Origins

Origins

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Historical Magazine of the Heritage Hall Archives

Heritage Hall Archives is located in the Hekman Library at Calvin University. It is the archives of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Calvin University.

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

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres
Editor

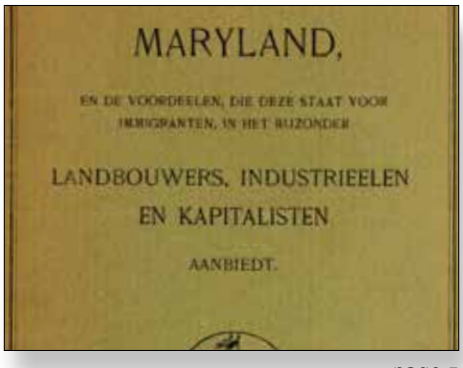
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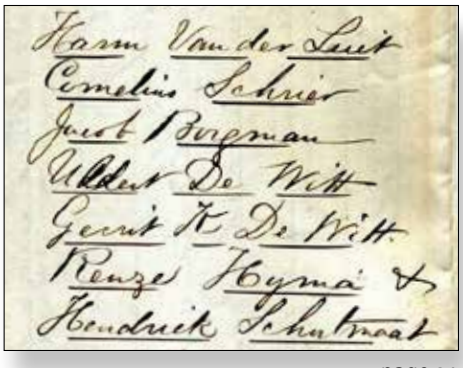
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Cover photo:
Tulare County Citrus Fair.
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From the editor . . .

"Relevant history is inclusive history," stated John Dichtle, President and CEO of the American Association for State and Local History. At *Origins* we also strive to include stories of people and endeavors that were not always successful. In past issues, *Origin*s has published the stories of Dutch colonies that ended tragically, stories of congregations that were organized by members full of hope, faith, and enthusiasm, only to have to close their doors years later.

We begin on the East Coast of the United States, where Rachel Hekman takes us to the ill-fated Wilhelmina Colony in Maryland. Here a group of Dutch immigrants hoped to found a successful colony in the late 1800s, only to be disappointed and eventually disperse. Rachel lives in Maryland, and her interest in the subject shines through. David Zwart then picks up the theme by recounting the stories of some Dutch settlements in California's Central Valley, including one also called the Wilhelmina Colony. And to show just how popular young Queen Wilhelmina was with her countrymen, right between the two coasts, in the state of Missouri, Archbishop Glennon of St. Louis bought thirteen thousand acres in Dunklin County, Missouri, to found his Wilhemina Colony, to be settled by Dutch and Flemish Roman Catholics. Dutch-born Pastor Vincent Tesselaar, a Roman Catholic priest, was recruited to lead the venture. See sidebar on page 7.

Inclusive history also delves into the stories of immigrants of less stellar repute. Loren Lemmen opens his article on the Bergman mystery by stating that the editor of *De Grondwet* noted that it was rare for a Dutchman to be convicted of murder. How rare? *The Grand Rapids Evening Press* of 30 July 1902 reported on the murder of the widow Berendina Heuvelhorst, who refused the advances of her brother-in-law Hermanus Heuvelhorst, for which he shot and killed her.

Rev. Douwe J. Vander Werp, pastor of the Graafschap CRC from 1864 to 1872 and Muskegon CRC from 1872 until 1875, wrote a scathing article in the *Wachter* of 1873 excoriating those immigrants who, in his opinion, were a disgrace. He wrote,

> Even so, in the stream of immigrants into America, there are also many of our fellow Hollanders who have taken flight across the ocean to escape their well-deserved punishment from their creditors and so to evade the results of their heinous crimes, and then continue the same behavior in this land. People who are a disgrace in this country, and who mean that they, while living here, will not be noticed by such who might recognize them. But be not deceived, the Lord will follow them and, in His time, bring their sins into the light of day and will punish them.

During Vander Werp's years in Graafschap, he would have been acquainted with the characters who stirred up a good deal of dust during the Bergman debacle playing out in Allegan County, Michigan. Vander Werp would not have known about Wynsen Sjaardema's flight from his creditors, but even this story, unsavory though it is, deserves to be told if we are to be inclusive and tell the

whole story of Dutch immigration.

What caused Vander Werp to write a two-column editorial in the *Wachter* on this subject? Well, it was personal. A fellow clergyman, Pieter Woudsma, while pastoring the famous Ulrum, Groningen, congregation, ran away with a woman, not his wife, to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he took the name Frederick Wathman. Besides being a clergyman, Woudsma was also a clock- and watchmaker, a skill he used to make a living in America. However, he died after living only four years in Ohio, and Rev. Vander Werp clearly saw this as the hand of God.

But, so as not to leave you disappointed in our shared Dutch heritage, we conclude with the story of Johanna Timmer, a woman ahead of her time, who lived her life in the service of God and others. Interestingly, she was born and raised in the same little community of Graafschap where some twenty-five years prior Bergman had been hounded out of town. Rhonda Penning does her proud.

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

From the interim curator . . .

In the last issue of *Origins*, I mentioned a new venture, a Heritage Hall blog called *Origins Online*. The blog has been live since October 2019. There have been posts about once a week, occasionally twice (it can be found at https://origins.calvin.edu/). I write most of them. A Calvin University history and strategic communication student, Caleb Ackerman, also has been writing stories on a regular basis. We also have a new Heritage Hall Facebook page. We post to it 3–4 times a week (it can be found at https://www.facebook.com/heritagehallarchives/). Both the blog and Facebook page tell stories about the work of Heritage Hall and about the histories associated with the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Dutch North American life.

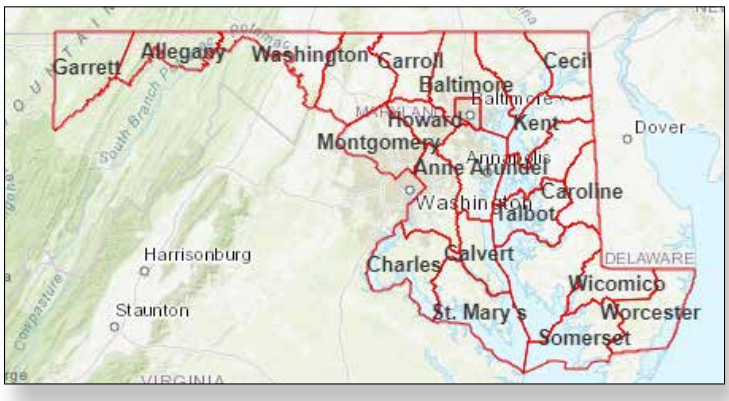
Heritage Hall has a new part-time staff member: Emily Koelzer. I mentioned her as a new volunteer in my notes from the interim editor in the fall 2019 issue of *Origins*. Emily now is on staff and working on digital projects for Heritage Hall and processing new collections. It's great to have her, along with Laurie Haan and Hendrina VanSpronsen. In addition to Caleb Ackerman, we have other students doing internships. One is working on a digital catalog of Heritage Hall's photo collection. Another is working on entering the finding aid for the Calvin University collection into Archon, Heritage Hall's digital finding aid, accessible through the Heritage Hall website and from Google.

William Katerberg

The Ill-Fated Wilhelmina Colony in Maryland

Rachel Hekman

When we think of Maryland—if we think of it at all—we think of crabs, Old Bay seasoning, and Baltimore, not tulips, wooden shoes, and windmills. At the turn of the nineteenth century, however, the Old Line State played host to the Wilhelmina Colony, a small settlement of Netherlander transplants located on the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay and named for the new queen of the Netherlands.[1] The colony, while short-lived, adds an interesting layer to the history of the State of Maryland, which was at one point or another home to refugee English Catholics, as well as enslaved Africans such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. It is also an interesting chapter in the story of Dutch-American history. The immigrant Dutch love their shared culture and religion so deeply that it is unusual to see an instance of a Dutch community so far removed from any other enclave of Netherlanders in the United States. Unfortunately for the Wilhelmina Colony, this distance and degree of separation are what likely led to its failure.



Maryland counties. Image courtesy of Choptankmaps at www.arcpgis.com

In the 1890s, the United States was an industrial powerhouse poised to become a global player. Bookended by the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890 and the Spanish-American War in 1898, the period was marked by innovation and expansion, as well as crime, poverty, and exploitation. Nationwide union strikes, such as the Homestead Strike of 1892, accompanied crippling economic depressions; the frontier was declared closed forever; and gold was discovered in Alaska. Despite this turmoil, immigrants from all over the world streamed into the United States, encouraged by improved ocean travel, political instability in their home countries, and the land the US Government was literally giving away. The Dutch were no exception. The 1880s and 1890s marked another wave of immigration to the United States from the Netherlands, following those who had come in the 1840s, but this time driven by agricultural and economic busts in northern Europe rather than religious conflict. Many of these migrants settled in well-known Dutch communities like Holland and Grand Rapids in Michigan and Pella and Sioux Center in Iowa.

The Dutchmen who came to Maryland's Caroline County in the 1890s,

Rachel Hekman is a graduate of Calvin University and has a master's degree in history from Western Michigan University. She lives in Washington DC, where she teaches high school history and continues to research and write about American religion and Dutch-American culture.

however, sought a different experience: a warmer climate than Minnesota or Michigan could offer, perhaps, or a place near the cold waters of the Atlantic, like their homes in the Netherlands. Some were possibly hoping to capitalize on the important shipping route everyone was expecting the Chesapeake Bay to become, whereas others were likely swayed by the state's intentional courtship of Dutch farmers.

Recruitment

Indeed, in the late nineteenth century, the State of Maryland was faced with a looming agricultural labor shortage.[2] The state's economy, having long relied on the free labor of enslaved Africans, recovered only slowly after the Civil War and emancipation. The Maryland tobacco farmers in particular suffered from postwar inflation, coupled with a declining European demand for American produce. Many Maryland landowners lost or gave up their farms in the 1870s and 1880s and moved west in search of better opportunities. Those who were left saw their farms gradually decreasing in size—from an average size of 121 acres in 1890 to 87.2 acres in 1929 in Caroline County alone—along with a lack of qualified agricultural workers.[3] The state government had unused land, a flagging economy, and a desire to compete with the highly productive Midwestern states.

For a state as wracked with racial tensions and the legacy of slavery as it was with economic and agricultural stagnation, the chance to bring a white, northern European, and Protestant population to Maryland's shores was similarly invaluable. The state's Dutch-language pamphlet declared that "The move of the Negro element to cities has resulted in the division of large farms into smaller parcels and paves the way for immigrants and others who want good


MARYLAND,

EN DE VOORDEELEN, DIE DEZE STAAT VOOR IMMIGRANTEN, IN HET BIJZONDER

LANDBOUWERS, INDUSTRIEELEN EN KAPITALISTEN

AANBIEDT.

UITGEGEVEN DOOR

HET STAATS IMMIGRATIE-BUREAU

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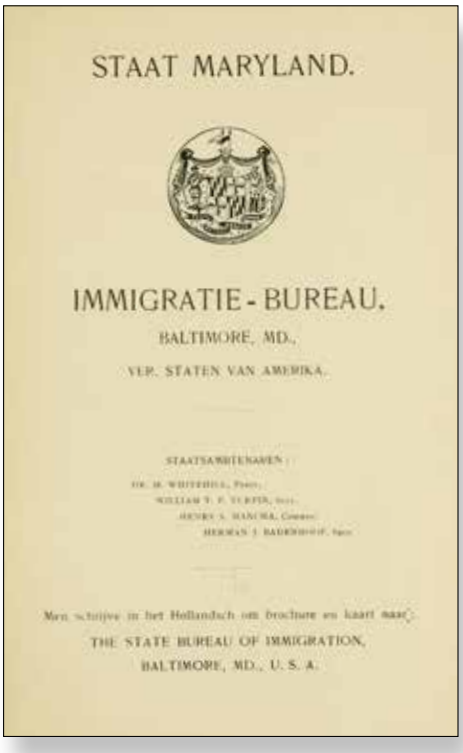
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND.

Recruiting Dutch immigrants brochure. Image courtesy of Maryland. Bureau of Immigration, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.

and cheap land with a pleasant social environment."[4] The implication of this passage in a booklet designed to encourage immigration is that the Dutch were of an ethnicity that Maryland considered to make "good, desirable immigrants," and that other types of immigrants were not.[5]

Therefore, Maryland made a concerted effort in the 1890s to woo Dutch and German immigrants to its shores. The state's Bureau of Immigration was founded in 1896 "to encourage immigration" to the region; the ideal candidate for secretary of the Bureau was a man "conversant with English, the German, Dutch and French languages."[6] Clearly, the intention from the beginning was to appeal directly to northern Europeans, who had reputations of being skilled farmers.[7]

The first secretary of the Bureau of Immigration was, fittingly, a Dutchman. Born in the Netherlands, Cornelis W. Van Der Hoogt was a Dutch American with a previous unsuccessful colonization experience—in 1892, he had been part of an ill-fated Dutch settlement in Colorado's San Luis Valley.[8] Upon his appointment in 1896, Van Der Hoogt oversaw the publication of several pamphlets and advertisements in the Dutch language, encouraging Dutch "landowners, farmers, and capitalists" to immigrate to the state. One pamphlet called it the "*beloofde land*"—the promised land.[9] The ground in Maryland, it said, was "cheap," the climate


STAAT MARYLAND.

IMMIGRATIE - BUREAU.

BALTIMORE, MD.,

VER. STATEN VAN AMERIKA.

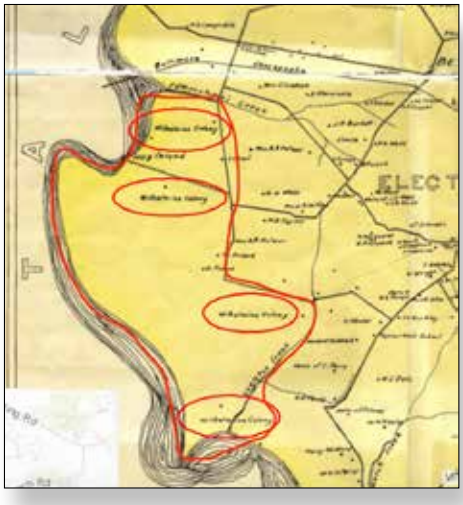
STAATSAMBTENAREN:

THE STATE BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION,

BALTIMORE, MD., U. S. A.

Recruiting Dutch immigrants brochure. Image courtesy of Maryland Bureau of Immigration, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD.

"infinitely better," and the benefits "greater" than the American West.[10] A subsequent 1899 ad published in the Dutch-language Iowa newspaper *De Volksvriend* lauded Maryland as a "great future for Dutch colonies," drawing particular attention to the state's agricultural potential.[11] Thus Maryland was recruiting Dutch



Carolina County showing Wilhelmina settlements. Image courtesy of Choptankmaps at www.arcpgis.com

farmers both from the Netherlands and from the United States itself.

Van Der Hoogt also traveled to the Netherlands and Germany to personally invite farmers in that region to immigrate to Wilhelmina and other parts of the state—a trip that was publicized in the Maryland press.[12] Part of Van Der Hoogt's efforts also included inviting the future Netherlands Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper to the United States in 1898 to tour Wilhelmina Colony himself as a sign of the venture's legitimacy.[13] Kuyper approved of the experiment, lauding Maryland as an ideal state in which to settle. He noted that the chance for being swindled was low, as the state was particularly invested in "getting a desirable class of people within its borders."[14]

Dating

There was no official "opening date" for the Wilhelmina Colony. In 1896, the state began printing brochures in Dutch; by 1897, maps of Caroline County already bore the name "Wilhelmina Colony."[15] A report published by the US Industrial Commission on Immigration in 1901 suggests that it was 1898 that saw the beginnings of the colony, but the *Denton* (Maryland) *Journal*, the newspaper of the Caroline County seat, reported that Dutch settlers had arrived in the colony as early as March of 1897: "The party of Hollanders who left Perkins, Iowa, to settle in this county, arrived in Baltimore last Saturday, and at Wilhelmina, their destination, the day following."[16] Van der Hoogt accompanied them to the site, but it is not known if he lingered long. It is, therefore, clear that the Wilhelmina Colony was founded in 1897, however slowly it grew afterward.

Even so, by the start of the First World War the colony had more or less dissolved. A history of the Eastern Shores published in 1916 remarks that the colony "was established . . . two decades ago" and had been broken up by the Dutch by the time of publication. Another local guide from 1920 agreed that "several years ago [the families] began to move away, and at present there are only a few of the former families living here."[17] The colony had, at best, lasted fifteen years.

Location

Wilhelmina Colony was located on Maryland's Eastern Shore, the eastern side of the Chesapeake Bay on the peninsula that separates the Bay from the Atlantic Ocean.[18] Members of the colony occupied several thousand acres of land on the eastern shore of the Choptank River, a major tributary of the Chesapeake Bay, on the boundary line of Caroline and Talbot counties. From the Choptank River, an ambitious sailor could make their way to Baltimore, Washington DC, or even Norfolk—all important nineteenth-century cities. The settlement was between the towns of Bethlehem and Preston (which several contemporary sources suggest was the location of a German colony or community founded around the same time) but relatively remote and rural compared to the nearby industrial city of Baltimore.[19]


De Staat
MARYLAND
State Bureau of Immigratio
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND.

Ad running from 1898 through 1899 in the Dutch-language newspaper *De Volksvriend*, extolling the state of Maryland. Image courtesy *De Volksvriend* on www.delpher.nl

The land that the Wilhelmina colonists occupied had once been part of a large colonial plantation, the first land patented in Caroline County in 1773.[20] The plantation had been owned by the aristocratic Frazier family, who at one point owned one thousand four hundred acres of land along the Choptank in Caroline and Talbot counties—the Frazier surname remains on street names and neighborhoods in Preston today. It was in the old Frazier house, a grand eighteenth-century Federal-style home, that the Wilhelmina settlers would gather for worship.[21]

Other Dutchmen would soon enter the region, settling in another Van Der Hoogt colony further south on the Eastern Shore in Somerset County. The Dutch settlers arriving on the Eastern Shore in 1897 would have found a landscape and a society not unlike the one they had left in the Netherlands: a shoreline view, an agricultural economy, and a Germanic population.

Expectations vs. Reality

The Dutch were welcomed to Maryland with open arms in 1897. "They are welcome," said the *Denton Journal* as the first settlers arrived in the state.

"The Eastern Shore needs more just such people."[22] The failure of the Maryland agricultural economy in the nineteenth century had many residents of the state worried, and they believed that the Dutch would help improve the many acres of land that had lain fallow since the abolition of slavery. The officials hoped that the "thrifty Northern European farmers" would reinvigorate the economy.[23]

However, the reality of the colony itself was not as sunny as the American observers would have had it. From the beginning, there seemed to be a disconnect between the expectations the Dutch had of the new land and the reality of it. The State of Maryland advertised the land on the Eastern Shore as being "wonderful farmland," "infinitely better and more pleasant" than the land in the American West.[24] While the Dutch immigrants did appreciate the climate, finding the relative warmth of the region a "welcome relief" from the raw cold of the Midwest, the soil of Wilhelmina Colony was sandy – not impossible to cultivate, but difficult, and not for the inexperienced farmer.[25] Even according to Marylanders, the soil was poor in nutrients and "somewhat neglected because in Maryland the land needs fertilizing."[26]

It quickly became clear that eking out a profitable living from the Choptank River land would be more difficult than it had appeared, especially by cultivating fruit, as the intention of the initial settlers had been.[27] "Generally," wrote one settler in 1899, clearly peeved at the complaints of others at the difficulty of the undertaking, "people who want to undertake something without means, and hope to be successful was never the case."[28] The *Baltimore Sun* quoted one early settler as reporting optimistically that "the soil is susceptible to much improvement"; another commented that "in the old country, [we] grow as much on an acre as has been grown here on ten."[29] "[The soil] was little more than blowsand," Andrew Pasma, one of the early settlers, later recalled, and "we were always struggling with brier such as I have never found in Michigan."[30] Jacobus Vermullen, a resident of the colony who left after three years, put it more bluntly in *De Volksvriend* when he called the entire venture "humbug."[31]

Perhaps because of the soil quality, Wilhelmina Colony got off to a slow start. The initial group appears to have been around twenty-five Dutch settlers from near Orange City, Iowa, who arrived in the colony in March of 1897.[32] Most settlers arrived with nothing but the bare minimum of necessities and found spartan conditions: rough roads and raw pine sharecropper cabins that were "not quite clean enough according to Dutch standards" even several years into the colony's existence.[33] Still, new settlers trickled in to Wilhelmina—a family here, a family there, mostly coming from other parts of the United States.[34] By 1900, roughly forty Dutch individuals lived in Caroline County, according to the United States Federal Census; another handful of Dutch families lived in neighboring Talbot County, including fourteen recent arrivals from the Netherlands who were likely considered part of the colony.[35] In 1905, though, only one Netherlands immigrant was recorded as having arrived in Maryland.[36] By 1910, there were only twenty-five Dutchmen left in the colony.[37] Wilhelmina Colony could not have numbered more than a hundred Dutch-born at any given time—a far cry from Van Der Hoogt's expectation of thousands.[38]

The Wilhelmina Colony in Missouri

A Catholic colony of Hollanders on the St. Francis River, one hundred miles south of St. Louis, is described at much length in a recent issue of the *St. Louis Republic,* which quotes:

Ten years ago, even five years ago, the water moccasin and the big green frog were the sole inhabitants of whole townships in the "Big Hole" country. Then the Hollanders came. Ditches were dug, and the green waters that had covered parts of Dunklin County since the year of the New Madrid quake vanished. Windmills took the place of the big water oaks. Wooden shoes splashed in the black mud of the roads that ran through the slashes. White caps, from time immemorial the headdress of the Holland women, bobbed in the village street. Stolid Dutch farmers, descendants of a hundred generations of dike builders, cheesemakers, and dairymen, settled on the rich, black earth that lies in the bend of the St. Francis River. Now there is a school where little Dutch children go. There is a parish church where the sermons are preached in the same tongue that you hear along the Zuyder Zee. There is a mill, a blacksmith shop, a store, and the usual little businesses that a rural community must have. The name of this little community is Wilhelmina, and all its officials are Hollanders. At the meetings of the town council nothing but Dutch is spoken. The mayor is a Dutchman. If they had any need for a town marshal, he, too, would be a Hollander. The merchants, the blacksmith, the teachers, and the carpenters are all Dutchmen. Of the 200 souls in Wilhelmina practically everyone is a Hollander. The pastor, Father Tesselaar, is also a Hollander.

The Sacred Heart Review, Vol. 49, No. 6, 25 Jan 1913

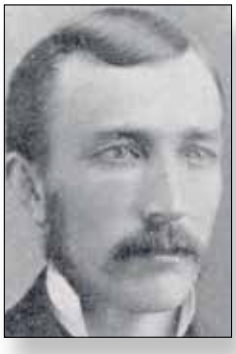
Reasons for Dispersal

Indeed, the poor soil drove many of

the Wilhelmina colonists to work for wages in nearby factories or as laborers on larger farms, opening up what could have otherwise been a tight-knit, if isolated, ethnic enclave.[39] Later on, families like the Pasmas split up as sons and daughters moved back to larger Dutch communities in search of better opportunities: Hilda Pasma moved to Paterson, New Jersey, to work in a dressmaking factory; Henry Pasma moved to Holland, Michigan, to attend Hope College; Thomas Pasma and his wife, Katy DeBoer, moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, for Thomas to attend Calvin College; and the rest of the DeBoer family followed them shortly afterward.[40]

Perhaps it is this pattern of inevitable return to larger Dutch enclaves that helps explain why Wilhelmina, and other far-flung Dutch colonies like it, failed. In Wilhelmina, the few children of the colony were educated amidst American classmates in the nearby Hog Island School, learning American subjects and being taught in English. Andrew Pasma notes that his parents made a point to teach him and his siblings theology at home, however, stringently refusing to send them to "the local English Sunday Schools."[41] Clearly, the Wilhelmina settlers desired a community that was culturally Dutch, and perhaps the failure of the colony was due to competing visions of this "Dutchness." Wilhelmina was an equal combination of Netherlands-born Dutch and American-born Dutch, with parents born in the "old country" raising children born in the United States. The two groups, by necessity of their birthplaces and their generations, would have had different perspectives on assimilation, identity, and what it meant to be Dutch. Pasma, for instance, was baffled at his parents' insistence on worshiping in a Dutch church.[42] Either way, the steady stream of failed colonists from Wilhelmina suggests that the attempt to forge this cohesive community was not successful.

Pasma believes that it was the failure of the Dutch Reformed church community in particular that was the true death knell for Wilhelmina. For Sunday worship, the colony met in the Frazier house, crowding only seven or eight families together in a room on the second floor to conduct services in Dutch. They were ministered to at first by Rev. Rense Joldersma, who, the *Baltimore Sun* reported, arrived in the colony in early May 1897.[43] Joldersma, a minister of the Reformed Church, had traveled from Philadelphia to serve as a missionary of the denomination.[44] He made his home in Pocomoke City in Worchester County. It is likely that he went back and forth between Wilhelmina and the Somerset Colony.[45] He seems not to have served either Maryland congregation any later than 1899, however; in September, he asked to "lay down his ministerial credentials to work for the state" and became, however briefly, a land agent for the Somerset colony.[46]



R. H. Joldersma. Image courtesy Van Wylen Library, Hope College, Holland, MI.

It is unclear who ministered to the Wilhelmina church after his departure. A 1905 report in *De Grondwet* indicates that there was a Rev. Versteeg and a Rev. Schilstra in residence at that time, though neither seems to have served the Wilhelmina Colony for long.[47] In the absence of a reliable minister, the elders of the small congregation read "long and exhausting dissertations" from the works of Reformed theologians such as Kuyper and Bavinck. The end result, according to Pasma, was regular and heated debates on infant baptism, infra- and supra-lapsarianism, and the use of New Testament songs in worship.[48] "The wrangling continued unabated," Pasma writes, and the members of the small community were constantly at odds with each other.[49] "There is no church life here," lamented a colonist



Talbot County Courthouse early 1900. Image courtesy of Robert G. Merrick Archives of Maryland Historical Photographs, State of Maryland Archives, Baltimore, MD.

to *De Grondwet* in 1908 after listing various families who had left the colony; "the colony did not flourish . . . because there was no church community here."[50] Without a shepherd to lead and to coalesce the various factions, the sheep scattered.

By 1908, families had begun to leave the colony *en masse*. Some, like Hilda Pasma, went in search of better opportunities, but more still left in the hopes of finding a better community. They "wanted to live, especially for their children's sake, near a Dutch church," as *De Grondwet* put it.[51] With only two Dutch families left by 1910, the church disbanded, and the colony followed soon after.

The decline of the Wilhelmina Colony, then, cannot be ascribed merely to economic issues. The land was difficult to work, surely, but the Dutch do not tend to shy away from difficult agriculture. Despite easier soil and more initial prosperity than Wilhelmina, the Dutch colony in Somerset County failed as well. Maryland, most observers agreed, was pleasant—it was not the state that pushed them away.[52] Rather, it was "community" that the Dutch colonists lacked, and they felt its deprivation most severely. They desired Dutch churches, schools, and fellowship, neither of which could be had in Maryland, and perhaps they could not agree on what those things even should look like. The rifts in the Reformed church in Wilhelmina proved fatal to the small community, and it is no accident that afterwards, the last of the Dutch families left Caroline County "as soon as they [could] sell their farms for a decent price."[53]

Maryland had much to offer Dutch settlers in 1897: decent land, cheap prices, proximity to resources, a comfortable climate, and a welcoming populace. Proponents believed it was the ideal place for a Dutch colony and pushed it aggressively. What more could a Dutchman want? "Castles in the air," one commenter later remarked of the colony's early ambitions; "nothing left of that dream."[54] What Maryland could not offer was less tangible, but all the more important: the simple pleasures of living alongside people who shared the same language, the same culture, and the same religion, whatever that truly meant.

Endnotes

1. Wilhelmina (1880–1962) was queen of the Netherlands from 1890 to 1948. Her mother, Queen Emma, acted as regent until 1898, when Wilhelmina came of age. She was immensely popular. In 1948 she abdicated in favor of her daughter Juliana.

2. Maryland State Archives, "Maryland Department of Labor," Maryland Manual On-Line https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/20dllr/html/dllrf.html (accessed 3 Feb 2020); James G. Gibb and Sherri Marsh Johns, "Epp Farmstead: Germans Homesteading a Charles County Farm," *Preservation Matters* 2018–2019, 31.

3. Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland, A Middle Temperament: 1634–1980* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 328; H. B. Winant and S. R. Bacon, *Soil Survey of Caroline County, Maryland* (Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, 1929), 4–8.

4. Maryland Bureau of Immigration, *Maryland, en de voordeelen, die deze staat voor immigranten, in het bijzonder landbouwers, industrieelen en kapitalisten aanbiedt*, (Baltimore: Press of Schneidereith & Sons, 1896), 25.

5. 61st Congress: 1st session, *Senate Documents,* Vol. 3 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909), 97.

6. John Prentice Poe, *Supplement to the Code of General Public Laws of Maryland . . . 1890, 1892, 1894, 1896, 1898* (Baltimore: Press of the King Bros., 1898), 359–360.

7. "The Dutch Settlement," *Denton* (Maryland) *Journal,* 24 July 1897.

8. Dorothy Roberts, "A Dutch Colony in Colorado," *The Colorado Magazine,* Vol. XVII, No. 6: 229 – 236; Peter De Klerk, "The Alamosa Disaster," *Origins,* Vol. IV No. 1:22–26.

9. *Maryland, en de voordeelen,* 6.

10. Ibid.

11. "De staat MARYLAND," *De Volksvriend*, 7 December 1899; Van der Hoogt was also an agent for the Prudential Land Company of Baltimore.

12. "To persuade settlers to come here," *Denton* (Maryland) *Journal*, 30 July 1898.

13. James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 293–294.

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17. Swepson Earle, ed., *Maryland's Colonial Eastern Shore: Historical Sketches of Counties and of Some Notable Structures, Illustrated* (New York: Weathervane Books, 1916), 161; Cochrane, *History of Caroline County*, 258.

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24. *Maryland, en de voordeelen*, 49.

25. "The Dutch Settlement Growing," *Denton Journal*, 6 March 1897.

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27. "Thrifty Settlers at Wilhelmina," *Denton Journal*, 10 April 1897.

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29. "Pleased with Maryland," *Baltimore Sun*, 27 February 1897; "Dutch Settlers at Wilhelmina," *Baltimore Sun*, 6 April 1897.

30. Pasma, HH Archives.

31. "No Promised Land," *De Volksvriend*, 1 March 1900.

32. "Thrifty Settlers at Wilhelmina."

33. "Dutch Settlement Growing"; Pasma, HH Archives.

34. *De Volksvriend*, 3 March 1898; *De Grondwet*, 23 May 1905.

35. 1900 United States Federal Census (USFS); "Immigrants from Holland," *Baltimore Sun*, 18 January 1900; "Pleased with Maryland," Baltimore Sun, 27 February 1897.

36. "Fewer Immigrants Come," *Baltimore Sun*, 2 January 1905.

37. 1900 USFC.

38. "Dutch settlement growing."

39. Pasma, HH Archives.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. "The Dutch Colony," *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 May 1897; Russell L. Gasero, compiler, *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). Rev. Rense H. Joldersma (1854 Netherlands–1913 USA) was an RCA pastor from 1884 until 1913. He was missionary among the Dutch in Maryland from 1899–1901.

44. Ibid.; Pasma, HH Archives.

45. Henry S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America: Dutch Immigration to the United States and Canada, 1789–1950* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 320.

46. *De Grondwet*, 25 February 1902; De Volksvriend, 21 September 1899. RCA Classis Wisconsin, meeting on 11 September 1899, had a long and serious discussion about Rev. R. H. Joldersma giving up his ministerial position at a special RCA Chicago Classis on 8 August 1899 in order to become the "Supervisor of Colonies" in Maryland. Classis Wisconsin argued that a minister in the RCA could not give up his ministerial position without just cause, but since it had been approved at the Chicago Classis, there was not much they could do about it. Joldersma did not serve long as Supervisor of Colonies. In De Grondwet of 25 February 1902, the Dutch settlers in Maryland advertised for "an honest land agent." By January 1902 Joldersma was living in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and serving Grace RCA, but by August 1902 he had accepted the appointment of Education Agent of Hope College.

47. *De Grondwet*, 23 May 1905; Johannes de Haas, Gedenkt Uw Voorgangers (Haarlem, Vijlbrief, 1984), Vol 2, 350. Dirk Versteeg (1846 the Netherlands–1905 USA) was an evangelist in the province of Zeeland, the Netherlands. In 1900 he emigrated and served the Netherlands Reformed Church in Paterson, New Jersey, where he was given emeritus status for health reasons. He visited the Maryland colony occasionally and died circa 1906 in New Jersey; Gasero, *RCA Directory*. Rev. Sybrandus A. Schilstra (1840 Netherlands–1916 USA) was licensed in Rotterdam, the Netherlands; emigrated in 1892; served First Rochester, New York, RCA 1892–1901. Would also visit the Wilhelmina Colony occasionally.

48. Pasma, HH Archives.

49. Pasma, HH Archives.

50. From Bethlehem, Maryland," *De Grondwet*, 3 November 1908.

51. "From Preston, Maryland," *De Grondwet*, 13 December 1910.

52. "From Preston, Maryland," *De Grondwet*, 11 March 1911.

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The Queen Wilhelmina Colony and Other Dutch Farming Colonies in California's Central Valley in the Late Nineteenth Century

David Zwart

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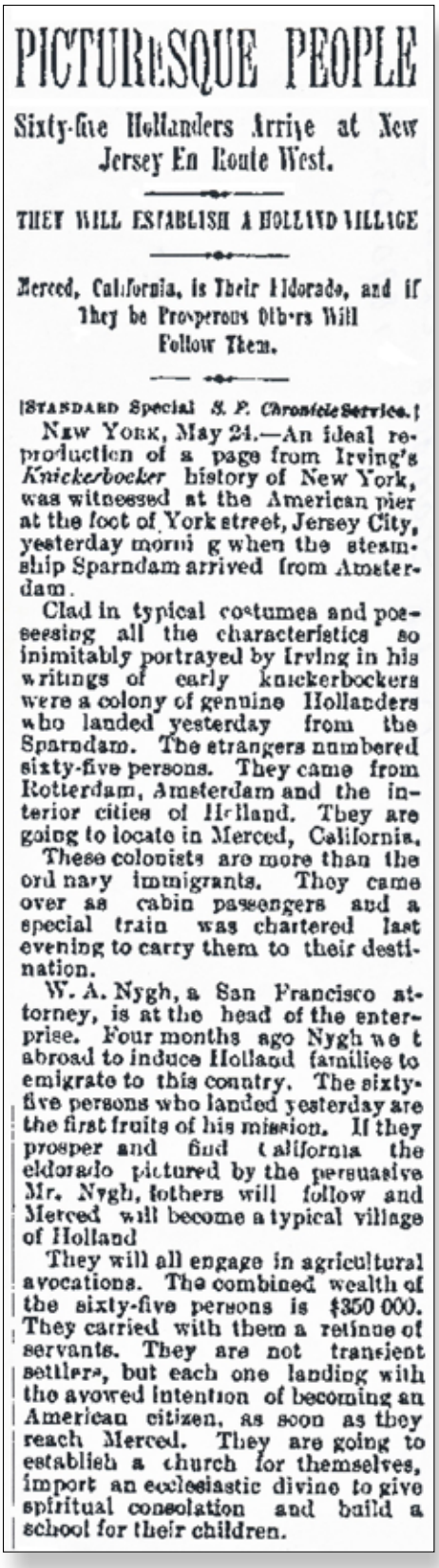
California occupies an almost mystical place in America's consciousness. It has been seen as El Dorado from the time of the Gold Rush, a place to get rich quick. California's cultural diversity resulted partly from its lure as El Dorado. The lure of gold drew immigrants from around the world. Dutch immigration to California was relatively small before 1890, when the census counted only seven hundred ninety living in California. The counties with the largest Dutch population included San Francisco County with two hundred and seven, Merced County with sixty-six, Sacramento County with fifty-four, and Los Angeles County with fifty-two.[1]

As gold mining decreased, a booming agricultural economy that promised the same quick wealth continued to draw immigrants from around the world to the Golden State. Dutch immigrants joined this migration in larger numbers in the late nineteenth century in search of agricultural riches. Dutch immigrant historian Henry Lucas claimed that Hollanders "were attracted [to California] by the lure of perennial sunshine and easy wealth."[2] The advent of colonies that sold small tracts of land in the Central Valley made the California dream seem more attainable in the late nineteenth century. Dutch immigrants founded a colony in Merced County in 1890. Another group established a colony in Fresno County in 1891. While both of these colonies would eventually fail, a third colonization effort in Kings County started an enduring Dutch immigrant community in that county.

Agriculture in the Southern Central Valley

The southern Central Valley stretches over two hundred fifty miles from north to south and about sixty miles from east to west, with an elevation change of only five to ten feet per mile. Even though rainfall averages only ten inches per year, farmers irrigate with water from the San Joaquin, Kings, Kaweah, Kern, and Tule rivers originating in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Valley agriculture also benefits from a long growing season with temperatures rarely dipping below freezing in the winter and summers of seemingly endless sunshine. The mixture of rich soil, water for irrigation, and sunshine has attracted many people to the Central Valley. A small number of Dutch immigrants were also drawn by the Valley's enticements.

Prior to the group of Dutch immigrants arriving in Merced County in 1890, agriculture in the Central Valley had undergone significant changes. When Spain and Mexico ruled California, the Central Valley was largely overlooked because of



PICTURESQUE PEOPLE

Sixty-five Hollanders Arrive at New Jersey En Route West.

THEY WILL ESTABLISH A HOLLAND VILLAGE

Merced, California, is Their Eldorado, and if They be Prosperous Others Will Follow Them.

[STANDARD Special S. F. Chronicle Service.]

NEW YORK, May 24.—An ideal reproduction of a page from Irving's *Knickerbocker* history of New York, was witnessed at the American pier at the foot of York street, Jersey City, yesterday morning when the steamship Sparndam arrived from Amsterdam.

Clad in typical costumes and possessing all the characteristics so inimitably portrayed by Irving in his writings of early knickerbockers were a colony of genuine Hollanders who landed yesterday from the Sparndam. The strangers numbered sixty-five persons. They came from Rotterdam, Amsterdam and the interior cities of Holland. They are going to locate in Merced, California.

These colonists are more than the ordinary immigrants. They came over as cabin passengers and a special train was chartered last evening to carry them to their destination.

W. A. Nygh, a San Francisco attorney, is at the head of the enterprise. Four months ago Nygh went abroad to induce Holland families to emigrate to this country. The sixty-five persons who landed yesterday are the first fruits of his mission. If they prosper and find California the eldorado pictured by the persuasive Mr. Nygh, others will follow and Merced will become a typical village of Holland.

They will all engage in agricultural avocations. The combined wealth of the sixty-five persons is $350 000. They carried with them a retinue of servants. They are not transient settlers, but each one landing with the avowed intention of becoming an American citizen, as soon as they reach Merced. They are going to establish a church for themselves, import an ecclesiastic divine to give spiritual consolation and build a school for their children.

Dutch coming to Merced, CA. Image courtesy of the *Ogden Standard Examiner, 25 May 1890.*

its distance from trade and population centers. The land was not given as grants to Spanish and Mexican inhabitants, as was the case in other parts of the state.[3] After its becoming part of the United States, gold seekers passed through the Central Valley on their way to the Sierra Nevada Mountains. When gold lost its luster, settlers looked to exploit the resources of the Valley. Cattle grazed the vast open lands beginning shortly after statehood. The livestock roamed freely, and the stockmen, according to an early account, "agreed among themselves and allotted each man his bounds; and yet none were compelled to confine his herds to that tract of land."[4] Twice a year, ranchers rounded up all the stock on their land and separated them by their brands. Land speculators eventually snatched up much of the Valley in large sections. In partnership, Miller and Lux together became one of the largest landowners, and they used their huge land holdings to raise cattle for their slaughterhouse in San Francisco.[5] Droughts in 1864 and again in 1877 exacerbated a situation in which there were more animals than the natural forage could support.[6] The livestock industry lost its dominance by the 1890s as the major agricultural activity to extract the wealth of the Valley.

Farmers, condescendingly called "sandlappers" by the stockmen, eventually controlled agriculture.[7] The arrival of railroads in the Valley in the 1870s encouraged more settlers to cultivate the land because agricultural products could be moved to market more easily. Already in the 1850s and 1860s, farmers planted grain crops along the Kings River in the Mussel Slough area and in the delta region east of Visalia. They used limited irrigation and relied on winter rains to grow crops for local consumption.[8] These early experiments encouraged other farmers to cultivate more wheat and barley, but freely-roaming stock limited the growth of farming. The cost to fence in land was prohibitive, and only the wealthiest could afford it; the cost to fence in one hundred sixty acres with wood could approach twenty-three hundred dollars. In 1874, the California legislature passed a "no fence" law, making the stockmen responsible for the damage their livestock caused to the grain farmers' crops. Enforcing the law created conflict between farmers and stockmen. One notable incident occurred in 1878, when a large number of cattle were shot south of the Tule River; "it was never known to the authorities who the guilty parties were."[9] Many stockmen were convinced by this and similar incidents that they needed to rein in their livestock.

With the annoyance of livestock gone and the accessibility of markets due to the railroads, the grain market exploded. For instance, between 1867 and 1887 the acreage of wheat in Tulare County increased from an estimated 3,236 acres to 349,452 acres. Bonanza wheat farms encompassed hundreds and thousands of acres.[10] A scarcity of labor required these farmers to invest in new machinery for their immense operations.[11] During the 1880s, the fortunes of the wheat farmers rose and fell with the amount of rain in the given year. This "dry land" wheat farming, relying only on the rain that fell from November to April, reached its zenith in 1884.[12] Single-crop farmers tried to extract as much wealth as possible from the Valley's land, always hoping for the next bonanza year. Farmers eventually realized that they needed to break their dependence on unpredictable rain in order to maximize the use of the land. Large-scale irrigation projects would provide a more reliable water source for wheat but also encourage the cultivation of more profitable crops.

With irrigation, farmers turned to

fruit orchards and grape vineyards that needed regular watering throughout the summer but provided a much higher income than single-crop farms. Fruit and grape production started



Map of Kings County in California. Image courtesy Tulare County California, published by Thos. H. Thompson in 1892.

slowly in the 1880s but grew rapidly in the 1890s. Farmers formed local irrigation districts following the passage of the Wright Irrigation Law in 1887, which settled many of the legal disputes between riparian and appropriation water rights.[13] They built extensive irrigation ditches to control the flow of water coming down the mountain rivers. Other farmers dug artesian wells to irrigate their orchards and vineyards.

Large landowners and corporations continued to operate in agriculture and developed land. In the *Official Historical Atlas Map of Tulare County,* the writer called the Paige and Morton Company's land holdings "the largest orchard in the State." It had a "very systematic" management and employed from two hundred fifty to five hundred people.[14] These corporations often invested the money and allowed a local manager to handle the farm. Other large landowners lacked the capital resources necessary to build irrigation ditches and plant orchards and vineyards. According to Tulare County historian Marion Nelson, some large landowners found it more "profitable to subdivide their land into smaller acreages. It was then sold to incoming settlers . . . [or] companies which purchased tracts of land to grow fruit."[15] While large farmers benefited from selling the land, small farmers could finally get their foot in the door of California land ownership. The *Kings County Resources Illustrated*, published in 1897, describes many independent farmers. For instance, Antonio Leoni owned eighty acres and reported revenue of $6,925 in one year in the 1890s


GELDBELEGGING

IN

CALIFORNIË

EN DE

QUEEN WILHELMINA KOLONIE

DOOR

L. C. LENS,
Directeur der Queen Wilhelmina Kolonie
HANFORD, TULARE COUNTY, Californië

voor rekening van den Schrijver.

ROTTERDAM
P. M. BAZENDIJK
1893

Louis C. Lens Investment brochure. Image courtesy Leesmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

from sixty acres of peaches, prunes, apricots, pears, and various kinds of "raisin vines."[16]

The Colony System

One of the best ways for small farmers to acquire land was through the colony system. The colony system started in the 1870s and continued throughout the 1880s and 1890s in the Central Valley. Most colonies encompassed two or more sections of land (1,280 acres), with the average size of an individual colonist's tract being twenty acres.[17] Early maps of Fresno and Tulare counties show both large and small colonies scattered over the east side of each county.[18] This system not only allowed large landowners to sell their land in small segments, often at a premium price, but also helped small settlers. According to historian Kevin Starr, the colony scheme "allowed Californians to pool financial and social resources in pursuit of economic survival and that more elusive but equally American ambition of community."[19] For instance, the colonists worked together to secure water rights because the irrigation companies would sell water only to tracts of at least one hundred sixty acres. Leaders of colonies offered to help the tenants learn how to grow fruit. The colonists improved their colonies by building roads and planting ornamental trees together. Some of the most organized colonies established their own schools and fraternal societies.

The success of the earliest colonies encouraged many colony schemes. One of the first colonies, the Central California Colony, demonstrated the benefits of this type of system. According to the 1907 *Fresno County California Historical Atlas*, "Before this colony was settled, wheat was grown on the land now occupied by it, and netted annually not more than $25,000, while only one family lived on the six sections; now the same land yields an annual cash return of from $500,000 to $700,000, while nearly two hundred families have comfortable and happy homes on it."[20] Many colonies followed the model of the Central California Colony and were based purely on economic gain and community building. Another, the Church Temperance Colony, was based on the social goal of abstinence from alcohol. Other colonies, such as the Scandinavian and Swedish colonies, were based on shared ethnicity. While these

social and ethnic colonies started with strict rules on membership, eventually the rules loosened.

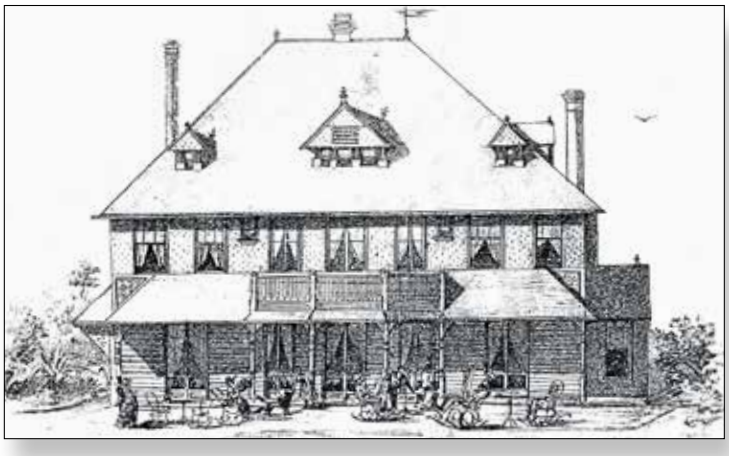


Dutch Young Settlers. Front Row: l. to r., Dick Versluys and Jake DeRuiter; Back Row: l. to r., S. deJong, Neil Schreuder, Arend Vanden Akker, Luke Van Herwynen, Frank Bakker, and Neil Slikker. Image courtesy First Hanford CRC 45th Anniversary booklet.

Dutch Colonies

The Dutch immigrants who arrived in the Central Valley in the early 1890s arrived during the height of the colony system and transition to fruit farming. These Dutch settlers bought land from Dutch capitalists who tried to establish colonies. Like similar colonies, the promoters promised to be "bourgeois agricultural settlement[s] providing a pastoral lifestyle, according to Kevin Starr."[21] Dutch colonists were told to expect nothing less as they attempted colonization in Merced and Fresno counties. The reality of poor soil quality and hard work doomed both enterprises.

In Merced County, the Holland California Land Company painted an "irresponsibly rosy" picture of agricultural opportunities, according to Jacob Van Hinte. Headquartered in San Francisco, the company sent W. A. Nijgh and J. H. De Veer to the Netherlands to recruit prospective buyers. Nijgh had lived in San Francisco for sixteen years, and De Veer had traveled for three years in the United States. The Holland California Land Company acquired four thousand acres from the Crocker-Huffman Land and Water Company, which had created Yosemite Lake for irrigation. Two-hundred acres were set aside for a town site named Rotterdam with the rest divided into twenty-acre plots. The company offered the land for $160 to $200 an acre. A 60 percent down payment was required before leaving the Netherlands, with the remainder due upon arrival or in four annual payments at 8 percent interest. The water would be available from the Crocker-Huffman Canal Company for one dollar per acre per year.[22]



Hotel Amsterdam in Fresno, CA. Image courtesy W. F. Andriessen, *Calfornie, met het oog of Nederlandsche Landverhuizer*, Amsterdam: Seyffardt's Boekhandel.

The company used the quality of the land and the advantages of the colony arrangement in their sales pitch. Nijgh and De Veer directed their efforts toward

> the younger generation who have been educated and have attended agricultural schools and other institutions for secondary and higher technical training to run a better kind of farming enterprise than formerly. Another category is the broader stream of young men from good families who possess ability, but not enough means to develop these abilities under the present economic situation in the Netherlands. . . . In short, everybody should come who feels that California promises more with less effort than the Fatherland.[23]

The company sold over thirteen hundred acres in 1889 and 1890 without any investors even seeing the land.

The first group of immigrants arrived in the spring of 1890 and immediately encountered problems. The company had made many false promises. Houses and sheds had to be built and wells dug, even though these had all been promised to the colonists. The climate was not nearly as mild as the salesmen had assured. The colonists suffered winters with dense fog and summers with oppressive heat. Farm work required much more effort than the company claimed. Some colonists arrived with more interest in "their beer mugs and tobacco pipes than about sustained work."[24] Even with the many broken promises, things seemed hopeful by the end of 1890, with more than 135 people inhabiting the colony. The situation turned dire in 1891, however, when the roots of the trees, especially olive trees, hit "hardpan." Water and roots

could not penetrate this hard layer of soil only a few feet under the surface. The Holland California Land Company assured colonists that the hardpan problem could be overcome, but the colony fell apart within a year, as many colonists sold their land for as little as ten dollars per acre.[25] The people had been led astray by overly optimistic evaluation of the soil and the ease of fruit cultivation.

A similar incident occurred in Fresno County at the same time. P. J. Koch and R. Mack, both Californians, organized the Fresno Land Company to sell land to Dutch immigrants in 1890. The company received the support of capitalists in the Netherlands. The sales pitch emphasized the advantages of Fresno land over Merced land. The Fresno Land Company sold land within the Perrin Colony No. 2, five miles north of the city of Fresno. In 1890, the *Official Historical Atlas Map of Fresno County* called this attempt "most interesting" and "very successful this far."[26] False expectations of California agriculture pervaded the Fresno Colony, just as they had in the Merced Colony. The Dutch consulate in San Francisco, P. J. Van Löben Sels, noted that many Dutch investors believed that if they could invest just $3,200 to $4,000 in a fruit orchard, "it would turn into a gold mine." Other immigrants held false notions on the amount of dedication and work needed to operate a successful fruit orchard. According to Van Hinte,

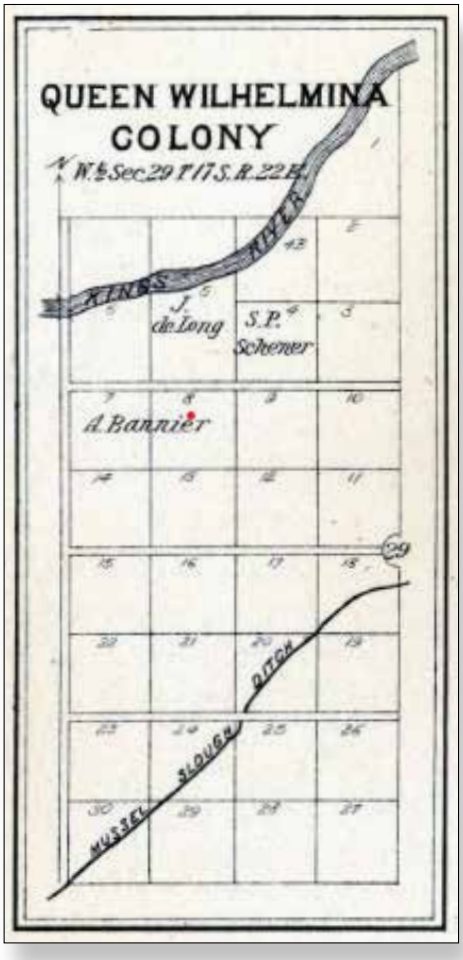
> Many a father or guardian had bought twenty acres for his son and promised the young man a salary of $75 per month to administer the property. But that was not enough to live on. There were those who straightforwardly acknowledged, "We spent too much for luxuries and munificent living and also too much for wages." Many of these young men found it to be "so vulgar" to be working side by side with a farmhand. There were also those who like "to toss off a stiff drink or two, or three or four."[27]

Adjusting to the reality of California agriculture was the least of the colonists' worries. The land of the Dutch colonists in Fresno County also had hardpan. By 1919, Fresno County historian Paul Vandor called the colony a "bare faced swindle," as the immigrants had overpaid for the land.[28] By his 1898 report, Van Löben Sels said that land was being sold for ten dollars an acre in the colonies.[29]

The Queen Wilhelmina Colony

Two Dutch colonists, dissatisfied with the Merced Colony, did not give up on the idea of creating a successful Dutch colony in Central Valley. Louis C. Lens and Albert Slotemaker started the Queen Wilhelmina Colony in late 1890 in Tulare County, in part of the county that became Kings County in 1893. Located in what was known as the Mussel Slough or Lucern Valley, the Queen Wilhelmina Colony benefited from good soil with no hardpan. This colony was also close to the water of the Kings River. The *Official Historical Atlas of Tulare County* showed the location of the colony to be in Section 29 of Township 17 South, Range 22 East.[30] It consisted of only three hundred twenty acres. In 1892, the map showed J. de Jong and A. Bannier owning twenty acres each and S. P. Schener owning ten acres.[31]

The Queen Wilhelmina Colony was used as an example for agriculture in Kings County in the 1890s. In an effort to boost interest in the young Kings County, the *Hanford Daily Democrat* published *Kings County Resources Illustrated* to present "her inducements in the investment of capital and the establishment of homes and industries."[32] This book included many short descriptions of farms in Kings County, including the



Queen Wilhelmina Colony showing Kings River and Mussel Slough ditch. Image courtesy *Official Historical Atlas Map of Tulare County, published by Thos. H. Thompson in 1892.*

Queen Wilhelmina Colony. When the book was published in 1897, the colony was still going strong.[33] Lens served as its capable director, and Slotemaker was an experienced fruit grower. According to *Kings County Resources Illustrated,* "When examples are wanted to show what can be done on small home tracts of land, the Wilhelmina Colony is constantly pointed out." Between 1892 and 1897, both Dutch immigrants and Americans bought tracts. The colony included the landowners Hyde with forty acres; Blydenstein with twenty-seven and a half acres; Rebel, Benner, Loutendam, and Herwoert with twenty acres each; Martens and Sower with fifteen acres


HOLLANDSCHE NEDERZETTING IN CALIFORNIA--FRESNO COUNTY

5,000 Akkers van 't Beste Land in California Gereserveerd voor 'n Hollandsch Settlement.

Vervoeg u om nadere Inlichtingen bij E. H. Casjens, of bij L. Snyders, Orange City, Iowa, of bij

J. A. FISHER, FRESNO, CALIFORNIA.

Ad running in *De Volkvriend* through most of 1904. Image courtesy *De Volksvriend*.

each; Dorsten with twelve and a half acres; Schener with ten acres; and Repping with five acres. Lens kept one hundred twenty acres for his own endeavors.[34]

In order to sell the colony's land, Lens advertised the colony to prospective Dutch immigrants in a pamphlet titled "*Geldbelegging in Californië en de Queen Wilhelmina Kolonie*" ("Investing in California and the Queen Wilhelmina Colony"), published in the Netherlands in 1893. He wrote his pamphlet to advise investors that "many families and individuals . . . became disappointed because they did not know the quality of the soil" before they arrived in the Merced and Fresno colonies.[35] By planting nearly ten thousand fruit trees in March 1891, Lens assured potential investors that "the bad impressions people in Holland had obtained through different colonists in California was the reason that this colony was not announced before I had established it to demonstrate that this excellent soil was suitable for fruit farming" in the Queen Wilhelmina Colony.[36] Lens was so convinced that the soil was good for fruit farming that he said he would allow anyone to live and work on the land for one year by only paying the interest on the mortgage for that year. With the Kings River running along the northern border of the colony, securing water for irrigation would not be an obstacle. Lens also described the climate as being very hot but "not so difficult since the air is thin."[37]

Lens provided a detailed list of expenses and prices for the colonists. The land sold for $125 per acre. This was less than the Merced and Fresno colonies and the average price for land in the area. According to the *Kings County Resources Illustrated* of 1897, land could be bought for between $50 and $300 per acre, depending on the level of development.[38] Lens estimated that total capitalization of from five to six thousand dollars would be needed to begin farming for the first four years. The cost could be less or more, depending on the size of the family and their willingness to work. Lens even encouraged people to invest money and let the land be taken care of for $250 to $350 a year if tools and horses were provided. Young colonists were encouraged to come and work for twenty-five dollars a month and live in the boarding house for twenty dollars a month to learn about fruit farming before investing. Lens would sell the land in installments himself but also gave information about interest rates in California for comparison.[39] He used specific figures from the Paige and Morton Company to illustrate market prices for crops. The profit was greatest for French plums at $600 per acre, with the profits of other crops such as apricots at $211, nectarines at $268, and peaches at $350 per acre.[40] Lens acknowledged that prices depended on the markets in the East and that fruit came only in the second year of a vineyard and the third or fourth year after planting an orchard.[41] While it is unclear from the historical record what happened to this colony, Lens surfaced again as a land developer in Spokane, Washington, in the late 1890s.[42] Even if the colony did not last beyond the nineteenth century, the Queen Wilhelmina Colony led the way for other Dutch immigrants to Kings County in the following decades.



Wagons in Pioneer Day Parade in Hanford, 1928. Image courtesy San Joaquin Valley Library System.

Conclusion

A few Dutch immigrants jumped at the opportunities promised by California agriculture in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The allure of California sun and soil meant that Dutch immigrants sought opportunities in the southern Central



Early Hanford CRC. Image courtesy of HH Archives.

Valley. Rapid agricultural changes in California created an atmosphere of unrealistic expectations. The idyllic farming lifestyle assured by colony salesmen never materialized. Not only did farming require more hard work than some were willing or ready to invest, but even the hardest workers failed on the hardpan of the Fresno and Merced colonies. Two enterprising colonists from Fresno and Merced founded Queen Wilhelmina Colony in Kings County with the promise of better soil and more realistic expectations. While started with significantly smaller ambition and claims than the Fresno or Merced colonies, the Queen Wilhelmina Colony would have the most lasting influence on the Valley.

The Dutch attracted to Kings County by the Queen Wilhelmina Colony triggered a chain migration after 1900 that developed into the enduring community the colonial promoters had tried to build. They communicated the availability of work to people in the Netherlands. The booming agricultural industry offered jobs to those who were willing to work hard. Immigrants usually had some connection to earlier Dutch immigrants. Many of the later immigrants came from the Haarlemmermeer area of the Netherlands. The family and neighborly connections of these later immigrants were very tight. Many who arrived at Ellis Island and eventually settled in Kings County listed the Haarlemmermeer as their former place of residence.[43] The Haarlemmermeer was a farming region in the province of North Holland that had been the bottom of a lake drained in the 1850s. Many left this region in small groups in the early 1900s as the land became unproductive. Others came from different places but usually had some connection to Dutch settlers already in Kings County.



Fruit picking near Lemoore, CA. Image courtesy San Joaquin Valley Library System.

The slow chain migration meant that a small community of Dutch immigrants took hold in Kings County. For instance, Arie Verkuyl encouraged many young Dutch to move to Hanford to work in the agriculture industry. Jan and Geuntje Schaap arrived in the town of Hanford in Kings County at the behest of Geuntje's brother Arie Verkuyl.[44] Other immigrants arrived in Kings County slowly. In 1905 Frank Bakker settled there. The P. G. Verhoeven family arrived in 1908, and Joe and Nellie Tos were married in that year.[45] When Dick Hoek arrived in Kings County in October of 1908, he worked on a farm where other Dutch immigrants were employed and took the first steps toward beginning a church. At his first meal with these fellow immigrants, he was shocked to find them not asking a blessing on their food, as was the Dutch custom. He knew they were from Christian homes, he would later recall. After dinner, he talked with Luke Van Herwynen, Dirk De Ruiter, and Dirk Versluys about the religious situation. Dick Hoek later called this meeting "the beginning of the Christian Reformed Church in Hanford."[46] The transplanted community of Dutch immigrants eventually founded the Hanford Christian Reformed Church in 1912. Affiliating with the Christian Reformed denomination, the Hanford church became part of a network of Dutch immigrant communities across the United States.

Endnotes

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Murder Will Out: the Bergman Mystery

Loren Lemmen

Allegan County, Michigan, 1875

In 1885 Isaac Verwey, the editor of *De Grondwet,* noted that it was rare for a Dutchman to be convicted of murder.[1] No doubt his readers concurred, but for years there had been some who felt that several local Dutchmen had gotten away with murder. The so-called "Bergman Mystery" was a widely reported case that pitted community leaders against each other and deeply divided the local populace. It all took place in Fillmore Township in Allegan County, Michigan, one of three more or less "Dutch" townships abutting the northern edge of the county, bordering the city of Holland. After the Civil War, the township began to fill up, so that by 1874 its population count was one thousand seven hundred forty-nine. There were five churches, three Reformed and two Christian Reformed. Almost everyone spoke Dutch.

The great fire of October 1871, which had left many local families homeless, was the most dramatic event that had occurred locally. While the fire had united people in a common cause, their unity ended abruptly in the winter of 1875, when on 23 February the *Allegan Journal* reported that six men had been arrested in "Frightened Fillmore" on the charge of "assault with intent to commit murder." The story is fairly straightforward. Several young men in the area, led by a man named Cornelius Schrier, told people they had beaten a man named Jan Bergman and had left him outside on one of the coldest nights of the year. They boasted that he would never return. But with Bergman nowhere to be found, Schrier and his friends were soon arrested.

The Roots of the Case

Bergman was married to Cornelius Schrier's sister Johanna Schrier. They had come to America with their older siblings and parents during the height of the cholera pandemic of 1866. Both their parents died on the voyage. This must have been quite a shock to the thirteen-year-old Johanna and her slightly younger brother Cornelius. Fortunately, they had older siblings who could look after them. When Johanna turned eighteen in 1871, she married the twenty-seven-year-old Dutch-born Bergman.[2] We do



Fillmore Township in Allegan County map. Image courtesy Allegan County GIS (Geographic Information System) Services.

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not know whether the older siblings approved of the marriage, but her brother Cornelius detested Bergman for the way he had treated Johanna. In fact, Bergman had abandoned her three years after the marriage after an arrest warrant had been issued against him. After that his whereabouts was unknown.

The *Allegan Journal* was the first to break the news, describing Bergman's return and what was believed to have happened on the night of his arrival.[3]

> In a short time Bergman went back to Europe and after staying there some time returned to America, stopping in Virginia.[4] During his absence he did not write to his wife and therefore she thought he was dead. She looked about for another husband and a few months ago she was married to a man named Klooster, who keeps a country store near Fillmore Center.[5] The newly married parties had scarcely passed the transcendental joys of the honeymoon and settled down to everyday life when Bergman called to make them a short visit. Although greatly surprised he did not imitate the style of some such unfortunate and dash his brains out, or kill his wife or husband number 2. He proposed to his successor that if he would give him $50 he would leave the country and make no trouble. Husband number 2 said that he had not $50 but would give him $20, all the money he had. Bergman was not a covetous man and so he agreed to take that much and call it square.
>
> But there is another strange chapter in this queer story, for some reason, unknown to us, 6 young men who lived in the township determined that Bergman should not stay a moment and took it upon themselves to assist his early departure. Bergman had made arrangements to stay at a nearby house overnight. These fellows, named Cornelius Schrier, Harm Vanden Luite, G. DeWitt, Aldert DeWitt, Jacob Borgman and Reme Hyma called on the owner of the house and told him he must not allow Bergman to stay all night; that he must drive him outdoors. The rowdies remained outside the house and the farmer went to the barn to milk. Bergman, when all was quiet, ventured to open the door when the men who were outside pounced upon him, knocked him down and began to beat him. He was taken out of the house and the men continued to maltreat him. When a schoolteacher, named Johnson who was boarding at the house interfered and stopped the fighting. He says that Bergman went off in one direction and the persecutors in another, but was not seen afterward and up to this date nothing of his whereabouts has been found. Suspicions were aroused and it was believed by some that Bergman had been murdered and his body hidden in the snow. Last Monday, Supervisor Mokma of Fillmore came to Allegan and entered a complaint before Justice Babbitt and the men whose names are given above were arrested by Deputy Sheriff Knapp and brought here. They were held to bail in the sum of $1000 and in default they have been in jail ever since.
>
> Their examination has been set for the 11th of March. Search has been made for the body but without success. So far the reader will see that there is no very good cause for suspicion of murder if the facts are as given above and we have them from reliable sources. Nevertheless the thing is badly mixed up and well worth investigating. The men who did the beating should, of course, be punished, but if Bergman is evidently no better than he ought to be, for there is a warrant out for his arrest for swindling his employer. It seems that when he lived in Fillmore he sold fruit trees to some of the farmers on the lake shore and took their notes in payment. In many cases the notes were paid and Bergman pocketed the money. Now dead or alive, Bergman is in trouble. If he is dead, we know what is happening; but if he is alive he probably has a very sore head and is in danger of seeing the inside of a prison, but he has 6 friends in the Allegan County Jail who earnestly hope that his life has been spared and there are some outside who don't care very much either way. The above is a thoroughly knotted skein of crime and to unravel it will require some trouble and time.

Unlike the Allegan reporters, the editors of the Dutch-language newspaper *De Grondwet* saw no humor in the story.[6] They reported that the "well-known and notorious" Bergman had been "horribly beaten, stomped on, kicked, and abused." And even though they found that Bergman was not just bad—that he was a "thoroughly evil person"—nevertheless no one had the right to do what had been done to him. They stressed the principle that Fillmore Township had a duty to seriously punish its own and they could not "shove it off." In their next issue they reported that Bergman was "not dead, but is dying and being nursed nearby."[7] They added to the mystery by stating that a certain public official who held an arrest warrant for Bergman knew where he was.



Location of schoolhouse. Image courtesy of Atlas of Allegan County, Michigan, published by C. O. Titus in 1873.

Despite all this, by mid-March the *Allegan Journal* reported that "the sensation has collapsed."[8] The defendants had been released on bail earlier, and at the hearing the prosecuting attorney Philip Padgham entered a plea of *Nolle Prosecurture,* indicating that he was unwilling to pursue the case.[9] The testimony of Edwin Johnson, the schoolteacher,

was deemed insufficient to make a charge. Although Bergman was still missing, the *Journal* reported, "This is probably the last we will hear of the famous 'murder' case." They could not have been more wrong. It would be an issue that involved many of the then current and future leaders of the area. Many were neighbors, attended the same church, and served on the township boards together.

Bergman had few, if any, friends in Fillmore Township. Nevertheless, many were enraged by the decision to dismiss the case. Posters were soon put up calling for a public meeting on 27 March. Over two hundred



Allegan County Circuit Court files. Image courtesy Western Michigan Archives, Kalamazoo, MI.

people attended.[10] The main witness, schoolteacher Edwin Johnson, had "refreshed his memory" and made statements that could justify reopening the case. He promised more if the case were to go to trial. Henry Russcher, whose home was the site of



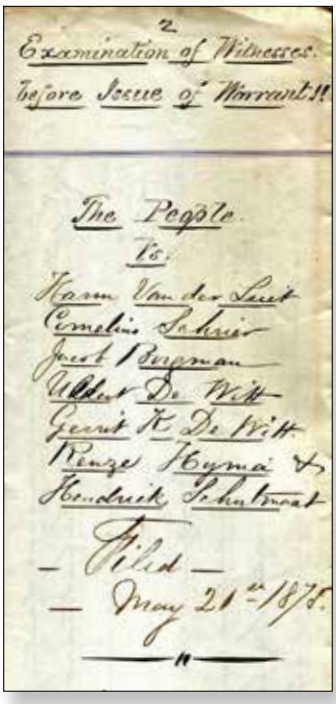
Germ Mokma. Image courtesy of HH Archives.

the attack, spoke of what he had seen and heard and added that his wife was also a witness but that she was still too afraid to make a public statement. Several people repeated incriminating remarks made to them by Cornelius Schrier.

Rev. William Vander Kley, pastor of the Graafschap Reformed Church, made a few remarks, and after some debate three resolutions were passed, almost "unanimously," according to local papers. One praised Germ W. Mokma, Township Supervisor, for his work in handling the complaint in the "notorious" Bergman case, the second condemned the "uncalled for and unlawful intermeddling" in the case by certain area residents, and the third called for publication of the resolutions in both the English and Dutch newspapers.[11]

The second resolution was in reference to several leading citizens, namely J. W. Garvelink, Gerrit S. DeWitt, and Cornelius Voorhorst, who had gone to the prosecutor and told him that after investigating the case they felt the facts did not warrant such serious charges. Garvelink was pitted against Mokma in the election for Township Supervisor. The results hinged on what people thought of this case. In the end, Mokma received one hundred nine votes and Garvelink sixty. Both were members of Graafschap Christian Reformed Church whose council sought clarification from Padgham in an attempt to reconcile the two.[12]

Meanwhile, those who believed that Bergman had been murdered continued to search for his body. The Deputy Sheriff of Ottawa County, along with a couple of area citizens, started their own investigation. Physical evidence was slim—only a cap found several miles downstream at the old Vyn sawmill in Zeeland Township. Three people identified it as the



Allegan County Circuit Court files. Image courtesy Western Michigan Archives, Kalamazoo, MI.

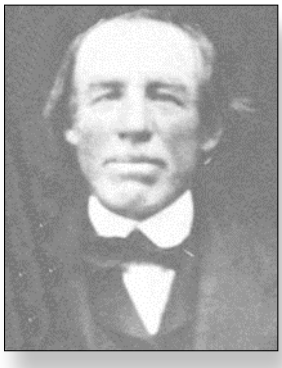
cap Bergman was wearing that night. Four people came forward and said they had heard a loud groaning and a team of horses going by at ten o'clock on the night in question. This information was well-timed for those who thought Bergman dead. The previous theory, which held that he was buried beneath the snow, proved doubtful when the snow melted and no body was found. Now the idea that they had weighted his body and put it in

the river came to the forefront. The river was soon dredged, but no body was found. Rumors of all sorts were being spread.

Even though the cap turned out to belong to the recently deceased mill owner, the men were rearrested in late May and a hearing set for early June.[13] The original defendants were generally about twenty-six and twenty-seven years old, with Cornelius Schrier the youngest at age twenty. However, now a seventh individual, a respected area farmer, aged fifty-five, was also charged.

Graafschap, June 1875

The examination was held at the home of Harm Lucas in nearby Graafschap. Justice of the Peace R. B. Newham of Saugatuck presided. "Hundreds of farmers" came from all over the area. The floorboards of the house creaked from the weight of the



Harm Lucas. Image courtesy of HH Archives.

"sturdy Graafschappers." When the reporter from the *Holland City News* asked for directions at the edge of town, he was told simply to "follow the crowd."[14] Arriving, he found that everyone had "an opinion to express based upon what *he knew* to be the facts." They found the west end of Fillmore Township "intensely against" the defendants, with the intensity of feeling moderating considerably as one went east. Arend Visscher, a twenty-six-year-old Dutch-American Attorney-at-Law in Holland and a member of the RCA, was selected to represent the defense.

The assault had begun at the home of the Henry and Geertje Russcher. They lived adjacent to the school, and the schoolteacher Johnson boarded



Jan W. Garvelink. Image courtesy HH Archives.

with them. These three were the main witnesses called by the prosecution.[15] Combining their testimony, we get a clearer picture of what happened.

Johnson was at the school on the afternoon of 9 February. Bergman came to the school and asked him if he would go next door to tell Foppe Klooster that he wished to speak to him. Johnson refused and Bergman left. Later in the evening, Johnson went to Klooster's store. It was crowded, and there was a lot of excitement in the air. Cornelius Schrier and the other defendants were among those present. Although the conversation was mostly in Dutch, Johnson understood that Bergman wanted $50 from Klooster for marrying his wife.

That night Bergman came to the Russcher house, where Johnson was present. He asked Russcher if he could stay the night, but Russcher said he could not accommodate him and went across the road to the barn to do chores. The defendants then arrived and warned Russcher not to give Bergman shelter. Russcher felt threatened. The defendants then went into the house and confronted Bergman.

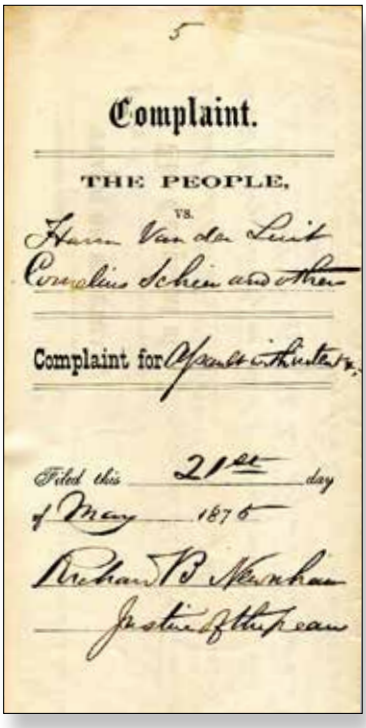
Schrier, who had a sword cane with him, began to talk with Bergman about the settlement of the money—that he wanted it back.[16] Others joined in talking roughly to Bergman, one saying he must leave the house. Bergman returned some of the money and said he would go if they would leave him alone. They all agreed, but when Bergman started for the door Vanden Luite struck him, knocking him against the table. Bergman appealed to Johnson for help, saying that he was not afraid of them one at a time but wanted "fair play." DeWitt then struck him a hard blow, knocking him against the door and breaking the hinge.

Mrs. Russcher and Johnson stayed inside while all the others went out, but soon followed after hearing screams. It was very dark out, but they saw Bergman lying on the snow surrounded by the defendants. Johnson went to help Bergman, who wiped his face as though to wipe away blood. Bergman then began to walk slowly down the road. He was dressed very poorly for the dangerous weather, with temperatures well below zero and a storm that night.

The low temperatures drove Johnson and Mrs. Russcher back inside immediately, while the defendants followed Bergman. Soon both Johnson and the Russchers heard a cry of "*Moord! Moord!*" (Dutch for murder). Henry Russcher then went down the road where Bergman had gone and met one of the defendants, who told him that they had given Bergman "enough." He then returned home. When the defendants returned, they told Johnson that they had chased Bergman and forced him back toward the house. They all said that he then shook hands with them and walked away.

The prosecution also called a number of people to testify concerning what the defendants had told them.

This proved to be the most damaging evidence. Several testified that Schrier had said that Bergman claimed he had



5

Complaint.

THE PEOPLE,

vs.

Hiram Van der Luit
Cornelius Schrier and others

Complaint for Assault & Battery

Filed this 21st day
of May 1876

Richard P. Newnham
Justice of the Peace

Allegan County Circuit Court files. Image courtesy Western Michigan Archives, Kalamazoo, MI.

two guns with him, but this was untrue. Bergman cried, "For God's sake don't kill me—I have a soul to save!" Schrier retorted, "You are a dog, you have no soul!" DeWitt pulled out a knife and stabbed Bergman in the face and head until "there was not an inch of skin on his face that was not cut." Schrier told people that Bergman had received enough at their hands that he would never come back. Schrier was warned by his friends to not talk about it but replied that he did not care if he was arrested and was not sorry for what he had done. Even when he was arrested, he told the arresting officer that he had knocked Bergman down twice and kicked him each time. The defense did not call any witnesses.

The trial lasted the rest of the week, with the result that six defendants were bound over for trial in the Allegan Circuit Court in September. Charges against Hyma were dropped. Most people now believed that the accused were guilty and that Bergman was dead, if not from the assault then from the terrible weather conditions. The English-language papers espoused this theory also, but *De Grondwet* maintained that Bergman was alive, as it had from the beginning. Its reporter believed that he was nearby recovering.[17]

Over the summer the search continued. Bergman's friends from the International Order of Odd Fellows contacted lodges around the country, hoping to learn something, but to no avail. There was one new development in August. A Dutchman in Spring Lake reported that he had received a letter from his mother in the Netherlands, who reported having seen a letter from Bergman written to his father in June.[18] Gerrit DeWitt and Hendrik Schutmaat went immediately to Spring Lake to get the letter. At the actual trial, however, the letter was not allowed as evidence. The defense claimed that Bergman had spent the night in the schoolhouse and produced a witness who said he had seen him the following morning. After only a half hour of deliberation, the most serious charges were dismissed, and the defendants were convicted of assault and fined $25. The Allegan reporters noted that the trial cost $550, while the fines amounted to only $150. With some disgust, they summed up their feelings: "So much for one drunken brawl."

The trial in court may have been over, but the trial in the papers continued. The letters Prosecuting Attorney Padgham had sent to the Graafschap CRC in answer to their questions were translated into Dutch and published.[19] In them he stated that it was the weak testimony of Johnson that made him drop the case initially, and that he could not reconcile Johnson's later testimony with what he had given in February. Mokma was unconvinced but did write a letter to the editor in February 1876 stating that he too now believed that Bergman was alive, based on yet another person who claimed to have seen the letter in the Netherlands. According to that letter, Bergman was in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin.[20]

However, in the spring of 1878 the case was again in the news. A man named DeHaan had approached Schrier and another defendant in the case, claiming that he had found Bergman's body. He wanted money or he would take the bones to the authorities and claim the reward. They quickly turned him in to the authorities, who arrested him for attempting to sell human bones. The case went before J. W. Garvelink, who was now the Justice of the Peace. The skeleton in question turned out to belong to DeHaan's deceased employer, a local doctor. However, the case was dismissed when the skeleton could not be found.

This event was followed that summer with a trip to the Netherlands by several people from nearby Overisel who planned to interview Bergman's father. They came back with the information that he was alive, but not much more. However, a few months later a man purporting to be Bergman himself wrote a letter to the Township Supervisor of Fillmore, and a committee was formed of five individuals to travel south to interview him.[21] But, the committee never reported, and nothing became of it. Apparently they had been unable to find him, so not many minds were changed.

Holland, December 1888

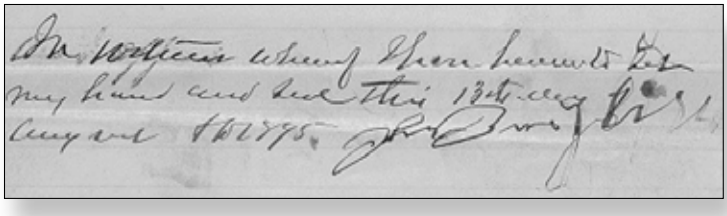
Years of peace were shattered in late 1888 when Bergman suddenly showed up at the offices of the *Holland City News*.[22] Now, at last, people could hear his story. Bergman claimed that

he had been severely beaten and was able to escape only because all but one of his assailants went looking for a rope with which to hang him. He was able to walk several miles to Holland, and from there he took a sleeping car to Chicago. Arriving there, nearly out of his mind, he was taken to a hospital, where he spent several months before being released. His injuries included a broken arm and shoulder blade, as well as a deep gash in his head. His doctor owned property in Florida and suggested he move there. He had lived down there ever since, growing fruit on the doctor's property. In time the doctor had died and the fruit business declined. He claimed that he was unable to do heavy work due to the injuries he had sustained and wished to pursue a lawsuit against his assailants. He retained G. J. Diekema as his attorney. It is unlikely anyone believed Bergman's story of an attempted lynching.

For Cornelius Schrier this opened old wounds. He wrote a lengthy letter to the editors of *De Grondwet*. He claimed that the case had wrecked his career as an artist. He was bitterly sarcastic of those who had believed for so long that Bergman was dead. He must have felt some vindication when the editors of *De Grondwet* supported him strongly and recommended that no one even negotiate with Bergman over compensation. Bergman's lawyer followed up, but apparently nothing came of it, and Bergman again left town empty handed.[23]

Bergman's End in Kittitas County, Washington

Located in the Cascade Mountains, Kittitas County became settled in 1890. Ellensburg, the county seat, had been platted fifteen years earlier. It remained a small village until the railroad came through in 1885. By 1890 the population had grown to nearly three thousand people. One



Bergman's final signature. Image courtesy of Kittitas County, Washington Probate Court Records, 1895, No. 170 at www.familysearch.org

of the new arrivals was a man who introduced himself as John Buerglin, a native of Germany. He was not married and had no family as far as anyone knew, except perhaps a sister in Michigan. He took a job as a teamster for a local freight company. As he had done in Michigan, he joined the Odd Fellows Lodge in Ellensburg, where he was known as "Dutch John." He bought several pieces of real estate and began loaning money out at interest to a number of people. Things seemed to be going well for him, and he became a well-known and popular personality in the local German community.[24]

Late one hot Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1895, John entered the Teutonia Saloon, which was owned by his friends Frank Uebelacker and Michael Kohlhepp. Seeing more of his friends there, he asked them to join him for a drink. Another customer, Sam Vinson, who had spent all his money on alcohol without satisfying his desires, asked to join in. But John said no, reminding Sam that he had never repaid a previous loan for drinks. Sam, who had already been involved in a minor scrape just prior to John's arrival, argued unsuccessfully. Frustrated, he grabbed a knife from a nearby table and stabbed John in the ribs. John managed to knock the man down with a whiskey bottle and, clutching his side, staggered out to find a doctor.

During the quarrel Sam Vinson's son, Charles, entered the saloon. He had just been kicked out of another establishment for causing trouble. When he saw Uebelacker attempting to break up the quarrel between the senior Vinson and Dutch John, he pulled his revolver. Kohlhepp then approached him with a pool cue. Vinson started to retreat, then turned and shot Kohlhepp in the lung.

The Vinsons were soon subdued and held until authorities came and brought them to the nearby county jail. Kohlhepp was taken to a doctor immediately, where he died less than two hours later.

The sheriff requested that all the saloons in town close that Sunday night. The situation in town was tense but remained under control. On Monday, first degree murder charges were filed against Charles Vinson. Meanwhile, Buerglin was operated on, and it was believed he had a good chance to survive.

However, as time passed tempers



Lynching of the Vinsons. Image courtesy of the Ellensburg Public Library.

rose. Some wondered if the Vinsons would get what they deserved in a county where there was no money to prosecute criminal cases of this nature. So too, the nature of the Vinsons and their past crimes was discussed. The son in particular had a history of violent crimes and had served several years in prison for armed robbery.

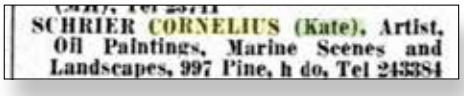
By Tuesday, Buerglin had taken a turn for the worst due to an infection. He had a will made out while the doctor prepared for a second surgery. He died shortly after signing the will, prior to the operation, and was buried immediately in the Odd Fellows Cemetery. Now talk of a lynching grew. Two popular citizens had been murdered in cold blood. The sheriff sent the keys to the jail cell to a different location and had a number of armed guards present around the clock. This was to no avail; when darkness fell, a mob stormed the jailhouse and after several hours of work broke into the cell and seized the Vinsons. They were taken a few blocks away and hung.

The double murder and lynching of a father and son made national and even international news. In Holland, Michigan, the news had a special significance.[25] For there, and there alone, it was reported that John Buerglin was, in reality, John Bergman. The whole Bergman story from 1875 to 1889 was retold on the front page. Ironically, the man who had claimed to be the victim of an intended lynching had become the catalyst for a double lynching. The man who had sought anonymity was front page news. In Ellensburg, many thought the lynching was just an act of revenge by friends of the deceased. The local newspaper blamed the whole thing, from start to finish, on alcohol. Suspected leaders were arrested and tried, but no one was ever convicted of the lynching.[26]

The Aftermath of the Major Players

Johanna Schier Bergman married Foppe Klooster, a shopkeeper in Allegan, on 20 July 1874. The couple had five children; only one lived to adulthood.[27] The family left Allegan County shortly after the Bergman case and, after living for a short time in Allendale and Muskegon, settled in Grand Rapids where Foppe worked as a carpet weaver. He died in 1915 in Grand Rapids, and by 1920 Johanna was living in the Holland Union Benevolent Association Home on Fulton Street in Grand Rapids, until her death in 1931. Both are buried in the Oakwood Cemetery in Muskegon.

Cornelius Schrier's actions of inciting a group of friends to beat up Bergman would cloud the rest of his life.


SCHRIER CORNELIUS (Kate), Artist, Oil Paintings, Marine Scenes and Landscapes, 997 Pine, h do, Tel 243384

12. Schrier artist ad in the *Muskegon City Directory. Image courtesy of the Muskegon City directories from 1924 through 1928 on* www.ancestry.com

In 1891 he married Janke Klooster, a sister to Foppe, and moved to Grand Rapids, where he set up a paint shop. In 1891 they became parents of two children. Janke died in 1924, and Cornelius married Kate Rose in September 1926 in Muskegon. By 1930 his home on Pine Street, Muskegon, was valued at $6,000. He called himself an artist/landscape architect. He died in 1938 and is buried next to Janke in the Oakwood Cemetery, where his sister Johanna and husband Foppe are also buried.

All of the officials who dealt with this case were young, inexperienced men. They went on to become leaders in the area. Germ Mokma became the mayor of Holland. Jan Garvelink became a State Senator. Harm Lucas led a group of Graafschappers north to Missaukee County, where the town of Lucas is named after him. Arend Visscher became a well-known attorney, representing the CRC in its lawsuit over the Pillar Church. Philip Padgham became a Circuit Court Judge. Bergman's lawyer, Gerrit Diekema, became Mayor of Holland and later was the American ambassador to the Netherlands. Despite their long and successful careers, it is unlikely any of them ever forgot John Bergman. Holland's historian, Gerrit Van Schelven, in writing of the case in 1913 stated that "it took years to end the factional and neighborly friction it had engendered."[28] Gerrit was a firsthand witness; in fact, he was the editor of the *Holland City News* and mostly likely attended the trial.

The story of the murders and lynching is still told today on History Tours in Ellensburg. David Baumgart of Washington wrote a book about the lynching in 2013.[29] It focuses on the Vinsons and lynching but does not tell the real story of John Bergman.

Endnotes

1. *De Grondwet*, 24 November 1885.
2. Hermanus Johannes (Jan) Bergman was born 28 February 1843 in Zwolle, Overijssel, the Netherlands. His father was a gunsmith for the Dutch military.
3. *Allegan Journal*, 23 February 1875.
4. One of the Schrier siblings, Pieternella, had married Danker Leys in Holland, Michigan, and moved to the Dutch colony Van Raalte was trying to establish in Amelia County, Virginia. Since Pieternella was Bergman's sister-in-law, he may have felt he could stay with them. Apparently, that did not last long. The Dankers lived in Virginia only from 1871 to 1874.
5. Foppe Klooster and Johanna Schrier were married in Holland, Michigan, on 20 July 1874, by Gerrit Van Schelven, Justice of the Peace.
6. *De Grondwet,* 9 March 1875.
7. Ibid.
8. *Allegan Journal,* 13 March 1875.
9. *Nolle Prosecurture* is legal Latin meaning "to be unwilling to pursue." It is used for prosecutors' declarations that they are voluntarily ending a criminal case before trial or before a verdict is rendered. Garvelink and Padgham had separately interviewed Johnson, and both stated that he had provided little evidence of a serious crime. It was Johnson's weak testimony that led to the dropping of charges. Johnson, in turn, claimed he was afraid to volunteer information and only gave answers to direct questions because of it.
10. *De Grondwet,* 6 April 1875.
11. Ibid.; Rev. William Vander Kley, born in 1819 in Delft, the Netherlands, would not live long enough to hear the end of the story. He died in December 1875 in Graafschap, Michigan. After he emigrated in 1871, he served the Pella, Iowa, RCA from 1871–1873 and the Graafschap, Michigan, RCA from 1873 until his death in December 1875 at age 56. Cause of death: asthma. http://www.mdch.state.mi.us/pha/osr/gendisx/
12. Graafschap CRC minutes of 4 May 1875, Art. 3.
13. *Holland City News,* 29 May 1875.
14. *Holland City News,* 5 June 1875.
15. Grand Rapids *Morning Democrat,* 6 June 1875.
16. A sword cane is a cane with a long blade inside.
17. *De Grondwet,* 15 June 1875.
18. *De Grondwet,* 10 August 1875.
19. *De Grondwet,* 7 September 1875.
20. *De Grondwet*, 15 February 1876.
21. *Holland City News*, 23 November 1878. The committee consisted of Harm Lucas, Germ Mokma, Hendrik Lubbers, Geert Jeurink, and Cornelius Lokker.
22. *Holland City News*, 15 December 1888.
23. *De Grondwet,* 22 January 1889.
24. Howard D. Baumgart, *The Ellensburg Tree of Justice* (Self-published), Washington State Historical Society website (http://columbia.washingtonhistory.org/magazine/articles/2001/0401/0401-a1.aspx)
25. *De Grondwet,* 27 August 1895. Newspapers in large Dutch cities repeated the story from 1875 on, using *De Grondwet* as a source.
26. Thus ends the story of John Bergman, though there is still much mystery associated with him. As soon as he arrived in Ellensburg in 1890 he began making substantial loans and buying real estate. Yet in 1889 in Michigan he claimed he was unable to do hard work due to injuries sustained in 1875. As a teamster, he would have made perhaps $2 a day. At the time of his death he owned several properties and had $3,300 out in loans. Where did he get this money, and why did he find it desirable to go to one of the most remote parts of the country, far from any place he had ever been, and then change his name and even his stated nationality? It is unlikely we will ever know all the true details regarding the "notorious Bergman."
27. Their daughter, Rosa Klooster, born in 1895, married Garrett Heyns.
28. *De Grondwet,* 3 June 1913.
29. Baumgart, *The Ellensburg Tree of Justice*.

Emigration as Escape: The Wynsen Sjaardema Saga

Janet Sheeres

The *Robert Parker* sailed into the New York Harbor on 27 September 1847. It had sailed from the port of La Havre, France, with two hundred thirty-three passengers and arrived in New York with two hundred thirty-one, two having died onboard. Among the many German, French, and Swiss passengers, there were one hundred ten Dutch nationals. Captain Jonas D. Parsons, who signed the manifest upon arrival, must not have been acquainted with the spelling of the foreign names and just wrote them as he heard them, leading to headaches for genealogists trying to figure out who was who.[1] Also, for some reason he listed all of the Dutch as going to Ohio, although several went to Michigan and others settled elsewhere.

Among the Dutch passengers was the Sjaardema family: father Wynsen, mother Taltje Bontjema, and children Dirkje (eighteen), Jurjen (thirteen), Yme (nine), and Trijntje (four). There should also have been a Jacoba who had been born two months earlier in July, who was signed out of the municipality of Franeker, Friesland, along with the other family members. Since she does not show up on the list of arriving passengers, she may have been one of the two passengers who died onboard, or she may have died traveling from Friesland to Rotterdam or from there to La Havre. Traveling with the family was a twenty-five-year-old single man, Tjerk Alberts Vander Plaat, also from Franeker and perhaps a friend of the family.

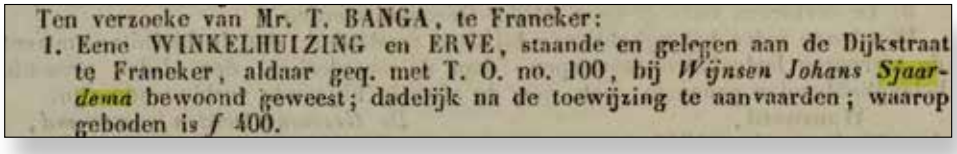
Disregarding the Dutch law stating that those leaving their municipalities, including emigrants, were supposed to register with the municipality, the Sjaardemas left without notification. The family is listed as leaving on 22 October 1847, but we know that they had arrived in New York in late September; therefore someone else must have made the notation in the records. There may have been a good reason for that. On the death registration of eleven-year-old Klaas Sjaardema, who died on 5 April 1847, it was added later that "the Sjaardemas had left for North America leaving behind outstanding debts."[2]



Street in Franeker, Friesland. Image courtesy of author.

Even though there were other Dutch emigrants on the same boat as the Sjaardemas, the latter did not choose one of the Dutch colonies that were being established in North America as their destination. Instead, they are listed in the 1850 United States Federal Census (USFC) as living in Perry County, Tennessee, where there were only three other Dutch families at the time. Since none of Wynsen's immediate family members

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Ten verzoeke van Mr. T. BANGA, te Franeker:
1. Eene WINKELHUIZING en ERVE, staande en gelegen aan de Dijkstraat te Franeker, aldaar geq. met T. O. no. 100, bij *Wijnsen Johans Sjaardema* bewoond geweest; dadelijk na de toewijzing te aanvaarden; waarop geboden is *f* 400.

Sale of home ad in *Leeuwarder Courant* of 10 January 1847. Image courtesy *Leeuwarder Courant* Archief, Leeuwarden, the Netherlands.

had emigrated, he did not join them either. So, was Wynsen trying to get as far away as possible from his fellow countrymen because of his debts? Sjaardema was not the only one who left behind debt. A certain B. Tieleman from Gelderland also left without paying up, as well as a Jenneken van



Map of Tennessee in USA. Image courtesy http://ontheworldmap.com/usa/state/tennessee/

Vreezenhuisman. She stole clothes from wash lines to sell for passage money, was caught and sentenced to jail time, but escaped before being apprehended.[3] One wonders how prevalent emigration was as a means to escape one's debts.

In a lengthy article in the *Wachter* of 21 March 1873, Rev. Douwe J. Vander Werp bemoans the fact that, while many upstanding people had chosen America as an emigration destination, there were also many scoundrels. He wrote,

> Even so, in the stream of immigrants into America, there are also many of our fellow Hollanders who have taken flight across the ocean to escape their well-deserved punishment from their creditors and so to evade the results of their heinous crimes, and then continue the same behavior in this land. People who try while living here, to not be noticed by those who might recognize them are a disgrace in this country. But be not deceived, the Lord will follow them and, in His time, bring their sins into the light of day and will punish them.

Apparently Sjaardema was one whose reason for emigrating would not have pleased Rev. Vander Werp.

Frisian Roots

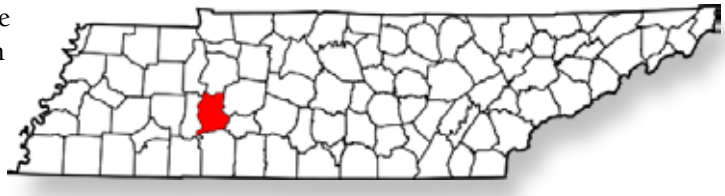
Wynsen was born in 1800 in Franeker, Friesland, the son of Johan Sjaardema, a market gardener, and Maaike Westra. The name Sjaardema still has a certain cachet in Franeker.[4] In the 1400s the Sjaardemas were the premier family in the town, with a splendid castle to match their status. Well into the nineteenth century various organizations in Franeker were still awarded annual stipends. However, many with the name Sjaardema were not true descendants but had been managers of Sjaardema farms and properties and adopted the name. These Sjaardemas were regular people who needed to make a living like everyone else.

Wynsen was the middle child, having two siblings older and two younger. He became a wholesale seed merchant, which would have been a natural consequence of having a father in the gardening business. He was only nineteen when he was first listed as being a debtor, owing Hein Sybes seven hundred fifty guilders, a healthy sum in those days.[5] Had he overspent trying to set up a seed business, or did he have other concerns? Did his father bail him out? These questions are not answered in the records. He married his first wife, Trijntje Tjeerds Brandsma, on 8 May 1825 in Franeker. Two children were born to them: Johan, born in 1826 and Dirkje, born in 1829. Tragedy entered the family when it was discovered that Johan had been born deaf, which meant that he could not distinguish sounds and therefore did not learn to speak. The cause was attributed to the fact that his mother, Trijntje, had been startled by something, had gone into premature labor, and had given birth at eight months. Johan made only screeching sounds and lived with the family only until he was nine years old. In September of 1835 he was placed at the Institute for the Deaf and Mute in Groningen, where he was taught to read and write and learned typesetting as a trade.[6]

On 11 March 1829 Wynsen was again litigated for four hundred guilders he owed Carel Bolger.[7] Again, what was the cause of this debt? Were his debts due to poor judgments in business or due to personal indulgences? Alcohol? Gambling? Tragedy entered the family again when Trijntje died in March 1832, perhaps due to complications of a third pregnancy.

In January 1833 Wynsen married Gepke Jurjens Hamer. Gepke also bore two children, Jurjen, born in 1833, and Klaas, born in early 1836, before she died in April 1836.

When his father died in May 1833, only Wynsen, his sister Hinke, and his brother Martin were left to divide the estate of their father. This included a house and real estate, which



Map of Perry County in Tennessee. Image courtesy of Public Domain at en:Wikipedia:U.S. county maps

was advertised for sale in December 1834. There was also an estate sale of household goods.[8] The proceeds of these sales should have given the three siblings a certain amount of cash, hopefully enough for Wynsen to pay any debt he had accrued.

In June 1837 Wynsen married for a third time, this time to Tjaltje Teunis Bontjema, who seemed to be a healthier woman, bringing four children into the world: Yme, born in 1838; Jacob, born in 1840 (he died in 1843); Trijntje, born in 1843; and Jacoba, born in July 1847.

In 1844 Johan graduated from the Institute for the Deaf and Mute and returned to his family home in Franeker, where he found his father married to his third wife, Taltje Bontjema, a mother with young children of her own, as well as stepchildren from two previous marriages. Probably not the most ideal situation for Johan to come home to, and probably the reason he moved to work in Leeuwarden, the capital city of the province of Friesland.

On 21 July 1847, Eritia M. de Swart demanded that Wynsen pay her the two hundred fifty guilders he owed her.[9] Shortly after that the family took off for America. That they took off rather in a hurry is evidenced by a small booklet Johan wrote in 1860, in which he complained that his family had abandoned him by moving to America and leaving him behind without so much as a final goodbye.[10] Wynsen may have rationalized that Johan, a deaf-mute, was better off in the Netherlands, where he had steady work, than in America, where it would have been difficult for him, being deaf, to learn English and to ply his trade of typesetting without knowing the language. Nevertheless, for him not to say farewell to his son indicates the haste with which the family departed.

While still on board the *Robert Parker*, Wynsen's home in Franeker was sold for four hundred guilders on 20 September, the proceeds going to cover his debts.


DE GULDEN DAG

DES

HEEREN.

GODSDIENSTIGE OVERDENKING

OP DEN

ZONDAG.

UITGEGEVEN TEN VOORDEELE VAN EEN

ONGELUKKIGE

DOOFSTOMME

Prijs 10 cent.

TRESOAR

Johan Sjaardema, *The golden day of the Lord: spiritual meditations on the Lord's Day, published for the benefit of an unfortunate deafmute.* Image courtesy Tresoar, Leeuwarden, the Netherlands.

Perry County, Tennessee

How the Sjaardemas made it from New York to Perry County is not known. They probably traveled inland on the Erie Canal to perhaps Rochester or Buffalo and then took a train south. In 1850 Perry County had a population of only 5,821. Wynsen is listed in the 1850 Census as a merchant, continuing the career that he had plied in the Netherlands. That he was able to speak English well enough within a couple of years to engage in sales may be due to the fact that, other than a few other Dutch speaking people in the county, the family was totally immersed in the English language. Tjerk Vander Plaat, who had traveled with the Sjaardemas, also settled near them in Perry County, working as a mechanic.[11] By the 1850 USFC he was married to the widow Aaltje Valkis van Aalst.[12]

Either on the journey to Tennessee or shortly after arriving, Taltje, Dirkje, and Trijntje passed away, leaving only Wynsen (now Vinson) and his sons Jurjen (William) and Yme (James). By 1849 Wynsen had married again, this time to Kezia (last name unknown), twelve years his junior, and they had one child, Jane, one month old in September 1850 when the census was taken. Kezia was a widow who brought along a four-year-old daughter Delilah. Kezia and Jane died either in Perry County or in Indiana before 1853, when Wynsen married for a fifth time in Bartholomew County, Indiana, to the widow Mary Ann Sprout.

While the climate in Perry County was temperate, with warm (sometimes hot) summers and mild winters, there was a problem. Tennessee was a slave-owning state, and 25 percent of families in Perry County owned slaves, meaning that Wynsen and his neighbor Tjerk were faced with the realities of slave owners buying and selling people, considering them as objects to be used.[13] Slavery was not allowed in the Netherlands. Any black person taken along by an owner on a ship setting foot on Dutch soil was immediately considered free. Added to the cruelties of slavery was the Fugitive Slave Act, signed into law in 1850, meaning that if you helped a slave escape to freedom you could end up in jail.[14]

In less than five years in Perry County, the Sjaardema and Vander Plaat families moved north, crossing Kentucky, another slave state, into southern Indiana. However, this is where Wynsen and Tjerk split, Tjerk choosing the Dutch settlement of Lafayette in northern Indiana and Wynsen staying south in

Bartholomew County. By 1860 there were 537 Dutch-born in the state of Indiana in a total population of 1,350,419. These Dutch had founded a couple of Dutch settlements in Indiana. One was Lafayette in Tippecanoe County, and this is where the Vander Plaat family settled.[15]

Indiana

Wynsen's marriage to Mary Ann Sprout (widow of Isaac White) on 20 June 1853 in Bartholomew County, Indiana, proved that he had moved to Indiana sometime between 1850 and 1853. Mary Ann was born in 1821 and was twenty-one years his junior. She brought with her a Quaker background. Bartholomew County abuts Jennings County in Indiana, the setting for Jessamyn West's bestseller *Friendly Persuasion*.[16] The plot is about the Birdwell family's Quaker religion conflicting with their son's enlisting in the Civil War. Southern Indiana was Quaker country, and it would have been interesting to know if Wynsen joined in his wife's religious beliefs. Wynsen might have been surprised that although the Quakers originated in England, they also had a history in the Netherlands. William Penn, the founder of the Quaker movement, was born in London, England, in 1644 to a Dutch mother, Margaret Jasper Vander Schuren. His father, Sir William Penn, was an admiral and landowner who had been knighted by King Charles II. Penn, the younger, visited the Netherlands in 1677, traveling to Wynsen's birth province of Friesland to visit Wieuwerd, a religious community of Labadists, hoping that they would unite with the Quakers. This was not to be; however, the Quakers acquired many adherents in the Netherlands, and the attraction of a life free from persecution led to a Dutch Quaker migration to the English colonies throughout the eighteenth century. There were an estimated five hundred Quaker families in Amsterdam in 1710, but by 1797 there were only about seven left. The Quaker presence disappeared from the Netherlands by the early 1800s.

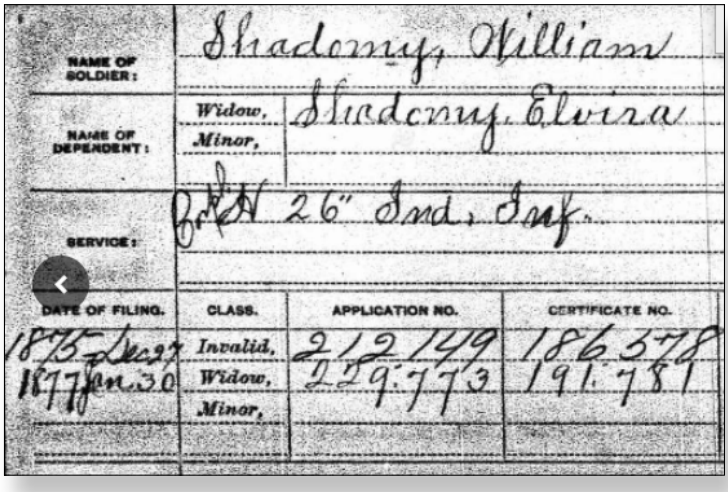
There is no indication that Wynsen became an adherent, but perhaps he may have found some solace and redemption with the Friends, as the Quakers called themselves.[17] Wynsen's marriage to Mary Ann Sprout produced one daughter, Josephine, born in 1855. By this time Wynsen's last name had changed from Sjaardema to Shadama in 1850 and to Shadomy by the time of his marriage in 1853. He died in Bartholomew County, Indiana, in July 1858, at fifty-eight years old.[18] He had cast his lot with strangers in a strange land and for all intents and purposes was forgotten by his fellow countrymen. Even his death and burial place might have been lost to history, had not Mary Sprout's sister written letters that were preserved in the Jennings County, Indiana, archives.

Epilogue

The Sjaardema emigration story would have been lost to history but for a small brochure that Johan printed in which he complained about having been abandoned by his family when they moved in all haste to America. This little booklet found its way into Tresoar, the Provincial Archive of Friesland, and Jacob van Sluis, one of the archivists, wondered who this Johan was and what had happened to the family in America. He contacted me to check out the American side of the story. Johan's story appeared in *Fryslân*, No. 1, in 2005; however now, fifteen years later, with much more information available on the internet, I wondered whether I could find out more about what happened to the Sjaardemas. This was a real genealogical puzzle given all the name changes, deaths, and marriages, but there was enough information posted online that I was able to reconstruct Wynsen's life to some degree, noting sadly that Wynsen's life in America did not lead to greatness either.

Johan, the son who remained living in the Netherlands; William Shadomy (Jurjen Sjaardema), born in 1833; and Josephine Shadomy, born twenty-two years after William in 1855, were the only three of Wynsen's ten children who survived, and of these three only William and Josephine left descendants, though none bearing the Sjaardema name.

Although a deaf mute, Johan learned to read and write and the typesetting trade. He moved to the city of Groningen, where he married Antje Wopkes in 1857. The marriage registration states that Johan's father resided in America.[19] Did Johan know that his father was still living, or


NAME OF SOLDIER: Shadomy, William
NAME OF DEPENDENT: Widow, Shadomy, Elvira
Minor,
SERVICE: 26th Ind. Inf.
DATE OF FILING. CLASS. APPLICATION NO. CERTIFICATE NO.
1875 Dec 27 Invalid, 212 149 186 378
1877 Jan 30 Widow, 229 773 191 781
Minor,

William Shadomy Civil War pension card. Image courtesy Civil War Records on www.Ancestry.com

did he just assume it? There was no contact between them. Johan died in a hotel on a trip to Arnhem in December 1871.

William Shadomy moved with his father to Indiana, where he enlisted in the Civil War.

Josephine Shadomy was only three when her father died in July 1858. Three years later, when she was only six, her mother died of tuberculosis. On her deathbed Mary Ann asked her nephew Egbert Toms to raise Josephine, which he did, though not immediately. For a few years Josephine lived with her aunt (Egbert's mother), Phebe Sprout Toms. She married James Swisher and had seven children. They ended up separating after many years of marriage. The Rachel Wilkins letter dated 7 February 1864 from Scipio, Indiana, to her former neighbors Polly and Rowley Sprout in Michigan states, "Egbert's wife has Mary's [Mary Ann Sprout White Shadomy Flanigan's] little girl, Josephine Shadomy. Expects to keep her—she has very fair skin, light hair and very curly and is quite fleshy." Josephine died on 25 April 1943 at age eighty-eight in Meeker County, Minnesota. If any of the descendants of William or Josephine Shadomy tries to trace back the name Shadomy to Sjaardema, they may run into some brick walls.

Endnotes

1. A transcribed version of the list may be found on http://www.macatawa.org/~devries/Shipindex.htm

2. Willem Wilterdink, *Winterswijkse Pioniers in Amerika* (Winterswijk: Vereniging Het Museum, 1990), 16.

3. http://www.nevenzel.nl/Nevenzel/03%20Den%20Ham/OKV/Nieuw-Nijverdal.htm 2 February 2020.

4. Also spelled as Sjaarda, Sjaerda, and Ziarda.

5. www.AlleFriezen.nl Notarieel archief akte; Repertoire: 040035; 10 Dec. 1819.

6. The Institute for the Deaf and Mute was founded in 1790 in the city of Groningen, the Netherlands.

7. www.AlleFriezen.nl Notarieel archief akte, Repertoire: 040035, 11 March 1829.

8. *Leeuwarder Krant,* 13 December 1833.

9. www.AlleFriezen.nl Notarieel archief akte; Repertoire: 041086; 21 July 1847.

10. Johan Sjaardema, *Mengelingen: Kleine verhalen, schetsen en gedichten voor jong en oud, uitgegeven ten voordeele van een ongelukkigen doofstomme* (Groningen M. De Waal, 1860).

11. The 1850 USFC of Perry County, Tennessee, unfortunately did not classify townships or post office districts. It enumerated the 926 families on 134 pages. The other three Dutch families lived near each other on numbers 746, 747, and 749 so must have known each other but had no connections with the Sjaardema and Vander Plaat families. Sjaardema and Vander Plaat lived on 628 and 631, respectively, also near each other, meaning that they were practically neighbors.

12. The Van Aalst family originated from Ophemert, Gelderland, and had arrived on the bark *Nederwaard* from Rotterdam in New York Harbor on 9 September 1847. Sometime between arrival and her marriage to Tjerk, Aaltje's husband, Wouter Van Aalst, and three of her five children died. How and when Aaltje and Tjerk met is not known, but it may be that Aaltje, being Dutch, was instrumental in the move to Lafayette. Wynsen's last two wives were American-born and would not have cared to live in a Dutch community.

13. The 1860 United States Federal Census Slave Schedules list 548 slaves living in Perry County out of 278,580 in the entire state.

14. The Fugitive Slave Act or Fugitive Slave Law was passed by the United States Congress on 18 September 1850 as part of the Compromise of 1850 between Southern slave-holding interests and Northern Free Soilers. It required that all escaped slaves, upon capture, be returned to their masters and that officials and citizens of free states had to cooperate. Abolitionists nicknamed it the Bloodhound Law for the dogs that were used to track down runaway slaves.

15. In Lafayette, Tjerk became a charter member of the Lafayette CRC and served as one of the first elders and clerk.

16. Jessamyn West, *Friendly Persuasion* (Hartcourt, Inc., 1945).

17. For Quakers in Indiana, see: https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022028/00001/336j by John William Buys.

18. After Wynsen's death, Mary Ann married Patrick Flanigan, an Irishman who abused her. She died 10 September 1861 in Geneva, Jennings County, Indiana. We know Mary Ann's history thanks to a letter written by a friend, Rachel Wilkins, to Mary's brother and his wife, Rowley and Polly (Hinchey) Sprout, in Michigan. Rachel's letters are preserved online as "The Rachel Wilkins Letters." Ingenweb.org/injennings/pages/jenrecords/wilkensletters.html

19. Information from Marriage Supplements Groningen 1856–1857 from #242 to #280. Ancestry film #1739

Johanna Timmer: Calvin's First Dean of Women and Founder of Kuyper College

Rhonda Pennings

How did a young woman, born in 1901 in a rural setting and growing up in an age of male headship and in a hierarchical system that favored boys over girls and men over women, become Calvin's first Dean of Women? It is a story that deserves a place in our Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Christian Reformed Church in North America annals. To fully appreciate her accomplishments, let us begin with her family's humble background.

Johanna's Family and Religious Roots

Johanna's grandfather, Albert Timmer, was born in 1825 in Zuurdijk, in the province of Groningen, the Netherlands. Zuurdijk is not far from Ulrum,



Johanna Timmer. Image courtesy HH Archives.

where the *Afscheiding* (Secession) under Rev. H. de Cock took place in 1834. In the summer of 1835, De Cock led a large number of members out of the Dutch Reformed Church of Zuurdijk to form a Christian Seceder Church. Albert Timmer was ten years old at the time, and although we have no record that his family joined this new movement, he would have been aware of the religious fervor gripping the community.[1] However, the fact that he joined the Graafschap CRC after coming to America gives us an indication of his religious affiliation.

The Timmers were carpenters in the Netherlands (the word *timmerman* in Dutch means carpenter). Albert Timmer arrived in the United States as a thirty-year-old single man in 1856 after a sailing journey of seventy-two days.[2] Four years later, on the 1860 United States Federal Census, he is listed as a single thirty-three-year-old farm laborer living in Holland Township, Ottawa County. In October of 1861 his first son, Hendrik, was born, indicating that he married shortly after the census was taken. He married Minnie (Meistje/Mentsje) Bisschop, whose family had arrived in 1853 from Uithuizen, also in Groningen. When the Civil War broke out, Albert was drafted in July 1863. Apparently not wanting to leave his young family, and financially able, Albert bought a substitute.[3]

Albert and Minnie Timmer chose a tract of forest land near the settlement of Graafschap, Michigan, where they built a log cabin. Like the other settlers, Albert cut trees for shelter, for warmth, and for clearing the land to grow crops. Because he was needed to help out at home, Henry (Hendrik) finished only the third grade.[4] Minnie died in June 1882 at forty-two years of age of acute intestinal obstruc-

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Walking to the Graafschap CRC in 1901, the year Johanna was born. Image courtesy HH Archives.

tion; Albert passed away ten years later in 1892. Both graves are in the Graafschap Cemetery in Holland, Michigan.

When Henry was a teenager, a doctor in Graafschap hired him to care for the horses, drive the buggy, and dispense drugs. As Henry grew older, the doctor equipped one room in his house from which Henry could run his business as a barber. Thus, at an early age, he began a business he would continue throughout his life.[5]

Henry was married to Anna Ensing on 8 May 1894 by Isaac Fairbanks, Justice of the Peace, in the city of Holland. Anna's parents came from Graafschap Bentheim in Germany in 1854, and, like her husband Henry, Anna was born in the colony a few years after her parents' arrival. In America they joined the Graafschap Christian Reformed Church and, when the young married couple moved to the village of Graafschap, they joined the church as well. Here they raised their three daughters and two sons.[6]

Johanna grew up in the village where her father, Henry, was a barber. They lived a simple life and relied upon God for their day-to-day sustenance. This frugal upbringing would serve her well in preparation for the work that lay ahead of her.

Johanna Timmer was baptized and made profession of faith in the Graafschap CRC and remained a member of that church until 1934, when the family, consisting of Mrs. (Anna) Timmer, by then a widow, and three children, one of whom was Johanna, joined the Prospect Park Christian Reformed Church.[7] By that time Johanna was already living and working in Grand Rapids and apparently had not transferred her church membership. The Graafschap congregation kept to the Dutch language well into the twentieth century. The December 1932 council minutes were the last ones written in the Dutch language and, while the congregation had introduced English-language worship services, it was not until July 1953, a century after its founding, that the Dutch-language services were entirely eliminated.[8] This meant that Johanna's spiritual education had been mostly in the Dutch language.



Graafschap CRC. Image courtesy HH Archives.

Her passion for mission work may have been inspired by the pastors who influenced her spiritual journey. Graafschap was one of the first congregations to join the Christian Reformed Church in 1857 and was noted for being rather conservative during that time. The following pastors served Graafschap during Johanna's early years: Andries Keizer, 1898–1902; William DeGroot, 1903–1909; Marinus Van Vessem, 1910–1915; and Ralph Bolt, 1915–1922.[9]

Rev. Keizer was known for his sound and solid preaching and teaching. During his ministry the Graafschap church experienced peace and tranquility, as well as spiritual growth and development. While Keizer had baptized Johanna, she was too young during his ministry for him to have had an impact on her life.



Rev. A. Keizer. Image courtesy HH Archives.

She was still a young girl during De Groot's ministry. He was noted for his dedication to financial prosperity for the church. During this time congregation members donated money toward the building of the Graafschap Christian School, indicating an interest in promoting and supporting Christian education.[10] His gift of inspiring the youth made a lasting impact on the congregation and bonded them to a deep mission commitment.[11] In May of 1909, the Young People's Society



Rev. Wm. DeGroot. Image courtesy HH Archives.

supported an Indian child at Rehoboth through the Mission Board.[12]

Rev. Van Vessem arrived in Graafschap when Johanna was nine years old and perhaps contributed to her spiritual formation the most. In 1888, at the age of twenty-two, he had spent two years in the mission field, where he accepted one hundred forty-two people for baptism or confession of faith.[13]



Village of Graafschap, MI. Image courtesy HH Archives.

Finally, Rev. Bolt, greatly loved and respected by the members of Graafschap, was a practical minister with an outstanding skill in personal counseling. His spirit of devotion and common sense helped him to respond to the growing needs of his congregation. One of the most pressing concerns was whether his catechism students should be taught in English or Dutch. In addition, in 1920 a big controversy in the Christian Reformed Church involved whether to establish Christian schools. This took place during a time when horses and buggies were being replaced by automobiles and the economy was affected by World War I.

Van Vessem and Bolt stimulated a vigorous mission interest, so that the congregation became the calling church for Classis Holland to send the Huizengas to the Navajos and Dr. Lee Huizenga to China. Rev. Van Vessem's "concern for spiritual maturity resulted in twenty-seven young people making their professions of faith as a group on 16 April 1913."[14] Johanna was twelve at the time, and this may have had a great impact on her life because it was at age twelve that Johanna felt God's call to go into mission work for her life's vocation.[15] She made a vow to serve God, and this vow was her vision throughout the rest of her life.

Johanna made profession of faith when she was barely seventeen years old, showing that she took her religious upbringing seriously. The Graafschap council minutes of 24 September 1918, Article 2, record that Johanna, along with four young men, came to council to make profession of faith. It seems that even then she was outnumbered by men. Article 3 describes the interview by Rev. Bolt and notes that they were all accepted.

Educational Roots

As a young girl, Johanna attended a public two-room country school, where she excelled as a student.[16] She graduated from the eighth grade when she was only twelve years old. Her parents thought that a three-mile walk was too strenuous for her, so she repeated the eighth grade.

For the next four years she was an exemplary student at her high school in Graafschap. Her dedication to God was evident in all her studies. After completing high school at age seventeen, she taught for one year at the Christian school in Paterson, New Jersey, which later became Eastern Academy.[17]

Her desire to go into missions led her to Calvin College (now University), where she took two years of Greek and other courses to prepare her for service to God. According to William and Marianne Radius, Timmer took courses for her bachelor's degree with "her eyes firmly fixed on the day when she would teach God's word to those who had not heard it yet." She was one of the first girls to earn a BA degree at Calvin, and the first female to win the coveted University of Michigan scholarship. After attending the University of Michigan, Timmer taught for one year at Grand Rapids High School in 1925.[18]

Teaching Career

Richard Harms, retired curator of the Calvin University Archives, stated, "This [Timmer's appointment] marks a change in the history of higher education. . . . Throughout the country, more women were attending college. Calvin's programs in nursing and teaching drew a growing number of female students—and the administration decided that they, like many other institutions, should hire a dean of women."[19]

In 1927, at age twenty-six, she broke new ground as the first woman to join Calvin's English faculty, as well as serving as Dean of Women. At first, Timmer had a difficult time deciding whether she should accept the position of dean at Calvin. Her friend Marianne Radius remembered how Johanna agonized over whether to accept the Calvin appointment. Was this where God wanted her to be when for so many years she had been preparing herself for the mission field?

Nevertheless, once Timmer was convinced that this was God's will for her life, she took on the challenge with joy and resolve. Radius wrote, "Jo wasted no tears on the doors Jesus closed in front of her. Instead she went cheerfully forward through the door that Jesus opened."

Her twelve years at Calvin were not without challenges. As a faculty member, Timmer was the first woman to enter the formerly all-male faculty room. Understandably, this was an adjustment for some of the male faculty. A few males had the attitude that a woman could not do this job adequately.[20]

In addition, there were a few male students at Calvin who had the superior attitude that women should not be college professors. Timmer's friends the Radiuses recalled an episode in which two male students arrived late to Timmer's class and found her class door locked. They concocted a plan to set up a ladder and then to climb through a window into the classroom. Undaunted, Timmer said, "You two gentlemen may leave the way you came." The embarrassed students obeyed her command.[21]



Timmer in her office. Image courtesy HH Archives.

Timmer's resilience and determination soon won her over to the male faculty and students. The faculty found her to be a compatible coworker, and students remember her as an outstanding English instructor. Her former students recall her enthusiasm for the subject matter and her strong faith in God. According to former student Katie Gunnink, "Timmer taught with such great conviction that the doctrines of the Bible became alive and precious. She taught with great thoroughness and asked her students to master the truths she presented to make them a permanent possession in their hearts and minds.[22] Gunnink also recalled that Timmer's favorite song was "Beneath the Cross of Jesus, I feign would take my stand." Her assurance was in the gracious act of God's grace in Christ.

At Calvin each professor took turns leading the daily chapel service. Timmer's messages were always meaningful and filled with applicable Christian doctrine.[23] In Gunnink's estimation, Timmer was a spiritually strong woman. Many Christians found in her a pillar of strength to lean on when they struggled with their own uncertainties and doubts.

In her capacity as Dean of Women at Calvin, Timmer had many opportunities to minister to the needs of young women who came to her for strength and counsel. Marianne Radius recalled that in the cubicle that was assigned to her as Dean of Women, Timmer heard many concerns and problems expressed by young women at Calvin. Radius personally attested to numerous girls who dedicated their lives to Jesus Christ through the gentle leading of Johanna Timmer.

As Dean of Women, she grappled with problems that were prevalent for that time period in religious circles. Perhaps the most controversial issue that Timmer faced was worldly amusements, which centered on attending theatre/movies, playing cards, and participating in dances.[24] She struggled with how to handle young women who participated in these endeavors. Although it appears that Timmer was never legalistic, she also realized that she needed to follow Calvin's rules in her role as Dean of Women.

Since all women lived off campus at that time, Timmer was required each month to contact each non-parental home where Calvin female students were boarding. She was also responsible for any misbehavior by these women. In a letter written to those who boarded Calvin's female students, Timmer requested answers to the following eleven questions:

- *Does your Calvin girl take undue liberties?*
- *Does she abuse the use of the telephone or of anything else?*
- *Is she cooperative, willing, neat, and thorough?*
- *Is she dependable in every way?*
- *Does she go out too often in the evening, and does she, whenever she goes out, sign out before leaving the house?*
- *She never sits in a parked car in front of the house, does she?*
- *Is her "sign out" record accurate?*
- *The girl does not have "sign out" slips in her room, does she?*
- *Is it understood that the yellow and blue slips must be in constant possession of the landlady?*
- *Does your girl invite guests without securing your permission?*
- *Has she good table manners and is she careful about personal hygiene?*[25]

In addition to her correspondence with host families, Timmer wrote student visitation reports to the faculty of Calvin. These reports were a synopsis of her student visitation assignments. She wrote,

> Although many of our women students have not yet adequately caught the spirit of Christian conservation, for the lack which their eternal attitudes are at times disappointing. I must believe, on the basis of my consultations and on the basis of my rather intimate contacts with the women students that there is, for the most part an undercurrent of moral and spiritual sincerity. There is a definite disposition in the right direction.[26]

In the same report to the Calvin faculty, Timmer wrote that several

students had transgressed the regulations on amusements. In fact, none denied habitual transgression during the academic year. She continued to write that "the matter of establishing definitely Christian attitude toward the amusement problem is the burden of the entire faculty, not merely of the President, the spiritual advisor and the Dean of Women.[27]

The most difficult part of her job was enforcing the 1926 Christian Reformed Church ban on card playing, dancing, and theatre attendance.[28] In the Rules of Conduct for Calvin students during that time,

> participation in theatre attendance, dancing, card playing and other similar forms of amusement is strongly condemned. Students who persist in these practices must be disciplined to the extent of being suspended and, if need be, expelled. Students mentioned by name will be disciplined upon evidence that they continue to attend theatres.[29]
>
> According to Harms, "the ban on theatre attendance was most nettlesome and time consuming since students and some faculty openly ignored it.[30]

The issue became so heated that the Calvin Board of Trustees appointed a committee to confer with the faculty on the situation and to communicate and explain their stand on the matter. This committee was tasked with urging the faculty to educate their students that these amusements were in conflict with Calvinistic ethical standards and to impress upon them the dangers of worldliness. The Board also impressed on the faculty that they must communicate to students that if they continued to participate in theatre, card playing, and dancing they would be disciplined and possibly expelled from Calvin.[31]

To complicate matters, Timmer received many letters and questions from Calvin constituents regarding how she was dealing with worldly influences. An incident of worldly amusement occurred of girls attending movies when they were off campus at a convention in Chicago. In a letter, S. G. Brondsema wrote that he was concerned about how the authorities at Calvin were maintaining the position of the church. He had heard about the Chicago incident from his daughter, who was attending Calvin at the time, and was concerned about her spiritual well-being. He wrote, "where there's smoke there is undoubtedly fire. Are we here in Michigan setting the pace perhaps for the rest of the church?" He ended his letter to Timmer with "I trust I may have the assurance that as much as your position, esp. among the girls permits, you will exert proper influence to correct these evils."[32]

One of Timmer's legacies to Calvin was to write a code of conduct for female students. To construct Calvin's Code of Conduct, Timmer read policies of other colleges in the Midwest, such as Hope College and the University of Michigan, as well as Radcliff College in Massachusetts. These rules were mandatory for all female students, both on and off campus.

The Code of Conduct for Calvin College included rules for attire, dating policies, and household responsibilities. Since many females were boarding at homes in Grand Rapids, Timmer wrote *Regulations Governing Self-Help for Women Students at Calvin College*. The following is an excerpt from this document:

> Grand Rapids affords ample opportunities for girls to work for their room and board. For this a student is expected to give in ordinary house-work not more than twenty-hours per week. The apportionment of time should be somewhat as follows: 3 1/2 hours per school day, 6 hours on Saturday, and 2 hours on Sunday. . . If additional time is given, it should be paid on the basis on 35 cents per hour. It is not advisable for girls to put in additional time. It robs them of time for study and recreation. Most of the girls do enough work on Saturdays and on other days of the week to allow for considerable leeway on Sundays. . . . The strain of working for room and board added to the strain of college work makes it psychologically and physically necessary for a woman student to be free from responsibilities during said periods.[33]

Although the rules may seem strict, they were indicative of society at that time. The following is an example of what was written in newspapers at that time.

> ***"What the Well-dressed Women will not do,"***
>
> - *She will never go hatless on city streets . . .*
> - *She will never be seen on city streets in a sleeveless dress . . .*
> - *She will never go gloveless in the city . . .*
> - *She does not consider white shoes to be part of a smart town costume . . .*
> - *Her stockings are sleek over her ankles and the seams are not awry . . .*
> - *She never overdresses . . .*
> - *She never wears heavy makeup in the daytime . . .*
> - *She does not wear sat-out pleats or slightly soiled frocks . . .*
> - *And when she's all dressed up in her best, and anxious to make an impression, she doesn't load herself down like a dray-horse with a lot of assorted bundles!*[34]

Besides her duties as Dean of Women, Timmer taught classes in English and German, wrote articles, gave speeches, earned her master's degree from the University of Michigan, and took graduate courses at two seminaries and a divinity school. According to Harms, "I don't think

anyone had reason to dispute her credentials, but sexism was very prevalent in the 1920s. A number of her male colleagues truly thought she couldn't do the job simply because she was a woman. She refused to be marginalized. If someone pushed, she pushed back."[35]

Johanna Timmer's letters and correspondence to female students, parents, and staff reflect that she had great compassion for the female students under her care. In a letter of gratitude to Timmer dated 6 October 1935, Jane Carolyne Edwards wrote, "My dear Miss Timmer, . . . I have been wanting to tell you for such a long time how much Calvin and you, Miss Timmer, have come to mean to me. . . . I'm an entirely different person than I was before I came to Calvin and I owe a great deal of it to you. I am so deeply grateful to you, and perhaps some time I will find the words to express my gratitude."[36]

In fact, sometimes Timmer received letters from people she did not know. In a letter dated 14 November 1934, Margaret MacMurray, a Sunday school teacher, wrote, "At a recent meeting a question arose which is as follows: Should a lady teacher be asked to close with prayer? This means, should she be asked to close on Sunday morning before the Sunday school is dismissed. . . . Then there is another consideration—is it scriptural?"[37]

In Harms's estimation Timmer wanted to do everything possible to help women succeed. She approached her role at Calvin with grace and determination. She proved that being a woman had no impact on her ability to do the job well.

Nevertheless, after twelve years the pressure of her work at Calvin took its toll on her. She requested a year's leave for health reasons but after that did not return to Calvin. Her departure from Calvin surprised the board, her colleagues, and her students. Many of them wrote letters to Timmer expressing their gratitude and best wishes.[38]

Reformed Bible Institute/College (now Kuyper College)

According to her friends, Timmer had been restless during her years at Calvin. She still desired to work in the field of missions but because of her health opted not to go overseas. Her focus now was on organizing a Bible school to train mission workers.[39] The founding of the Reformed Bible Institute, RBI (now Kuyper College), in 1940 was not without controversy.

The concept of training mission workers was new in Reformed circles. People resisted the concept because of the negative stigma on evangelism and the emphasis on ministry and Bible study in the seminaries. One commentator called the product of such a school "tin can preachers."[40]

But when the Reformed Bible Institute was founded, Timmer became its first president and dean. She taught Reformed doctrine, and her students rated Timmer as a brilliant instructor. In addition, Timmer administered the Christian Service Department. She took on any and all tasks necessary to ensure the success of RBI. In spite of her incredible workload, she still found time to direct and encourage many missionaries.[41]

During her years at RBI, Timmer was responsible for the creation of Young Women's Societies throughout the Christian Reformed denomination. Later the federation joined the young men in the denomination to become the Young Calvinists of the Christian Reformed Church.[42]

It was also while working at RBI that Timmer convinced two of the school's female graduates that something needed to be done to help single mothers and their children. With financial backing arranged by Timmer, these women took the first steps toward organizing what is now Bethany Home, which provided shelter and love for unmarried women and their children.[43] These two women, Marguerite Bonnema and Mary DeBoer Vanden Bosch, were students in the first class at RBI. It was reported that Johanna Timmer greeted Mary when she arrived by bus from Denver. Bonnema and Vanden Bosch were roommates and soon discovered that they shared the dream of wanting to start a Christian home for children. Timmer played a big part in encouraging the dreams and aspirations of these two women.



Reformed Bible Institute (RBI, 1945) at 1230 Lake Drive SE, Grand Rapids, MI. Image courtesy HH Archives.

For over ten years Timmer was at the head of RBI. During this time, she traveled extensively to promote young women's societies. At the request of Corrie ten Boom, she

even traveled to the Netherlands, the homeland of her grandparents, to set up a school there modeled after the Reformed Bible Institute.[44]

Additional Careers

In 1951, at age fifty, Timmer became the principal of Ripon Christian Grammar School in Ripon, California. In 1956, she helped found the first Christian high school for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, called the Philadelphia-Montgomery High School.[45]

Timmer retired in 1963 in Holland, Michigan, but remained active as a Bible teacher during her retirement. At one time, she taught six different women's Bible study groups. She continued to teach classes until the day she died on 13 January 1978.

Timmer is interred in the Graafschap Cemetery in the Michigan community where she had been born seventy-seven years earlier and where as a young girl she had vowed to serve God, a vow she fulfilled with dedication, compassion, and perseverance.



Bolt-Heyns-Timmer Hall at Calvin University named after, among others, Johanna Timmer, one of only four women so honored. Image courtesy of the editor.

Her Legacy

Her legacy is far reaching. It was reported that some of the women of Holland to whom she had taught Bible studies stood around her coffin quietly weeping at the death of their beloved teacher.[46] These women knew that Timmer's life reflected the crown of righteousness designed for those who long for the appearing of Jesus and live holy lives in anticipation of His return.

Johanna Timmer was a remarkable woman. She grew up in a simple, God-fearing family. Her upbringing in the Christian Reformed Church during the 1920s set the stage for her passion for missions. Throughout her life, she met adversity with determination and became a role model for women. Her work in the arena of education showed her to be a woman who supported student success in all areas. She was respected for her devotion and integrity.

Timmer is remembered as a pioneer for opportunities for women. Her life is a story of faith that makes her a heroine of faith for Calvin University, Kuyper College, and the Christian Reformed Church. Her dedication to God's calling in her life led her to accomplish great things in the educational arena. Women like Johanna Timmer paved the way for today's women to pursue their dreams and ambitions.

Endnotes

1. J. Wesseling, *De Afscheiding van 1834 in Groningerland* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1973–1978).

2. William and Marianne Radius, "Johanna Timmer, Servant of Jesus Christ 1901 – 1978," *The Banner*, 2 June 1978, 20–21.

3. US, Civil War Draft Registrations Records, 1863–1865 for Albert Timmer, Michigan 2nd Vol 3 of 3, on Ancestry.com.

4. Radius, *The Banner*.

5. Radius, *The Banner*; it is interesting to note that the 1900 USFC lists his occupation as "butter maker." Perhaps it was Anna making the butter to augment Henry's barbershop income.

6. Timmer family on Ancestry.com.

7. Prospect Park CRC membership directory. Prospect Park CRC was organized in 1907 and was located on Central Avenue between 24th and 25th Streets. The congregation joined the Graafschap CRC in 2002.

8. *Graafschap Christian Reformed Church 150 Years of Service* anniversary book.

9. Richard Harms, compiler and editor, *Historical Directory of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Historical Committee of the CRCNA, 2004).

10. However, the Christian School in Graafschap was not founded at the time. Graafschappers were happy with their public school, which they considered Christian. In 1915 they wrote to Classis Holland in defense of not starting a Christian school, "because the education in our public schools is being kept as Christian as possible with prayer and Bible reading and hiring only Christian teachers." *Graafschap CRC 150th.*

11. *Graafschap CRC 150th.*

12. *Graafschap CRC 150th.*

13. Marinus Van Vessem (1866–1945) was the youngest graduate of the Calvin Theological Seminary. In 1888, at age 22, Synod chose Van Vessem to become a home missionary.

14. Graafschap CRC council minutes 16 April 1913.

15. Radius, *The Banner.*

16. See endnote 10.

17. Chris Overvoorde and Ann Saigen, *Stories of Faith: Fifteen Heroes of Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College Press, 1992).

18. Radius, *The Banner*.

19. Jessica Folkema. *First Female Faculty Member: Johanna Timmer*. 9 March 2011. Calvin University Archive Collection.

20. Folkema, *First Female Faculty Member*.

21. Radius, *The Banner*.

22. Katie Gunnink, "Miss Johanna Timmer, *Outlook,* 16 February 1978.

23. Overvoorde, *Faith*.

24. Lillian V. Grissen, ed., *For Such a Time as This* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

25. Letter to parents. Johanna Timmer Collection 257, Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, and the Christian Reformed Church in North America Archives (HH Archives).

26. Student Visitation Report to Faculty, undated. Timmer Coll. 257, HH Archives.

27. Ibid.

28. Richard Harms, "Flashback: Johanna Timmer, Pioneer for Women's Opportunities," *Calvin Spark*, Summer 2005, 13.

29. Rules of Conduct, Timmer Coll. 257, HH Archives.

30. Harms, "Flashback."

31. Calvin College Board of Trustees, Minutes of Curatorium, 4 June 1925, Art. 12. Timmer Coll. 257, HH Archives.

32. Brondsema to Timmer, 29 October 1935. Timmer Coll. 257, HH Archives.

33. *Regulations Governing Self-Help for Women Students at Calvin College*. Timmer Coll. 257, HH Archives.

34. Newspaper article, Timmer Coll. 257, HH Archives; it is interesting to note that none of Timmer's newspaper articles have the name of the newspaper or the date when it was printed. This was an earlier age when copyright did not matter as much.

35. Harms, "Flashback."

36. Jane Edwards to Johanna Timmer, 6 October 1935, Timmer Coll. 257, HH Archives.

37. Margaret MacMurray to Johanna Timmer, 14 November 1934, Timmer Coll. 257, HH Archives.

38. Grissen, *Such a Time.*

39. Overvoorde, *Stories.*

40. Grissen, *Such a Time.*

41. Overvoorde, Stories.

42. Grissen, *Such a Time.*

43. Grissen, *Such a Time.*

44. Grissen, *Such a Time.* Corrie ten Boom (15 April 1892 Haarlem, the Netherlands—15 April 1983, California, USA) was a WWII concentration camp survivor who started a rehabilitation center for other concentration camp survivors, as well as a global ministry to preach the power of forgiveness. She was the author of *The Hiding Place*.

45. Ibid.

46. Radius, *The Banner.*

CRCNA congregations with memberships that peaked over 1,000

The Christian Reformed denomination began in 1857 with four member congregations who seceded from the Reformed denomination. These four congregations were Graafschap, First Grand Rapids, Noordeloos and Vriesland. The first three of these churches still exist today, two of which at one time had memberships exceeding 1,000.

How many other Christian Reformed congregations had membership in excess of 1,000 during the past 163 years? How many of these churches still exist and what is their membership today, or what was their membership when they discontinued?

This list of ninety-three churches shows the year of organization, the year that each congregation peaked in excess of 1,000, the actual number of members that year, and the current membership as listed in the CRCNA *Yearbook 2020*. The final membership and year are also listed for discontinued churches.

This listing is part of a larger project which lists the peak membership and year for all CRCNA organized congregations, past and present. Present membership is also shown as listed in the 2020 yearbook. In the case of discontinued churches, the listing includes reasons for discontinuance (closing, relocation, merger, affiliation with another denomination) and the year of closing along with the final membership.

There are two of these lists—one is strictly alphabetical by location, the other is alphabetical by classis. Both lists separate the US and Canadian congregations.

It should be noted that the peak membership of the Christian Reformed denomination was 316,415 members in 1992. The membership in 2020 is 216,336.

These listings were compiled by Phil Erffmeyer with the able assistance of Clarice Newhof, both volunteers in Heritage Hall, the Archives for the Christian Reformed denomination, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Calvin University.

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Eastern Avenue CRC as it looked in 1924. Organized in 1879, it reached its peak membership in 1924 when Rev. Herman Hoeksema was its pastor. Sunshine CRC in Grand Rapids had a membership of 3735 in 1991, but was not organized until 1971. Image courtesy HH Archives.

CHURCH & LOCATION	PEAK MEMBERSHIP YEAR	PEAK MEMBERSHIP NUMBER	CURRENT 2020 MEMBERSHIP
UNITED STATES			
Bellflower, CA — First	1950	1380	137
Byron Center, MI — First	2020	1235	1235
Chicago, IL — Englewood First	1946	1560	Relocated 1962 (864)
Chicago, IL — Englewood Second	1950	1098	Relocated 1961 (678)
Chicago, IL — First (Fourteenth Street)	1929	1335	Relocated 1946 (1027)
Chicago, IL — Roseland First	1944	1304	Relocated 1971 (697)
Chicago, IL — Roseland Second	1915	1114	Relocated 1971 (489)
Chino, CA — Crosspoint	2020	1464	1464
Chino, CA — First	1980	1022	Withdrew 1997 (755)
Cicero, IL — First	1950	1209	Relocated 1974 (488)
Cutlerville, MI — Hillside Community	2015	1350	1253
Elmhurst, IL — Elmhurst	2020	1653	1653
Fullerton, CA — Orange Korean	2002	1125	200
Grand Rapids, MI — Church of the Servant	2005	1055	756
Grand Rapids, MI — Alger Park	1989	1142	666
Grand Rapids, MI — Alpine Avenue	1908	1715	Merged 1990 (591)
Grand Rapids, MI — Bethel	1965	1065	Merged 1994 (381)
Grand Rapids, MI — Boston Square	1961	1061	155
Grand Rapids, MI — Brookside	2020	1324	1324
Grand Rapids, MI — Burton Heights	1938	1240	Discontinued 2005 (209)
Grand Rapids, MI — Calvin	1977	1454	507
Grand Rapids, MI — Coldbrook	1915	1415	Relocated 1963 (511)
Grand Rapids, MI — Dennis Avenue	1915	1089	Relocated 1953 (885)
Grand Rapids, MI — Eastern Avenue	1924	2400	627
Grand Rapids, MI — First (Spring St.)	1881	1718	587
Grand Rapids, MI — Franklin Street (5th Ave)	1912	1250	Merged 1966 (458)
Grand Rapids, MI — Fuller Avenue	1955	1129	340
Grand Rapids, MI — Grandville Avenue	1930	1960	Merged 1994 (343)
Grand Rapids, MI — La Grave Avenue	2020	1928	1928
Grand Rapids, MI — Madison Square	2008	1294	1035
Grand Rapids, MI — Neland Avenue	1965	1148	649
Grand Rapids, MI — Oakdale Park	1931	1525	449
Grand Rapids, MI — Plymouth Heights	1985	1147	486
Grand Rapids, MI — Seymour	1956	1215	417
Grand Rapids, MI — Sherman Street	1944	1314	492

CHURCH & LOCATION	PEAK MEMBERSHIP YEAR	PEAK MEMBERSHIP NUMBER	CURRENT 2020 MEMBERSHIP
Grand Rapids, MI — Sunshine	1991	3735	223
Grandville, MI — Hope	1971	1124	192
Grandville, MI — Ivanrest	2012	1179	830
Holland, MI — Calvary	2005	1667	1061
Holland, MI — Central Ave (Market St)	1910	1830	456
Holland, MI — East Saugatuck (Collendoorn)	1906	1088	364
Holland, MI — Fourteenth Street	1936	1121	336
Holland, MI — Graafschap	1939	1131	428
Holland, MI — Harderwyk	2010	1347	1120
Holland, MI — Pillar (Ninth Street)	1927	1298	778
Hudsonville, MI — Evergreen	2019	1313	865
Hudsonville, MI — Georgetown	1996	1160	741
Hudsonville, MI — Hillcrest	1999	1000	767
Jenison, MI — Baldwin Street	1969	1153	391
Jenison, MI — First	1966	1018	Discontinued 2016 (79)
Jenison, MI — Ridgewood	1981	1061	561
Jenison, MI — Twelfth Avenue	1965	1102	Discontinued 2018 (155)
Kalamazoo, MI — First (Walnut Street)	1923	1090	Merged 1986 (346)
Kalamazoo, MI — Grace	1961	1010	275
Kalamazoo, MI — Second (Burdick)	1923	1140	523
Kalamazoo, MI — Third	1947	1092	498
Kentwood, MI — Kelloggsville	1995	1243	306
Lakeview Terrace, CA — All Nations Church	2015	2200	2180
Lansing, IL — Bethel	1994	1071	927
Lynden, WA — First	1926	1094	439
Lynden, WA — Second	1951	1073	297
Lynden, WA — Sonlight Community	2004	1025	540
Lynden, WA — Third	1956	1040	462
Midland Park, NJ — Midland Park	1946	1428	385
Munster, IN — First	1990	1145	276
Muskegon, MI — First	1910	1505	Discontinued 2013 (104)
Orange City, IA — First	1970	1142	310
Orland Park, IL — Orland Park	2009	1311	1144
Paterson, NJ — First	1920	1200	Discontinued 1999 (167)
Paterson, NJ — Second	1920	1165	Merged 1986 (388)
Pella, IA — First (Connect)	1955	1173	202

CHURCH & LOCATION	PEAK MEMBERSHIP YEAR	PEAK MEMBERSHIP NUMBER	CURRENT 2020 MEMBERSHIP
Rock Valley, IA — First	1940	1080	433
Sheboygan, WI — Christ Community (First)	1945	1079	238
Sioux Falls, SD — First	2020	1323	1323
Whitinsville, MA — Pleasant St.	1956	1137	361
Visalia, CA — First	2020	1107	1107
Wyoming, MI — Lee Street	1958	1047	395
Zeeland, MI — First	1948	1359	138
CANADA			
Burnaby, BC — New Westminster	1975	1223	285
Brampton, ON — Crosspoint (Second)	1995	1099	424
Brampton, ON —Immanuel	1965	1253	Relocated 2005 (492)
Calgary, AB — First (River Park)	1981	1112	395
Edmonton, AB — Inglewood (Third)	1961	1200	496
Edmonton, AB — Maranatha	1965	1150	277
Edmonton, AB — Second	1960	1175	Discontinued 1984 (225)
Grimsby, ON — Mountain View	1981	1034	816
Hamilton, ON — First	1959	1140	370
Sarnia, ON — Living Hope (Second)	1970	1121	339
St. Catharines, ON — Maranatha (First)	1962	1409	Discontinued 2014 (182)
Strathroy, ON — East	1965	1044	342
Toronto, ON — Second	1966	1196	Withdrew 1995 (233)
Trenton, ON — Ebenezer	1975	1030	577
Woodstock, ON — Maranatha	1971	1022	521

Disease and Death in the Early Years of the Michigan Colonies

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

Johanna Veldhuis was a healthy and intelligent eleven-year-old when she emigrated with her family from Overijssel, the Netherlands in 1847, along with twenty-three other families and a few individuals, under the leadership of Rev. S. Bolks. Sailing on the *Audubon* on 3 September, they reached New York in early October and spent the winter in Syracuse. On 1 May 1848 they traveled by canal boat to Buffalo, then by steamer across the Great Lakes stopping in Milwaukee before landing in Grand Haven, Michigan. Flatboats took them from Grand Haven along the shore of Lake Michigan to the Holland colony, and from there Rev. Bolks chose an area we now know as Overisel.

From Syracuse she wrote happy letters to a cousin in the Netherlands about the ocean voyage, the many things she had seen, her stay in Syracuse, how she loved school there, and the final journey to Overisel. The letters reveal her keen observation about life around her and her hope and optimism for the future in the colony.[1]

Shortly after arriving, Johanna died in early June in the Overisel colony and is the first person buried in the Old Overisel Cemetery. Johanna had traveled over land and sea to reach her destination, only to die of something so rudimentary as dysentery in her new homeland. She was not the only one. According to Van Koevering in *Legends of the Dutch*, the death rate in the early years was at least one out of four persons.

Health wise, life in those early years of the Michigan colonies was precarious. The settlers were well aware of the "pestilence that stalks in the darkness, and the plague that destroys at midday" (Psalm 91). In 2006 Jan Peter Verhave, a visiting research fellow at the Van Raalte Institute, and an expert on infectious diseases, made a study of these diseases in the Michigan colonies. He concluded, based on the first official record about deadly diseases, that from 1 June 1849 to 1 June 1850 in the Dutch villages in Ottawa County and Fillmore in Allegan County, the total number of deceased was eighty-nine.[2]

Among the causes he listed were various fevers, consumption, cholera, dysentery, measles, inflammations, and smallpox. Many of these were caused by poor housing, poor hygiene, insufficient diet, and drinking contaminated water and milk. Some of the early settlers were literally bitten to death by mosquitoes that bred in stagnant pools and swamps and rain barrels, causing malaria, while lice and fleas caused typhus.

Once the cause of a disease had been located, isolating it went a long way to eradicating it. Discoveries such as vaccines and antibiotics also helped mitigate the severity of a disease.

Two illnesses were especially problematic. One was cholera spread by close contact, and the other smallpox a virus that was transmitted by close contact but could also spread by



Memorial pillar of first deaths in the colony, Zeeland, MI. Image courtesy of the Editor.

droplets in the air when an infected person sneezed our coughed much like Covid-19.

Cholera

Originating in Asia, cholera is caused by fecal matter in food and water. Dutch newspapers first reported on cholera in early 1832 stating that it had reached Paris and that fleeing Parisians had brought it to Belgium. The Dutch government closed the border with Belgium, but not the seaports and the disease entered the Netherlands via a fishing vessel in June, 1832, and after that would flare up periodically. According to Dr. J. S. Chambers in *The Conquest of Cholera*, on 19 May 1859 the pestilence broke out in Detroit among recently arrived immigrants from the Netherlands and an epidemic costing a thousand lives followed. Hoyt Post wrote in his diary that the cholera panic is raging through the country and that everything looks dark and dismal, business is almost at a stand[still]. A. De Weerd wrote in December 1849 about how when it became known that the illness was increasing the President of the United States declared a universal fasting and a thanksgiving day on the fourth of August.

Smallpox

The origin of smallpox is unknown. It already appeared in ancient Egypt. It is a virus that is spread person to person by contact, and through droplets in the air. Symptoms include high fever and festering sores that leave permanent scars. The Zeeland emigrants (1847) under Jannes Van de Luyster imported smallpox through one in their party who had contracted it *enroute*, and came down with it when he arrived in Holland, Michigan, and an epidemic set in doing its deadly work. By 1800 a smallpox vaccine had been developed. In 1845 Dr. C. B. Goodrich vaccinated the Ottawa County Indians against smallpox. However, the majority of Dutch settlers were members of the Christian Seceder (*Afgescheiden)* churches and for religious reasons refused to let their children be vaccinated. They felt it would be opposing God's (punishing) father hand. Also, had Jesus not said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." (Mark 2:17)

Crammed together in their small cabins, there was little space for social distancing, and sheltering in place would have meant starvation. Only the strong survived those first years.

Endnotes

1. The Overisel Colony: The First 150 years 1848-1998 (Overisel, MI: Overisel Sesquicentennial Committee and Overisel Historical Committee, 1998). All other information in this article is from: Jan Peter Verhave, Disease and Death among the early settlers in Holland, Michigan (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Institute, Hope College, 2006), and Adrian Van Koevering Legends of the Dutch (Zeeland, MI: The Zeeland Record, 1960). See also Loren Lemmen's article on Cholera at Sea in Origins, 2005, No. 1, available on https://origins.calvin.edu/issues/origins-vol-23-no-1-spring-2005/download/

2. The number of deaths for the first two years (June 1847 to June 1849) was much greater, but no records were kept.

for the future

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

White Hot Politics: Holland Christian's Bid to Close 20th Street Becomes a Church Fight Over Christian Education
by Robert P. Swierenga

A. J. Muste and Radical Pacifism
by Michael Douma

Bert Bandstra, Pella's Democratic Congressman
by Jessi Vos

Steven Monsma / Vernon Ehlers: Fellow Professors / Political Rivals
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Dow Henry Drukker. Image courtesy of Public Domain.

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