this nature. The index alone is more than 100 pages and is subdivided by name, place, and subject. This thoroughness helps the researcher or casual reader to quickly locate relevant sections of the work. Footnotes are also cross-referenced, so one can move through multiple note references with ease.

Denice Fett



In Peril on the Sea

Kenneth A. Schaaf

Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2018.
This book is available at Amazon for
\$30.00 plus shipping.

There are numerous accounts of the journey to America in letters to the Netherlands and other travel journals. Few are as engrossing as the story of Oepke Bonnema and his group of eighty-five Frisians who boarded the *William and Mary* en route to America.

When this group of Frisians boarded a ship in Harlingen in late April 1853 bound for England, little did they know that their journey

would become news in many parts of the world. Travel to the United States in the mid-1800s was very often crowded and took varying lengths of time. Few possessions could accompany a passenger, and food was often scarce by the end of the voyage. But this group of passengers experienced hardships and tragedy unlike most others.

Fierce storms had battered their ship en route to England and forced it ashore nowhere near its intended destination. This delayed its arrival in Liverpool and forced them to wait another three weeks before passage on a new ship could be booked. The new ship, *William and Mary*, departed from Liverpool for New Orleans in late March with 208 British, Irish, and Dutch emigrants onboard. Captained by a young American, Timothy Stinson, the vessel was shipwrecked in the Bahamas under rather questionable circumstances. The loss of the ship first made news around the world when the captain reported the vessel lost in the Atlantic sea with over two hundred still on board. But then the truth was discovered. Instead of assisting the passengers, the crew had sneaked away in the lifeboats and were unaware that days later the passengers were rescued by heroic wreckers and cared for by Bahamians. There are numerous accounts of the generosity of the natives of Nassau.

A passenger, Hendrik Kas, wrote to his family in Friesland, “They are the best people of all. They would give the clothes off their back for poor seaman. Each [of us was given] an English testament, for the people are very religious everywhere. They sell nothing on Sunday and worship faithfully in the churches and in the homes.”

Bonnema’s original settlement goal was Dubuque, Iowa, but on arrival they decided to continue up the Mississippi to find a place that more closely resembled the Friesland they had left behind. Just north of La Crosse, Wisconsin, they established the colony of New Amsterdam. After all their sacrifices to reach this goal, the colony never flourished and there is little left there to remind us of this courageous group of immigrants.

Broer Haagsma’s journal of this trip, *Lotgevallen van den Heer Bonnema en Zijne Togtgenooten op Reis Uit Friesland Naar de Vereenigde Staten van Noord-Amerika*, in itself is a compelling read. In *In Peril on the Sea*, Kenneth Schaaf has created a gripping narrative that easily captures the reader’s attention. The meticulous research Schaaf has done paints a vivid picture of the people, places, and events that surround the story.

Mary Risseeuw

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

After the Honeymoon: Visit to the Plains
during Drought and Depression
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Hollanders on the Plains:
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