Origins

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

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Cover photo:
Second CRC in Cicero, Illinois. Typical CRC church interior of the early 1900s. The pulpit is front and center on a raised platform, the communion table is situated below the pulpit and the baptismal font is next to it. Image courtesy of the Calvin University Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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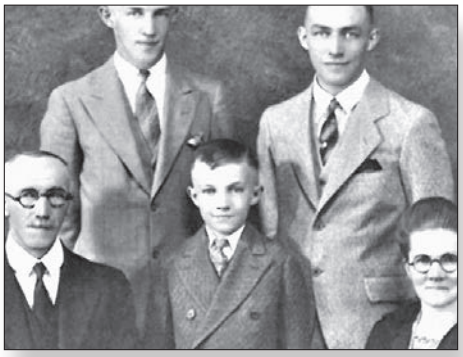

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from the editor. . .

From the editor . . .

Chairs. They're everywhere. In fact, so ubiquitous are they that we seldom stop to admire their styles and craftsmanship. We are used to having a chair to sit on whenever and wherever we need one. This was not always the case with the settlers who came to this country from the Netherlands in the mid-nineteenth century. Only a handful were wealthy enough to ship their household goods, but the remainder ended up sitting on tree stumps or wooden chests when they first arrived. In *De pilgrim vaders van het westen*, Dingman Versteeg noted, "As for furniture, conditions were equally poor. In the forests of Michigan tree stumps often served as tables. In some cabins, tree stumps were left in the ground within the area of the cabin walls. A goodly number of the immigrants used the wood from boxes and crates in which they had shipped their belongings to make tables and closets. Nail kegs were used for chairs." It is no wonder, then, that Joris den Belder, a tailor in the Netherlands, immediately began making chairs in Pella, Iowa, after he arrived in 1847. Where there's a need, fill it. Many others did as well. By the 1880s there were nearly forty independent Dutch-born chairmakers and over fifty cabinetmakers from various provinces in the Netherlands living in various parts of the United States. These men were not working in furniture factories but working on their own making household furniture.

In Michigan, Grand Rapids became the foremost furniture producing city in the United States, employing thousands of men. By 1911 there were fifty-nine furniture plants going full speed. In *Strike, How the Furniture Workers Strike of 1911 Changed Grand Rapids*, Jeffrey Kleiman noted, "While not all Dutch immigrants became furniture workers, the majority of furniture workers were Dutch. At the turn of the century, when their numbers peaked, nearly half of the seven-thousand-man labor force of the city's chief industry was drawn from these religiously cantankerous people."

Mary Risseeuw researched a number of these Dutch immigrants who set about making furniture and founded their own companies. In a dozen vignettes, she gives us a glimpse into their backgrounds and their creativity. Included in her article are such well-known companies as Baker Furniture and Hekman Furniture, as well as some lesser known, but no less interesting ones. Robert Schoone-Jongen follows up writing about what happens when these "religiously cantankerous people" decide to lay down their tools and walk out to strike for higher wages.

But manufacturing of furniture was not limited to men working in the factories; it also generated many ancillary occupations, such as designers, salesmen, bookkeepers, dealers, and procurers. There were those who earned their keep by drawing the products and producing sales catalogs. And, of course, all this furniture had to be moved, providing work for teamsters. In the 1910 USFC there were one hundred and ninety-two Dutch-born teamsters working in Michigan; one hundred and sixteen of those were working in Kent County. One such person was Joseph De Boer, who was born in the Netherlands in 1840 and came to Grand Rapids in 1855. For fifty-one years Joseph was a teamster for the Nelson-Matter Furniture Company—until his death in 1912. While he was working for the Nelson-Matter Furniture Company, two brothers with Dutch roots arrived in Grand Rapids also to learn the teamster trade. Their story is told by Robert Yonker.

Turning to furniture making also saved the livelihoods of the John Cammenga family. When John lost his job at Berkey and Gay Furniture Company due to the Depression of the 1930s, he decided to go into business for himself. The resulting story is told by Ronald Cammenga and his aunt, Joyce Bouwkamp Cammenga. Among other items, Cammenga Custom Cabinet Company (later Cammenga Church Furniture Company) also made church furniture, which brings us to our final article, "Sacred Furniture."

In a letter sent in to *De Wachter* of 14 June 1905, Gerrit J. Withage describes a church service held by Dutch immigrants on the isolated western Canadian prairies. Gerrit

writes, "It was no beautiful temple where we found ourselves; no, it was only a simple hut, because we still do not have beautiful houses here. Also, we did not have a nice platform; a chest turned bottom up, a two by four with a small store box on top of it—that was the whole pulpit. But no problem; we heard God's Word." Reading this made me want to gather more information on "sacred furniture," resulting in the article. When you attend church next time, take a good look at the furniture. It is special and chosen with care. The article appears on page 36.

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

From the interim curator . . .

News

A major new development at Heritage Hall is *Origins Online*, a blog that will feature news and history related to the work of the archives. It will include stories about new collections and current work and events at Heritage Hall. And it will feature stories about the history of Dutch North America, the seminary and university, the Christian Reformed Church, and more. A page on the blog will allow you to subscribe (or renew your subscription) to the print version of *Origins* and will provide a convenient link to older issues.

Material related to the mission of Heritage Hall continues to pour in from the university, seminary, and denomination; and, we continue to acquire fascinating sources that illuminate the history of Dutch North America and Reformed Christianity. Here are two examples:

Documentary films and magic lantern slides related to Christian Reformed missions among Native American peoples in New Mexico.

A collection of some 1500 postcards from the early 1900s to the 1960s, with images of churches, schools, holidays and festivals, and businesses in Dutch immigrant enclaves in the midwestern United States.

Efforts to make Heritage Hall's collections accessible online continue. The finding aid for the Manuscripts Collection has been searchable online for several years. This summer and fall the finding aids for the Christian Reformed Church of North American and Calvin Theological Seminary will go online. We are still working on the large finding aid for Calvin University. We also plan to put a larger sample of our images, documents, and other sources available online—e.g., some of the postcards mentioned above. This will be a gradual process. It promises to make resources available to researches of all sorts, whether middle school, high school, or university students; professional scholars; or community members.

Staff & Volunteers

Our staff includes Hendrina Van Spronsen, who is the office coordinator, processes material related to the denomination, and is the business manager and a copy editor for *Origins*. Laurie Haan is a department assistant who does a variety of things, including processing material related to the university and seminary.

Our longtime denominational field agent, Robert Bolt, has retired. We thank him for his many years of work in Heritage Hall, and for many years more before that teaching in the history department at Calvin. I took a class with Dr. Bolt in the spring of 1988, and I got to know him better as an emeritus colleague when I came to the Calvin history department in 1999. Others will continue the work he did, but we will miss his presence at Heritage Hall.

We are blest with many volunteers. Phil Erffmeyer processes material related to all areas of Heritage Hall, and he has taken up some of the work of the denominational field agent. Casey Jen is working with the CRCNA to update and harmonize the ordained ministers databases of the denomination and Heritage Hall. Emily Koelzer is helping us to process new collections and provide more detailed descriptions of some important older collections. Jeannette Smith is working on collecting demographic data from *The Banner* and putting it in a database. And Clarice Newhof is working on using Christian Reformed Church yearbooks to determine membership statistics for local churches.

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- We will still do the traditional paper version.
- But we are adding an online version via PayPal.

William Katerberg, Interim Curator

Dutch Furniture Manufacturers in the United States

Mary Risseeuw

The Early Years

In 1878 Grand Rapids became "the Furniture Capital of America"—all because of a wagonload of furniture that went to the Philadelphia Centennial and came back with blue ribbons and great acclaim.[1] Walnut was the chief wood for quality furniture at that time, but the majority of the walnut available in the area was sold to large Chicago and eastern factories. This made the stock that was left an expensive investment for local cabinetmakers. The earliest furniture men were Englishmen who did not let limited stock and capital stop them. They were astute businessmen who used local materials, had an available workforce, used professional designers, and did assertive marketing to make their impact on the industry, so that quite early Grand Rapids had established a worldwide reputation. The Dutch, and other Europeans, who joined them brought a sound knowledge of cabinetmaking techniques from the old country. Between 1870 and 1885 the leading Grand Rapids companies were Berkey & Gay Furniture Company; Nelson, Matter & Company; and Phoenix Furniture Company. These three companies exhibited at the Centennial and all won awards, proving that production assisted by machines had arrived. "The American furniture industry of the 1870s and 80s looked to Grand Rapids with envy and fear; few other manufacturing centers or individual companies produced stylish furniture at lower prices."[2] There was a great deal of resistance to machine-produced furniture, but Grand Rapids manufacturers took the lead in adopting new techniques and equipment. At that time the term "furniture" was used to distinguish everyday products from fine cabinetmaking.

Immigrant Work Force

Immigration from Europe continued to rise after the Civil War. The largest numbers to arrive in Grand Rapids were from Poland, Germany, and the Netherlands. Most of these immigrants had been farmers and laborers in their home countries and arrived without the financial means

Berkey & Gay Furniture Company. Image courtesy of the Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Mary Risseeuw has researched nineteenth- and twentieth-century Dutch immigration to Wisconsin for almost thirty years. She has lectured throughout the Midwest and the Netherlands on the subject. She has a BS from UW-Madison and an MA and MFA from Northern Illinois University. In May 2018 she presented two genealogical sessions at the National Genealogical Society's annual conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Berkey & Gay sanding room. Image courtesy of the Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

to purchase farmland. Jobs in local factories were readily available. Although many of the workers were unskilled or semi-skilled, many of the Dutchmen who found jobs in furniture factories came with a skill set in woodworking and cabinetmaking. They settled into neighborhoods that could be recognized by the province of origin. By 1900 the Dutch constituted more than one-quarter of the city's population. And although not all the Dutch immigrants became furniture workers, about half of the seven thousand employed at the turn of the century were Dutch. About 40 percent of the remaining number were Polish. The largest difference between these two groups of workers was that the Dutch had arrived about five years earlier than the Polish. There was an economic advantage to this. Dutch workers earned more and had larger families. Older children in Dutch households worked outside the home and brought in additional income, allowing about three-quarters of Dutch factory workers to own their own homes.

The Shopmark, a publication of the Berkey & Gay Company, often featured stories of the immigrants who found work in the factories. The March 1924 issue featured a story about Martin Slabbekoorn, who had arrived in 1890. He had worked for a clock and mantel company for twenty-one years before joining the finishing room of Grand Rapids Upholstering Company, a subsidiary of Berkey & Gay.

> Martin was born in the province of Zeeland, the Netherlands, a little more than 60 years ago. Here he was a plowman, tilling the soil on the lowlands of Holland, But at the age of 28, he saw visions of better things in America and with his wife and two children sailed to this country. Straight to Grand Rapids he came and at once commenced work with the Clock and Mantel Company . . . .[3]

Jake Tanis, another Dutchman, ran the factory elevator at Berkey & Gay for more than thirty years. His trip was recounted in February 1917:

> In April 1880, Jake and his family (including wife and 12 children) arrived in America on the *Zaandam*. Jake said that they were only 21 days on the boat, but the [impact of] voyage lasted him for weeks after that. The ocean gave a little celebration for Jake the last few days of the trip and when it was over, Jake says that all the lifeboats were smashed, and the wooden shoes were floating around the ship like decoy ducks.[4]

These men worked until they had saved enough to bring other family members to Grand Rapids. When these families arrived, they very often found employment in the same factory. It was not unusual to have three generations of a family working in the same place.

Dutch Initiated Companies

The Paalman Furniture Company

One could plot a "genealogy" of Dutch furniture craftsmen throughout West Michigan who worked at the earliest furniture companies, moved on to other companies, and then founded their own. One such designer/craftsman was John Paalman, who emigrated in 1880.[5] At age twelve he began working at the McCord-Bradfield Furniture Company and then moved to an apprenticeship in cabinetmaking at Widdicomb Furniture Company. At age twenty-four he became the foreman in the machine and cabinetmaking division of a furniture company in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was the Stickley Brothers Furniture Company that lured him back to Grand Rapids, where he was a superintendent before

John H. Paalman. Image courtesy of S. Koster.

Paalman tea wagons. Image courtesy of S. Koster.

founding Paalman Furniture Company in 1916. He was a skilled cabinetmaker, but also a good machinist, and his technical knowledge made him one of the successful manufacturers in Grand Rapids. With an initial capital stock of $100,000, the company's original executives also included L. B. Cumings, D. M. Hoogerhyde, and C. Hondelink.[6]

Bergsma Brothers Furniture

Bergsma Brothers Furniture Company was started in 1940 by Kenneth and Julius Bergsma. Born in Grand Rapids to Rev. Karst Bergsma and Sietske (Sadie) Kamp, the brothers had started a woodworking shop in Denver, Colorado, while their father served at First Christian Reformed Church there. The brothers returned to Grand Rapids, entered Calvin College, and upon graduation started a furniture company.[7] The company prospered for thirty-eight years, acquiring Imperial Furniture Company and launching a new venture in Calvin Furniture in 1953, the year they also purchased Gunn Furniture Company from Edsko Hekman, who had bought it in 1949. Calvin Furniture was known for its Scandinavian Modern influenced furniture. The success of the company is due, in no small way, to the impressive designs of Paul McCobb. The brothers had a second venture called Excelsior Furniture Company that occupied the original Berkey & Gay factory, as well as the Jewel Furniture Company. In 1954 Bergsma added tables to their line. During the 1970s and 1980s they made furniture and cabinetry on contract for other companies, including stereo speakers, armoires, and entertainment centers, as well as case clocks for Hamilton Clock and organ cabinets for Lowry Organ Cabinets. Following the lead of other furniture companies, they eventually moved the bulk of their production to plants in Tennessee and North Carolina.

Rev. Karst Bergman. Image courtesy of the Calvin University Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The Doezemas: Father and Sons

Another "chain" of family furniture businesses is found in the Doezema family. Rense (Riner) and John, along with other brothers, worked with their father in the construction business. Their father, Tjerk (Charles) became a carpenter after immigrating, although he had no formal training.[8] The houses that he built were considered cheap and erected closely together, thus maximizing his profits. There was little harmony between father and sons. John quit and went into furniture making, and his brother Riner soon joined him. Riner declared that he "didn't want to build 'those cheese boxes' anymore."[9]

In 1929 they began producing secretary desks and breakfronts and, when materials became more plentiful, they added bedroom and living room suites. John was the designer and took his inspiration from Chippendale and Renaissance pieces. They only produced high-end furniture, and Riner's marketing took them to the national trade show at Merchandise Mart in Chicago on an annual basis. In time, John's sons Willard and Frank joined them, as did Riner's sons, William and Charles. John's sons, Chester, Harold, and James, eventually started the Furniture Arts Company, producing a line of fine tables. Doezema Furniture continued until 1955 and had pieces placed in the White House.

Charles and William Doezema went on to found Mastercraft in 1946. The Doezema brothers went overseas during World War II and returned to the USA planning to make furniture with an urban cosmopolitan style. They

top Doezema Furniture Company newspaper advertisement. Image courtesy of the Doezema family.

above Oval table with goat's feet legs in the White House. Image courtesy of the Doezema family.

Doezema Family: Riner and Reka (Kwant) surrounded by their children, Katherine, Annette, Lambert, Edward, Charles, William, Harriet, Angeline, 1936. Image courtesy of the Doezema family.

Doezema Furniture Factory workshop. Image courtesy of the Doezema family.

worked together producing exquisitely designed high-end luxury furniture. Their designs were bold and made a huge impact on all who saw them. The very high quality of exotic materials combined with etched solid brass ensured their popularity with both interior designers and collectors. Mastercraft often had a range of designers working on projects, including Bernhard Rohne and John Widdicomb. Together these designers produced beautifully designed pieces of furniture that are still in demand today. William Doezema sold the company to Baker Furniture in 1974. The Doezema legacy lives on in Herman and Lee Doezema, the nephews of William and Charles. They are the craftsmen who designed and built the chapel furniture for Calvin University and the chancel furniture for the Third Christian Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Baker Furniture

Siebe Baker, born 5 July 1852 in the Netherlands, emigrated in 1870.[10] Together with his friend Henry Cook he founded the Cook & Baker Furniture Company in Allegan, Michigan, in 1890. The first pieces they produced were a combination desk and a bookcase in golden oak. The company became known for their ability to blend periods, styles, and international influences. "In remarks made in 1923, Mayor E. P. Stephan of Holland, sang the praises of Dutch settlers in this part of the state: 'Summed up, the message that Holland and Zeeland want to get across to all furniture dealers and ultimately to the consumer is that "If It's Made By Dutchmen, It's As Good As Can Be Made." Capital letters assured that no one missed the point."[11]

Baker ventured into Modernism with Art Deco pieces in 1925. Siebe died that same year, and the presidency was passed down to his son, Hollis S. Baker. Hollis greatly expanded the company, and at its peak it employed four hundred and fifty people. He reorganized the business and started producing the kind of furniture that *he* liked. Every year, and sometimes twice, he traveled to Europe and often spent months in England and

France searching for the best antique furniture. By 1941, Hollis Baker had amassed a collection of over one thousand five hundred antiques and decided to establish the Baker Museum for Furniture Research in Grand Rapids. In 1983, Hollis Baker donated over three hundred pieces from this original collection to the Grand Rapids Art Museum. This gift eventually became the Baker Furniture Study Collection. One hundred and thirty-nine items of the Baker Study Collection were offered for sale by the museum at a Sotheby's auction in 1999. Most of the lots were sold and raised a total of nearly $400,000, which was used to maintain and conserve the collection at the Grand Rapids Art Museum. Baker went on to collaborate with Finn Juhl, a renowned Danish designer, to produce the first Danish Modern Collection for the American market. They are also credited with a groundbreaking Far East Collection in 1949 that brought modern Chinese design to the Western market. Hollywood royalty experienced the elegance of modern Baker designs when the company was asked to furnish the Green Rooms for the Academy Awards in 2011 and 2013.[12] The company eventually passed to Siebe's grandson, Hollis M. Baker, who maintained the principles of his father and grandfather. "For three generations, the Baker family has been steeped in the traditions of making fine furniture," explains Hollis M. Baker. "Our study and research and our efforts to find ways of re-creating the techniques of the great furniture craftsmen of the past are all directed to the production of a finished product worthy of our motto, 'For those who appreciate the finest.'"[13] In 1969 Hollis M. sold the company to Magnavox, and through mergers it is now owned by the Kohler Company in Kohler, Wisconsin.

The Werkman Furniture Company

Reinder E. Werkman was born in Uithuizen, Groningen, the Netherlands, on 24 June 1855, to Eeuwke Jans Werkman and Geertje Wiebes Bolling. The family emigrated in May of 1867. By age thirteen Rein was delivering vegetables from a wheelbarrow and by fifteen was working in the flour mill of the Werkman-Geerlings Company. By the age of twenty-one he saw the need for planed lumber to accommodate a growing construction trade. In his reminiscences in 1876 he wrote:

> I borrowed $250 from Rev. Roelof Peters (of the First Reformed Church) and bought out W. Scott's interest in the bankrupt planing mill. At that time there was not a bank in Holland from which to borrow the money. I went to the Ottawa Station with plenty of nerve and bought out the stock of lumber of Stacy & Van Drezer, amounting to over $3,000, on short time. To meet the payments. I had to find a market for this lumber and shipped it, after being dressed, to Red Cloud, Nebraska. Doing such a business all at once, my competitor, the Phoenix Planing Mill, an old establishment, thought I had a lot of capital to back me. By accommodating the local carpenters, I soon had all their business and the old firm went broke for lack of custom work. I then bought their large mill for a small consideration and did a very successful business.[14]

It was not long before he began building homes. By 1887 he had recruited Hendrik Te Roller, Matthew Notier, and Cornelius De Roo to join him in creating the Werkman Furniture Company.

Werkman was one of the few companies whose intention was to sell inexpensive furniture but, three years later, before 1890, he went bankrupt because of a faulty title on the property.[15] In 1891, Jacob Van Putten, Barteld Slag, Cornelius Blom Sr., Cornelius Ver Schure, and several members of the Huntley and Herman Van Ark families, including Gradus Van Ark, put up $32,000 in capital, bought out Werkman's interest, and formed the Ottawa Furniture Company.[16]

The Werkman, Van Ark & Company

Gradus Van Ark arrived in the US in 1866 with his wife, Aaltje, and three children. His obituary states that "he listened to the addresses by Dr. A. C. Van Raalte in the Netherlands and those caused him to come to this country to make his home here and throw his lot with the Hollanders of western Michigan. He located in this city [Grand Rapids] and worked as a carpenter."[17] Along with Riner Werkman, he built the Phoenix Planing Mill, which became known as Werkman, Van Ark & Company. After selling his portion of that business, he built the Holland Furniture Factory with Jacob van Putten and John

Ottawa Furniture Co., Holland, Michigan. Image courtesy of Joint Archives Holland, Michigan.

Vander Veen. He also built the Third Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. "He was, however, best known for making wine, which was used for the church communion services. Carroll Van Ark visited his paternal grandfather's home for family dinners on Sundays and remembered when wine did not involve the ritual of communion. As the story goes, Mr. Van Ark would take the men down into the basement to inspect the vats. Sometime later, they would come back upstairs with flushed faces and jolly spirits."[18]

About 1920, with his brother Frank and father, Gradus, Henry Van Ark built the three-story Van Ark Furniture Company store in downtown Holland.[19] His brother Herman learned his trade in the planing mill owned by their father. He eventually joined his father at the Holland Furniture Company. He then became a major stockholder in the Bay View Furniture Company and served as its president for seventeen years before his death. Praise—and criticism—were abundant in the trade journals. Competition was stiff among these companies. Keeping up with current trends and tackling a wavering economy posed a constant challenge. The *Furniture Journal* offered these words about the company:

> The Bay View stuff is built by Dutchmen of the good old sturdy Holland stripe men who learned their trades where conscience and the principle of right was behind every branch of the curriculum and who carry the same principle into and through the product of their labor today.[20]

Jacob Van Putten was also doing well at the Holland Furniture Company. In 1904 the same *Furniture Journal* reporter stated that goods were flying out of the factory and "I have it on pretty good authority that Nelson's (one of the salesmen) account alone runs well up toward $10,000 a month. Do you wonder why '*Mynheer*' sits and smiles!"[21]

Hekman Furniture

Edsko Hekman and Hendrikje Ymker arrived in Grand Rapids from Winshoten, Groningen, in July of 1893 with their four sons. Edsko had been a baker in the Netherlands but, unable to find work, started his own small baking business making cookies. The business grew rapidly, and by 1917 he also manufactured crackers.

Mr. & Mrs. Edsko Hekman. Image courtesy of the Calvin University Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Edsko died that same year, and his sons took over Hekman Brothers Company. Jelle became president of the Dutch Tea Rusk Company in Holland, John became president of Hekman Biscuit Company in Grand Rapids, and Henry served as president of Hekman Furniture Company in Grand Rapids. The furniture company was started with their good friend James Boonstra in 1922. Their first line of furniture consisted of thirty occasional tables. During World War II they converted their production to include glider bottoms and ammunition boxes in order to survive. After graduating from Calvin College in 1935, Henry's son Edsko also became part of the business.[22] In an interview he stated, "I was enamored with the idea of business. I have to get everything done in a plodding way. At Calvin, I learned that the glory of becoming a Christian was an open heart and an eager mind—and of course, busy hands."[23]

It seems that this approach was a family trait. His grandfather went from being a cookie baker to building the Hekman Biscuit Company. "He did it," remembers the grandson (Edsko), "on the strength of tasty cookies and the fussy Dutch expression, 'Het is steeds nog niet goed genoeg,' which may be translated as, 'It is still not good enough.'" This thread of Dutch culture can be seen in many aspects of this industry.[24] In the 1960s Hekman began offering furniture in Neoclassical, Italian Provincial, French Provincial, and Danish Modern styles.

Hekman furniture sanders. Image courtesy of the Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Hekman family. From l. to r. Mary Lou Lieffers Hekman, Beth Hekman Bushouse, Grace Hekman Bruinsma, Edsko Hekman, Claire Kuiper Hekman, Helen Kuiper Noordewier, Donna Tinholt Hekman, Louis Hekman. Image courtesy of the Calvin University Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

By the 1980s they began marketing desk and computer cabinets for home offices and furnished large hotels that included the Amway Grand in Grand Rapids and the Ritz-Carlton in Chicago.

A testament to the family's dedication to the community and Calvin College (now University) is the existence of the Hekman Memorial Library. In 1928 the library was dedicated on Calvin's old Franklin Street campus, a gift from the widow (Hendrikje Ymker) of Edsko Hekman and their three sons. They also donated funds to erect the Seminary at the Franklin Street location. The family contributed a major gift again when the campus was relocated to Knollcrest and the library was rededicated in 1970. The gift came over one hundred years after Edsko Hekman Sr. had emigrated from the Netherlands.

The Herman Miller Company

Herman Miller was a real person; he just never worked at Herman Miller. He was the father-in-law of D. J. (Dirk Jan) De Pree.[25] De Pree started working at Star Manufacturing Company, located in Zeeland, Michigan, in 1909, directly out of high school, when he was eighteen years old.[26] The company made reproductions of European bedroom, living room, and dining room furniture and claimed Sears as their biggest client. In 1914 De Pree married Nellie Miller and five years later had worked his way up to company president. At the very least, he was a determined Dutchman. In 1923, with the financial assistance of his father-in-law, Herman Miller, he bought the Star Manufacturing Company and renamed it for his backer. He continued to produce the same furniture that Star had, but the Depression brought him close to bankruptcy. He decided to gamble on producing innovative furniture that was designed by Gilbert Rohde, a commercial artist from New York. Rohde convinced De Pree that the future was in furniture with simple, clear lines that was more adaptable to changing lifestyles.

> It's the people that live in the house who use the furniture that are the important ones, said Rohde. Rohde elaborated: "You're not making furniture anymore; you're making a way of living—a lifestyle." De Pree would recall and repeat this comment for years. Up to 1930, he had always produced for the store buyers. If he couldn't please the buyers, he couldn't get his furniture displayed. Rohde would have none of this slavish response to the middlemen. He designed for the people in their homes.[27]

The gamble payed off, and he produced what we now know as mid-century modern furniture. After the death of Rohde, De Pree knew that a top designer was critical for his business. He found that in George Nelson, an acclaimed designer and architect. Nelson did not see this as his purview alone and recruited the likes of Charles Eames, who had just won the 1946 design competition at New York's Museum of Modern Art for a molded plywood chair. That chair would go on to become one of the most famous designs of the century. Charles and Ray (Bernice Alexandra Kaiser, his wife) Eames joined the design team at Herman Miller. The company gained celebrity through the success of the Eames's designs. De Pree wrote: "With one stroke he (Eames) has underlined the design decadence and technical obsolescence of Grand Rapids."[28]

De Pree, and his sons Hugh and Max, who succeeded him, believed in participative management, where employees share in decision making and profits. In the 1950s this was not the norm. Although employees were skeptical at first, they came to like the idea. They all had the opportunity to play a role in the business by making suggestions and contributions, and by improving performance. "The new participative management became another cornerstone of the company philosophy. The workers no longer had the bosses looking over their shoulders at every turn. They started to take ownership of their work and the future of the business."[29] Herman Miller continues to be a leader in the industry.

Herman E. De Vries

There were other Dutch craftsmen who, after honing their skills in Michigan, took their expertise to other areas of the country. Herman E. De Vries was born in 1884 in Joure, Friesland, the Netherlands. His father, Eize, was a builder of wooden boats and Frisian racing yachts who eventually started a furniture business. Herman appren-

ticed with his father but also received a fine arts education. When he arrived in Grand Rapids in 1905, he quickly found work as a draftsman in the furniture industry. He moved to Chicago and while working at Marshall Field and Company was asked to design and execute furniture for special clients. Stickley Brothers in Grand Rapids lured him back with a position as chief designer. After the start of World War I he organized the Wood Batik Shops, Inc. De Vries had been experimenting with this Javanese technique that was usually applied to fabric. "He invented and patented a process for applying this art to wood. He is able to secure all the decorative effects of paint and enamel and still retain the grain of the wood. The company is exhibiting a line of console tables, mirrors, lamps, candle sticks, bowls and breakfast suites in batik finish supplemented by a line of genuinely carved reproductions of Georgian Italian Hall furniture."[30] In 1930 he opened an office in New York and offered his services to furniture manufacturers in New England. "In New York he introduced the early American maple, later the modern European furniture, and is one of the country's highest paid furniture designers.[31]

The Largest Chair in the Netherlands

A curious twist in the story of Dutch woodworkers is that of Cornelis Teurlincx and Willem Meyers (Meijers). Cornelis, Willem, Willem's wife, and their seven children left Oirschot in Noord Brabant for Detroit in 1848. Willem's brother Pieter followed them in 1851. Cornelis Teurlincx and Pieter Meyers came from a long line of skilled woodworkers. In an interesting turn, Teurlincx had returned to the Netherlands by 1858 and, utilizing the American production techniques he had learned in the US, opened the first chair factory in Oirschot. He partnered with Hendrik Meyers, who had

Large Oirschot chair located in the town of Oirschot, province of Noord Brabant, the Netherlands. Image courtesy of TripAdvisor.

remained in the Netherlands. Willem Meyers remained in the US and by 1860 was the owner of a chair-making shop in Detroit. His sons Nicholas and David worked for him, as well as their boarder, John Tilbrush (likely Johannes van Tilburg). Preferring not to work in factories, they chose to use their skills in a specialty shop.[32] John Tilbrush decided to leave Detroit, but instead of being lured to the factories in Grand Rapids he is found working as a chair maker in the Louisville, Kentucky, furniture industry in 1870 and 1880.[33]

Part of Cornelis Teurlincx's intent in coming to the US was to develop a chair that was different from the Brabant knob chair. The chair he designed after his return to the Netherlands was called the Oirschotse chair and was the beginning of larger scale furniture manufacturing in that village. At that time, chairs were already being made on a reasonable scale in Oirschot. Even though the Brabant knob chairs were somewhat in demand, they were not very comfortable with their straight backs. The American chair, on the other hand, was a lot stronger, more stable, and more comfortable.[34] By 1907 there were no Teurlincx or Meyer family members interested in continuing in the business, and it was sold to Just Nuyens. The company survived for one hundred fifty years before mass production and lower wages in other countries forced them to close. Today the *Grote Stoel* (Large Chair) built in 1958, and believed to be the largest chair in Europe, graces the town square in Oirschot. It is a reminder of the heritage of the furniture and chair industry in that region and the influence of Teurlincx's time in the United States.

Meanwhile in Iowa . . .

Although little documentation has been found about Dutch wood craftsmen and furniture designers outside Michigan, there is the narrative of Georg Heeren. He was born in 1867 in Tenaard, Friesland, the Netherlands, and learned the art of woodworking as a young boy before deciding to emigrate with his friend Herman Jaarsma.[35] After arriving in Chicago, Jaarsma went on to Pella, Iowa, where he opened what is the present day Jaarsma Bakery. Heeren very quickly found work in Chicago designing the

Georg Heeren. Image courtesy of Pella Historical Society and Museums, Pella, Iowa.

scroll work used on the porticos of houses and buildings. His ability as a creative designer proved to be lucrative. After eleven years, and the unrest caused by labor unions in Chicago, Heeren decided to follow his friend to Pella. The economy was doing well in 1878, and the communities being built very often centered around their churches. The furnishing of those churches was the perfect opportunity for Heeren, and the primary product to come out of his shop was church pews. His grandson, Georg Heeren Jr., remembered his grandfather as an innovator. He used a steam engine to power the machinery in his shop, and with the advancement in technology he moved on to gas engines. By the 1930s, individual electric motors were the next development. Heeren's creative skills were put to multiple uses over the years, but a memorable one is the first Tulip Time festival in 1935. Because the decision to hold the festival was made too late for the tulips to grow, Heeren crafted one hundred twenty-five wooden tulips that were four feet in height. Heeren, along with Lon Wormhoudt and Central College President Irwin Lubbers, is credited with the creation of the first Tulip Time. "Everyone was impressed with Heeren's handiwork, in creating the wooden tulips for the festival in four days' time."[36] However, it was resolved that in the fall of 1935 thousands of tulip bulbs would be planted to provide natural color for future festivals. He also constructed all the windmills that decorated the city at that time. Over the years he had collected postcards of important buildings around the Netherlands, which he used to construct a Dutch village in miniature that is still on display at the Pella Historical Society. He accepted many jobs for churches in the area that ranged from doors to pulpits and pews. He was also the go-to person for the Rolscreen Company (the current Pella Window Corporation) when they needed custom reproductions of blinds, screens, and furniture for their customers. Although he did reproduction work, he was a creative innovator, artist, and craftsman.

Challenges and Diversification

There were many challenges for furniture companies over the decades, but in 1911 the industry suffered its first big setback when more than six thousand workers went on strike for better working conditions and pay. In Grand Rapids the strike lasted for four months before conditions were met. (See article in this issue on the strike by Robert Schoone-Jongen.) The peak years of the industry were slowed enormously by the Great Depression and World War II. Companies did what they could to survive when materials were rationed and there were strict rulings on the price of furniture. It forced Sligh Furniture in Zeeland to make pallets and sleds. Diversification became a critical choice for many companies, and

bottom left to right Calvin University Chapel pulpit handcrafted by Herman and Lee Doezema. Image courtesy author.

Calvin University baptismal font basin (detail) sculpted by Carl Huisman (emeritus Calvin University Art Dept.) Image courtesy the author.

Calvin University Chapel baptismal font handcrafted by Herman and Lee Doezema. Image courtesy author. Baptismal basin font basin sculpted by Carl Huisman (emeritus Calvin University Art Dept). Image courtesy the author.

Calvin University Chapel communion table handcrafted by Herman and Lee Doezema. Image courtesy author. The chapel communion furniture was donated to Calvin University in memory of Rev. Edward B. Pekelder and Mrs. Helen Schoonbeek Pekelder.

the focus on office furniture became a sound one for Steelcase, Haworth, and Herman Miller. The furniture industry in Michigan, and other northern and midwestern states, was also radically changed by companies choosing to move their operations to southern states in the US. A glimpse into the legacy of Dutch furniture craftsmanship can be found in some simple *Google* searches. In online consignment auctions Georg Heeren is listed as a famous woodworker from Pella, and exquisite pieces of furniture from Dutch furniture companies are still commanding top dollar. This incredible influence and legacy of Dutch craftsmen, entrepreneurs, and businessmen is still held in high esteem in the furniture industry today.

Endnotes

1. Officially named the International Exhibition of Arts, Manufacturers and Products of the Soil and Mines, the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 was the first official World's Fair in the United States. It was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia.

2. Christian G. Carron, *Grand Rapids Furniture: The Story of America's Furniture City* (Grand Rapids: Public Museum of Grand Rapids, 1997), 33.

3. Ibid., 31.

4. Ibid.

5. Jan Hendrik Paalman was born 5 October 1871 in Noordijk, Gelderland, Netherlands, to Hendrik Jan Paalman and Egberdina Ziel. His father was a *klompenmaker* (wooden shoemaker) in the Netherlands and continued his craft in Grand Rapids. In 1905 John married Agnes Boshoven of Grand Rapids. He died in 1964 in Grand Rapids.

6. Hoogerhyde also spelled as Hugerhyde.

7. Julius graduated in 1941 and Kenneth in 1942.

8. Tjerk (Charles) Wiegers Doezema was born 2 August 1837 in Grootegast, Groningen, Netherlands. On 21 May 1868 he married Anskje (Agnes) Fokken Hofstee in Doezum, Groningen. Anskje was born 26 April 1841 in Grootegast. They arrived in New York on 16 April 1881 with six children; Riner was an infant when they arrived.

9. https://www.swierenga.com/frankdoezemafamilyhistory.html.

10. In a letter to Enkhuizen in 1872, Siebe's father, Melchior, wrote: "Here [America] my next to the eldest son, Siebe, when a boy of eighteen, had gone in the year 1870 to earn his living as a carpenter." Baker, Melchior Siebe. Travel Account, 1871. Twenty-two leaves, typewritten copy, with translation. Enkhuizen, Noord Holland—USA, Calvin University Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

11. Sam Burchell, *A History of Furniture: Celebrating Baker Furniture, 100 years of Fine Reproductions* (New York: Henry S. Abrams, Inc., 1991), 130.

12. https://www.bakerfurniture.com/design-story/legacy-of-quality/design-legacy/.

13. Burchell, 161.

14. Van Reken, Donald, *The Life and Actions of Reinder E. Werkman*, https://dutchamericans.files.wordpress.com.

15. Werkman was an entrepreneur or, at the very least, driven. By 1894 he was in Oak Harbor, Washington, with his friend Hein Te Roller settling new immigrants. He continued as a railroad immigrant agent, settling Dutch immigrants in Washington and Montana. There's another story in that!

16. Robert Swierenga, *Holland Michigan: from Dutch Colony to Dynamic City* (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2014), Vol. II, 881.

17. Michigan Obituaries, 1820-2006. Database with images. *Family Search.* https://FamilySearch.org: 22 Feb 2018. Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

18. "The Dutch-American Roots of Joan Van Ark," Genealogy Magazine. com/joan-van-ark; to read the entire article, go to: https://www.genealogy-magazine.com/joan-van-ark/.

19. Henry Van Ark was the grandfather of the well-known actress Joan Van Ark.

20. *Furniture Journal*, Vol. 21, 1904, 39.

21. Ibid.

22. Edsko Hekman's wife, Clarie, was also a 1935 graduate of Calvin College. She is the daughter of H. J. Kuiper who served for many years as the editor of the *Banner*.

23. Bruce Buursma, "It's Hekman Again," *Calvin Spark,* Vol 39, Winter 1993, 21.

24. Ibid., 22.

25. D. J. De Pree was born 31 July 1891 in Zeeland, Michigan. He died 10 December 1990 in Holland, Michigan. His parents were Jan De Pree (1865-1929) and Adriana (Jane) Vereeke (1872-1949). They married 4 February 1891 in Ottawa County, Michigan.

26. https://www.hermanmiller.com/about/timeline/.

27. Bill Birchard, *Merchants of Virtue: Herman Miller and the Making of a Sustainable Company* (Palgrave, MacMillan, 2011), 25.

28. Ibid., 29.

29. Ibid., 31.

30. *Furniture World*, Vol. 50, 25.

31. Bernard H. M. Vlekke and Henry Beets, *Hollanders who helped build America* (New York: American Biographical Co., 1942), 111.

32. Renate van de Weijer, "Cornelis Teurlincx and Willem Meyers in America." Individual Papers, Calvin University Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

33. 1870 and 1880 United States Federal Census.

34. Otakar Máčel, Sander Woertman, and Charlotte van Wij, *Chairs: The Delft Collection* (Rotterdam, 010 Publishing, 2008), 149.

35. Georg Heeren was born 10 January 1867 in Ternaard, Friesland, to Roelof Johan Heeren and Klaaske Botes Spandaw. They were married 13 June 1862 in Schoterland, Friesland. Roelof's parents were Jurjen Heeren and Jantje Patrijs. Klaaske's parents were Bote Spandaw and Wybrigje Fokkes Veenema.

36. A Supplement to the *Pella Chronicle,* May 2016.

Lost in Translation: the Dutch, the Churches, and the Grand Rapids Furniture Strike of 1911

Robert Schoone-Jongen

On the morning of 19 April 1911, some seven thousand furniture workers walked from their Grand Rapids homes to dozens of factories, ready to spend ten hours amid the noise, vapors, and sawdust. These productive people annually carved and assembled about one-third of all the chairs, tables, bedsteads, sideboards, cabinets, and display cases produced in the United States. Grand Rapids, Michigan, indeed, deserved the nickname "Furniture City of America." One half of those furniture workers were Dutch-Americans; the balance largely Poles, Lithuanians, Germans, and Swedes. Eight firms formed the core of the Grand Rapids furniture industry, each of them with roughly four hundred or more workers. Eighty-five percent of the city's furniture workers worked for the nineteen firms that formed the Grand Rapids Furniture Manufacturers Association. The owners were almost exclusively local men with family trees rooted in New England and upstate New York. They lived on the bluff to the east of downtown; the workers resided closer to the mills, near the Grand River and its tributaries.[1]

Stow & Davis Furniture: 86 Front Ave., S.W., Image courtesy of Assessor's Department Real Property Appraisal Card Collection. City of Grand Rapids Archives and Records Center, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Grand Rapids prospered and grew from the furniture business. The city's ten banks testified to the profits the factories earned. Five of the furniture companies were knotted into the tangled web of directors who controlled the banks and savings and loan associations. The furniture makers could finance their businesses through the local banks, independent from the larger banks in Chicago, or Detroit, or New York. The furniture men/bank directors sat alongside prominent department store owners, lawyers, and newspaper publishers. Come noon, they all lunched together at the exclusive Peninsula Club at the corner of Fountain and Ionia and, if the weather permitted, spent a pleasant afternoon on the links at either the alliterative Kent County Country Club along Plainfield Avenue or the Highland Club at Giddings and 5th Street, beyond the eastern boundary.[2]

Transportation costs had forced the manufacturers to cooperate with each other, beginning in 1881. The major markets were concentrated on the East Coast, and even farther away to the west. Grand Rapids products could not

Robert Schoone-Jongen recently retired as Associate Professor of History at Calvin University. 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.

Women painting furniture. Image courtesy the Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

be shipped in bulk via the Great Lakes. Neither did the city sit on the nation's major railroad trunk lines, the nearest of which lay in Indiana. Five railroads held the transportation keys to the city. The furniture makers formed the Furniture Manufacturers Association to jointly negotiate freight rates with the railroads. Those lower bulk rates were a vital part of the city's ability to win such a large share of the national furniture market.[3]

On Sundays the factory owners and their workers occupied different spiritual realms. The owners gravitated to congregations located in the center of the city, especially Park Congregational and Fountain Street Baptist Church. The workers scattered among dozens of churches, both Catholic and Protestant. The Dutch, who accounted for a quarter of the city's population, supported thirty-three separate congregations in the city. Theologically the denominations ranged from Unitarian to Roman Catholic, with the vast majority featuring the word "Reformed" in their titles. Reformed was subdivided largely between "Reformed" and "Christian Reformed," with a few other variants as well. Only seven of the Dutch congregations held services in English in 1911.[4] The Reformed (RCA) churches tended to stress a more pious Calvinism, one more at home with other Protestant denominations and American culture. The Christian Reformed (CRC) ministers stressed principled living, strongly influenced by social and political trends recent immigrants imported with them from the Netherlands. The question of secret society membership was a major sticking point. The CRC vigorously denounced groups like the Masons. It looked askance at any organization that included membership oaths and rituals, including labor unions. The RCA held no such official positions.[5]

During the six days of the week spent laboring at the lathes, unskilled laborers (mostly Polish and Lithuanian) earned less than two dollars for their ten hours of toil. The skilled carpenters, joiners, and veneer men (mostly Dutch) garnered about $2.25 per day. The managers and foremen (mostly Germans and Swedes) received considerably more. A healthy percentage of the workers managed to buy modest houses, financing them through mortgages held by a savings and loan association. Those institutions were, in turn, beholden to the furniture manufacturer who controlled the banks. By Monday, the money in a pay envelope carried from a pay window would be back in the hands of the owners who had paid it out on Saturday. This economic hamster wheel fueled industrial discontent among the furniture workers. Consumer prices were rising, but when the workers asked for an increase in wages, the men who owned the big houses on the bluff pleaded poverty.[6]

When a delegation of furniture workers appealed for higher wages in 1909, they were first asked to wait for an answer until after the owners saw the results of the always crucial semi-annual buyers' conventions. The eventual answer was to ignore the requests and dismiss the petitioners as agitators. The manufacturers association would only deal with individual workers, claiming that each worker should be free to negotiate his own terms of service with a fair-minded employer. Another local organization, the Employers Association, kept files on workers' behaviors. Still another group backed by the manufacturers, the Good Government League, sought to keep city politics inclined to the industrialists' interests. All this prompted Viva Flaherty, the social outreach workers for the Fountain Street Church, to write, "The associated employers refused arbitration in order to maintain the right of organized capital to deal with labor unorganized."[7]

In 1910, the several thousand furniture workers organized Local 335 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. From the outset five Dutch-Americans stood among the leaders, four of them members of the Christian Reformed Church. Henry Bowmaster, the first president of the local, had been born into a Dutch immigrant household in Allegan County in 1865 and reared in the Christian Reformed Church.[8] After working in the Chicago area, where he also married, he moved to Grand Rapids to make a living building houses. Garrit Verburg, an immigrant from the Oudewater province of Utrecht, the Netherlands, served variously as president, treasurer, and

Chair makers at the Widdicomb Furniture Factory. Image courtesy the Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

business agent.[9] Employed as a cabinetmaker, Garrit and his wife, Lena Vander Schelde, raised their children in the Grandville Avenue Dutch enclave. Twenty-six-year-old millworker Louis (Lieuwe) Van Dyke, who served a year as president of the local, was Michigan born and lived with his wife, Engeltje (Lena) Kooistra and their growing family in the Creston neighborhood, within walking distance of the Dutch-speaking Coldbrook CRC.[10] John Timmer, secretary/treasurer in 1913, had moved from Muskegon to the Grandville Avenue neighborhood and worked as a cabinetmaker.[11] His service in the union brought him to the attention of Grand Rapids Mayor George E. Ellis, who hired Timmer as a secretary. Gerrit Raterink, president in 1916, was a house builder in the West Leonard area and a longtime member of the Alpine Avenue congregation.[12] People like Verburg, Van Dyke, and Timmer, cabinetmakers in the factories, earned approximately $550–$645 per year, working ten-hour days, five and one-half days per week, with no paid vacations or any other benefits, but they earned enough to allow someone like Van Dyke to own his home on Spencer Avenue in 1910. Timmer and Verburg also purchased homes eventually. Bowmaster and Raterink built the homes their families inhabited on Dunham and West Leonard, respectively.[13]

Garrit Verburg, left, in Strike office. Image courtesy the Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

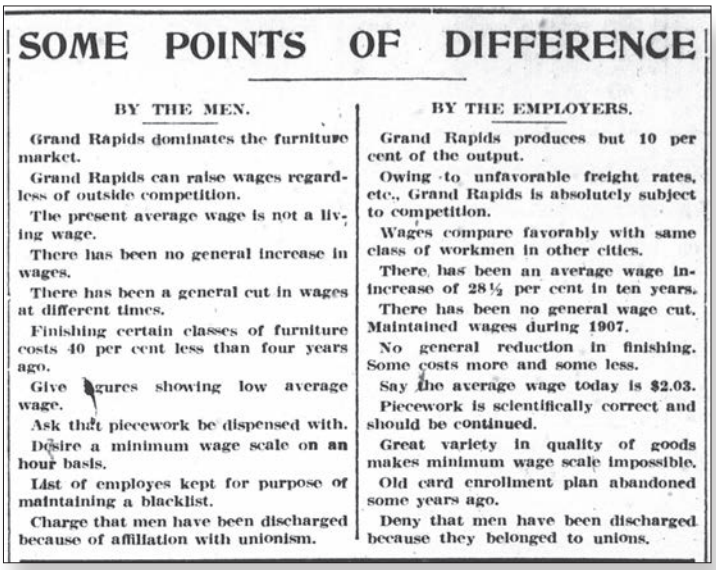
The rise of Local 335, and its prominent Dutch contingent, fueled the ongoing Christian Reformed Church debate on labor union membership. While the denominational (CRC) Synod proved reluctant to issue blanket condemnations, except for banning membership in the Knights of Labor in 1886, local church bodies dealt with the question on a case-by-case basis.[14] Classis Grand Rapids West denounced the Wood Workers Union in 1899 and then asked the denomination to create a list of banned unions.[15] That request was denied. In 1904 Synod again refused to condemn unions but urged careful scrutiny of each one. While Christian unions were preferable, prudence required Christians to act as salt and light in existing organizations as well. But, in 1906, Synod did distinguish between "bread and butter" unions, like those affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, and overtly Marxist unions connected to the Socialist Labor Party.[16] An American Federation of Labor union membership might be compatible with church membership, but church members could not endorse violent protests or political revolution. The anti-union sentiment in the Christian Reformed Church could be best summarized in words Professor Louis Berkhof published in 1916: "Surely the brotherhood of believers takes precedent over the brotherhood of labor." And again, "'Not for a class, but for the King' should be their slogan; the establishment of social righteousness, their [unions'] ideal goal."[17]

But under the leadership of Rev. John W. Brink (who had authored synodical reports hostile to unions), the Grand Rapids West Classis condemned membership in the Bricklayers & Masons Benevolent Association in 1907 for having equated Sunday with all other holidays, requiring members to swear an oath of secrecy, and advocating a closed shop employment system.[18] The classis grudgingly approved membership in the cigarmakers union, while urging church members to avoid joining it.

Ministers like Brink looked upon society as a body with different parts, each with its unique function. This biblically invoked analogy meant, they said, that each person needed to live within their divinely assigned function. Owners had one assignment, workers another. Workers could not tell owners how to run their businesses; owners should pay the workers as fairly as possible. What was left unsaid was what workers should do when owners were being patently unfair in their demands and stingy with wages. That power imbalance became the issue in Grand Rapids in the months leading up to 19 April 1911.

Prof. Louis Berkhof. Image courtesy of the Calvin University Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

At a mass meeting called by the Carpenters and Joiners in October 1910, four thousand furniture workers voted for a nine-hour workday, a 10 percent increase in pay, and an end to the piecework pay system in the factories. On 9 February 1911 the union had sent this proposal to the Furniture Manufacturers Association, which ignored it since it came from an organization. When on 25 March the carpenters voted to strike on 1 April, Mayor Ellis and other notables offered to arbitrate the dispute. The manufacturers declined the offer. Other unions then voted to support a carpenters' strike. At the request of the head of the city's biggest bank, John W. Blodgett, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Schrembs, and two other community leaders, the union leaders postponed the strike to allow time for a blue-ribbon commission to examine the situation. Schrembs jointly chaired the commission with Rev. Alfred W. Wishart of Fountain Street Baptist Church, Viva Flaherty's employer. The union leaders (presumably including Garrit Verburg) presented their grievances to the commission on 6 April. The manufacturers responded in writing, rejecting all the union demands on 17 April. The next day the union leaders authorized a strike. The men reported for work at the usual time on the 19th, but then at nine o'clock in the morning about four thousand put down their tools and headed for the doors. The Grand Rapids Furniture Strike of 1911 had begun. From that moment on the city would never be quite the same.[19]



SOME POINTS OF DIFFERENCE

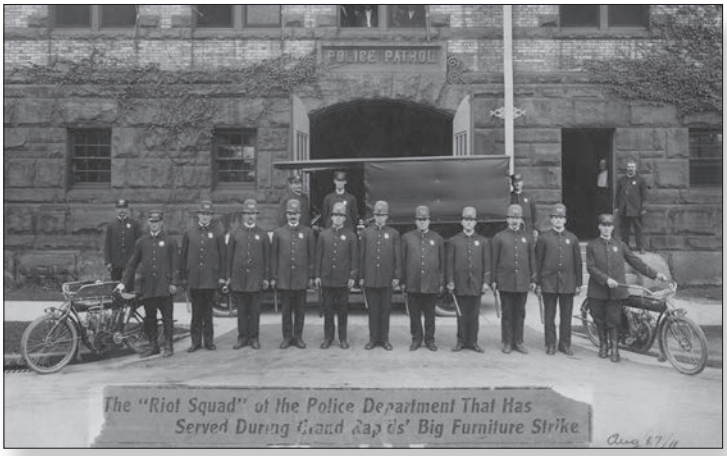
BY THE MEN.	BY THE EMPLOYERS.
Grand Rapids dominates the furniture market.	Grand Rapids produces but 10 per cent of the output.
Grand Rapids can raise wages regardless of outside competition.	Owing to unfavorable freight rates, etc., Grand Rapids is absolutely subject to competition.
The present average wage is not a living wage.	Wages compare favorably with same class of workmen in other cities.
There has been no general increase in wages.	There has been an average wage increase of 28½ per cent in ten years.
There has been a general cut in wages at different times.	There has been no general wage cut. Maintained wages during 1907.
Finishing certain classes of furniture costs 40 per cent less than four years ago.	No general reduction in finishing. Some costs more and some less.
Give figures showing low average wage.	Say the average wage today is $2.03.
Ask that piecework be dispensed with.	Piecework is scientifically correct and should be continued.
Desire a minimum wage scale on an hour basis.	Great variety in quality of goods makes minimum wage scale impossible.
List of employes kept for purpose of maintaining a blacklist.	Old card enrollment plan abandoned some years ago.
Charge that men have been discharged because of affiliation with unionism.	Deny that men have been discharged because they belonged to unions.

Strike problems. *De Grondwet* 16 May 1911. Translation: William Boonstra, an employee of the John Widdicomb Furniture Company accused Frank Wysocki of having scratched him in his face. The latter denied guilt. More serious offenses are occurring at the present strike; however, the public is generally behaving itself. And it would be even better if people would leave the warring parties to their own devices. Unsolicited advice is not appreciated, which is just as well.

Bishop Schrembs openly sided with the workers in the dispute. A large share of his flock consisted of Polish immigrants, who found themselves at the bottom of the city's social ladder, the poorest paid of the furniture workers. They lived on the West Side, in neighborhoods that often flooded, in part because the city's riverside factories acted as a levee that kept the river out of the downtown area. The poorly paid Poles were building the Basilica of St. Adalbert within the shadow of the Widdicomb company mill as the strike broke out. Rev. Wishart openly supported the factory owners, several of whom attended his prestigious church.[20] Wishart would duel, in print, with the carpenters' union's strike leader William B. McFarlane.[21]

McFarlane's presence symbolized the national attention Grand Rapids furniture workers gained. He was sent by the national union to oversee the strike. With two hundred thousand members nationally, the union offered strike benefits (three-quarters of a weekly wage) and logistical support. There were rallies and marches to keep the members enthused for the cause, as well as the daily solidarity of standing together on the picket lines. The companies kept operating with the minority of workers (predominantly Dutch-Americans) who refused to join the walkout. On 24 April, Veit Manufacturing became the first company to accept the workers' demands. During the coming weeks only two others would concede.[22]

The manufacturers also enjoyed national support. The National Association of Furniture Manufacturers voted to cut production nationally rather than taking advantage of the output drop from the Grand Rapids factories. In another instance, Grand Rapids Show Case Company



Strike and Riot Squad. Image courtesy the Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

announced that an out-of-town competitor would help fill orders the local plant could not complete. Then Grand Rapids Show Case began importing strikebreakers. First came one hundred fifty unemployed Pullman Palace Car workers from Chicago, then more from Philadelphia. The city health department exiled a group of strikebreakers from Greenville, Michigan, who came to the city with smallpox victims among their number.[23]

The furniture strike struck at the economic and social core of Grand Rapids. Mayor Ellis sided with the workers and resisted the manufacturers' demands that he stop the picketing. When violence began, the mayor hired one hundred auxiliary policemen, mostly from the ranks of the strikers and including many Dutch. He also closed all the city's saloons for the duration, including the private one at the Peninsula Club, one of the manufacturers' favorite watering holes. But the fact that the city firemen turned their hoses on the disorderly, mostly women and children, outside the Widdicomb factory was not well received, and two senior firemen were dismissed.

The conventional story says the Dutch were law abiding during the strike.[24] But in the confusion of the early days some of the first persons arrested for disorderly conduct were Henry Van Strien and Peter J. Beukema.[25] As violence increased on the picket lines, especially outside the Widdicomb factory, the two local Christian Reformed classes met in regular session on 16 and 17 May. Both bodies appointed committees of three ministers and four laymen to study the carpenters' union, the strike, and its causes. Rev. John W. Brink chaired Classis Grand Rapids West's committee. The laymen included a bank teller, an advertising writer, a gas fitter/contractor, and a railroad lawyer.[26] When Classis Grand Rapids East met, Rev. Johannes Groen presided as the body agreed to follow West's lead. Besides the three ministers, East's committee included a bookseller, a peddler, a lumberyard laborer, and a carpenter who had recently started his own manufacturing company.[27] Given the fact that CRC members were a significant percentage of the factory workers, and given a general hostility to organized labor within the church, much was at stake in these deliberations—for the strike, the church, and the city.

The committee of Classis West very publicly studied statements by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and compared them to previous rulings from the Christian Reformed synods, dating back to 1883.[28] The verbal fisticuffs the strike inspired within the churches prompted Rev. Henry Beets of the LaGrave Avenue church, and editor of the *Banner,* to lament, "The strike has done much harm. Not only has it entailed financial loss, but its moral and religious effect have been and are baneful. . . . Brethren by reason of one faith, one Lord, one baptism, yea, one congregation, are at variance with one another. Anger is oft evidenced, because one has kept at work or returned thereto. Expressions as the following are heard: 'You ____ scab. I got no use for you.' 'You are a man without principle.' 'If I must choose between the Union and the Church, I'll leave the Church.' Many a greeting is not returned, hands outstretched for a brotherly clasp are ignored or spurned." Beets squarely placed the blame on "the Union and its brotherhood . . ." for this dissension.[29]

On the other side stood Rev. Johannes Groen, pastor of the East Street congregation. Groen, lacking Beets's editorial megaphone, confined his thoughts to conversations and church meetings. We can get a sense of his thoughts during the strike from an address on unions he gave to a Grand Rapids ministers' conference a few years afterward. Groen argued that union membership was not wrong unless the organization functioned as a lodge. Since no American Federation of Labor union fit that category, it was incumbent on Christians to leaven those unions as Christian. Separate unions only divided workers and reduced their collective influence against the concentrated power held by those who controlled concentrated wealth.[30] In the wake of another forceful Groen statement to the 1914 Synod (and his lonely, one-man minority report dissenting from the conclusions the majority of the committee had adopted), even Henry Beets publicly asserted that he too had never been among those who issued a blanket condemnation of all unions. "We believe there is too much good in them to be thus branded [as antithetical to church membership] and cast aside as works of darkness."[31]

Economics undermined the strikers' ability to hold out forever. They

Mayor Ellis. Image courtesy the Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

had families to feed and mortgages to pay. By the end of July workers were beginning to abandon the picket lines and picking up their tools once again. William McFarlane, the union leader, moved on to head another strike in Great Britain. The Grand Rapids carpenters gave him a rousing send-off on 31 July. Some of the furniture manufacturers agreed to award sixty hours pay for fifty-five hours of work. And in this atmosphere, Classis Grand Rapids West reassembled on 9 August with its committee on the strike ready to report. Elder Ysbrand Veenstra from the Alpine Avenue congregation presented the recommendations.[32] The committee advised and classis approved a motion advising members against membership in the carpenters' union. It was further agreed that this would be handled as a pastoral and not as a disciplinary matter. No church members would be excommunicated or censured for belonging, but the consistories would work to persuade union members to drop their affiliations. The report overlooked any analysis of the furniture manufacturers or of the grievances that had provoked the strike.[33]

The afternoon *Grand Rapids Press* headlines read,

"Is Against Unions.
Christian Reformed Church Goes on Record Today.
Objects To The Oath. Ritual and Basis Not Being Religious Chief Points."

The lead sentence was even more blunt: "Members of the Christian Reformed church cannot belong to labor unions and remain in good standing in the church."[34] The article claimed that the decision of one classis bound all members of the denomination, even in Chicago and Paterson, New Jersey. It also created the impression that the Christian Reformed Church broke the strike. The next day the newspaper quoted an unnamed deacon in the church as saying, "Personally, I have no intention of resigning from the union. I have been a church member in good standing for years. I love the church and believe in its teachings, but I am convinced that a mistake has been made."[35] He went on to say he would appeal any disciplinary action taken against him. He also claimed that no church member he talked to intended to quit the union. If the church did proceed against union members, he predicted, many would opt to join the Reformed Church in America.

Rev. Johannes Groen. Image courtesy of the Calvin University Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Classis Grand Rapids East, convening on 30 August, two weeks after the strike had collapsed, reached a very different conclusion. Rather than ruling on the union question alone, classis continued its committee with a mandate to examine the Employers Association's role in the city's labor woes, as well as the constitution of the local Trade and Workers Association. If labor was to be understood, it could not be viewed in isolation. An incomplete report would not do.[36]

The end of the strike did not mean the end of the labor question in the Christian Reformed Church. Succeeding synods would return to the issue. But over time the denomination's generally hostile views were muted. As for the four church members who helped lead the carpenters' local during the strike years, their futures ran the gamut. Garrit Verburg spent several years as the carpenters' union's business agent, trying to recruit craftsmen for the organization. As late as 1923 he could be found fighting the good fight for the carpenters at a meeting in Benton Harbor. He also worked on Mayor Ellis's city hall staff, and later at the short-lived bank Ellis opened in Grand Rapids. Soon after the strike he bought a home of his own on Madison Avenue and affiliated with the Burton Heights Christian Reformed Church, making profession of faith at a consistory meeting—chaired by Rev. Henry Beets. Verburg never again worked in the furniture factories.[37]

Louis Van Dyke left the Christian Reformed Church a few years after the strike, but not voluntarily. He came under church discipline due to marital infidelity, not union activities.[38] During 1916 Classis Grand Rapids West authorized his expulsion. Eventually he moved to the Detroit area, then Los Angeles. He never worked in the furniture factories again.[39]

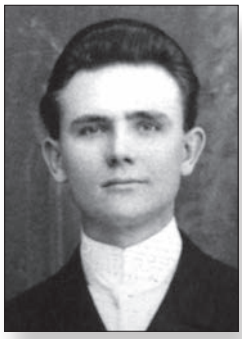
After serving as Mayor Ellis's secretary for a few years, John Timmer was appointed clerk of the city's justice court. He held that position until the day he died. Death came to him while attending a Sunday morning service at the Burton Heights Church, where he also served in the consistory. His death notices made no mention of his activities in the carpenters' union. He never worked in the furniture factories again.[40]

Gerrit Raterink continued building houses in the city's northwest quadrant and remained active in the carpenters' union. One of his sons would be elected to the city commission from the westside ward. Gerrit was working on a city parks crew, making the ice rink in Richmond Hill Park, when he collapsed from a heart attack. His passing was noted on the front pages of the city's newspapers that highlighted his union activities. He never was chosen to serve on the Alpine Avenue church consistory.[41]

Rev. Johannes Groen remained the pastor at East Street/Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church until 1919. In 1916, at the corner of Eastern and Wealthy, he was shot at twice by a disgruntled parishioner.[42] A few years later Groen took an early retirement and moved to California. Until his final days at Eastern Avenue, he remained one of the more socially progressive voices in the Christian Reformed Church. He spoke in favor of both union membership and woman suffrage, much to the consternation of other voices in the church. Four years after his departure from Grand Rapids, the majority of his congregants followed his successor, Rev. Herman Hoeksema, out of the Christian Reformed Church to form the even more conservative Protestant Reformed Church.[43]

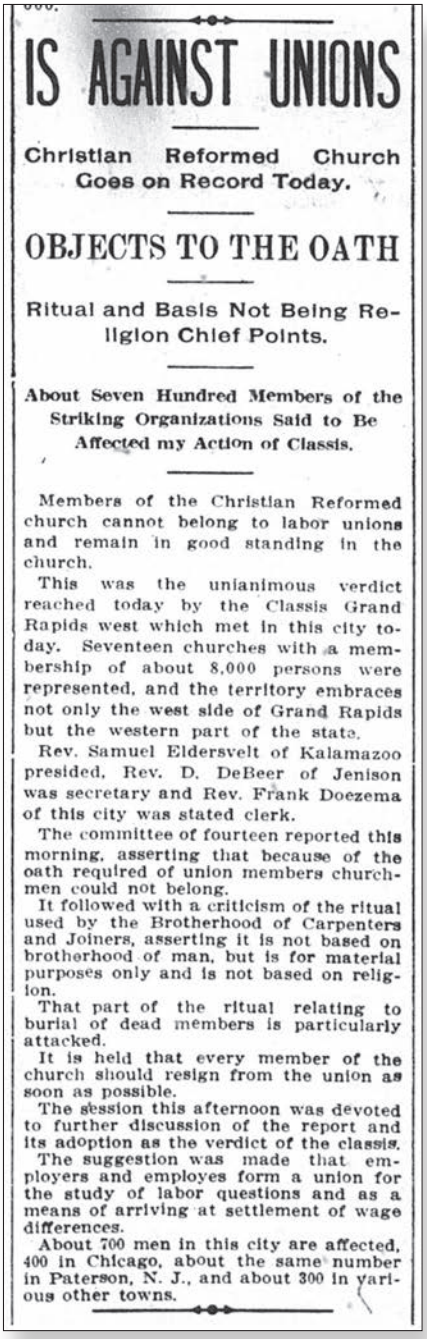
Rev. Henry Beets served as the minister of the Burton Heights church until 1920, when he accepted a position as Director of Missions for the Christian Reformed Church. He remained the editor of the *Banner* until 1929, molding the ecclesiastical opinions of the English-language faction of the church.[44]

Rev. Henry Beets. Image courtesy of the Calvin University Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Rev. Herman Hoeksema. Image courtesy of the Calvin University Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The furniture manufacturers won the strike, but at a cost. Competition from regions where wages were even lower led to a long, slow decline in the number of factories that actually made furniture in the Furniture City. In 1914, when the federal government enacted the Clayton Anti-Trust Act outlawing interlocking directorates such as the one that linked the Grand Rapids banks together, the city's bankers asked for five percent of all the exemptions the government received. The vast majority of those petitions were rejected. Upstart companies in the community also undermined the old manufacturers' establishment. When James Van Keulen (who served on the study committee for Classis Grand Rapids East) and his brother, Nicholas Van Keulen, organized the Colonial Furniture Company in 1910, it proved



IS AGAINST UNIONS

Christian Reformed Church Goes on Record Today.

OBJECTS TO THE OATH

Ritual and Basis Not Being Religion Chief Points.

About Seven Hundred Members of the Striking Organizations Said to Be Affected my Action of Classis.

Members of the Christian Reformed church cannot belong to labor unions and remain in good standing in the church.

This was the unianimous verdict reached today by the Classis Grand Rapids west which met in this city today. Seventeen churches with a membership of about 8,000 persons were represented, and the territory embraces not only the west side of Grand Rapids but the western part of the state.

Rev. Samuel Eldersvelt of Kalamazoo presided, Rev. D. DeBeer of Jenison was secretary and Rev. Frank Doezema of this city was stated clerk.

The committee of fourteen reported this morning, asserting that because of the oath required of union members churchmen could not belong.

It followed with a criticism of the ritual used by the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, asserting it is not based on brotherhood of man, but is for material purposes only and is not based on religion.

That part of the ritual relating to burial of dead members is particularly attacked.

It is held that every member of the church should resign from the union as soon as possible.

The session this afternoon was devoted to further discussion of the report and its adoption as the verdict of the classis.

The suggestion was made that employers and employes form a union for the study of labor questions and as a means of arriving at settlement of wage differences.

About 700 men in this city are affected, 400 in Chicago, about the same number in Paterson, N. J., and about 300 in various other towns.

Strike *Grand Rapids Evening Press* headline. Image courtesy of *the Grand Rapids Evening Press*, 9 August 1911, page 1.

Widdicomb factory. Image courtesy the Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

to be a harbinger of things to come. Dutch-American factory workers would become rivals of the old New Englanders who had made Grand Rapids the Furniture City and challenge their monopoly of the city's levers of power and influence.[45] Others, such as the Hekman brothers—Henry, Jelle, and John—founders of the Hekman Furniture Company in 1922, and John Doezema founder of Doezema Furniture in 1929, copied the Van Keulen brothers' pattern in the very near future.

Endnotes

1. One source lists the eight largest firms as: Berkey and Gay Furniture Co., Grand Rapids Chair Co., Imperial Furniture Co., The Macey Co., Oriel Cabinet Co., Phoenix Furniture Co., Royal Furniture Co., and Widdicomb Furniture Co. (Christian G. Carron, *Grand Rapids Furniture: The Story of America's Furniture City*. Grand Rapids: The Public Museum of Grand Rapids, 1998, 46). Another source adds American Seating, Grand Rapids Show Case Co., and Sligh Furniture Co. (Jeffrey D. Kleiman, *Strike! How the Furniture Workers Strike of 1911 Changed Grand Rapids* (Grand Rapids: The Grand Rapids Historical Commission, 2006), 13. For the profile of the work force, see Jeffrey D. Kleiman, "Making Furniture" in Christian G. Carron, *Grand Rapids Furniture: The Story of America's Furniture City* (Grand Rapids: The Public Museum of Grand Rapids, 1998), 48-9; Kleiman, *Strike*, 1-28.

2. *Grand Rapids City Directory, 1911*. Kleiman, "Making Connections," 44-55. Kleiman, *Strike*, 28. The Highland Club became the Ottawa Hills neighborhood during the 1920s.

3. The 1911 *Grand Rapids City Directory* lists five railroad companies serving Grand Rapids: Pere Marquette, Lake Shore and Michigan Southern, Grand Rapids and Indiana, Grand Trunk, and Michigan Central. The LS& MS and the MC belonged to the New York Central System. The GR&I was connected to the Pennsylvania Railroad. Grand Trunk was headquartered in Montreal and the Pere Marquette in Cleveland.

4. The 1911 *Grand Rapids City Directory* included these denominational designations: Reformed Church in America (14), Christian Reformed (13), Free Holland Reformed (2), Free Holland Christian Reformed (1), Holland Baptist (1), Holland Unitarian (1), and Holland Roman Catholic (1). The Reformed congregations included four that were designated as English congregations, the Christian Reformed three.

5. James D. Bratt and Christopher H. Meehan, *Gathered at the River: Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Its People of Faith* (Grand Rapids: The Grand Rapids Council for the Humanities, 1993), 73-80.

6. Viva Flaherty, "History of the Grand Rapids Furniture Strike With Facts Hitherto Unpublished." Grand Rapids, 1911, 7-8.

7. Ibid., 12.

8. Bowmaster (Bouwmeester in original Dutch) was working as a carpenter on his own in Grand Rapids in 1920, by 1940 he was working as a carpenter in Pontiac, Michigan, where he died in 1948.

9. Garrit Verburg was born in 1870 in the Netherlands, emigrated in 1881, and died in Grand Rapids in 1929.

10. Louis Van Dyke was married to Engeltje (Lena) Kooistra in 1904 by Rev. L. J. Hulst pastor of Coldbrook CRC; she was granted a divorce in 1916 due to "extreme cruelty." Van Dyke moved to Los Angeles, where he died in 1955.

11. John Timmer was born in 1881 in Muskegon. He married Jane Temple and died in April 1940 in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

12. Gerrit Raterink was born in 1864 in Holland, Michigan; was married to Dingena (Dena) Van Dyke in 1887 by Rev. Peter Ekster, pastor of Alpine Avenue CRC and died in 1934 in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

13. These profiles are compiled from the 1910 United States Federal Census (USFC) for the City of Grand Rapids, the 1911 *Grand Rapids City Directory*, and the membership records of the Coldbrook, Grandville Avenue, Burton Heights, Alpine Avenue, and Dennis Avenue Christian Reformed churches; Michigan Department of Deaths; www.findagrave.com; and the 1920, 1930, and 1940 United States Federal Census.

14. The 1886 CRC Synod condemned the Knights because it required members to swear an oath that seemingly denied the role of Providence in human affairs and advocated Marxist notions on property. Henry Zwaanstra, *Reformed Thought and Experience in a New World: A Study of the Christian Reformed Church and Its American Environment, 1890–1918* (Kampen, J. H. Kok B.V., 1973), 240.

15. A classis is a regional governing body in Reformed denominations consisting of a pastor and elder from each congregation in the district.

16. Labor organizers connected to the Socialist Labor Party and the Industrial Workers of the World did appear in Grand Rapids during 1911, but with little success. On 6 and 7 February Emma Goldman, one of their premier speakers, held meetings in the city. One of her local supporters, William Buwalda of Hudsonville, helped organize the events. Goldman and Buwalda first met in the San Francisco area during 1908, when he attended one of her lectures wearing his uniform as a soldier in the US Army. For this he was court-martialed, sentenced to a term in Alcatraz, and dishonorably discharged from the service. Goldman's very public defense of Buwalda led President Theodore Roosevelt to urge the army to commute Buwalda's prison sentence. He also helped to organize more appearances by Goldman in 1912 and 1914. < https://www.sproutdistro.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/mob_work_vol_2.pdf> (accessed, 05 August 2019).

17. Louis Berkhof, *The Christian Laborer in the Industrial Struggle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., 1916), 28, 31. Berkhof had been making similar comments about unions as far back as 1904, when he gave a speech on unions in Paterson, New Jersey (Zwaanstra, 250).

18. Zwaanstra, 251-54. The union leadership said that workers who did work on Sundays should be paid at the higher rate they would receive for working on national holidays. The "secret oath" required members to not divulge the union's strategies in dealing with uncooperative managements.

19. Strike chronology published in undated newspaper clipping, Bajema Clippings, Folder 16, Local History Collection, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, MI. It is also worth noting that the carpenters owned their own

tools. Leaving the tools behind symbolized the workers' sense of owning their positions in the factories. They belonged there. Their presence was not a mere matter of being allowed to work there.

20. The search committee that called Rev. Wishart to Grand Rapids in 1906 included William Gay, chair (Berkey & Gay Furniture Co.), Charles Hamilton (sales manager, Berkey & Gay), Frank Leonard (owner of a prominent importing business), and James Hawkins (Grand Rapids city treasurer). Jeffrey D. Kleiman, *Strike: How the Furniture Strike of 1911 Changed Grand Rapids* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Historical Commission, 2006), 61. Bratt & Meehan, 74-78.

21. Ibid. 95-6.

22. Nachtegall Manufacturing Company on 13 May; Fritz Manufacturing on 15 May.

23. Bajema Clippings, Folder 16, Local History Collection, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

24. Flaherty, 20.

25. Peter J. Beukema was born in 1885 in Michigan. He died in June 1973 in Grand Rapids. He belonged to the Plainfield CRC. Henry Van Strien was born in the Netherlands in 1867, arrived in the USA in 1871, was married to Cornelia Smit in 1889, died in 1945 in Grand Rapids. Van Strien was a member of the Coldbrook CRC. (CRC Membership records, Heritage Hall Collection, Calvin University, Grand Rapid, Michigan)

26. Minutes of Classis Grand Rapids West, 16 May 1911, Article 21. (Heritage Hall Collection, Calvin University, Grand Rapids. Michigan.) The other ministers were Evert Breen (Grandville Ave.) and Lambertus Veltkamp (Franklin St.). The laymen: Ysbrand Veenstra (advertising writer for H. Leonard & Sons, Importers), Wynand Van Korlaar (teller, Fourth National Bank), Gelmer Kuiper (claim attorney, Pere Marquette Railroad), and Jappe De Boer (contractor). The lists of occupations, both here and below, are drawn from the 1911 *Grand Rapids City Directory* and the 1910 United States Federal Census for the City of Grand Rapids.

27. Minutes of Classis Grand Rapids East, 17 May 1911, Article 16 (Heritage Hall Collection, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, Michigan). The ministers were: John A. Kett (Dennis Ave.), John J. Hiemenga (Coldbrook), and Peter Ekster (Commerce Street); laymen: James Van Keulen (pres., Colonial Furniture Co.), Berend Pieterson (laborer), Doeke Bouma (peddler), and John B. Hulst (bookseller).

28. "Rapport in zake Kerkelijke Besluiten Betreffende Unions" *De Wachter* 12 April 1911, 9-10.

29. *Banner,* 3 August 1911, 481.

30. *Banner*, 30 September 1915, 604-05. See also James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 76-79 and Zwaanstra, 262-77.

31. *Banner* 30 September 1915, 605. Needless to say, his remarks during the strike were at variance with this hindsight.

32. Ysbrand Beukema was born in the province of Groningen in the Netherlands in 1864 and emigrated in 1884, married Trijntje Van Haitsma in 1889, was secretary of the Christian school board, worked himself up from stock clerk to advertising manager at H. Leonard & Sons, and died in Grand Rapids in 1923.

33. Minutes of Classis Grand Rapids West, 9 August 1911, Article 8.

34. *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, 9 August 1911, 1.

35. *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, 10 August 1911, 1.

36. Minutes of Classis Grand Rapids East, 30 August 1911, Article 18.

37. Burton Heights Christian Reformed Church membership directories (Heritage Hall Collection Calvin University, Grand Rapids, Michigan); USFC Schedules for the City of Grand Rapids, 1920, 1930; *Grand Rapids City Directories*, 1910-1929; *Grand Rapids Herald*, 26 September 1929; *Benton Harbor News-Palladium*, 6 June 1923, 1.

38. See Note #10.

39. *Grand Rapids City Directories*; USFC of 1920, 1930, 1940; *Los Angeles City Directories*.

40. Burton Heights CRC Membership Directories; USFC of 1910, 1920, 1930; *Grand Rapids City Directories*; *Grand Rapids Press*, 29 April 1940, 2; *Grand Rapids Herald*, 29 April 1940, 1.

41. *Grand Rapids Herald*, 2 February 1934, 2; *Grand Rapids Press*, 2 February 1934, 1; USFC of 1910, 1920, 1930; *City Directories*.

42. *Banner*, 18 May 1916. William Hoekstra, A Dutch immigrant, shot at Groen two times, both bullets missing. Hoekstra did not shoot at Groen because of the union controversy but because he had been denied membership in the Eastern Avenue CRC, of which Groen was pastor. For a complete explanation and outcome, see *Origins*, Vol. 36, #1, page 12, note 36.

43. https://blog.reformedjournal.com/2018/08/25/the-paradox-of-a-christian-reformed-progressive/ <25 July 2019>. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism*, 77-79.

44. Viva Flaherty's service with Fountain Street Baptist Church ended during the 1911 strike. That fall she published her account of the strike, with its pointed criticisms of Rev. Wishart's public role as defender of the furniture manufacturers. She moved to New York for a few years but returned to Grand Rapids in 1917, in time to distribute anti-draft pamphlets during World War One. She was among a group arrested under the Espionage Act and tried for disloyalty. Klaas Oosterhuis, one of the co-defendants, pastored the Holland Unitarian Church of Grand Rapids. Another, Dr. Martin E. Elzinga, a veterinarian, belonged to Central Reformed Church. The jury found all those charged "not guilty." Flaherty remained active in social justice movements, and the Socialist Party, for many years. She died in Grand Rapids in 1968. "Socialists Acquitted," *The International Socialist Review: A Monthly Journal of Socialist Thought* (Vol. 18) 1917, 283. (Google Books, accessed August 5, 2019).

<https://grpeopleshistory.org/2016/08/29/several-arrested-in-grand-rapids-in-1917-for-passing-out-anti-draft-information/ > (Accessed August 5, 2019.)

45. James (Jacobus) van Keulen was born in 1862 in the Netherlands. He emigrated in 1880 and married Neeltje Roest in 1883. Van Keulen was an elder at Beckwith Hills CRC. On 20 November 1926 he was instantly killed when a machine knife sliced into his abdomen at his workplace, the Colonial Furniture Company. Nicholas was born in 1864, arrived with James in 1880, married Peternella Jongejan in 1914, and died in 1940 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Both brothers started out working for McCord & Bradfield Furniture Co.

From Bekius to Bekins: Dutch Brothers Launch the First Nationwide Moving and Storage Company in North America

Robert Yonker

Bekins family homestead. Image courtesy the Bekins family.

Robert Yonker graduated from Calvin College with a major in history. He is retired from a career in property and casualty insurance. Presently he is on the board of the Holland Home REAL program and has presented programs on various historical subjects.

The Family's Dutch Roots

While under French rule in 1811, the people in the Netherlands were required to adopt surnames. Many Dutch, including Frisian, families had used patronymic names, that is, names inherited from their father's first names, such as Jansen, the son of Jan. Allert Douwes, born in 1757, took the surname of Bekius to comply with the law. Allert's son, Douwe Allerts, born in 1784, also accepted the name Bekius at the same time his father did.[1] In 1819 Douwe Bekius married Maartje Schaaf; their son, Sjoerd, was born on 26 February 1830 in Hallum, in the Frisian municipality of Ferwerderadeel.

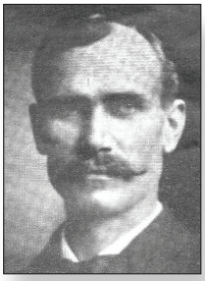
Times were tough in the Netherlands in the mid-1840s, specifically with the potato famine of 1845, as well as other concerns, so Sjoerd looked to the United States for a better life. In 1853 he sailed to Great Britain, traveled to the port of Liverpool and, after a wait of about thirty days, boarded the *William and Mary* on 24 March 1853 along with eighty or ninety other Hollanders. Early on the ship hit rough North Atlantic weather, causing considerable seasickness among the passengers, so much so that eleven died, eight of them children. Sjoerd was also sick but after two weeks recovered.

The ship hit a rock as she neared the Bahamas, and as the *William and Mary* was about to go under another ship rescued Sjoerd and his fellow passengers, dropping them off on one of the islands of Bahama, though their belongings were lost. In a letter home, Sjoerd wrote, "The natives were our salvation" as they housed and fed the survivors of the sinking ship.[2]

Eventually Sjoerd made his way to New Orleans, where some German settlers gave him food, clothes, and money and then directed him to the Netherlands consulate at St. Louis, Missouri. Sjoerd had planned to go to Iowa, where he thought farming conditions would be good;

The eleven children of Sjoerd and Tiertje Bekius: Cornelius, David, Martin, John, Sjoerd, Abram, Daniel, Geertje, Martha, Magdalena, and Teeke in the insert. Image courtesy of the Bekins family.

however, the consulate officer mentioned Holland, Michigan, as a place where he would find fellow Dutchmen. Following the officer's suggestion, he traveled to Michigan, settling in Beaverdam, a rural community, just north of the Holland-Zeeland area in Ottawa County, where he took up farming.[3]



Marten Bekins. Image courtesy of the Bekins family.

In Ottawa County Sjoerd met Tietje Berkompas, who was also born in Friesland, and who had emigrated with her parents in 1847.[4] The Berkompas family came with Rev. Martin Ypma and had settled in the Vriesland, Michigan, area. Initially Ypma's congregation was part of Classis Holland that in 1850 joined the Reformed Church in America. Sjoerd and Tietje married on 21 October 1855. They farmed in the Beaverdam, Michigan, area, raising a large family (of their thirteen children, two died in infancy). The family joined the Beaverdam Reformed Church when it was founded in 1870 and were lifelong members. Their son Douwe (David) served on the church council for many years.

Early Bekins Moving and Storage Co. truck. Image courtesy of the Bekins family.

Moving On

It seems that not all of Sjoerd and Tietje's sons were keen on farming. Four of them—John, Teeke, Daniel, and Martin—would eventually become involved in the furniture moving and storage business.[5] Martin, born in 1863, left the farm in 1880 and moved to Grand Rapids. While there he changed the spelling of his surname to Bekins. The reason for this change was never clear, but later family members joked that the "u" of Bekius had been mistaken for an "n" in cursive writing and a clerk spelled it that way in the records. Or it is possible that Martin wanted a more Anglicized spelling and pronunciation of his surname. Eventually all of Sjoerd Bekius's descendants that were involved in the moving business changed their surnames officially to Bekins or just used that spelling.[6]

In Grand Rapids, Martin worked as a teamster, driving horse-drawn freight wagons during the day. He sought to better himself by going to school at night to obtain an education that he might not have received had he stayed on the farm. Most likely he went to the Grand Rapids Business College, founded in 1866, now Davenport University.[7] The school offered business courses such as bookkeeping, businteess law, and arithmetic that he would need to establish his own business. Soon his brother John (born in 1868) joined him, also working as a teamster. Being employees of a freight company, they undoubtedly learned the basics of how to pack, ship, handle, and store furniture, as Grand Rapids at the time was the place where not only fine furniture but also much regular household furniture was made, which all had to be moved and stored.

The entrepreneurial drive of the brothers, Martin and John, now using the surname Bekins signifying a growing Americanization, led them to leave the Dutch provincialism of the West Michigan area and move to Sioux City, Iowa, in 1891. The nearest other Dutch settlement to their new home was some seventy-five miles distant in Sioux County. Utilizing the moving skills they had learned in Grand Rapids, and not wanting to be employees working for someone else, they chose to start their own furniture moving and storage business.

They had good reason to choose Sioux City as in the 1880s: it had an annual population growth rate of 413.3 percent, swelling the population from 7,366 in 1880 to 37,806 in 1890. By 1888 the city was, after New York City and Kansas City, the third city in the USA to have elevated trains, which, while not necessary in the moving business, was an indication of how progressive the city was. The western migration of Americans of that era was very much in need of the services the Bekins brothers had to offer.[8]

With confidence in their ability to be successful in business, they bought three horse-drawn vans and hired twelve employees. At the end of their first year in business their financial statement showed assets of $2,246.67.[9] This was a tidy sum of money for 1890. This Sioux City operation was the first of many Bekins family successes and innovations that would eventually make the Bekins name and company well known as a leader and one of the largest in the moving and storage business in the world.

Bekins horse-drawn storage and moving van. Image courtesy of the Bekins family.

In 1895 Daniel (born in 1880) and Teeke (born in 1858) became managers of the Sioux City operation. In 1906 the Bekins Company built the first steel-reinforced concrete building in Sioux City. The building was used in the moving and storage of household furniture. At five stories tall, it was large for its time. *The Sioux City Journal* reported in 2016 that as an indication of how well the building had been constructed one hundred ten years earlier, a real estate developer had no trouble obtaining permission from the city planning commission to make the building into a seventy-unit loft-style residential apartment complex.[10] A year later, as contractors were working on the apartment units, they also noted that the building was in such good shape that the structure itself needed no repair; they only had to construct the apartment units. A hundred ten years of dust and dirt was cleaned up and the Bekins sign "Where Beautiful Homes Begin" on the exterior of the building was removed.

Moving West

Noticing the westward expansion of the United States, the brothers opened another storage facility in Omaha, Nebraska, and one in Los Angeles, California, in 1895. While living in Nebraska, Martin married twenty-year-old Katherine Cole in Lincoln, Lancaster County, Nebraska, in April 1889. The couple had four children—Ruth, Milo, Floyd, and Reed. Less than a year later, John married Dena Prange, in the same town and county. John and Dena had two sons—Melvin and Paul.

In 1898 Bekins Household Shipping Company was established in Chicago, Illinois. This, through a network of agents, allowed shipments by rail linking the East and West coasts of the United States. In Los Angeles the Bekins Company was the first to use covered moving vans on the West Coast.[11] Also there the company had a steel-reinforced concrete building built—a first in California. It had a ramp for horse-drawn vans to enter directly into the warehouse, allowing the unloading of the transported goods without regard to possible weather-related damage. This contrivance was another first in the household moving and storage of furniture industry.

In Los Angeles in 1903, Martin, who would make Los Angeles his home, pioneered the use of motor vehicles in the furniture moving and storage business when he bought two air-cooled, two-cycle gasoline-engine-powered moving vans. At the time there were only about seven hundred gasoline-powered trucks in the United States.[12] This was not only a first use of motor vehicles in the moving industry but quite a daring venture as there were only one hundred ten miles of paved roads in the country, all located in large cities such as Chicago, New York, Cleveland, Boston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Gas stations did not exist for the most part, making it necessary to purchase fuel from hardware stores.[13] By the end of World War I the Bekins Company had rid itself of all its horse-drawn vans and wagons and was using motorized vehicles exclusively in the local delivery of household furniture.

In 1906 in San Francisco, while the Bekins Company was having the first steel-reinforced concrete warehouse built in that city, the great earthquake and fire struck. Two floors of the Bekins building had been completed and survived the earthquake and fires with little or limited damage, even though all the surrounding buildings were destroyed.[14] The Bekins motor vans were put to good civic use, with the company picking up the now homeless fire victims, many of whom they brought to live temporarily in the Bekins newly-built and undamaged warehouse until they could find more normal quarters. Later four floors were added to this building.

The accumulation of wealth allowed

Bekins building still standing after San Francisco earthquake. Image courtesy of the Bekins family.

the brothers to make generous contributions to their home congregation in Beaverdam, Michigan. In memory of their mother, Tietje, who had died in 1905, John and Martin presented the church with $1,000 to buy an organ. This beautiful organ is still being used in the church.

Early in 1910, the Bekins family built a *Consistorie* (separate building used by the council) for the church in memory of their father, Sjoerd, who had passed away in 1907.[15]

With the business thriving, Martin took time out to do some traveling that did not involve moving furniture. In 1922 he signed on for a world tour with the Cook Travel Company, followed by a European tour in 1928 and a trip to Hawaii in 1931. His unexpected death at age seventy in 1933 was due to a fall from a ladder, causing contusions and fractures.

John stayed in Omaha, Nebraska, until 1940, when he also moved to Los Angeles. He died in 1948 in San Francisco but was brought back to Omaha to be buried. After his death, Dena returned to live out her life in Omaha, where she died in 1967.

The Next Generation

Twenty-seven years after its founding in Sioux City, Martin brought his family into the now nationwide company. His children, Ruth, Milo, Floyd, and Reed, took over the business and installed Milo as president. The children continued the innovative practices of their father and uncle and introduced specially built shipping boxes called *Porto Vans*. These box-like units were designed so that furniture and other delicate items could be transported without being damaged. These were similar to containers used on ocean freighters and railroad freight cars. By the end of the 1920s Bekins had nearly a thousand of these *Porto Vans* criss-crossing the country.[16]

The moving industry's first trans-


SEATTLE CITY DIRECTORY (1910) 1882

FIRE PROOF STORAGE

BEKINS MOVING & STORAGE CO.

WE OPERATE THE BEST PADDED FURNITURE VANS IN SEATTLE

WHAT WE DO FOR YOU

We make removals of furniture, pianos, etc., from house to house on short notice.
We will pack, box and store the entire contents of a house.
We will pack and prepare goods for shipment and forward them to any part of the world.

FURNITURE

BEKINS MOVING & STORAGE CO. SEATTLE SAN FRANCISCO LOS ANGELES CHICAGO NEW YORK

For shipments of Household Goods to or from the East and California we charter private cars and secure greatly reduced freight rates for our customers.

Bekins Moving & Storage Company
INCORPORATED
Tels.: East 414, Cedar 414
Madison St. at 12th Av. SEATTLE, WASH.

Advertisement in the 1910 *Seattle City Directory*. Image courtesy of the Bekins family.

continental household move by motor van in 1928 was accomplished by Bekins using a padded van. It took fifteen days for the two Bekins employees (a father and son team) to drive from Sioux City, Iowa, to Los Angeles, California. While there were some numbered US highways available for use, they followed the Old Santa Fe Trail.[17]

Just as their parents saw business opportunities in the west of the United States, the new owners did the same. With California's population growth accelerating in the 1920s, they opened regional locations in Berkeley, Sacramento, Fresno, Pasadena, and West Hollywood. The Bekins steel-reinforced concrete buildings built in these California locations were designed by structural engineers rather than by architects. The roof lines and mini pilaster were taken from contemporary pattern books. A recent *Los Angeles Times* writer describes these storage buildings as "castles," as they were built in typical Bekins fashion with strong appearance and business efficiency in mind, having twenty-foot-long bays under a twelve-foot ceiling.[18]

One of the more notable moves for Bekins involving Los Angeles and San Francisco occurred in 1958. That was the year when two Major League Baseball teams moved to California, the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles and the New York Giants to San Francisco. Since each team plays one half its games at home, the move involved not only the team's equipment and uniforms but also its office and management furniture. Because many of the players took residence in the home-team cities, their personal and family belongings were also moved by Bekins. As of 2015, Bekins Northwest was still the official mover for the NFL's Seattle Seahawks.[19]

The Pacific Northwest Office

Daniel Bekins, born in Beaverdam, Michigan, in January 1880, joined the company as a young adult. At age twenty-three he opened an office in Seattle, Washington. Naming his branch of the Bekins business "Bekins Northwest," he started out with fifteen horses and six moving vans. Like his brothers, Daniel also had a sense of Seattle's excellent business potential.[20] By 1900 the city had a population of eighty-one thousand inhabitants and ten years later about two hundred and forty thousand. Daniel married Bertha Hedden in 1901, and they had seven sons, two of whom died as infants. Twenty-one years later he opened an office in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Facing retirement age in 1935, he put his five sons—Glenn, Stanley, Claude, Fred, and Bruce—in charge of Bekins Northwest, including the Canadian operation.[21]

After WWII

Just before the involvement of the United States in World War II, all of

1906 Steel reinforced concrete Bekins storage building in Sioux City, Iowa. Image courtesy of the *Sioux City Journal,* 17 March 2019.

the Bekins regional offices and locations were combined to form Bekins Van Lines. When the war ended and the large number of veterans started families and moved to the suburbs, Bekins was in a favorable position to move their warehouses from their locations in the centers of cities to outlying areas, again resulting in large increases in sales.

Always innovative and with numerous locations in California, Bekins also was able to serve the Hollywood movie industry. From their Los Angeles and Hollywood facilities they stored, cleaned, repaired, and distributed millions of dollars of film. Utilizing the Bekins Electronic Product Division, the company devised a catalog system that allowed for easy retrieval of films.[22]

Federal deregulation of the moving and trucking industry in the 1970s brought about intense competition. As usual, Bekins met the challenge with creative marketing techniques to retain and attract customers with the slogan, "No Excuse Move." With this slogan they were the first in the industry to offer guaranteed pricing, pickup and delivery dates, and full replacement protection coverage. In 1987, with the coming of computers, Bekins was tracking 95 percent of its shipments on-line.[23]

As businesses changed and modernized, so did the moving van line industry. Nevertheless, Bekins was able to keep up with or stay ahead of the competition. By the 1990s, 60 percent of their business still came from the moving of furniture and household goods. The remaining 40 percent consisted of specialty transporting and distribution of a variety of items. Bekins served such prominent customers as Williams Sonoma, Neiman Marcus, and American Express. With their usual strong emphasis on customer service, Bekins not only delivered the furniture but uncrated it and set it up in the consumer's home; in the event items were damaged, they would come back to handle the return.[24]

The most innovative venture of the 1990s was the takeover of an entire retailer's transportation, delivery, warehousing, inventory control, and installation and billing operations. An example of this type of service was that provided to Kodak for its high-end copiers and printers. To make this possible Bekins developed a national inventory management system using bar codes for tracking. In addition to Kodak, this management system was also made available to other customers.[25]

In 1995 Bekins led a moving industry consortium in the development of a Certified Professional Mover (CPM) program. Using a CD-ROM based training module, this program was designed to instruct the independent agents, as well as employees, in correct procedures in the best handling of moving objects. One year after developing this training system, Bekins was the first van line to earn the CPM status.[26]

Bekins Holding Company sold its shipping subsidiary (Home Direct USA), which was created in 1999 to help "e-tailers" deliver goods too bulky, such as sofas, wide-screen TVs, refrigerators, etc., for United Parcel Service (UPS) to deliver to consumers' homes; this was a private equity firm headed by auto racing legend Roger Penske.[27] While Home Direct USA had $125 million in sales in 2005 and had experienced annual growth sales that rated from 25 percent to 50 percent from its inception, the Bekins owners did not want to invest more capital into it and felt it was time to sell.

Bekins Moving and Storage was purchased by Minstar, Inc., led by corporate raider Irwin L. Jacobs, in 1983. Under Minstar's ownership there were two thousand employees, four hundred seventy independent agents, and more than fifty wholly

Early motorized Bekins van. Image courtesy of the Bekins family.

owned moving and storage companies. Four years later, the Bekins family repurchased the company and returned it to a privately-owned status with Karen Bekins as CEO and Chairman of the Board.[28]

In 1995, the Bekins family, always looking to grow its business, tried to purchase the moving division of Mayflower Group Inc., but their rival, United Van Lines, outbid them. Nevertheless, grow they did, showing three hundred locations in 2009, a fleet of twenty-one hundred vehicles, and company-owned warehouse space of over four million square feet. With their long company history of profits and success in meeting challenges and changing times, Bekins was a prime

Bekins Building in Sioux City getting repurposed. Image courtesy of the *Sioux City Journal*, 17 March 2019.

target for a takeover. This happened in 2012 when Wheaton World Wide Moving, with headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana, acquired Bekins, but the Bekins Van Lines name continues to be used as a separate brand. As part of Wheaton, Bekins offers discounts to partner organizations. Three such partners are the National Association of Senior Move Managers; National Active and Retired Federal Employees; and Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Pastors, Teachers, and Employees.[29]

Bekins building in Santa Monica, California. Image courtesy of the *LA Times*, 1 March 1989.

The success of the various Bekins enterprises can be directly related to quality, training, and education, as well as the work ethic of the Bekins family members. Nothing was handed to a family member when they came to work in the family enterprise. He or she had to earn their way into a leadership and/or ownership position in the corporation. A good example is that of John Melvin Bekins.

Current Generation

John Melvin Bekins, born on 3 July 1957, is the great-grandson of Sjoerd and Tietje Bekius, grandson of John and Dena Bekins, and son of Melvin and Katherine Bekins. After college, he began his career with Bekins Van and Storage. Donald R., the grandson of founder Martin Bekins, worked for forty-seven years for Bekins enterprises. In 1983 he was honored with the receipt of "Outstanding Contributions Award in the Household Goods Moving Industry" from the American Movers Conference.[30] These men are just two of the many descendants of Sjoerd and Tietje who make their livelihood by moving and storing other people's possessions.

The Bekins family is a close-knit clan. Periodically they hold family reunions at various locations in North America, such as Vail, Colorado; Monterey, California; Iowa; and even the Netherlands. Recently some seven hundred of the more than two thousand descendants of Sjoerd and Tietje attended the family reunion held at the original farm in Beaverdam, Michigan, now operated by the sixth generation Bekins farm family. Not only did they receive copies of the Bekins family genealogy, but they got caught up on the activities of the family members and talked a lot of business, especially about the various Bekins companies and locations.

When the children of Dutch immigrant parents, the brothers Martin and John Bekins, founded the Bekins moving and storage business, neither they nor their parents could have dreamt the company would become the fifth-ranked cross-country moving company and enjoy a fine reputation countrywide.

Endnotes

1. Genealogical information taken from: *Bekins Blue Book, Centennial Celebration the Family of Sjoerd Bekius, Known as Bekins in America. In Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the Pioneer Arrival of his Wife, Tiertje Bekius (Berkompas) in America—1847-1947 (Place of publication not identified, 1947); ebook at Hathi Trust Digital Library, University of Michigan:* https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015071166972;view=1up;seq=1.

2. For the complete story of this shipwreck, see: Kenneth A. Schaaf, *In Peril on the Sea (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2018)*.

3. *Bekins Blue Book*.

4. Tietje Berkompas was born on 23 March 1836 in Menaldum, Friesland. Her parents were Teeke Abrahams Berkompas and Getje Abes Postma. The name on her birth registration is spelled as Tietje (sometimes also spelled as Trietje on various documents), though on her grave it is written as Tjettje.

5. "Martin Bekins (1863) Industrial/Commercial Leader in Exploring America's Dutch Heritage" in New Netherland Institute: https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/history-and-heritage/dutch_americans/martin-bekins/.

6. In the 1940 United States Federal Census there were still thirty-nine individuals using the original spelling of Bekius.

7. The only business school in Grand Rapids in 1880 was the Grand Rapids Business College, now Davenport University. It was founded in 1866 shortly after the Civil War. For more information on the University see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Davenport_University>.

8. "A History of Sioux Neighborhoods" in *Sioux City Journal, 1 May 2018; elevated train information from "Faded Tracks," Sioux City Journal, 22 January 2015. Sioux City population figures from:* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sioux_County,_Iowa>.

9. First year financial statement showing assets and liabilities obtained from *Funding Universe, Bekins Company History.* <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/bekins-company-history/>. Using the Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator, the assets in 2019 terms would be $63,086.49.

10. "Bekins Building" in *Sioux City Journal, 14 December 2016 and 2 January 2018; Mason Dockter, "Bekins Building to Welcome Renters," Sioux City Journal, 17 September 2017*.

11. *Funding Universe Bekins Company History at:* <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/bekins-company-history/>.

12. Tina Grant, "Gas Powered Moving Trucks," *International Directory of Company Histories, 1996, Volume 15 (Chicago, IL: St. James Press, 2007)*.

13. Dayton Duncan, author; Ken Burns, director, *Horatio's Drive: America's First Road Trip, The American Lives II Film Project, Inc., A PBS DVD Distribution, Washington DC, 2003*.

14. San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906 in US Geological Survey, 1907, and *International Directory of Company Histories (St. James Press, 1996); Funding Universe Bekins Company History relates the story of the motor van usage of bringing homeless fire victims to live in reinforced concrete buildings, pointing out that the Bekins reinforced concrete building was the only one of its kind in the city to survive with only minor damage.*

15. *Beaverdam Reformed Church 100 Years—1870-1970*, Beaverdam, Michigan.

This building, now called the chapel, was first built separate from the church building, (where the parsonage now stands) and later moved and annexed to the church.

16 *Bekins Company—Company Profile, Information, Business Description, History, Background Information on Bekins Company, at* https://www.referenceforbusiness.com/history2/79/Bekins-Company.html.

17. Funding Universe Bekins Company History. The drive, from 23 June to 8 July, was accomplished by Gordon Mead and his son, Wayne.

18. Leon Whiteson, "Throwback Thursday—Bekins in Southern California," *Los Angeles Times, 1 March 1989. The article describes the fortress-like Bekins buildings.*

19. https://www.bekinsmovingandstorage.com/bekins-northwest-official-mover-seattle-seahawks/.

20. "MLT Based Bekins Wins Best of Western Washington," in *Lynnwood Today. Edmonds News, 7 November 2010.* https://mltnews.com/bekins/. The company also moved the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants.

21. *Bekins Van & Storage Co.* (Vancouver: Bekins Van & Storage Co., 1939). Canadian readers might be interested to know that Bekins bought this first office site in a building located at the corner of Beatty and Pender Streets in Vancouver. When it was built in 1913, it was the tallest building in the British Commonwealth.

22. Thomson Gale, *International Directory of Company Histories: Bekins (Farmington Hills: Cengage Gale, 2016)*.

23. *Bekins History (Hillside, IL: Bekins Company, 1978)*.

Read more at https://www.referenceforbusiness.com/history2/79/Bekins-Company.html#ixzz5tU8IozjZ.

24. Ibid.

25. Martin Bekins, New Netherlands Institute.

26. *The History of Bekins: 125 Years of Expert Moving at* https://www.bekins.com/why-bekins/history/.

27. Julie Johnson, "Bekins Selling Shipping Unit to Fund Controlled by Roger Penske," *Crains Detroit Business, 15 December 2005*.

28. Ms. Karen Bekins, wife of Paul Bekins (grandson of Daniel Bekins), has been Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Bekins Moving & Storage Co. since January 2009. Ms. Bekins graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in civil engineering.

29. "Our Partners Wheaton World Wide Moving" at: https://www.wheatonworldwide.com/why-wheaton/partners/.

30. *Chicago Tribune, 8 April 1990, Donald R. Bekins obituary.*

"If you can't find a job, create one!" The Beginning of a Successful Furniture Business

Joyce Bouwkamp Cammenga
Ronald Cammenga

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, immigrants came to the United States from the Netherlands for a variety of reasons. Some came because they were seeking employment opportunities, as economic conditions were harsh in their homeland.[1] Work was scarce, and wages for work that could be found were often insufficient to support a family with children. Thus, certain immigrants came to America with the hope of fulfilling their dreams of prosperity and success.

Others ventured a voyage across the ocean, spending weeks in a cramped cabin, often contending with terrible bouts of seasickness and eating food that was less than adequate, as well as with subpar medical care because they were fleeing from persecution. Many of these folks, often from the lower class, were part of the *Afscheiding* (Secession) movement, led by the reverends Hendrik De Kok, A. C. Van Raalte, H. P. Scholte, and others. It was their dream to build churches in which they could worship God according to their convictions, without harassment by the State. Still others were motivated to leave the land of their nativity for the sake of their children, especially the education of their children in Christian schools that were not subject to the control of the government.

However, these were not the reasons for which Jan (John) Cammenga and his wife, Bieke (Beatrice) Bergsma, left the Netherlands for America, at least not the main reason. You might say that it was romance, more than anything else, that moved them (pun intended) to leave family and friends, in search of a new life in a new land. Jan Cammenga was of the burgher class, while his wife, Bieke, belonged to the much lower laboring class. Jan was a "Cammenga" (sometimes also spelled as Cammengha and Cammingha) who descended from the Lords of Ameland. The Cammenga line can be traced back to the 1400s as the rulers and caretakers of Ameland. Ameland is one of the northernmost of the string of islands known as

Cammenga Street on the island of Ameland, the Netherlands. Image courtesy of the Cammenga family.

the East Frisian Islands, lying off the north coast of the Netherlands in the North Sea. Because a branch of the Cammengas from Ameland settled in Leeuwarden, the capital of Friesland, it has always been closely associated with that city. There is to this day, in the museum in Leeuwarden, a Cammengha Hall, which contains many artifacts and items of historical value from the island of Ameland.

But back to our story. Because

Rev. Ronald L. Cammenga is Professor of Reformed Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Joyce Bouwkamp Cammenga is the wife of Phillip Cammenga. She and her husband live in Cedar Springs, Michigan. She is a homemaker who enjoys her children and grandchildren, as well as works on family history.

Jan and Bieke Cammenga. Image courtesy of the Cammenga family.

Cammenga family: front row: Alice, Jan, Sebastian, Bieke, Andrew, back row: Peter and John Jr. Image courtesy of the Cammenga family.

Jan was from the burgher class and Bieke from a lower class, they were ostracized and treated badly by both their families. Not just the Netherlands, but much of European society was very stratified at this time. It was expected that one married within his or her own class. When burghers married outside their class, they invited trouble into their married life. Although there is evidence that the Cammengas were sympathetic to the *Afscheiding* movement and felt themselves to be in agreement religiously with the supporters of the movement, this does not appear to have been the decisive factor in their decision to emigrate. Cut off from both their families, they sought to start a new life in a land where class was not so rigid and where there was a greater mingling of the people in all classes. That new land was America, the land of opportunity, the land to which other disadvantaged Dutch folk had emigrated.

At the time Jan and Bieke emigrated, their family was growing. They were married in May of 1898 and, in 1903, after five years of marriage, made their decision to emigrate. They boarded ship with their young family and set out on their ocean voyage to America. At that time, their first child, Aaltje (Alice) was four years old and son Jan (John) was a toddler of nearly two years of age. He was born in Bovenknijpe in the municipality of Schoterland, Friesland, on 17 September 1901.[2] Both Alice and John lived to adulthood. Their next three younger sisters, all named Pietje, died very young; the middle Pietje lived the longest, just a couple of months past her first birthday.[3] Three more sons joined the family: Andrew born in 1908, Peter in 1912, and Sebastian in 1920. Two of these, Andrew and Sebastian, also known as Bob, became ministers, serving first in the Protestant Reformed Church and later in the Christian Reformed Church.

Father Jan Americanized his name to John and also changed the name of the son who was his namesake from Jan to John. The family eventually settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, among many others of their ethnic background who had also ventured to western Michigan. John Sr. sought to support his family by plying the skills that he had learned in the Netherlands as a baker. Like many other Dutch entrepreneurs in western Michigan at that time, he set up his own small business. But the flour dust caused major problems with his asthma, and he was advised by his doctor to get out of the baking business. This he did, taking up farming instead. Unfortunately, the farm to which he moved his family was a poor farm in the Belmont, Michigan, area. Farming was less than a success, and John Sr. soon moved his family back to the city of Grand Rapids, where he became a yard man and handyman—a jack of all trades.[4] As such, he established himself with some of the wealthier families in East Grand Rapids and continued as a handyman to the end of his working days. He died in 1954, and Bieke in 1957.

John Cammenga Jr. Image courtesy of the Cammenga family.

John Jr. (hereafter John) learned a lot from his father and at a young age started working with him. At first, he helped with deliveries from the bakery. Later he assisted his father with work as a handyman, including repairs and small building projects. In later years, his gardening skills were likely the fruit of what he had learned during the family's stay on the farm, as well as help with what was always a large family garden. Much of the garden produce fed the family throughout the year: not only the fresh vegetables as they ripened in the summer but all that was canned and stored in the fruit cellar for the long, cold Michigan winters.

When John reached adulthood, he found work at several different furniture companies. Eventually he ended

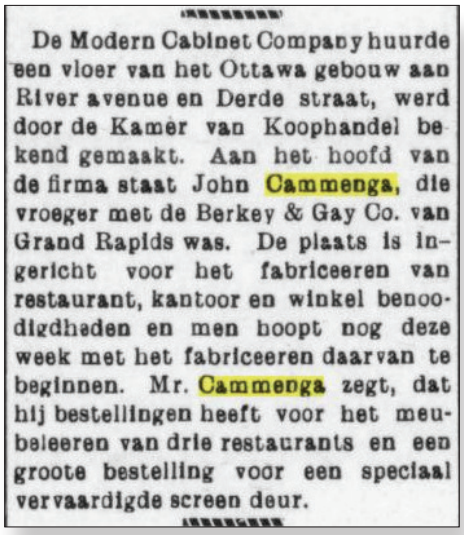
John and Mildred marriage in 1925. Image courtesy of the Cammenga family.

up working at Berkey & Gay Furniture Company in Grand Rapids. Hard work in the cabinet room, along with obvious skills in woodworking, soon paid off. Before long, he was promoted to foreman of the cabinet room. However, when the 1930s Depression hit, and new furniture sales slumped, the company closed its doors. Like so many others during this time, John was without work. For all practical purposes, there were no jobs available in the industry. Try as he did, John could not find work.

But John did not let the dire state of the economy get him down. He maintained a positive attitude. Rather than giving in to despair, he looked at the situation as an opportunity. This was undoubtedly the beginning of what became his motto for life: "If you can't find a job, create one!" And that is exactly what he did.

By this time, John was a married man. On 11 June 1925 he had married Mildred Redder, whose family was also of Dutch extraction.[5] He and Mildred moved to Zeeland, Michigan, where John set up shop in his garage. He was able to do all types of woodworking, both repairs to furniture and the making of new furniture. Working out of his garage, he supported his young family that included John, born in 1927, and Edward, born in 1930.

After some time, the family moved to the Pine Creek area of Holland, Michigan. The Depression still made it difficult to find work, but John was beginning to make a name for himself constructing window sashes and doors. In the Holland and Zeeland area he found a ready market for his products, especially for screen doors. He made large quantities of them, and at a dollar apiece he was able to support his family comfortably. As the demand grew for his windows and doors, John's business grew, which necessitated yet another move. That move was to Lincoln Avenue near 36th Street in Holland. As a result of the move, John renamed his business Lincoln Manufacturing Company.



De Modern Cabinet Company huurde een vloer van het Ottawa gebouw aan River avenue en Derde straat, werd door de Kamer van Koophandel bekend gemaakt. Aan het hoofd van de firma staat John Cammenga, die vroeger met de Berkey & Gay Co. van Grand Rapids was. De plaats is ingericht voor het fabriceeren van restaurant, kantoor en winkel benoodigdheden en men hoopt nog deze week met het fabriceeren daarvan te beginnen. Mr. Cammenga zegt, dat hij bestellingen heeft voor het meubeleeren van drie restaurants en een groote bestelling voor een speciaal vervaardigde screen deur.

Article in *De Grondwet* of 16 May 1935. Translation: The Chamber of Commerce announced that The Modern Cabinet Company has rented a floor in the Ottawa building on River Avenue and Third Street. Heading the company is John Cammenga, who was previously with Berkey & Gay Co. of Grand Rapids. The place is equipped to manufacture fixtures for restaurants, stores and offices, and the management hopes to begin production this week. Mr. Cammenga states that he already has orders to furnish three restaurants and a large order for an especially fabricated screen door.

The door and sash work continued to prosper, and, as a result, John made his final move. In 1943 he bought property that had a house and workshop on site. He moved his family and his business to 600 Graafschap Road, just outside the city of Holland, Michigan. With the change of location came also a change to the name of the business, which now became known as Cammenga Custom Cabinet Company. The Graafschap location provided not only a suitable place for his business but a house for his family and plenty of ground for a large garden as well. The rear of the five-acre property contained woods and wetlands—an ideal spot for adventuresome boys.

Demand for fine cabinetry exploded after World War II. There was also a surge in church membership. Many older churches remodeled or built additions, and many new churches were constructed. Soon John found that he was getting many orders for church furniture. Western Michigan had long established itself as a leader in furniture design and production. Large furniture factories in Grand Rapids and Holland were turning out fine pieces that went to furniture stores all over the United States and beyond.[6] But besides these large furniture companies that mass produced many different kinds of furniture for home and office, there were also many specialty companies, small businesses, and custom woodworkers. These small, independent shops also prospered during the years following the Great Depression. That was the case with Cammenga's furniture business, as well.

As the demand for church furniture

Holland Building of Cammenga Furniture. Image courtesy of the Cammenga family.

grew, so did Cammenga's business. Eventually he changed the name of his company one more time to Cammenga Church Furniture Company. That was the name on the large sign that adorned the front of the Graafschap property along the roadside. The growth of his business meant that John needed to hire more help. Now, not only was he working for himself but he was creating jobs for others. His two older sons, John and Edward, were already working for him, as would a third son, the youngest member of John's family, Phillip—a tailender. By 1953, John employed fifteen full- and part-time workers, with a weekly payroll of between $2,000 and $3,000.

Among his employees was Jim Van Iwaarden, who was a professional photographer. He filled in the cracks between weddings and portraits by working for John. Jim was an excellent machinist and had a good eye for design. He also assisted John in promoting the business by taking pictures of their products to show those who were interested in new furniture for their church buildings. Another part-timer was Ray Diepenhorst. Ray owned a blueberry farm north of Holland that occupied him during the summer months. But when he was not working in his blueberries, he was working at Cammenga Church Furniture. He was an excellent woodworker and skilled craftsman. He was considered second in command, and when John was busy in the office or delivering orders Ray was in charge of production in the shop. John Koning also became an employee of Cammenga Church Furniture. He was remembered as a cheerful man who was a

Jim van Iwaarden working on the planer. Image courtesy of the Cammenga family.

dedicated and dependable worker.

As the business grew, so did all of the work outside the shop—all the details necessary to operate a successful business. John was not only the owner and foreman but was also the salesperson, the order taker, the draftsman, the sample maker, the troubleshooter, the delivery man, and the head of the customer relations department. He did all the office work and the payroll himself, as well as the designing of his own line of church furniture. This included especially pulpits, pulpit furniture, baptismal fonts, communion tables, and church pews. They were all made according to his specifications and design.

John prided himself on the fact that he never owned a new machine. The entire shop was furnished with older, used machinery or machinery that he had bought and rebuilt. He excelled at pouring Babbitt bearings into old machines. He also sharpened all his own saw blades and drill bits, until the advent of the much harder carbide tipped blades and bits. When the business was first moved to Graafschap Road, all the machines were run by an overhead line shaft, with leather belts that were connected to all the machines on the line. "Klak, klak, klak" was the constant sound in the shop as the joints in the belts ran over the pulleys. After the workshop was enlarged and updated, the line shaft was replaced with electric motors, which were installed on each of the machines. During the war motors were very hard to find but as the economy recovered after the war they once again became available.

The two-story workshop on Graafschap Road was originally built as a slaughterhouse. That was its use back in the 1920s and 1930s. Soon the company outgrew the existing structure, and a 3,200 square foot addition (forty feet by eighty feet) was built in 1949–1950. It was a cement block structure built mostly by John and his sons after working hours and on Saturdays. The cement floor was poured from a cement mixer, which was powered by a single-cylinder engine. Because much of the work was done in the winter, the gravel used in the cement mixer had to be heated. The gravel was heaped over a large steel tube and a roaring fire was built in the tube, which then heated the gravel. There was no such thing as redi-mix concrete in those days. With new facilities and lots of orders, the business enjoyed a season of prosperity and growth.

Besides all his responsibilities connected to his business, John was also a devoted husband, father, and church member. At first his family belonged to the Protestant Reformed Church, but later they joined the Christian

Cammenga Church Furniture Company: John Cammenga standing far right, kneeling Jim van Iwaarden, to his left Edward Cammenga and far left the younger John Cammenga. Notice the church pews that are being assembled. The pulpit is in the background. Image courtesy of the Cammenga family.

Reformed Church. John was remembered as a devoted student of the Bible. He was often elected as Bible leader of the men's Bible study in the church of which they were members. He served many terms as an elder, with all the responsibilities that came with the eldership, such as serving as clerk of the council. He made the church and faithful church membership a priority in his life, and in the life of his family. His business was always closed on Sundays.

In 1954, however, John's health began to deteriorate. Most of his problems were heart related. Frequent hospitalizations led to absences from the business. There was no one to run the company and no one to make sales calls. John's oldest son and namesake, John, had left the family business and started his own auto parts business, Park Auto Parts, south of Zeeland. Middle son, Edward, had found work at a local furniture company. Both were married and supporting their own growing families. The youngest son, Phillip, was not old enough to take over the business. He, like his older brother Edward, would follow in his father's footsteps in the furniture-making industry. But for the present, no one was found to run the business. When John was able to work again briefly, he decided that the stress and strain of owning his own business was no longer an option. And so he closed the doors of Cammenga Church Furniture Company.

Eventually John sold the Graafschap building and property to the city of Holland. The city developed the land into a nature preserve, which it is to this day—the DeGraaf Nature Center. All of the original buildings on the property have been torn down.[7]

After selling the Graafschap property to the city of Holland, John, with the help of his youngest son, Phillip, moved what was left of his machines and factory to buildings in the small village of Douglas, near Saugatuck, Michigan. He had bought the property and buildings of what was then known as Gray Gables, a tourist attraction just across the Kalamazoo River. For a time, both he and Phillip worked for Baker Furniture Company in Holland. But eventually they both left Baker in order to restart the family furniture business. Soon enough they found plenty of work to support themselves, though they tried to limit the work to what the two of them could handle. There was no attempt to grow the business to what it once had been. One of the more famous pieces that John and Phillip were involved in at their Douglas location was assembly of the life-size Last Supper, carved by the sculptor Leo Jungblut and commissioned by the Howe Military

Hope College's Anchor. Image courtesy the *Holland Sentinel,* 12 October 2014, Holland, Michigan.

Leo Jungblut's sculpture Last Supper in the Cammenga Church Furniture Company before being placed in the chapel of the Howe Military Academy in Howe, Indiana. Image courtesy of the Cammenga family.

Academy in Howe, Indiana, as a gift for their chapel from philanthropist Ray Herrick. At the time of his death, the large boat anchor that was to be the emblem of Hope College was at the Douglas workshop. Although technically John had was not hired to design and construct the base on which the anchor was to be mounted, he was hired to construct the wooden spires for it. Sadly, he was unable to complete this project before his death; it was then completed by his son Phillip.

John's work came to an end when he passed away suddenly in 1964 from an aortic aneurysm and Phillip carried on the family business. Eventually, the property in Douglas was sold. Over the years since John's death, the property has changed hands a number of times. Presently it houses a collection of antique shops and art galleries, which are open to the public. Gone are all the machines and almost all traces of the furniture-making shop that once was housed in the buildings.

Throughout his life, John lived up to his motto "If you can't find a job, create one!" Not only was he able to create work for himself and support his family during the difficult years of the Depression of the 1930s, but he did so throughout his life. Besides creating work for himself, he helped to create work for others who were often desperate for work in order to support their families. In his life he proved the truth of the saying of the wise teacher in Ecclesiastes 2:24, "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor."

Endnotes

1. During the time the subjects of this article emigrated, the economic malaise in the Netherlands was mainly due to the agricultural crises which ensued when the American farmers flooded the European markets with cheap grain, so that the European (including Dutch) farmers could not compete, lost their farms, and were forced to throw their laborers out of work.

2. All genealogical data from www.allefriezen.nl; www.wiewaswie.nl, and www.ancestry.com.

3. Pietje is a female name, deriving from Pieternella. The first Pietje (name Nelly in the US) was born on 3 March 1903 in the Netherlands and died in October 1903 (10 months) in the United States. The second Pietje was born on 5 March 1905 and died 13 August 1906 (18 months); the third Pietje was born on 20 September 1906 and died 23 September 1907 (1 year). These little girls were all named after Jan's mother, Pietje van Dam. It was custom to name the next female after the grandmother, if the first one had died, and continue doing so. When the next child born was a son, he was named Peter.

4. According to the membership papers of Mayfair CRC, the family joined in November 1916, coming from the Plainfield CRC. Christian Reformed Church Records. Archives of Calvin University, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

5. They were married in the Oakland, Michigan CRC by Rev. John Kolkman.

6. Any reader who may be interested in reading about the development of the furniture industry in western Michigan during this time is referred to Robert Swierenga's fascinating account in his *Holland Michigan: From Dutch Colony to Dynamic City*, volume 2. Chapter 14 is titled "Furniture for Home and Office," pages 877-905.

7. Presently, standing on the property is a large visitors' center, filled with interesting exhibits and information on all the animals that make their homes in the local wetlands. The backside of the property is crisscrossed with nature trails, well-built and easily navigated. Anyone who is interested in a very worthwhile day trip, either for themselves, their children, or their grandchildren, would greatly enjoy the DeGraaf Nature Center. There is also a spacious parking lot and helpful staff. And best of all, in the finest Dutch tradition it is all free.

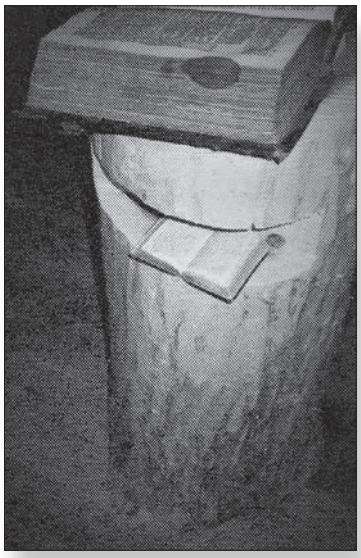
Sacred Furniture

Janet Sheeres

In January 1866, Douwe J. Vander Werp, pastor of the Graafschap, Michigan, Christian Reformed Church (hereafter CRC), traveled to Grand Rapids to negotiate the construction of a pulpit. It was to be ready in three weeks and would be delivered using two wagons, all for a cost of $100 or less (about $1,500 in today's currency). The first coat of paint would be applied in Grand Rapids and the final coat in Graafschap by a Grand Rapids painter.[1] Returning to his council, Vander Werp received its approval and wrote a letter to order the pulpit. Although it was to be ready in three weeks, it was not delivered right away because of the lack of funds, even though a pulpit fund had been established the previous year. Unfortunately, we do not know who, or which furniture company in Grand Rapids, Vander Werp dealt with. The only Dutch-named carpenter in the *Grand Rapids City Directory* of 1865-1866 was Berend De Graaf.[2] De Graaf was an elder in First CRC of Grand Rapids at the time and, since later he also crafted the first pulpit for LaGrave CRC, he may have done so for the Graafschap CRC.[3]

The above article in the Graafschap CRC council minutes is one of the few references that mention church furniture in CRC council minutes—who made it, where it was made, and how important it was to the worshipers. From church histories and council minutes it seems that the actual building generated more discussion than the furniture inside, which is rather interesting, given how much furniture was required—pulpits, pulpit chairs, pews, communion tables, baptismal fonts, collection plates, communion sets, psalm boards, etc.

Because the Graafschap CRC had been organized as a congregation in 1857, one wonders what they used for a pulpit until 1866. There is a sketch of a portable pulpit that was apparently used by some Seceder pastors who moved from place to place in the early years of the Secession (1834), when its meetings were forbidden. This *preekstoel* is said to have been



Tree stump pulpit used by early Michigan pioneers in their log cabin churches. Image courtesy of Calvin University Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Graafschap CRC portable pulpit. Image courtesy Graafschap CRC, Graafschap, Michigan.

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used in Graafschap Bentheim, Germany, and taken along to the United States by immigrants to Graafschap, Michigan. It folded up for easy transportation and was simple to set up when and where needed.

In 1862 the Graafschap congregation completed building its new church, and when Vander Werp arrived in Graafschap in the fall of 1864 he may have decided that it was high time the congregation had a proper pulpit and began the process of procuring one.

There was a valid reason for a proper pulpit in Reformed churches, that being that the pulpit was reserved for clergy only and considered inappropriate for theology students and elders to preach or read sermons from. The pulpit was raised higher than the communion table and baptismal font to symbolize that the Word of God was above the sacraments, in direct opposition to Roman Catholicism, which considered the sacraments sacred and elevated them above the Word. The pulpit was also to be placed front and center in the sanctuary, signifying the centrality of the Scriptures in the service. A lectern, on the other hand, positioned lower than the pulpit, was to be used by elders during announcements and reading services and by the *voorzinger* (lead singer before organs set the tune).

Pulpit in the Dutch Reformed Church of Ulrum, Groningen, the Netherlands. Pulpit used by Rev. Hendrik de Cock, father of the Secession of 1834 in the Netherlands. Image courtesy of Calvin University Archives.

Vander Werp, who had come from the Netherlands, where this was common practice in Reformed churches, decided to institute this custom also in the American CRC congregations. There is a little history to his decision. When Vander Werp was a student pastor in the Christian Seceder's congregation in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, its council decided to remove the pulpit and install a lectern for him to use until he was ordained.[4] Therefore, once Vander Werp was an ordained pastor and allowed to use a pulpit, he may have considered it important to introduce the same distinction in Graafschap and the other four CRCs.

Later that year, at the CRC General Assembly meeting held on 5 and 6 September 1866 in Grand Rapids, the question was raised whether an elder could use the pulpit for reading services or had to keep himself to the lectern.[5] The assembly decided that the pulpit was for ordained clergy only. The issue came up again at the February 1884 Noordeloos CRC council meeting, who referred it to the June 1884 Synod, held in Grand Rapids, Michigan.[6] This time Synod ruled that each congregation set its own guidelines for pulpit versus lectern use. But when the Munster, Indiana, CRC decided to allow an elder on the pulpit so that the people could hear him better, there was an immediate backlash, and the objecting members resigned in protest.[7]

Pulpit from First Reformed Church, Albany, New York. Image courtesy of First Reformed Church, Albany, New York. The church was founded in 1642 and the pulpit brought over from the Netherlands circa 1686.

Several years later, the issue was again discussed in the Dutch-language newspaper *De Grondwet* of 14 January and 4 February 1890.[8] A subscriber wanted an answer to the question "What is the proper use of the pulpit?" and was answered that the pulpit should not be imbued with an essence of holiness, like the priests' clothes in the Old Testament, but rather was to be used simply as a tool used by both ordained men and elders to bring the Word of God. That is apparently what the Graafschap congregation thought as well, for twenty-five years after purchasing its pulpit they replaced it with a platform and lectern. The old pulpit was stored in the horse barn and eventually sold for $3.00 on 18 September 1891.[9]

Frequently the pulpit was an improvised affair. In Maryland, the RCA

DeKorne pulpit furniture in Westview CRC Grand Rapids, Michigan. Image courtesy of Tom van Zoeren.

missionary for Classis Philadelphia, Rev. Rense H. Joldersma, preaching in the home of one of the Dutch families that had settled in the area, used a "pulpit" that had been hastily constructed from an upright post with four projecting legs and a slanted board on top.[10] However, when the structure was found to be too short for the tall pastor, a square box of books was used as a base for the stand, making it about a foot taller. When Joldersma began pounding "the pulpit" while preaching, the congregants became concerned that the makeshift structure would collapse.[11]

Nevertheless, in many Reformed churches the pulpit was not just a useful place for the preacher's notes but a highly visual symbol pointing to the Word itself, and many churches favored ornately carved pulpits.

While, as noted before, there is very little information as to who actually produced the pulpits, here and there a few names are mentioned in the church records. In 1868 in Mattoax, Virginia, Gradus Vande Riet helped not only to build the church building but also carved the pulpit and made the pews for the small Reformed (RCA) congregation.[12] In Middleburg, Iowa, a Mr. Luimers is commended in *De Volksvriend* for the beautiful pulpit he had made.[13] At the organizational meeting of LaGrave Avenue CRC on Thursday, 24 February 1887, Berend De Graaf Sr., a carpenter and merchant in the city and a charter member of LaGrave, volunteered to make the pulpit.[14] When, a year later on 14 June 1888, the congregation dedicated its first building, the necessary chancel furnishings of pulpit, baptismal font, and communion table were in place.[15]

It seems that Pillar Church (Ninth Street CRC) in Holland, Michigan, also had an original pulpit that later had been shunted aside but was restored in May 1912, when the building committee was instructed to restore the old, original pulpit that had been stored away as a forgotten relic in the corner of the old council room and give it a place of honor in the new council room.[16]

Pulpits in the CRC never reached the grandeur of the elaborately carved structures seen in older churches in the Netherlands. However, there are some beautiful pulpits in the CRC churches in North America. Boudewijn De Korne, a young Dutch carver who came to America at age fourteen in 1880, began working for Berkey & Gay Furniture in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Later, he and another Dutch immigrant, John Lindhout, set up their own carving shop at 1000 Ottawa Avenue in the city. The De Kornes joined Broadway CRC (Westview CRC in 1962), and Boudewijn carved a beautiful pulpit, as well as other furnishings for the church.[17]

Boudewijn De Korne in his workshop 1908. Image courtesy of Tom Van Zoeren.

Given our church fathers' adherence to the centrality of the pulpit, it is interesting to note that during the past few decades many pulpits have been pushed aside to make room on the pulpit platform for praise teams and bands.

The Pews

Then, of course, there was the seating challenge. Before the Reformation, churches were not usually furnished with pews, but the rise of the sermon taking central place in Reformed worship made seating a necessity. Early congregations that formed in the Dutch colonies in America after 1847 used primitive church furniture.[18] The Van Raalte congregation in Holland, Michigan, built a modest thirty-five- by sixty-foot building in which "the parishioners sat on logs during the services that could last two hours or more. It could seat approximately two hundred twenty-five people, with fifteen persons in each of the fifteen rows."[19]

The first church building to be erected in Pella, Iowa, was completed in March 1848. It was built with unplaned native lumber. The seats on both sides of the aisle consisted of boards nailed onto trestles.[20]

Derk Sjerda, a teamster, volunteered his newly built barn to house the Muskegon, Michigan, First CRC congregation when it organized in 1867. He put planks on blocks of wood for seating. A decade earlier the same had been done in Noordeloos,

Michigan, where, in fact, a dispute arose about planks or boards that had been set aside for seating, *a la* the Muskegon arrangement. Because the congregation met in the parsonage, the boards were apparently stored elsewhere during the week. A member of the congregation mistook them for free lumber and carted them away (to use for making caskets!), causing an uproar.[21]

In 1874, the Beaverdam, Michigan, RCA built a new structure, which so depleted its funds that when the time came to buy pews neither money nor credit was available. Finally, in January 1875, Deacon H. J. Beld took out a $400 mortgage on his farm to enable the church to buy pews. The council gave Beld a mortgage for the same amount on the church property as security.[22]

In 1883 the Fremont, Michigan, First CRC also depleted its budget when they built their church at a cost of $295, so that it was also without funds for pews. It solved the seating concern by having every member bring a chair. Later, when funds became available, the church decided to have pews instead of chairs. It is not known who supplied the pulpit or communion table.[23] The Hull, Iowa, CRC also used wooden kitchen chairs at first (1895). The chair legs were nailed to boards to keep them from moving. Later benches were purchased, and even though this was an improvement, old-timers remember when once the benches had been inadvertently varnished with an inadequate (read: cheap) varnish, the members found themselves stuck to their bench when getting up.[24]

In 1887 the Young People's Society of the Lansing, Illinois, RCA provided three beautiful chairs for the pulpit platform, as well as a carpet for the area, all at a cost of $16.00.[25] In 1904, after twenty years of existence, the Harrison, South Dakota, CRC replaced pulpit and pews for a cost of $73.04.[26]

As the number of congregations in the CRC increased, more and more pews were needed. In 1898 the Prosper CRC in Falmouth, Michigan, council instructed its member, Gozen Mengers (1847–1916), a carpenter, to build six new pews in the church "that are to be somewhat longer than the short ones."[27] Perhaps Mengers's pews were not adequate (or did not sit well), because five years later the Prosper CRC council, in a meeting held on 3 September 1903 (Art. 5), stated, "Since we will send another $25.00 to the Gelters Stack Company for church pews, we will still owe $25.00 and Agema is instructed to ask the company for a delay of the remaining $25.00 in payment until December 1."

When Georg Heeren, a skilled craftsman, arrived in Pella, Iowa, from the Netherlands, he immediately set up shop on Washington Street and soon received orders to supply many of the area churches with pews. "Due to their size and the amount required of an order to fill a church, Georg quickly ran out of space to store them, even though he stored them vertically on one end."[28]

Henry De Gooyer (1864–1938), a manufacturer of interior items in Orange City, Iowa, included church pews in his stock, advertising everything to be *goed en goedkoop*—good and cheap. In Zeeland, Michigan, it was the firm of De Pree & Elenbaas that manufactured pews, boasting that it had recently provided the First Congregational congregation of Bass River, as well as for the RCA in Overisel, both in Michigan.

Alma Holwerda Hulvey describes the pews in the Vriesland, Michigan, CRC in the 1930s: "The pews in the church were made of solid oak, lightly contoured. But one found little physical comfort during a long sermon. Some church members brought velvet cushions that remained in their family pew for years."[29] Another comfort was provided by Henry C. Spring, a Grand Rapids funeral director who provided ornate cardboard fans held in brackets on the back of the pews. Without air conditioning or electric fans, these cardboard fans were much appreciated in the summer.

Much of the church seating in Grand Rapids and surrounding areas was manufactured in Grand Rapids by the Grand Rapids School Furniture Company (later American Seating), which, due to its great success in school seating, expanded to church seating in 1887. The company, one of the largest in the country, provided work for many Dutch immigrants. The Grand Rapids Public Library American Seating Collection (No. 232) contains three 1960s catalogs of chancel and church furniture. At that time the company had thirty regional offices across the United States and provided the seating for CRCs in Grand Rapids, Michigan; Lafayette, Indiana; Paterson, New Jersey; and Artesia, California.

Sometimes, when updating, churches wanted to sell their old pews. In 1904 the newly built Alpine Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids had also installed new pews. It placed an ad in *De Grondwet* that it had thirty-two fifteen-foot pews for sale. The ad added that "the pews were still in good condition and very suitable for a country church."[30] In other words, country churches were considered to be less discriminating than city churches in their seating tastes!

Pew Rental and Seating Arrangements

Before the churches adopted a budget system, it was quite common to rent pews as a means of raising funds for the church.

In some churches there was a sliding scale with the more desirable pews costing more. Rev. A. C. Van Raalte was in favor of the system. If each family had its assigned pew, Van Raalte argued, families would not be separated, and they would know their place without having to search or having to run to it; also, each one could make his chosen seat more comfortable with pillows and such.[31] That the practice was still common in the beginning of the twentieth century is evident from the council minutes of Broadway CRC (now Westview) that met on 20 February 1905 to assign pews. Nevertheless, the practice was frequently debated and finally, in an effort to be more democratic, done away with.

Early church seating arrangements separated the men and boys from the women and children. If there was a single middle aisle, the men would sit in one section and the women in the other. If there were two aisles, the women would occupy the large middle section and the men the two outside sections. The men were served communion before the women. Elders and deacons had special pews flanking the pulpit, and sometimes the pastor's family also had a dedicated pew close to the pulpit.

The well-known Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper also favored families sitting together in church; however, he felt that once young people reached the age of twenty and had not yet made profession of faith, they should be shunted to the back rows, where they then should contemplate that they were not really part of the congregation until they made a public profession. "Sitting there would be a constant reminder to them: 'You don't belong in the back anymore. Prepare yourself to come to the Lord's Table.'"[32]

Communion Tables and Baptismal Fonts

Van Raalte apparently also had a definite idea about the communion table that would be used in the new Pillar Church built in 1856 in Holland, Michigan. Council minutes note that the council approved his recommendation that the church should have a twenty-foot-long communion table with two ten-foot extensions.[33] Parishioners would walk toward the front to be seated at the table to partake of communion. Elders would sit at each end of the table to make sure no one who had been denied communion for disciplinary reasons, or visitors who had not asked permission, would partake. This worked well in smaller congregations, but in larger congregations there were sometimes three to four sessions of people who had to come forward to partake as others left, taking much time while the remainder of the congregation became restless. This method was finally done away with in most churches and replaced by a single table that was used to hold the trays of bread and wine for the elders to pass through the congregation.

Baptismal Font originally in Cicero, Illinois, CRC; now owned by Robert Swierenga. Image courtesy of Robert Swierenga.

That the church fathers attached respect to the church furniture is indicated by the fact that, even after Pillar RCA became Ninth Street CRC and a new communion table was bought and kept in the council room when not in use, the Young People's Society was allowed to use the consistory room for its meetings, though not the communion table.[34]

Baptismal fonts were often gifted to congregations by private donors, Ladies' Aid Societies, and other church organizations. The *Banner* of 22 February 1935 mentions that "The Second Cicero, Illinois, congregation has ordered a baptismal font to match the church furniture. [In 1927 the church furniture for Second Cicero was supplied by the Leenhouts and Hoffman Co. but apparently not an adequate baptismal font.][35] The font is to be paid for by voluntary gifts. The purpose is to give the same prominence to baptism that is given to the Lord's Supper."[36] Rev. Peter A. Hoekstra, who pastored Cicero II from 1927 to 1940, baptized Robert (Bob) Swierenga and two of his five siblings at this font after it had been installed. Also baptized at the same font were his younger three siblings, albeit by other pastors. (Rev. Hoekstra was the maternal grandfather of the Swierenga siblings.)[37]

The font became a Swierenga heirloom when Bob's father, John Swierenga, received it from his friend, the pastor of Cicero Bible Church, which had purchased the church building in 1973 when the CRC congregation relocated to Elmhurst, Illinois. The Cicero Bible Church built a baptismal tank in the former choir loft and obviously had no use for the font. The Baptist pastor knew that John Swierenga had married Mary, the oldest daughter of Rev. Hoekstra, and assumed, correctly, that John might be interested in it. Bob gained possession of it in 1997 when his father downsized.

It seems that Rev. Peter Moerdyke, pastor of the First RCA from 1873 to 1892 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, also had a sentimental attachment to the font used in his baptism. On a trip to the Netherlands in 1886 he was able to bring back this baptismal font

from the Hervormde Kerk in Biervliet, Zeeland, the Netherlands.[38] I have not been able to find out whether this baptismal font was meant to be used in his church here in the USA or kept as a private memento.

In Firth, Nebraska, a new font in the RCA was gifted in memory of Rev. John Steunenberg (1874–1943) by Mrs. William (Anna Visser) Wolvius, previously the wife of Rev. Steunenberg, who had served the Firth congregation from 1931 to 1936. The font was described as *zeer kostelijk en doelmatig versierd* (richly and purposefully decorated).[39]

An RCA congregation was organized in Woodstock, Minnesota, in 1945. On Sunday, 4 July 1948, a new baptismal font was used for the first time to baptize the triplets Kenneth, Kathryn, and Karen Vanderburg.[40] The Muilenburg family had donated the font in memory of Arthur Muilenburg, who had died on 4 June 1946. With the addition of the baptismal font, the church furniture—pulpit, communion table, and baptismal font—was complete. All the pieces were crafted by Rev. Berend T. Vander Woude, the congregation's first pastor from 1945 to 1952, and it was described as follows: "[I]n the entire area, there is not found such a beautiful chancel set as in the Edgerton church."[41]

Newly organized congregations often had to *make do* before they were able to afford or obtain the necessary furnishings. When Rev. Rense H. Joldersma led the worship service in the newly organized RCA in Baldwin, Wisconsin, in 1905, twelve babies were presented for baptism. Without a church building as yet, much less the furnishings, a simple glass fruit bowl served to hold the water for baptism. Rev. Joldersma was used to innovations; he was the pastor who had preached from the rickety pulpit in Maryland only a few years earlier.[42]

Before it was able to finance a communion service, First RCA congregation in Orange City, Iowa, in 1871 used a stoneware pitcher and cups to serve communion.[43]

The 1920 financial report of Broadway CRC (now Westview) lists the following under disbursements: Communion Set $114.35, and Communion Supplies $15.61. Since Broadway was organized in 1890, it must have worn out one communion set already.

In some denominations the baptismal font is located near the entrance door as a symbol that baptism represents entering God's family. Most Reformed churches position the font in the front of the church, along with the communion table as symbols of the sacraments.

In the LaGrave Avenue CRC 100th anniversary booklet, *A Century of Grace*, there is a list of members who donated the many items needed for the interior of the church, including pulpit furniture, lectern, and communion table.[44]

And even though the buildings, the fixtures, and the furnishings themselves are not considered to be the essence of a congregation, they are often dedicated to the service of God and considered special, worthy of being finely crafted and pleasing to the eye. Rev. Jacob Eppinga, preaching at the dedication of the then new sanctuary of LaGrave Avenue CRC on 14 June 1959, said,

> As we go from the old into the new . . . [We] take with us a pulpit, signifying that there is still a Gospel in this soul-sick world to proclaim. We take with us a baptismal font—the seal of God—and a table of communion, signifying the living Christ who dies for our sins. [All] that was dedicated then—right here on June 14, 1888—we take with us to the new church.[45]

Chancel furniture of LaGrave CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Image courtesy of LaGrave Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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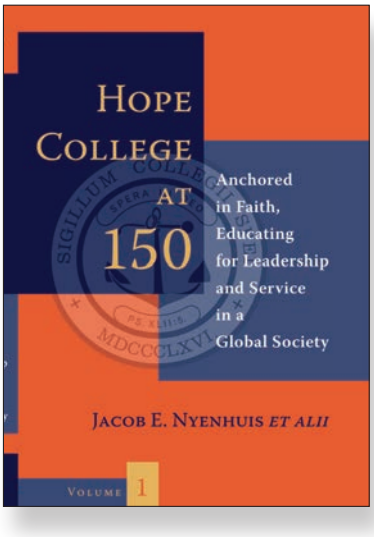
Souvenir History of Pella, Iowa (Pella, IA: The Booster Press, G. A. Stout printer, 1922).

Endnotes

1. Graafschap CRC Council minutes, 12 January 1866.
2. Berend De Graaf, Sr., born on 24 May 1824 in Dalfsen, Overijssel, the Netherlands and died 3 April 1902 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He married Egberdina Rietberg in 1849 and emigrated from Kampen, Overijssel, in 1851. In the 1860 census De Graaf is listed as carpenter, but in subsequent censuses he is listed as merchant. He was a charter member of LaGrave and served as elder.
3. First CRC Grand Rapids council minutes, 15 September 1862.
4. Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, *Son of Secession, Douwe J. Vander Werp* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2006), 74.
5. __ ed. *Minutes of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013), Art. 25, page 164.
6. Art. 55, CRC Synod, held June 11 ff., 1884 in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
7. *Diamond Jubilee 1870–1945*, Munster Christian Reformed Church, Munster, Indiana. Calvin University Archives.
8. *De Grondwet* (The Constitution) was a Dutch language newspaper published weekly in Holland, Michigan, from 1860 to 1938. It was the largest Dutch newspaper in North America, with well over 7,000 subscribers in 1907.
9. Graafschap CRC anniversary booklet, page 36.
10. Rense H. Joldersma (born 1854 in the Netherlands and died 1913 in Grand Rapids, Michigan) was missionary among the Dutch in Maryland from 1890–1901. An RCA congregation was founded in 1901 but disbanded in 1905.
11. *History of the Pasma Family*, undated, page 26, Family Histories/ Genealogies, Archives, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
12. Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, *The Not-So-Promised Land; the Dutch in Amelia County, Virginia, 1868–1880* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013), 90.
13. *De Volksvriend*, 17 August 1899. *De Volksvriend* (the People's Friend) was published in Orange City, Iowa, from 1874 to 1951. This is, in all likelihood, Herman J. Luijmes/Luymes born in 1824 in Elst, Holland, where he married H. S. Mulder in 1849. In 1856 the Luymes family emigrated to the USA and settled at Pella, Iowa, where they lived until 1870 when they came to Sioux County along with the pioneers. Mr. Luymes was a carpenter.
14. See Note #2.
15. Eppinga, *A Century*, 243.
16. Pillar CRC council minutes, 6 May 1912, Art. 6.
17. See Mary Risseeuw's article on Dutch immigrant furniture manufacturers.
18. De Vries, Michael, and Harry Boonstra, *Pillar Church in the Van Raalte Era* (Holland, MI: Pillar Church, 2003), 28.
19. Ibid, 78.
20. *Souvenir History of Pella, Iowa 1847–1922* (Pella, IA: The Booster Press, G. A. Stout printer, 1922), 54.
21. CRC Classical Assembly Minutes, 8 June 1859, Art. 5.
22. *Beaverdam Reformed Church 100 Years—1870–1970*. Beaverdam RCA, Beaverdam, Michigan. These pews lasted until May 1910, when the congregation voted to buy new pews. H. J. Beld is Hendrik Jan Beld, born 1840 in Graafschap, Bentheim, Germany, and died in 1888 in Ottawa County, Michigan.
23. *Our 100th Year 1882–1892 First Christian Reformed Church, Fremont, Michigan.*
24. *The First Christian Reformed Church Hull, Iowa, 1894–1968, Anniversary Book*, Calvin University Archives.
25. *De Grondwet,* 25 January 1887.
26. *Christian Reformed Church, Harrison, South Dakota, 125th Anniversary 1884–2009*, 8.
27. Prosper CRC, council minutes, 6 January 1898, Art. 5.
28. James E. McMillan, ed., *Artisans and Musicians, Dutch and American; Pella, Iowa 1854–1960* (Pella, Iowa: Pella Printing Co. Inc., 1960), 56.
29. Alma Holwerda Hulvey, *Across the Cobwebs of the Years* (Huntington Beach, CA: Alma Holwerda Hulvey, 1983), 39.
30. *De Grondwet*, 8 March 1904.
31. De Vries and Boonstra, *Pillar Church*, 58.
32. Abraham Kuyper, *Our Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 94.
33. Pillar RCA council minutes 29 April 1856.
34. Ninth Street CRC council minutes, 27 October 1913, Art, 5.
35. *Second CRC Cicero Dedication Program*. 1923 Chicago City Directory: Cornelius Leenhouts and Albert Hoffman ran a furniture store on S. Ashland Avenue in Chicago.
36. *The Banner*, 22 February 1935.
37. Swierenga's son Robert Jr., born 11 February1958, was also baptized at this font some four weeks later by Rev. Derke P. Bergsma.
38. *De Grondwet*, 28 September 1886. Pieter Moerdijk was born on 29 January 1845 in Biervliet, Zeeland, the Netherlands; he emigrated with his family to Michigan in 1849 and died in 1923.
39. *De Volksvriend*, 7 December 1944.
40. Ibid., 5 August 1948. Arthur Muilenburg was born on 29 December 1884 in Sioux County, Iowa, and died 4 June 1946 in Pipestone County, Minnesota.
41. Ibid.
42. Rev. Joldersma was pastor of Fulton, Illinois, RCA from 1903 to 1907 and was sent three hundred miles north to Baldwin, Wisconsin, to organize the congregation, as the two churches were probably in the same classis.
43. *De Volksvriend*, 4 April 1940.
44. Jacob Eppinga, *A Century of Grace, LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church 1887–1987* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: LaGrave Avenue CRC; Hoekstra Printing, 1987), 249.
45. Ibid, 244.

book review



Hope College at 150: Anchored in Faith, Education for Leadership and Service in a Global Society

Jacob E. Nyenhuis, et alia

(Van Raalte Press, 2019)

What began as an assignment to complete a survey conducted by the Council for Independent Colleges (CIC) to locate unique buildings on Hope College's campus, soon morphed into a full-scale architectural history of Hope College. The assignment changed, however, when then Provost James Boelkins approached Jack Nyenhuis to compose the sesquicentennial history of Hope College, which was to occur in 2016. Jack accepted this challenge, and what resulted is a two-volume, fourteen hundred plus page history of Hope College's one-hundred-fifty-year existence. Chartered in 1866 by the State of Michigan and fully accredited by the North Central Association in 1914, and later by a host of professional and disciplinary organizations, Hope College stands today as a highly respected, nationally known institution of Christian higher education. The story is compelling and should be inspiring to all who love and support Hope College, as well as Christian higher education across the country.

The two-volume set is composed of nine chapters and twelve appendices. Jack Nyenhuis is the primary author, with chapters written by James Kennedy, Dennis Voskuil, Robert Swierenga, Alfredo Gonzales, John Jobson, Michael Douma, and Scott Travis. The book is ably edited by one of the best in the business, JoHannah Smith, chief editor at the Van Raalte Institute. It is interesting to note the extensive use of students in conducting the research for this publication.

The history of Hope College, from its inception to today, demonstrates several things to me. First, and foremost, this is the history of commitment and survival, or, better put, a history of survival because of commitment—commitment to a Christian perspective and a Christian mission pervade this history. This was a mission envisioned by Abertus Van Raalte; nurtured into existence by its first president, Philip Phelps; and sustained by his successors, all of them dedicated to the preservation of an institution of Christian higher education. Second, it is of note that the college arose out of the church. The eastern branch of the Reformed Church in America took note of the rise of churches on the western frontier and realized that those churches needed preachers. In order to provide educated preachers, the church needed a school to prepare them. What the church really wanted was a theological school, but what the church eventually got was something much broader and grander.

The theological education was there in the early days, but the theological branch was the source of much tension between the church and the college, a tension that did not end until the establishment of Western Theological Seminary in 1884. Third, as Voskuil and Kennedy point out, Hope College has always been in search of its identity. Phelps envisioned a university, Hope Haven University, with a theological school and school of science. That concept did not fly—far too grandiose an idea for a fledgling school. Instead, it became a four-year liberal arts institution, with the later addition of preprofessional programs.

But its roots were vocational: preachers and teachers for the school and for God's people. The identity of the college as to its mission was stable in its early years. When the college sought to gain recognition among its peers, however, the battle for its Christian mission was waged. Thankfully, the college has survived as a Christian institution—rooted in the Reformed faith but now decidedly ecumenical. That's the story that is told in these two volumes.

There are nine chapters in the two volumes and twelve appendices. The chapters are written thematically, so the reader can pick and choose what to read first and last.

My recommendation is that the reader begin with chapters one and three in order to get the history and the foundational principles of the college. Nyenhuis has written three of these chapters, all very lengthy. The topics he chose for himself were the development of the academic program and the faculty; the architectural history of the college; and, with Gonzales, the history of the attempts to diversify the faculty, staff, and student body. The architectural history covers over three hundred pages of Volume 1—a book by itself. Chapter six on diversity, for those who lived through some of this history, is at times painful to read. But some success is noted. Considerably more women have been added to the faculty, and faculty of color have also increased, as have the number of students from ethnic minorities. Swierenga does a masterful job of presenting all the twists and turns of the financial history of the college. Also interesting to note is that there were some wheeler-dealers in the early history. There were those who knew the art of the deal long before Donald Trump wrote his book. The chapters on athletics (Renner), student life (Jobson and Douma), and alumni (Travis) are also worth the read.

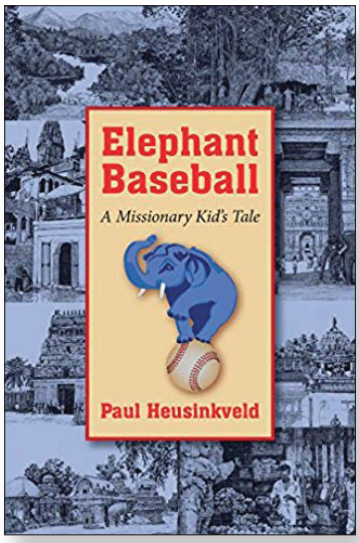
And then there are the twelve appendices. What time and energy had to have gone into the compilation of these appendices. Truly a treasure trove of information left for future historians to explore.

So, that is the history of Hope College's one hundred fifty years of existence. The history was not always pretty. It had its twists and turns, crises, and successes. Crises which, in the early days, were primarily financial; crises in the later years had to do with whether the college would maintain its Christian character. But the college has not only survived but thrived.

I recommend this book to anyone who has a heart for Christian higher education. It should be read by the presidents, provosts, and faculty of other Christian higher education institutions who may be struggling not only to exist but also to maintain their Christian mission. As the classicist Nyenhuis might say: *Tolle Lege*.

Jon J. Huisken
Dean of Academic Services
and Registrar Emeritus
Hope College

book review



Elephant Baseball: A Missionary Kid's Tale

Paul Heusinkveld

(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017)

Two hundred eighty-two pages, illustrated

Available online at various prices

The intriguing title is reason enough to pick up and peruse this delightful recent book. It is a compilation of engagingly written, often highly amusing boarding school memories of the author. His parents were Reformed Church in America missionaries stationed at various sites in the Persian Gulf during the 1950s and 1960s. While father Dr. Heusinkveld attended to his medical missions practice, Paul and his older brothers were sent off to the distant missionary boarding school in Kodaikanal, South India, for ten months of the year.

The book provides insight into the emotional adjustments that missionary children had to make because of lengthy separations from their parental homes, living in a strange culture (in his case two—Arab Islamic and Indian Hindu), and striving for acceptance and recognition by peers existing together twenty-four hours a day. But challenges to adolescents in such a context were supplemented with richly broadening exposures that the author recounts appreciatively. He includes tender accounts of highly supportive school staff members. His recital of numerous devious and exciting pranks is told with relish and warmth. This is a book that is both entertaining and instructive.

Many readers of *Origins* know missionary families whose children were educated in a setting like that depicted here. This book will provide insight into what missionary families often experienced in a now largely eclipsed era. It will also deepen appreciation for the missionaries whom churches sent as their surrogate cross-cultural witnesses. This book is number eighty-eight in the Reformed Church in America's Historical Series, a series that graciously includes a number of Christian Reformed titles. The series itself includes a sizeable number of other titles on RCA mission history. It emphasizes the admirable part Christian missions has played in that denomination's history.

Heusinkveld went on to a career in foreign diplomatic service with the US government. He was posted primarily in the Persian Gulf area because of his facility in Arabic and his understanding of the culture in which he was raised. His book acknowledges the important part his life as a missionary child played in preparing him for this calling.

Elephant baseball is an inventive game created in the jungles of mountainous southern India by creative missionary kids on a camping trip. But I'm not explaining it to you! You'll have to read the book to find out all about it!

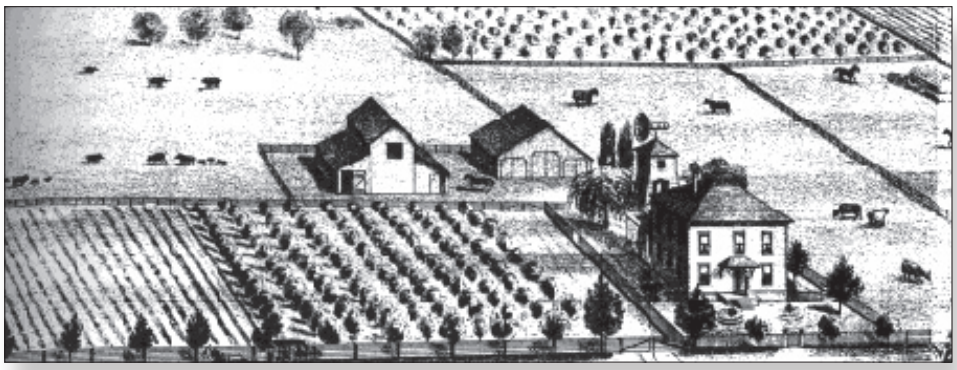
James A. De Jong
Emeritus president and professor
of historical theology
Calvin Theological Seminary

for the future

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

The Rise and Demise of the Wilhelmina Colony in Maryland
by Rachel Hekman

Dutch Farming Colonies in California's Central Valley in the late Nineteenth Century
by David Zwart



Map of Wilhelmina Colony, CA. From: *Tulare County 1892, California.* Image courtesy of the *Official Historical Atlas Map of Tulare County* published by Thos. H. Thompson in 1892.

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