Origins

Historical Magazine of the Heritage Hall Archives

Volume XLI • Number 2 • 2023

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Heritage Hall 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.

Heritage Hall, Calvin University
1855 Knollcrest Circle SE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546
(616) 526-6313

Origins is designed to publicize and advance the goals of the archives. These include the gathering, organization, and study of historical materials produced by the day-to-day activities of the church, seminary, university, and the diverse communities that support them.

William Katerberg
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Tracey L. Gebbia
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James C. Schaap
Robert Schoone-Jongen
Robert P. Swierenga
Contributing Editors

InnerWorkings
Printer

Cover photo:
Postcard of Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church and Christian School, at the corner of Granville and Clyde Park, ca. 1910. Heritage Hall, Conrad and Dee Bult Collection.

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from the editor. . .

The Fall 2023 issue of *Origins* explores a wide variety of topics, but the essays have a common element—biographical stories that offer us windows into Dutch immigration and Dutch Reformed history.

The first two articles are about people from the Grandville Avenue area in Grand Rapids in the first half of the twentieth century. Grandville Avenue was a blue-collar neighborhood, where the majority of folk were Dutch Reformed. The story Dewey Heetderks tells is about a half-dozen young men and one young woman who went into medicine from the 1910s to the 1930s, including his uncle, his father, and his aunt. The larger context is a blue-collar neighborhood and an immigrant community in transition, as they Americanized and many people in them joined the middle class.

Wilma Ditmar and Walter Lagerwey grew up in the same neighborhood. Marcia Lagerwey—their daughter—depicts their romance and marriage through letters that they wrote to each other on the eve of World War II and during the early war years. The article ends as Walt ships off to war in 1943. A subsequent article will pick up their story, through letters that traveled back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean via the U.S. Army's "Victory Mail" (or "V-Mail") service. Their story is in some ways a common one from the war. But it also is distinct as a Dutch Reformed variation, and it is unique for the sheer number of letters and the rich detail and depth of thought in them.

The next two essays are about the Christian Reformed Church. Andrew Voss describes the life and work of Daniel Zwier, who pastored a variety of congregations in the Christian Reformed Church from the 1910s to the 1940s. He also served the denomination, regularly attending Synod (a dozen times as clerk), participating on countless committees, and writing about church matters. Zwier's last congregation was in Chatham, Ontario. He was again serving where the CRC had need, as it scrambled to provide churches for the first wave of post-war Dutch Reformed immigrants to Canada.

Gerry Gerrits writes about his family's emigration from the Netherlands to Nova Scotia, on the east coast of Canada, and the founding of Kentville CRC in the Annapolis Valley in the 1950s. Dutch Reformed immigrants there integrated more quickly into Canadian society than those in Ontario and western Canada. Gerrit reminds us that the Christian Reformed Church has never been a monolith and that the local cultures in which Dutch Reformed folk found themselves shaped the communities and institutions they built.

The last two stories in this issue are about people that typically don't make it into Dutch American and Reformed stories. Robert Schoone-Jongen recounts the life of Lini Moerkerk de Vries. She grew up on the margins of the Christian Reformed community in Paterson, New Jersey but left it behind as a young adult, becoming a labor activist, a communist, and a public health nurse. She also served with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, and for a quarter century she directed public health programs among indigenous peoples in Mexico.

Finally, Pieter Hovens describes the participation of Simon Pokagon, a Potawatomi leader, in the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of Holland, Michigan, in 1897. Simon was the son of Leopold Pokagon, who had led a Potawatomi band in southern Michigan during the era when the United States government forced Native peoples in the state to cede their land. Hovens offers a window into Native-white relations in the late nineteenth century, exploring why Hollanders invited Pokagon and how Pokagon used this platform to promote the rights and legacy of his people.

News from the Archives

The big news for the fall is that the Hekman Library is undergoing renovations over the next year. The first floor (basement), second floor (where Heritage Hall is), and third floor will be closed. Heritage Hall will remain open, however. To enter, you'll need to go to the library's third-floor entrance. A passageway to the stairwell will remain open. Go down

to the second floor, where there will be a passageway to Heritage Hall. You can also go up to the fourth and fifth floors.

When the renovations are complete, the library will look quite different. Many student offices and services will be located on the second floor, and the third floor will be the library's main floor. We may close Heritage Hall now and again for short periods if things get too noisy, but we expect it to be open for business for the year.

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The price of printing and mailing *Origins* has gone up significantly in the past few years. It will not fall any time soon, if ever. At $15.00 a year, *Origins* is still a bargain, we think, and at that price we will break even on the cost of printing and mailing.

A few years ago, we stopped including the little envelopes for sending in checks for renewing your Origins subscriptions. I know that this change has been an inconvenience for some of you. The simple reason was cost. Only a small number of people were using the envelopes. And printing the envelopes and having them inserted in the magazine cost several hundred dollars a year.

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In between issues of *Origins* in print, remember to check out *Origins Online*, our blog (at https://origins.calvin.edu/). If you're on Facebook, check out our page for bits and pieces of history and news related to Heritage Hall (https://www.facebook.com/heritagehallarchives).

"We Grew Up Together"

From Immigrant Neighborhood to Careers in Medicine

Dewey Ralph Heetderks Jr., with William Katerberg

My story is about six young people who grew up in the same Grandville Avenue neighborhood in southwest Grand Rapids in the early 1900s. Their Dutch Reformed families were typical of the neighborhood. They were immigrant families who mostly held mostly blue-collar, working-class jobs. In some ways these six young people stand out as exceptional for finding their way into careers in medicine. They also are examples of how the neighborhood and larger Dutch Reformed community were changing, from immigrant and ethnic to native born and Americanized, and how an educated middle class was emerging in them.[1]

Though more than a decade separated the five boys and one girl, they all knew each other. Growing up in a "Dutch ghetto," as it has sometimes been called, meant that they were raised in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and went to a "Dutch" elementary school just off Grandville Avenue, where the first few grades were taught in the Dutch language. Fifteen years separated them in age, but the sameness in their Dutch environment made them alike in their background.

The Larger Setting

The Dutch Reformed community in the Grandville Avenue neighborhood was part of a bustling, ethnically diverse industrial city. Grand Rapids grew from 60,000 people in 1890 to 113,000 in 1910 and 169,000 in 1930. It was known as the "Furniture City," its fine furniture factories taking advantage of the region's timber industry. Grand Rapids also built appliances, such as refrigerators, and in the early twentieth century it began to support the automotive industry, supplying factories in Detroit with parts. The promise of work in these industries drew large numbers of immigrants—Polish Roman Catholics and Dutch Reformed notable among them.

Dutch immigrants, like other Europeans, came looking for a better life. That included religious liberty, an attraction for Dutch immigrants who had been part of the *Gereformeerde Kerk* (GK) in the Netherlands. The GK was a small denomination that in the 1830s had split from the national, state-controlled church, and its members suffered discrimination. The Dutch also came for economic opportunity, whether for farmland or jobs in growing American towns and cities.

Religion and strong families were important to these immigrants. Most were frugal and industrious and had a strong worth ethic. They also were people of "the book"—the Bible. They took theology seriously, valued orthodox religious education, and set up a system of Christian schools.

Education beyond the ninth grade was rare, however. Most of the young men in the neighborhood began

Dewey R. Heetderks, M.D., is a retired physician and clinical professor of urology at the Michigan State University Medical School. He is author of Merchants of Medicine: Nostrum Peddlers — Yesterday & Today *(2002).*

Grandville Avenue CRC and Christian School. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

their life of work at that point. Few finished high school in the 1910s, and college was even more unusual. Dutch Reformed folk appreciated education, but most did not encourage higher education. Some even opposed the CRC developing a full-fledged college, fearing that it would lead to Americanization and worldliness. Students who did finish high school and were able to attend college typically became preachers or teachers.

By the 1910s, and especially the 1920s, however, a small but growing number of Christian Reformed youth began to seek careers in fields such as engineering, law, and medicine. In some cases, parents might help financially, but often not for professions other than ministry and teaching. Still, from the start Calvin College, first as a junior college and then as a four-year baccalaureate school, designed its curriculum for students who intended to go on to state schools in professions such as engineering, medicine, and nursing.

The Neighborhood

The Grandville Avenue neighborhood stretched for a mile from Franklin Street to Plaster Creek. Near the creek stood Grand Avenue CRC, a Dutch language congregation organized in 1891, and Grandville Avenue Christian School. By 1913 Bethel CRC, founded as an English language congregation, also served the neighborhood. The Reformed Church in America attracted Dutch immigrants, too, and it had two congregations in the neighborhood: Fifth Reformed Church (1886) and Grace Reformed Church (1897). In 1900 about 75 percent of the neighborhood population was of Dutch origins. By 1920 more than fifty Dutch American businesses served it, including import shops that brought familiar old-world goods to families adjusting to American life.

Grandville Avenue CRC was a traditional congregation and a large one. It used the Dutch language and did not allow a choir until the 1950s. Bethel CRC was a little more progressive, by local standards, for its use of English and for attracting members interested in promoting Dutch Reformed influence in American society.

Grandville Avenue Christian School was among the largest in the CRC's National Union of Christian Schools during its peak, from 1915 to 1960. By the 1930s it had some 900 students in classes from kindergarten to grade nine. In the 1910s it also had a "normal school," which trained teachers. In the 1920s, Calvin College took over training teachers for CRC-related Christian schools.

The era of Reverend Ymen "Y. P." De Jong symbolizes the evolution of the neighborhood. Y. P. served Grandville Avenue for three decades (1917–1945). In 1917 Dutch was the day-to-day language of the congregation; by 1945 it was English. Cars had replaced horses and buggies. And many of the neighborhood's young men had served in two world wars. In the process they had become increasingly confident Americans, sometimes impatient with older ethnic prejudices. By the 1950s, the Dutch enclave in the Grandville Avenue area was breaking up, with families moving to suburbs in Grandville, Wyoming, and Jenison.[2]

This history provides the context for my story.

The two streets that in my family's memory defined the Grandville Avenue neighborhood were Caufield and Sheridan. Many of the men worked in nearby factories, such as the Leonard Cleanable Refrigerator Company (later owned by Kelvinator). These streets were surrounded by Hall Street and Grandville Avenue. Along the residential streets were houses, and behind the houses were outhouses that boys would occasionally tip over. Unfortunately, one time someone was in the outhouse!

Church for my family, at Grandville CRC in the early 1900s, was conducted in the Dutch language. There was no Sunday school in our congregation at the time, but there were catechism classes held during the week. They were taught by the pastor in the Dutch language. At-

tendance was taken by the students signing in, which resulted in the boys sometimes adding a few fictious names to confuse the pastor. On Sunday evenings some of the older boys would sit in the balcony section of the church. On occasion the pastor had to interrupt his sermon and instruct them to stop misbehaving. Fortunately for them, he did not call out their names.

Boys like these might sound like rascals, eager to escape their neighborhoods, families, and churches. But the lives of the six young people in my story suggest that, even as they found success in the wider American world beyond the Grandville Avenue neighborhood, they and their descendents often stuck with the traditions and institutions of their youth.

The Heetderks Family

My paternal grandparents were Albert J. Heetderks and Jeltje "Julia" Blocksma. He was born in Germany and immigrated to the United States in the early 1880s. She was born in Michigan. They married in 1891 and were typical of the blue collar, family-centered Dutch American neighborhood. They lived on Sheridan Avenue for many years. Albert was a carpenter who worked in a variety of areas of construction. He and Julia soon started having children—three boys and a girl.

The oldest of the boys was Bernard John Heetderks. He was born in 1892. After high school he studied at Valparaiso College, a small school in northwestern Indiana. He attended medical school at Loyola University in Chicago. After graduating from medical school in 1914 at the age of 22, he took a two-year internship at a Detroit hospital.

After his training, young Dr. Heetderks began the practice of medicine in Missoula, Montana, at the Northern Pacific Hospital. While there, World War I broke out, and in April 1918 he enlisted in the Army Medical Corps. Prior to going overseas, he courted and married Kathryn Corlett. She was born in Iowa but grew up in Arkansas. She went to Western Montana College in Dillon and taught school in Deer Lodge.

Following his discharge from the Army in 1919, Bernard practiced medicine in Manhattan, Montana, which had a Dutch enclave, later moving to Bozeman. His two physician sons—Bernard John Heetderks Jr. and Albert D. Heetderks—later joined him. The brothers obtained their medical degrees from the University of Minnesota. The three of them established the Heetderks Clinic of Bozeman, Montana. Bernard died in 1979 at the age of 76.

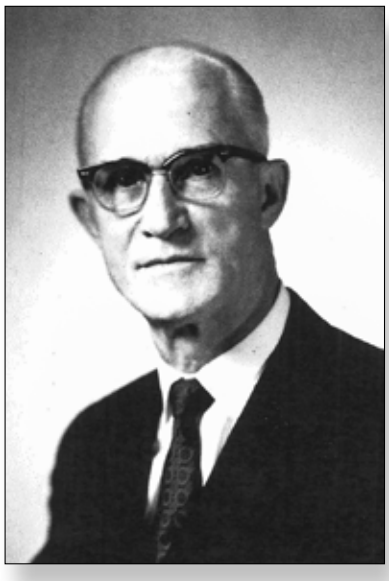
Dewey Ralph Heetderks followed his brother in the pursuit of a career in medicine. He was born in 1896. After high school, he attended Calvin College for several years in the 1910s. He received little or no financial support from his parents, however, as they wanted him to go into the ministry and would have supported that career. Instead, he paid for his own education by working hard at multiple summer jobs, including selling Fuller Brushes door to door. In 1918, his draft card indicates that he was working at a tannery on a farm near Grand Rapids.

After the war Dewey finished his undergraduate degree at the University of Michigan (1922) and went on to earn his medical degree there in 1925. Dewey completed his internship at Blodgett Memorial Hospital in East Grand Rapids in 1926 and went on to obtain a specialty degree at the Mayo Clinic, where he completed his residency as an ear, nose, and throat doctor.

In addition to seeing patients, Dewey contributed to research. He was the first doctor to describe "vasomotor rhinitis," in 1929. In patients with this condition, the membranes of the nose swell and secrete mucous when the body is exposed to cold temperatures. Assisting him in his research on this malady was a young lady, Lorna Pattison, who eventually became his wife. During their courtship, Dr. Heetderks would examine Lorna's nasal membranes while she sat with her feet in a bucket of ice water!

After finishing his residency training in 1931, Dewey and Lorna married. He returned to Grand Rapids, where he practiced for many years. He died in 1983 at the age of 86.

Like my father, I attended Calvin College, graduating from it in 1953, and went on to the University of Michigan for medical school. I went on to serve as a urologist in the U.S. Army Medical Corps. After the military, I went into private practice and taught clinical urology at Michigan State University.



Dewey R. Heetderks, Sr., later in life. Courtesy of Dewey R. Heetderks, Jr.

It was rare that women became physicians in the early twentieth century.[3] But like her brothers, Bernard and Dewey, Anna Mildred Heetderks went into health care. She was born in 1901, and like Dewey she studied

at Calvin College in the 1910s, in its preparatory (high school level) program. She went on to earn a degree in dietetics.

Photo of Berend John Heetderks in uniform during World War I. Courtesy of Dewey R. Heekderks, Jr.

Anna served as a dietitian at the Mayo Clinic. While she was there, she met a Mayo-trained urologist, Dr. Roland G. Scherer. They married in 1932 and soon moved to Bozeman, Montana, where Scherer joined the Heetderks Clinic. The clinic was renamed the Heetderks-Scherer Clinic. Anna died 1958 from cancer, leaving Dr. Scherer a widower. In 1959 he met and married Melania Rose "Mel" Potrutz, a woman from Grand Rapids. She too had been married before, to a Dr. Martin Batts, but had been widowed many years earlier, in 1944.

As the stories of my family show, higher education and medicine became a path into the middle class. This was true not just for my father, uncles, and aunt, but for the generation that followed, some of us joining our fathers in medical practice.

Jay Venema

Jacob Richard "Jay" Venema was born in 1908. His father, Joseph "Anco" Venema, was born in the Netherlands and immigrated to the United States in 1882. Anco worked in Grand Rapids as a printer, including advertising for a furniture company and a retail store. Jay's mother, Jannetje "Jennie" Vanden Berg, also was born in the Netherlands, emigrating in 1892. The Venema family lived on Sheridan Street. His sister Josephine was working as a stenographer in Grand Rapids in 1930, according to the census. It listed Jay as a student.

In 1925, Jay graduated from Grand Rapids Christian High School, where he was class vice-president in his senior year. He studied medicine at the University of Chicago, earning his degree in 1935. In 1934 Jay and Irene Ruiter married. She was the daughter of Dutch immigrants, her father a painter. She went to Grand Rapids Christian High School, and in 1931 she graduated from the Blodgett School of Nursing. She worked as a public health nurse. They had five children. They were for many years active members at Burton Height Christian Reformed Church.

Jay took his internship at Butterworth Hospital in Grand Rapids in 1936 and finished his medical residency at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit in 1939. He then returned to Grand Rapids to begin his practice in internal medicine and cardiology.

Jay spent much of his career in medical education. His manner of teaching was rooted in the William Osler style of bedside teaching. Osler emphasized that physician clinical training had to be taken out of the lecture hall and given at the bedside. Osler was also one of the founding professors of Johns Hopkins hospital.[4] Venema thrived on this method of education, building close relationships with internal medicine residents and interns. After a successful career practicing his true calling, he died in 1986 at age 77. His funeral was held at Burton Heights Christian Reformed Church.

Louis Brunsting

Louis A. Brunsting was born in Grand Rapids in 1900. His father, Albert Lucas Brunsting, emigrated from the Netherlands to the United States in 1884. Albert worked as a grocer and machinist over the years. His mother, Swaantje "Kate" Bulthuis, was born in Chicago to Dutch immigrant parents.

Louis studied at Calvin College and Grand Rapids Junior College in the 1910s. He was drafted and served in the Army during World War I. The 1920 U.S. Census lists him as living at home on Sheridan Avenue and teaching at a "parochial school," presumably a CRC-related Christian school. He went on to finish his undergraduate degree at the University of Michigan and then entered the medical program there, graduating in 1924. In 1923 in Grand Rapids, he married Lena Jennie Pleune, a child of Dutch immigrants.

After graduating from Michigan, Louis took an internship at Blodgett Memorial Hospital in East Grand Rapids. He and Dewey R. Heetderks left Grand Rapids together to further their careers in medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. As it does today, the Mayo Clinic enjoyed a reputation for excellence in medical education and medical care. Louis completed his residency in hematology and syphilology and then became a consultant in dermatology in 1939. From 1953 to 1962, he served in the as professor and chairman of the Department of Dermatology at the Mayo Clinic.

Louis's brother Henry Albert Brunsting also studied at Calvin College and became a doctor. And Louis's two sons became physicians. After a long and successful career, he died at the age of 80 in 1980.

Intersection of Grandville and Clyde Park, 1948. Grand Rapids Public Library, Robinson Studio Collection.

John Bernard Plum

John Bernard Plum was born in Grand Rapids in 1909. His father, Bert Plum, was born in the Netherlands and immigrated to the United States. His mother was Anna Smit, who was born in Grand Rapids. They married in 1905, and John was the second of three children. The family lived on Sheridan Avenue. Bert worked variously in a piano factory and as a machine hand and had other jobs in furniture factories.

With the example of neighborhood boys and friends who became medical doctors, John also chose medicine. Like others in the group, he went to Grand Rapids Christian High, graduating in 1927. He was in the same class as Irene Ruiter and two classes behind Jay Venema. John attended Calvin College from 1929 to 1932, completing the pre-medicine program. He then went to Vanderbilt University's Medical School, graduating in 1936.

It is not clear what Plum did for the two years between graduating from high school and starting at Calvin. He likely worked to support his family or to save money to go to Calvin. The cost of his medical degree was burdensome enough that he enlisted in the U.S. Amy to meet his financial needs. His experience was positive. He received graduate training in military medicine and in the army eventually rose in rank to full colonel. He was assigned to the inspector division and in time became the Inspector General of the United States Army.

Captain Heetderks and Colonel Plum

Serendipity—or providence, as the CRC pastors who taught me catechism would have said—brought Colonel Plum and me together briefly.

In 1963–1965 I had to fulfill my military obligation. I was assigned as a medical officer to the Sandia Army Base in New Mexico. Located southeast of Albuquerque, Sandia Base was the major nuclear weapons installation of the U.S. Defense Force from 1946 to 1971. With Manzano Base, it carried out atomic weapons research, design, development, testing, and training. In 1965, the U.S. Army assigned Colonel Plum to perform a general inspection of the Army hospital located at Sandia Base. The hospital also served Manzano and the adjacent Kirkland Airforce Base.

Plum's cadre of military physicians (a mix of colonels and majors) would inspect the entire hospital, its medical services, and its surgical inpatient and outpatient services. The inspection included the operating rooms, emergency department, pharmacies, and medical records offices—everything. To prepare for the inspection, hospital staff waxed the floors, painted everything that could be painted, and shined the windows. Each medical officer was properly dressed, and the hospital gleamed. The hospital was prepared, and we were ready.

On the day of the inspection, the Inspector General and his team entered the hospital. All the medical officers, me among them, lined up against the entrance wall of the hospital and stood at attention. The hospital's commanding officer, Colonel Tenery, began by introducing all of us physicians to the Inspector General. I was the attending urologist at this base, with the rank of captain. When Colonel Ternary came to me, he said, "This is Captain Dewey Heetderks. He is head of our urological services." I saluted, but I do not remember whether Colonel Plum saluted back.

John Bernard Plum, Prism Yearbook, Calvin College, 1932. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

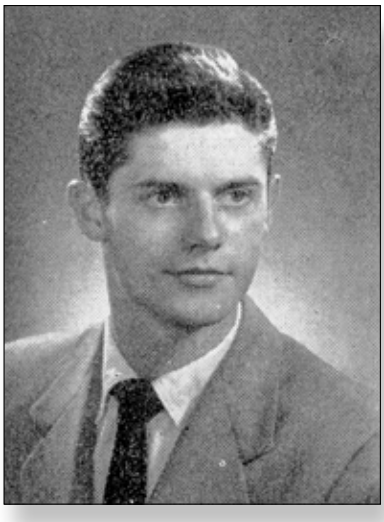
What he did do was ask, "Was your father Dewey Heetderks?" I responded, "Yes Sir!" "Well," he said, "we grew up together." I think we shook hands, but I am not sure of that. My colonel was elated and said something about planning to be with the Inspector General later that day. I became the hero of the day just because my father and Colonel Plum had grown up together as boys! Maybe my colonel and colleagues thought that this family connection had inclined Plum to take it easy on us. One way or another, it was a moment to remember.

After finishing my military service, I received offers to teach in medical schools in different parts of the country but felt drawn to return to Grand Rapids. There, I established my own practice, served at Butterworth Hospital, and taught clinical urology at the Michigan State University Medical School.

Conclusions

The Heetderks, Venema, Brunsting, and Plum families all lived in an immigrant neighborhood in Grand Rapids in the 1910s. The families were products of the Christian Reformed Church and the schools it had built. Dutch was their primary language. The parents were primarily working class, in blue collar jobs. By the 1910s, and even more the 1920s and 1930s, this community was Americanizing; a growing number of its children were finishing high school, with some going on to higher education, a variety of professions, and middle-class success.

The young people in this story who went into medicine did so in the context of two world wars, several of them serving in the military. Their careers brought them around the country, sometimes to other Dutch enclaves, such as Manhattan, Montana, and sometimes back to Grand Rapids. Their children would continue that Americanizing story. But ties to the ethnic and religious community of their youth remained vital to many of them.



Dewey R. Heetderks, Jr., Prism Yearbook, Calvin College, 1953. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

The details would change, from neighborhood to neighborhood and from one ethnic-religious immigrant group to another. But this kind of story played out again and again in the 1910s–1940s, through the Great Depression and two world wars.

Endnotes

1. For another story about Dutch Reformed physicians in the early twentieth century, focusing on three women doctors, see Rachel Hekman, "The Dutch 'Maiden Aunts' of Medicine," *Origins: Historical Magazine of the Heritage Hall Archives*, 40:2 (Fall 2022), 26–32.

2. This paragraph and the previous two draw heavily on H. J. Brinks, "The Era of Ymen P. De Jong," *Origins: Historical Magazine of the Heritage Hall Archives* 5:2 (Fall 1987), 4–15, notably pp. 4–6.

3. See Hekman, "The Dutch 'Maiden Aunts' of Medicine."

4. "About William Osler," Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University, Canada, https://www.mcgill.ca/library/branches/osler/osler-bio (accessed 19 July 2023). The site also includes links to other material on Osler.

"My Dear Troubled Love"

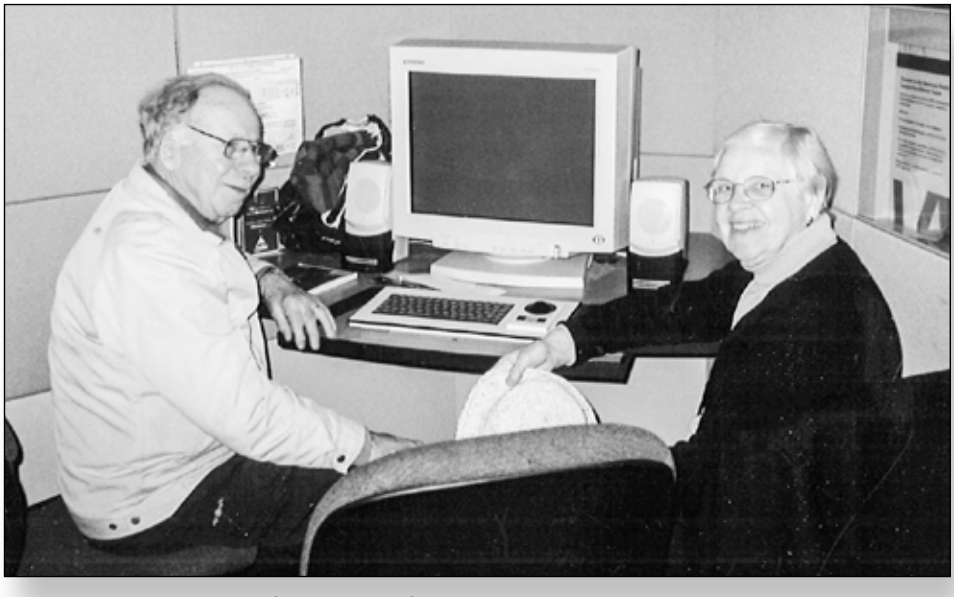
Marcia Lagerwey

This is a love story, and, like many love stories, it is set during a war. When the United States declared war on Japan and then on Germany and Italy in December 1941 and entered World War II, the lives of millions of its citizens and their hopes and loves changed; this was especially true for young people.

The extensive letters of my parents, Walter and Wilma Lagerwey, were written between 1941 and 1945. They represent one couple's attempts to cope with these uncertainties. They agreed to "write each other every day and tell each other everything." Over 1400 letters, some censored by the U.S. Army, made the one-to-two-week journey across the wartime Atlantic, past German submarines.

Stories of falling in love, engagement, and marriage in the early 1940s are common, but my parents' letters are both universal and special. They record the actions and feelings of a young, second-generation, Dutch, Christian Reformed couple from Grand Rapids, Michigan, thrown into a churning world of war and geographies beyond their imagination, both at home and abroad.

Part of tightknit families and a conservative Christian Reformed community in Grand Rapids, my parents struggled with family issues while they made life decisions. Jealousies, religious questions, and anticipation of future absences sometimes threatened their relationship. The war became a constant backdrop of their lives and letters. This article tells their story to 1943, when they married and Walter was shipped overseas. A second article will carry the story to the end of the war in 1945 and Walter's return home.



Wilma and Walter later in life. Courtesy of the author.

Director of Education at Worcester Art Museum in Worcester, MA for 30 years, Marcia Lagerwey is writing a memoir titled "Diary of a Curator" as well as working on her parents' World War II letters.

Wilma and Walter's particular love story began in 1936, during the Great Depression. Wilma Ditmar, one of ten surviving children, met Walter Lagerwey, future Calvin College professor of Dutch. At the time, he was the bookkeeper at her father's Ditmar Market on Burton Street, several blocks west of Clyde Park Avenue. In her detailed 2011 family memoir, which describes the background to the letters, Wilma described their first meeting:

> Walt had just returned from the Netherlands where he had lived with his mother and siblings for four years. He was a round-shouldered, red faced, shy 18-year-old young man. He had his eye on me, but soon I lost interest in him. I was a clerk at my father's store and Walt became my father's bookkeeper. The other workers at the store loved to challenge our relationship by teasing both of us. Then Walt would blush from ear to ear. Soon I had enough of this, and after that I spoke to Walt very little.

The year Germany annexed Austria (1938), Wilma began studying at Calvin College, one of the first girls from Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church to attend the college. In winter-spring of 1939 she caught what seemed to be the flu or a lingering case of strep throat, leading to rheumatic heart disease. Her doctor put her on bed rest for the summer of 1939 and again during the following winter; she was unable to continue at Calvin.

Per doctor's orders, Wilma's feet weren't allowed to touch the floor, and, bed-bound, she read the *New York Times* that her father brought her daily. She would have read about the Blitzkrieg when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, starting the European phase of World War II. In the winter of 1940, despite these world-altering events, life at home continued. The United States had not entered the war due to strong isolationist sentiment. It did, nonetheless, supply the Allies with food, oil, and war materials and began to prepare for the possibility of entering war.

When Wilma called in the grocery list to her father's store, Walt always answered the phone.

> Then we would talk a bit. I became bold enough to ask him to stop by when he brought the moneybag to my home. Of course, he would have a glimpse into my bedroom. This was when our courtship started. In the spring of 1941, he would take me out for rides in a borrowed car. His Model A was not good enough for me. I can still hear the "putt putting" of the Model A driving up our long driveway, and my heart would quiver. What a change in my attitude.

Their courtship slowly continued. Walt's mother, Martha Lagerwey (née Maartje Klein) had three children. Walt was eight years old in 1926 when his mother committed her mentally ill husband, Alexander Lagerwey, to Kalamazoo State Hospital with *praecox dementia*. He was transferred to Pine Rest Christian Hospital and remained there until 1932, when Martha took him back to the Netherlands. She had depended on her oldest child, Walt, and didn't want him to marry before he was 30. Walt was 22, and Wilma was 25, and in for a long wait.

Then Y. P. De Jong, the minister at Grandville Christian Reformed Church where both families attended, put in a good word for Walt. Wilma wrote:

> Often, my dad would let Walt take his car. Of course this did not make Grandma [Walt's mother] very happy either, but this meant we had a few more precious minutes together. I remember so well how *gezellig* [cozy]

Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church, ca. 1925. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

Wedding photo of Wilma and Walter, 1943. Courtesy of the author.

these times together were. His lit-up cigar reflected in our large living room mirror. Slowly on, all problems became minor. Grandma talked to Y.P. De Jong, the *dominie* [minister] for whom she worked. He said to her, 'You ought to be thankful that he would marry such a fine Christian girl.'

De Jong's support doubtless heartened Walter and Wilma, but war truly changed their prospects for marriage.

On December 8, 1941, the day after the surprise attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor, the United States declared war on Japan. Three days later, after Germany had declared war on the United States, it declared war on Germany and Italy. These declarations triggered an acceleration of events for my parents and for many other couples. Walt and Wilma were engaged in 1942 on their way home from the Chicago wedding of Wilma's uncle, John Griffioen. This was their first trip alone. They stayed at a Y.M.C.A. overnight, Walt on the upper floor and Wilma on the lower floor. "Of course we could not sleep together," Wilma wrote. The next day, they had a flat tire near Indiana Dunes, Indiana, which Walt changed, asking Wilma to get a "gadget" out of the glove compartment.

I'm sure Walt was a little anxious and then said to me, "Look in the glove compartment. There's something there which you apparently saw." I hadn't seen anything, but I opened the glove compartment and found a ring box. I opened it and there was my engagement ring. I was so excited that, as we were riding along, I threw my arms around Walt and shouted, 'We're engaged!' What a joy this brought to both of us! We made a short stop at the beach because Walt wanted to take a picture with the diamond glistening in the sun. This sealed our love. Later Walt told me that he had paid $75 for this priceless gift to me and that he paid it off at $10 a month.

But when and how could they marry? And would Walter be drafted and sent overseas, where he might be injured or killed?

By January 1943, Walt had procured a job at the Federal Communication Commission (F.C.C.) in Washington, D.C. He and my mother hoped that government service would keep him out of the war, according to my mother's memoir. Indeed, he put in an appeal to the draft board for a formal exemption from the army.

Walt and Wilma talked about getting married in January but decided, on the advice of others, to wait. "Today I had a premonition that we would be hearing from your board," Wilma wrote to Walter on April 5, 1943. "But I suppose premonitions aren't worth much but are just many times a wishful thought. Sometimes it seems so hard to go on like this, forever living in uncertainty and separated from each other."

On the same day, Walt wrote Wilma a typical balanced analysis and told her that the decision whether to marry was hers:

There is then this choice which confronts us. To marry now, regardless of the decision of my board, or to await a possible favorable decision, which if not forthcoming, may become an indefinite period of waiting, and which is very probable, or to wait until after the war. If we are to marry after I am in the army, there is no reason to wait now. The decision of course on marrying before a possible entry into the army rests entirely with you my love. I realize fully what it entails for you. You must decide, whether you in the first place would be willing to go back home

> [with your parents] or in with others as the case may be. You must decide whether or not in the way of God's providence you wish to become a mother. I may add here your oft repeated statement, that it is so much more difficult to bear children as one becomes older, particularly the first. Then too you are the best judge and I wish you would consult a capable physician as to the advisability of your having a child within a year or so. Should your response to these two conditions be favorable there is no reason to wait longer.

My father's sensitive letter reminds me that the unavailability of birth control presented this young couple—aged 24 and 27—with a stark decision.

On April 6, Wilma discovered that her future mother-in-law might travel to D.C. with her daughter, Sophie, who would work at the Dutch Embassy. Deeply unhappy, Wilma wrote in her memoir, "To me especially, it didn't seem right that she should go to Washington D.C. while I stayed in Grand Rapids."

As family members vied for Walt's presence and tried to make plans, relationships grew strained.

Wilma wrote Walt:

> My love I am upset, sort of bewildered…. Just about five minutes ago I called Sophie. I told her what you had written about wanting her to be present if and when we get married. Of course I realize that she cannot postpone any longer going to Washington. She will leave the 13th, which is next Tuesday. She said if once out there she could not afford to make the trip back. Of course I said that it was up to her but that you expressed the wish to have her present at the wedding. Then as I was just about ready to hang up Sophie said that maybe your mother was going along with her to Washington next Tuesday. I can't figure this out…. If your mother goes to Washington some time, alright, but why now when everything is uncertain. Why doesn't she go out there when Sophie has been away from home for some time and when we perhaps also will be out there? I don't understand do you… such plans as these may upset everything (April 6, 1943)….

In her next day's letter, written at 3:45 p.m. after her day at work, Wilma put aside her distress and focused on feelings about her fiancé. "My abiding love," she opened her letter.

> …I do like to think that someday I will be indispensable in your eyes, in fact I hope you think that even now I am in a measure indispensable to your happiness and wellbeing. My love I like to think of making a pleasant and happy home for you someday and may it be soon. Can you imagine me darning your socks, mending your clothes, and pleasing you by fixing nice things to eat. My love I so much look forward to the day when I can in any way try to please you and live for you….
>
> Today it is already Wednesday and still no news from your board. It must be that there are quite a great number of appeals otherwise it should not take so long. Now as I write I am wondering when you shall come home. My love how I longingly await this. Each week I think well now perhaps my love will be coming home this week and yet each week manages to slip by without being able to greet you….
>
> After getting ready for school I first hastened to the post office to mail your letter which I imagine you will receive tomorrow. I certainly hope it has not made you unhappy as it is my deepest wish to make you happy and not unhappy. Your unhappiness is my unhappiness and your joy my joy….

Wilma also described how the men in the post office watched her responses.

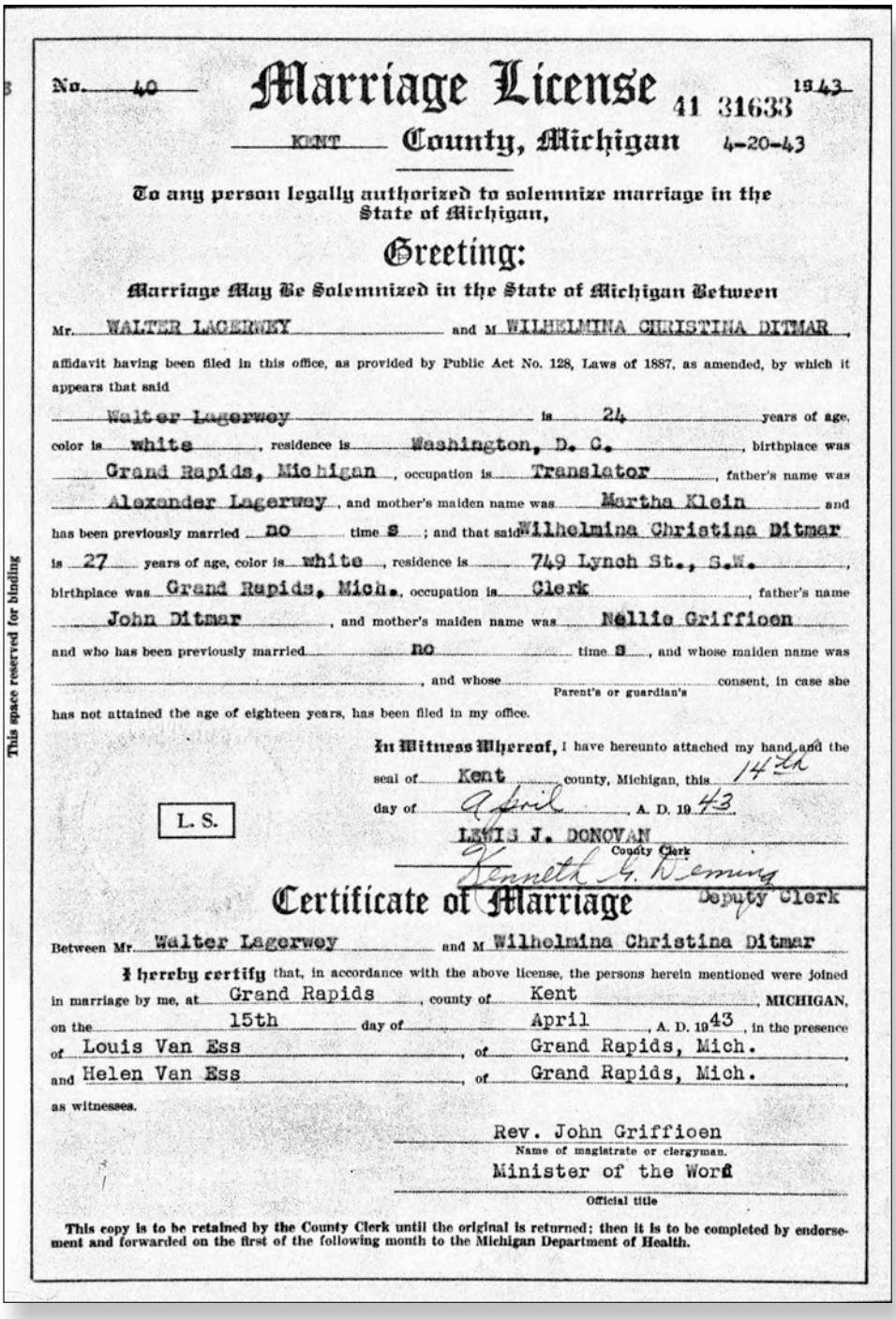
> I guess [they] get quite a kick out of watching my reaction…. Perhaps I should contain myself a bit more, although it is hard to hide from anyone your happiness. It is often much easier to put on a camouflage when unhappy then when happy. For when happy one's face just radiates the inherent joy. But I hope that very soon you will make me even happier by sending yourself instead of a letter. As long as this cannot be I certainly look forward to your loving letters.

Wilma closed her letter with a description of a package she had sent Walt.

> I hope you will receive my package in good shape and consider it as an act of love. I purposely baked an applesauce cake as this will keep for more than a week without getting stale. I only hope that you will not be separated from me for another week and that you will be able to enjoy some of this cake etc. on the train to Grand Rapids. Well dearest love I now leave you hoping that you are happy and well. With tender love, I am your loving Wilma (April 7, 1943).

Before Walt received Wilma's distraught letter, he wrote on April 8 and discussed their future.

> The fourth week of waiting has passed. I think we have learned a little patience don't you? On the other hand I cannot help feel that our correspondence stage is over.
>
> However there are more complications. Mother wrote yesterday that perhaps she might take on some easy



No. 40

Marriage License

41 31633 1943

KENT County, Michigan 4-20-43

To any person legally authorized to solemnize marriage in the State of Michigan,

Greeting:

Marriage May Be Solemnized in the State of Michigan Between

Mr. WALTER LAGERWEY and M WILHELMINA CHRISTINA DITMAR,

affidavit having been filed in this office, as provided by Public Act No. 128, Laws of 1887, as amended, by which it appears that said

Walter Lagerwey is 24 years of age, color is white, residence is Washington, D. C., birthplace was Grand Rapids, Michigan, occupation is Translator, father's name was Alexander Lagerwey, and mother's maiden name was Martha Klein and has been previously married no time S; and that said Wilhelmina Christina Ditmar is 27 years of age, color is white, residence is 749 Lynch St., S.W., birthplace was Grand Rapids, Mich., occupation is Clerk, father's name John Ditmar, and mother's maiden name was Nellie Griffioen and who has been previously married no time S, and whose maiden name was _____, and whose _____ consent, in case she has not attained the age of eighteen years, has been filed in my office.

Parent's or guardian's

This space reserved for binding

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto attached my hand and the seal of Kent county, Michigan, this 14th day of April A. D. 1943

L. S.

LEWIS J. DONOVAN
County Clerk

Kenneth G. Deming
Deputy Clerk

Certificate of Marriage

Between Mr. Walter Lagerwey and M Wilhelmina Christina Ditmar

I hereby certify that, in accordance with the above license, the persons herein mentioned were joined in marriage by me, at Grand Rapids, county of Kent, MICHIGAN, on the 15th day of April, A. D. 1943, in the presence of Louis Van Ess, of Grand Rapids, Mich., and Helen Van Ess, of Grand Rapids, Mich., as witnesses.

Rev. John Griffioen
Name of magistrate or clergyman.

Minister of the Word
Official title

This copy is to be retained by the County Clerk until the original is returned; then it is to be completed by endorsement and forwarded on the first of the following month to the Michigan Department of Health.

work! Well there goes my dependency claim. Of course it's really not a matter of dependency anymore. It's either occupational deferment-or Army-or-Navy. Do you still have prejudices against the Navy. I don't think I would exactly care for the Navy, but might be able to enjoy the Merchant marines. That is my "wander lust" I guess. Well we shall both soon be happy I trust, I hope as husband and wife….

Wedding hopes and plans dominated Wilma and Walt's letters, but the war was ever present. By April 1943 there were reasons for the Allies to hope. The Japanese were on the defensive, Allied forces were winning in Africa and planning a full-scale invasion of Italy, and the Soviet Union had turned the tide against Germany at Stalingrad. The war effort was still heating up at home, with a government-controlled wartime economy and the steady buildup of American forces in the United States and then in the European and Asian theatres of the war.

My father had considered the U.S. Navy or U.S. Merchant Marines—something I didn't know until I read the letters. But for him, as for so many others, anything could happen while he waited to hear from the draft board. In this context, Walt engaged Wilma in a religious discussion about life after death.

> And of course we should be happy always. But those moments when we can forget the world and live in thought of glory today are few. And yet I constantly remind myself that death is our lot. It is our task to study or at least think about it, and what is to come. … I am sometimes inclined to feel that souls are not immediately judged nor immediately ushered into glory or perdition. You write that you think faith excludes reason. I am afraid you can say really neither one or the other. They are not antitheses. Religion and I mean true religion, is a matter of reason. When one really considers what we are, our vanity (I am thinking of Pascal), and the world about us, infinity above us, we are persuaded that God is, and motivates all things. And in his divine revelation we are taught God's relation to us and ours to him. There are many things which the mind cannot grasp, and these we accept by faith, on the authority of God. It's really a beautiful harmony and I find it difficult to express. The more I read, the more I would learn. How I hope that I shall be able to learn Latin, Greek, Hebrew…

Sometimes as I lie in bed, I can so

vividly imagine you right with me. I am happy though that for some time, I feel calm and am not plagued by "lusts of the flesh" I certainly do love to think of you, my love. I feel as I ever did, only my heart throbs stronger. Looking forward to the times that will be ours, in a joyful union of body and Spirit, I take leave again.

I am enclosing a comprehensive summary of our financial status! You have bought shoes. I wish that I could have been there when you got them. Your loving fiancé, Walt

These letters brought my father back to me, as I knew him. He struggled his entire life to find answers to deep metaphysical, existential questions, reading voluminously in theology, philosophy, linguistics, and history as he engaged his prodigious intellect with cross-cultural and personal questions. He adored my mother, his intellectual life partner, and remained attracted to her until he died at age 86. And he loved tracking finances and keeping budgets, perhaps an outgrowth of his first job as an accountant in Grandpa Ditmar's store.

At 24, he dug into life's meaning while calculating the cost of a pair of shoes. Later the same day, Walt received Wilma's April 6 and 7 letters and wrote again. Already the diplomat, he saw both sides and reassured his fiancé that he wanted the same thing she wanted: to be together and to marry as soon as possible.

"My dear troubled love," he wrote:

How can I sympathize with you and yet gently reassure you. Your letter, to me is a masterly description of one whose feelings have been slighted…. I too have been perplexed by it all. I am sure you can judge from the tenor of my letters how I felt about coming home, and what is more, about marrying. I had no idea that Sophie was coming [to D.C.] on the 13th already, in fact I thought she would be coming about the 20th. I also thought that perhaps we could have married before that…. Mother wrote that Sophie insisted on her coming along…. You certainly know by now how anxious I am to come home and still more how I want to make you mine…. Now it is Thursday, and no news from the Appeal board… (April 8, 1943).

And then, Walt received a phone call from Wilma that changed everything. She'd given up on waiting to hear from the Appeal board and made a decision. Walt was ecstatic.

And here my love I was, thinking about what to say next. Now I sit here all flushed with excitement. It's hard to believe…. The telephone rings out in the hall. No one hardly ever calls me. But I'll answer it just the same. GRapids call. What?! Did I hear that right? I am trying to think of your first words. One of the first things was, "We are going to marry next week my love, Thursday, the 15th."

After months of adjusting to disappointment and waiting, Walt was overwhelmed with emotion.

[It] seemed as though it never would happen. And yet I have talked to her, the object of my adoration for well nigh six years. And now she is to be mine, mine alone, mine to love and cherish. Oh how I hope and pray that I may be above all a good husband to you. I am aware my love of my many faults. Perhaps the greatest is, at times a melancholy spirit…. I am aware of the new responsibilities and already I am thinking about living quarters…. What momentous days these have been. I really feel as though I need the reassurance of your kisses and embraces. I feel too, as you have written, that all the excitement and anxiety which has preceded our decisions, were in a sense detrimental. I feel in this commotion that we must be calm and temperate. But my cheeks remain flushed. Oh to lose myself completely in and with you. To feel the rapture of hearts bound by a lasting bond of love….

Wilma with Walter, who is in uniform, shortly before shipping out, 1943. Courtesy of the author.

Walt continued to pour out his heart to his longed-for bride, as he looked back to treasured memories and forward to the children they would tell about these life-changing times.

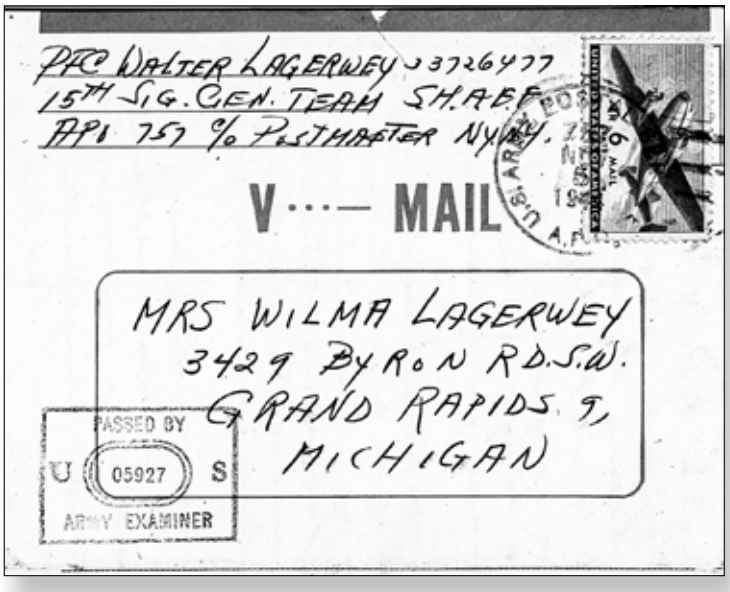
And now as these dreams of ours are about to be realized, as you are to be my bride, and I your groom, as well walk life's path together, as we work and play, and study, and all the things we have longed for, we can't but help

looking back. Another milestone. We are to become man and woman. Pleasant memories linger, and will. Someday, we will tell ours of our first meetings, of our talks, of our rides, of all the things we have done. And our engagement, what a happy day! …I only pray that our lives may be in God and then confidently we can march on, and also teach ours of the hope of future bliss, teach them to live and conquer death. And now in anticipation of our happy reunion, with some small misgivings (the doubter) and great hopes (the idealist) and calm yet too (the realist) I say goodnight with a fervent—with a tender kiss, a passionate embrace, the lover. Yours, lovingly, Walter Lagerwey (April 8, 1943).

On April 9 and 10, Walt addressed Wilma as "My Loving Bride" and "My Dearest Loving Bride." Wilma wrote her last letter on Wednesday, April 7, the day before her momentous call that propelled Walt into euphoria and her into a whirlwind of wedding planning. One week! Were my grandma and Aunt Sophie at the wedding? I wondered when I first read the letters. Unsure, I kept reading.

Walt opened with "I am a happy man today" in his April 9 letter, written on a Friday evening. He described "itching" to get home, how slowly the hours passed at work, and how long it seemed until Tuesday when he'd arrive in Grand Rapids, two days before their April 15 wedding.

> As I walked home [after dinner] there was new buoyancy in my steps…. I can hardly imagine working Saturday Sunday and part of Monday yet! … It was quite a problem to figure out what to do particularly as I do not know whether mother is coming here now…. As things now stand, I'll be home Tuesday at 12:01 p.m. I do not see how I can wait any longer…. I should buy some new shoes. I would like a suit but that would hardly be wise. I certainly am wondering how my fair charming bride will look…. Perhaps you have an impetuous lover. After getting home tonight I quickly shaved. The package was here. Immediately after supper I dashed to my room, and hurriedly opened the package. If it had come last night before you called, and had you asked me to marry you, I would have said, may I! It certainly is wonderful….



An example of a V-Mail letter from Walter to Wilma. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

Walt described his excitement about their plans, punctuating his thoughts with multiple exclamation marks. Then, he turned to practical matters and the week ahead.

> And now my love, my bride, let me repeat that it is quite impossible to leave tomorrow. I shall take the 5:15 Monday night, and arrive Tuesday at noon. I will report for work again on Wednesday of the following week, which is also pay-day and very nice at that. That will be one of our first problems no doubt. And what a problem. Of course it's all very hard to imagine. What is marriage. I do know that you will be my bride, my wife. You will always be at my side (I hope) and even in Spirit we shall always be one. I will try to care and provide for you, and love you most of all. And you will be all that I could wish for. Can you see us walking together…. I too will wear a ring, symbol of our love, the circle of our family. And what a beautiful, wonderful symbol at that. Last night before I retired to sleep, I prayed long and fervently. And today I have been happy and blessed. If I feel this next week, I shall be a small star at our wedding….

Then Walt, ever the caretaker, expressed his concerns about Wilma's health.

> I wanted to say that I just could not get to sleep last night, it seemed. Just thinking and turning. I hope you will be careful and take it all as easy as possible. Whatever you can leave till I come home, please do. I really have no idea what you are all doing. But I know you will take care!
>
> …I feel you are happy, that you are marrying as you always wanted to, quickly and simply. But what glorious speed, what magnificent simplicity! Now my love, my bride, I say good night. In a few hours I will be with you, and together we will be and what a good night that will be. My love, I love you truly. Walter Lagerwey [underlined with a flourish].

Walt addressed his April 10 letter

to "My Dearest Loving Bride," and his joy continued to overflow as he prepared to leave work for eight days. "Oh, I wonder so much. Will everything be alright, and what will our wedding be like, how will my bride look. Will I remain outwardly calm and composed. Oh what hours, these are. Never have I longed so much for you. I think about where we will stay after our wedding, the rapture of being with my own love, our travels and our home to be…."

In the middle of his busy workday, Walt arranged with a friend's doctor for a required blood test for the marriage license. "So I rushed home on the street car, impatient almost at every stop," he explained. "Then I quickly walked back. By 11:30 I had my blood test. Unfortunately the paper will not be ready till 2:30 pm Tuesday…."

Another friend agreed to pick up and send the papers special delivery to Grand Rapids to arrive by "Wednesday noon or thereabouts," the day before the wedding. "I trust this will be sufficiently early," Walt concluded.

Here, finally, I discovered that Walt's sister Sophie and mother *did* attend the wedding.

> I would count it as a special favour if Gert [my mother's sister] would sing, "I love you truly" and perhaps Margaret [another sister] would be kind enough to favor us with *Liebes Traum*. I don't know what Sophie or Piet [Walt's younger brother] may or will want to do. I hope that I shall be master of myself and will be able to help make it a cherished and memorable evening….

His whole family would be at the hastily planned wedding. Walt's next sentence glowed: "And with such great inspiration, perhaps I may be able to reflect some of the sunshine you have poured into my heart." This last letter before their wedding, he signed: "Good night, my loving bride, your loving groom Walt."

In her memoir, Wilma concluded this story.

> Walt returned to Grand Rapids on Tuesday, and we married on Thursday, April 15, 1943. One week of preparation just gave us enough time to squeeze in a shower and buy a wedding dress. The dress was blue and cost only $18. We had a beautiful, simple wedding. My uncle John Griffioen married us, and the ceremony was at the parish house of Lagrave Christian Reformed Church. Walt and I walked down the aisle together. There were no attendants. When we got to the ring part of the ceremony, my uncle could find only one ring in his pocket. My ring had slipped inside Walt's ring. This sealed our love in a symbolic way…. Among [the gifts] was a clock from Walt's family, a clock that stood on our mantle for many years. This clock, with its chimes, was a symbol…. As the plaque next to it said, "*Zoals het Klokje Thuis Tikt, Tikt het Nergens*"—as the clock ticks at home, it doesn't tick anywhere else.

Walt and Wilma did not wait, because of the war. And the war did not wait long for them. When they arrived in D.C. two weeks after the wedding, Walt's induction papers were waiting. He requested that his papers be transferred to Maryland, which postponed his entry into the army and basic training by two months. Their correspondence stage wasn't over, but it soon had to rely on the U.S. Army's postal service.

On April 15, the day Wilma and Walter married, the U.S. Army established its first overseas "V-Mail" station that would process "Victory Mail" letters to and from service men and women. Walt and Wilma would rely heavily on that delivery system from the time Walt shipped overseas in July 1943 until Christmas 1945, four months after the war ended, when he shipped home and met his fifteen-month-old son, Wallace.

Author's Note

The discovery of Walter and Wilma Lagerwey's pre-war letters inspired this retelling of their early love and engagement. Their experiences tell us a great deal about the universal struggle to live and love in the context of war.

After my parents died, my siblings and I decided to donate their extensive war letters to the archives at Calvin University, where my father taught and we had attended college. Included with this gift were a few of my father's chapel talks, my mother's memoir about their life together, and my dissertation, a chapter of which focused on my mother and her letters to my father during World War II. I wanted to share this unusual letter collection with more than just family members. Including intimate descriptions of daily life, theological discussions, and detailed information about basic training and the war in Europe, our parents' 1,400-plus letters are likely one of the largest such collections of WWII letters that exists. They are part of the Walter Lagerwey Collection at Heritage Hall. (https://archives.calvin.edu/index.php?p=collections/controlcard&id=442)

Reverend Daniel Zwier: Forgotten Citizen of the Christian Reformed Church

Andrew Voss

As far as we know the following is true.[1] Around noon most days *Dominie* Daniel Zwier would emerge from the upstairs parsonage study where he prepared his sermons, walk down the stairs, and out the back door. He would be wearing his usual starched white shirt, tie, vest, and dress pants as he proceeded to his shiny Buick sedan; opened the hood, and with rolled-up sleeves, began to tinker with the engine.

This sight amused his neighbors not only because Zwier was their dignified pastor but because he was dressed more for a congregational meeting than for work on an automobile. Zwier was as much at ease fixing things, however, as he was exhorting from the pulpit on Sundays, drafting an article for a church magazine, or transcribing the minutes of a day's work at Synod. He had learned mechanical skills back on the farm in his youth, after all, before he had felt the call to the ministry.

Figures like Zwier often are neglected, if not forgotten, in histories of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), but they deserve recognition. Zwier did not seek the spotlight and was relatively unknown, even to most CRC members. Leaders like him nonetheless were and are essential to the "machinery" of the denomination running well. Zwier pastored four CRC congregations over three de-

The Zwier family home in Maxwell City, New Mexico. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

Andrew Voss is interested in history and has written narrative genealogies. These included the family of his wife Jane Zwier Voss. Reverend Daniel Zwier was her grandfather. Andrew and Jane are members of Lombard Christian Reformed Church in Illinois.

cades, served on an array of committees for the church and its agencies, was the first or second clerk at twelve meetings of Synod and contributed regularly to Christian Reformed magazines such as *De Wachter* and *The Banner*.

Dominie Zwier came from humble beginnings. His immigrant family roots were in a small village in the Netherlands. And he grew up on a farm in Maxwell, New Mexico, where life was difficult, the kind of kid who tinkered with everything and read any book he could get his hands on. His parents, the Christian school they started, and mentors like Reverend Idzerd Van Dellen nudged him onto a path to higher education and leadership in the CRC. But his desire to learn, willingness to work, and calling to serve his church define his story.

Early Days

Daniel Zwier was born December 8, 1878, in Opperdoes, North Holland, the Netherlands, to Jan Zwier and Wijntje (Winnie) De Jong, the first of six children. Daniel attended grammar school in the land of his birth. His parents were godly, church-going people. His father served as an elder in the *Gereformeerde Kerk* in Opperdoes under the pastorate of Reverend F. M. Ten Hoor, who later became a professor at the CRC's Theological School.[2]

Zwier was a young man of almost 14 years when his family left Opperdoes in search of a better climate for members of the family who suffered from respiratory ailments caused by work in the damp lowlands of the Netherlands. His parents were enticed by assurances of Dutch land agents about great farmland in the dry climate of Colorado in the USA.[3]

The immigrant family, after having traveled from New York City to Alamosa, Colorado, with a group of two hundred fellow Hollanders, found that the farmland that had been promised was not available because of fraud. They were faced not only with this swindle but with harsh winter conditions, inadequate housing, disease, and death. They were stuck in a foreign land, not even speaking the language of their new homeland.

Wedding Photo - Daniel Zwier & Minnie Kamp, 1911. Courtesy of Dan Joldersma, a grandson of Reverend Daniel Zwier.

The Zwier family recovered and quickly moved on to nearby Maxwell City, New Mexico, where a small group of Dutch colonists had settled a few years earlier. They lived in an adobe brick home with no luxuries and farmed the barren, dry land.[4]

It was during those years that a young man named Idzerd Van Dellen was installed as the first and only pastor of the small CRC there. During the first few years, Van Dellen preached in the Zwier living room with the top of Winnie's sewing machine as a makeshift pulpit. He chose the dry climate of Maxwell because his wife, Margaret, suffered from tuberculosis and had gone there earlier. Van Dellen was instrumental in raising funds to build a new residence, called the Bethesda Consumptive Relief Sanitarium. Later, the Zwier family purchased and managed that institution. It eventually moved to Denver, and in 1947 it became a mental health hospital when modern medication reduced cases of tuberculosis. It closed in 1999.

The Zwiers established a small school in Maxwell City for the children of the settlement. They highly valued education. Not much is known of Daniel's youth. Presumably, he attended the school, but he also was self-taught, learning to read English from whatever books he could find and even mastering the contents of the catalog from Montgomery Ward.[5]

Aside from helping on the family farm and advising local farmers, Daniel as a young man repaired electric appliances, watches, and whatever else needed fixing. However, his true calling was the ministry. His friend

and mentor, Reverend Van Dellen, encouraged him to take it up. These two men had a close relationship that lasted throughout their lifetimes.

Zwier applied to Classis Iowa to support him as a candidate for ministry in the CRC. The Theological School in Grand Rapids, in turn, welcomed him to join its preparatory course of study, on the recommendation of Van Dellen. Part of his preparation was a year of study at the Free University of Amsterdam, where he came under the influence of notable thinkers such as Herman Bavinck, the author of *Reformed Dogmatics*. In 1908, after receiving a preparatory diploma, he began a three-year course of study in the Theology Department at the Theological School and Calvin College of the CRC.

Daniel graduated in 1911. Van Dellen, his long-time friend and the president of the Theological School's board of trustees, signed his diploma and offered the closing prayer at the graduation service.

While studying for the ministry, Daniel had met and courted Minnie Kamp, a Grand Rapids native. They married two months after commencement.

Pastor and Preacher

The newly ordained Reverend Zwier launched his career as pastor and preacher at the age of 32 at the First CRC of Oostburg, Wisconsin (1911–1914). He thus began his life's work of 35 years in the CRC. Other pastorates included First Munster CRC, Munster, Indiana (1914–1920); Maple Avenue CRC, Holland, Michigan (1920–1945); and, finally, First Chatham CRC, Chatham, Ontario, Canada (1946).

By far his longest charge was the Maple Avenue CRC in Holland. The congregation was poised for growth in a vibrant city when Zwier arrived. Perhaps because it was the newest of Holland's six CRC congregations, it took the lead in promoting innovation. In 1924, Maple Avenue began to use individual cups in the celebration of the Lord's Supper—a hygiene measure first introduced in North America the 1890s—three years before any of its sister churches in the city made this change.[6] In 1944 Zwier expanded an ongoing "outreach" ministry that supported the Tohatchi, New Mexico, mission (1915–1951). He convinced his congregation to become a calling church, thus committing it to paying two-thirds of a missionary's salary there.[7] Maple Avenue also sent a missionary nurse to China in 1926. In 1935 it erected a "parish house" for Sunday school and catechism classes. By 1940 it had grown to 188 families, with 499 communicant members.[8]

During the Great Depression years, Zwier volunteered to take a substantial pay cut. At the same time, he encouraged the people to contribute toward a new church edifice that, as it turned out, they would not build until after his death. When a member of Maple Avenue suggested that the congregation could save money by mimeographing the weekly church bulletin instead of sending them out to be printed, Zwier agreed to take on this task. This included both writing the copy and reproducing it for distribution each week.[9]

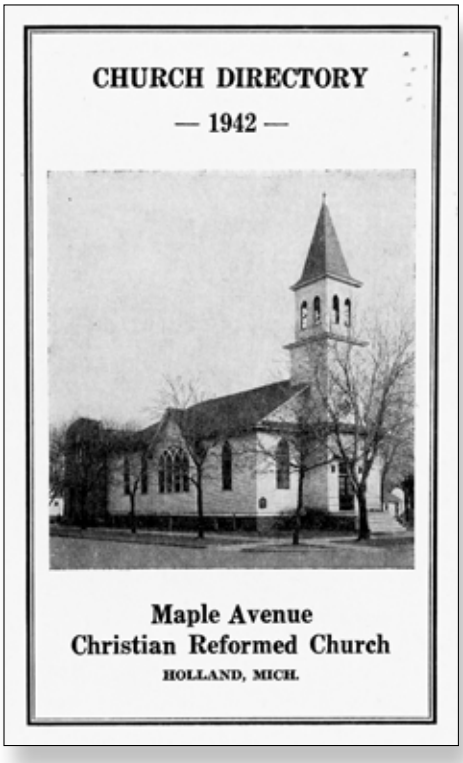
Zwier was an ardent supporter of Christian schools. At the beginning of each new school year, he preached a sermon laying out the scriptural foundation for Christ-centered education. In a sermon titled "Covenant Training," based on Genesis 18:19, he admonished: "Not Biblical instruction in addition to secular training, but Biblical training permeating the secular."[10] He also led the charge as president of the Holland Christian School Board.[11]

Even before his pastorate at Maple Avenue, Zwier was known as an advocate for Christian higher education. While he was in Munster, Indiana, a group interested in promoting the idea of a Christian high school in the Chicagoland area solicited his advice. He encouraged them, saying: "You know persistency, if applied in the right direction, is a good thing. It takes a good many blows to drive a long spike home, but keep at it, and you will succeed."[12]

Zwier also served the CRC institutionally. He was on the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary[13] and on the denomination's financial board.[14] Synod appointed him to a committee to develop the 1934 *Psalter Hymnal*, the first to include hymns in addition to psalms.[15] He also accepted a position as a Classis Holland's representative on the Christian Reformed Board of Missions.[16]

In addition to all of this, Zwier was a preacher, of course, and spent much time in his study preparing sermons. In the parsonage at Maple Avenue CRC, his study was upstairs. He was also a scholar. He wrote articles in Dutch for the denominational paper *De Wachter* on such topics as common grace and premillennialism, both subjects of controversy in the CRC. He kept the door closed during his "working hours," and his wife and children knew not to disturb him. A knock on the door by Minnie or one of the children called him down for mealtimes.[17]

Minnie was the manager of the busy household, in addition to duties expected of the pastor's wife. In a letter written to relatives in the Netherlands, Reverend Zwier wrote, "My wife has been sick, but thank God, is now on the mend. She was over-worked, it seems not so much with house work, but with labor in committees for this and that and everything else. Women who work in those endeavors are sometimes very



Maple Avenue Christian Reformed Church. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

busy. The result, as prescribed by the doctor, is to avoid all this outside activity."[18]

The ongoing stress caused Minnie to need extended bed rest. This, in turn, required their daughter Agnes to cut short her college education to help care for the family. Reverend Zwier's frequent absences added demands on Minnie and the children. During his brief ministry at Chatham at the end of his career, Minnie even volunteered to read his radio broadcast sermons and taught several catechism classes because of his ill health.[19] If pastors like Zwier too often are forgotten in the history of the CRC, their spouses and children are even more so.

In May 1945 Maple Avenue CRC celebrated Zwier's twenty-fifth anniversary as its pastor with a program at the church. During his years at Maple Avenue, Zwier officiated at 419 baptisms (including those of five adults), 392 confessions of faith, 148 marriages, and 114 funerals.[20]

Synod

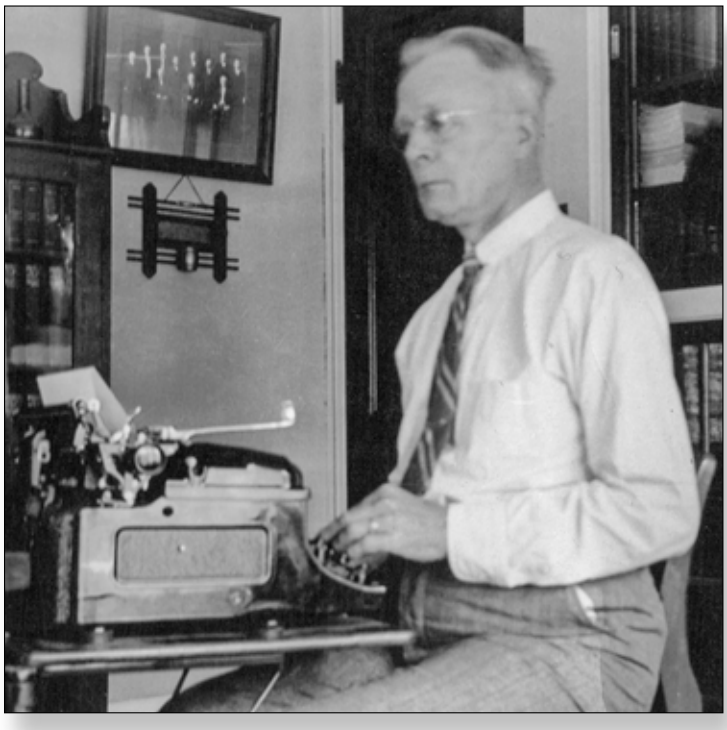
In addition to his work at local churches and on denominational committees, Zwier also served regularly as an officer at meetings of the Syond of the CRC. Synod elected him first clerk eleven times and second clerk once. Being clerk was no small task, considering that those meetings lasted two weeks and that the recorded Acts of Synod routinely ran to 300 to 400 typewritten pages. He worked late into the night each night to get preliminary minutes and committee reports ready for discussion the following day.

Over the years, Synod asked Zwier to serve in many ways, including an appointment to a committee for catechetical instruction, a committee on worship, and a committee to revise the order of worship for the churches. He was nominated numerous times to be the editor-in-chief of *De Wachter*, although it does not appear he was ever appointed to that position. He did serve on the committee on doctrinal standards for *De Wachter* and its English language counterpart, *The Banner.*

The denomination recognized Zwier's skills at mediating disputes. Synod sent him as part of a committee to confer with and ease strained relations between Classis Illinois and representatives of the League of Christian Reformed Men's Societies of Chicago. He also was part of a delegation tasked with studying the problem of the relationship of the editorship of *The Banner* to pastoral work.

There is a cliché that fits Zwier: when you want something done, ask a busy person. After having served on the committee to produce a new *Psalter Hymnal*, Synod called upon him to proofread the manuscripts to save the money it would have cost to hire a person to edit the book. A few years later, he was asked to help produce a second edition of the hymnal. That involved collaborating with Professor Christiansen, director of the choir at St. Olaf College, and Dr. Buszin of Ft. Wayne College, who offered advice during the process.

Starting in 1936, the CRC Synod began to meet annually rather than biennially and did its work in a shorter time span. Zwier opposed the change. "We should never have had annual Synods," he observed later. "We cannot do good work when we meet so often."[21] By that he meant that good



Zwier at work in his Maple CRC parsonage study. Courtesy of Dan Joldersma.

work was often reversed by Synod the following year.

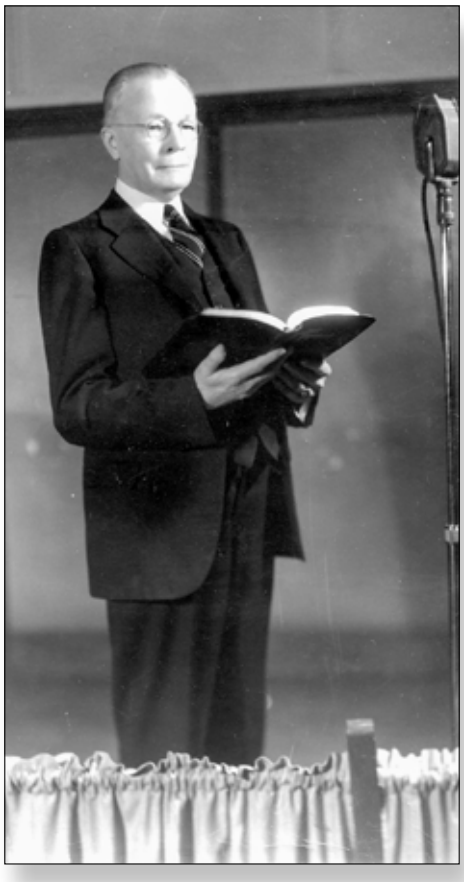
The Battle over Common Grace

Zwier's baptism in CRC controversy came at the infamous Synod of 1924. Trouble had been brewing for several years over a theological issue referred to as common grace. Simply stated, this doctrine posits that, besides the saving grace that God grants to his elect, there is also a certain favor, or grace, that God bestows on all creatures as part of limiting the impact of sin on all of creation. This sounds perfectly reasonable on the face of it. Not so for some CRC folk of the day. Clergy and scholars debated the issue *ad infinitum*.

Among them were a small number of Christian Reformed pastors—notably Reverend Henry Danhof and Reverend Herman Hoeksema—who argued that there is only "particular grace." And the reprobate certainly were not covered by that.

The debate got ugly. In the end, Synod took a hard line against the dissenters, rejecting the admonition of the pre-advice committee to go easy on the particular grace advocates. The majority at Synod believed that no further study was needed. As a result, Reverend Hoeksema left the denomination with most of his congregation to establish the Protestant Reformed Church. A lawsuit contested the ownership of the Eastern Avenue CRC property, that of Hoeksema's congregation. The result was that the property stayed with the portion of his congregation that remained with the CRC.[22]

Zwier and several other delegates protested Synod's decision. The 1924 Acts of Synod record Zwier's protest, including his entreaty that "too hastily made declarations, according to the conviction of the undersigned, will not be conducive to advance the peace and well-being of our churches.



Zwier broadcasting a message. Chatham, Ontario, 1946. Courtesy of Dan Joldersma.

Experience has taught us that undue haste in such weighty matters, when emotions run high because of the battle being waged are seldom good."[23]

One can only speculate what would have transpired if Synod had adopted Zwier's counsel. It might have prevented a schism, and the CRC might have emerged as a more unified body. Some have argued, citing Zwier's protest, that the CRC owes the Protestant Reformed Church an apology.[24]

Zwier went on, nonetheless, to publish a series of articles in *De Wachter* that argued the case for common grace in defense of the CRC position. Dr. Cornelius Van Til wrote a series of articles in which he explored the views of revered theologians on the Common Grace debate. Specifically, in one article he mentions the give-and-take between Zwier and Professor Klaas Schilder, the notorious Dutch neo-Calvinist theologian and professor in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. There was basic agreement between the two, except for minor points. But then, no two theologians ever agree on everything! "And it is with the greatest of appreciation of the labors of such men as Kuyper, Bavinck, Hepp, Schilder, Hoeksema, Zwier, and others," Van Til went on to write, "that we say what we say."[25]

The Synod of 1928, when it considered "worldliness," was another memorable affair. An exhaustive committee report narrowed down the subject to three problem areas: movie attendance, dancing, and card playing (gambling). Over the years Zwier had preached many sermons that warned against such evils. Zwier wholeheartedly agreed with the committee's advice and strongly recommended that CRC members abstain from such activities. Indeed, Synod's pronouncement in 1928 amounted to a prohibition on the three forms of worldliness. It even fired a seminary professor for attending movies after having been warned to stop.

Ironically, a little-known secret is that one of Zwier's sons later won a car in a raffle and danced with joy to use that vehicle to take his girlfriend to the picture shows, thus violating all three of his father's, and Synod's, edicts![26]

Last Synod

The Synod of 1941 was Zwier's last Synod. His health was failing, and he suffered a heart attack during the proceedings. The president of Synod that year, N. J. Monsma, honored his service by saying, "I feel prompted to speak a word of special appreciation to the Rev. Mr. Zwier, the first clerk. None of us have ever doubted his sacrificing spirit, but since he has labored during the greater part of the sessions of this Synod under the handicap of,

Daniel and Minnie Zwier with their children (L to R): John, James, Donald, and Agnes, ca. 1935. courtesy of Dan Joldersma.

as he himself puts it, a physical disability, my appreciation of his devotion has increased and, I trust, that the members of Synod will join me in this expression of appreciation. May our heavenly Father soon restore him completely to good health!"[27]

When Henry Beets announced his own retirement as the denomination's Stated Clerk after having served forty years in that role, in his closing remarks to Synod in 1942 he had this to say of Zwier: "During the last dozen of Synods my work in preparing the 'Acta' for the press was considerably lightened by the fine work of Brother Zwier, during so many Synods appointed as first clerk, I love to pay tribute to him for his fine work."[28]

Epilogue

Daniel Zwier died in June 1946 at the home of his son James in Holland, Michigan. He was 67. He had not been feeling well for some time and had asked to be declared emeritus from the ministry. He was living in Chatham, Ontario, at the end of his career, once again serving the CRC where it was in great need. Waves of Dutch immigrants were arriving in Canada after World War II, and the denomination was working mightily to support their immigration and organize new congregations for them.

The Lord took Zwier home while Synod, a body he had dearly loved and had served so ably, was in session in nearby Grand Rapids. The Acts of Synod highlight of his service to the CRC, concluding: "In many other ways his talents were used in the service of God and for the good of our churches."[29]

His friends and colleagues Dr. Ralph J. Danhof, Rev. Idzerd Van Dellen, and Dr. Henry Beets conducted his funeral at Maple Avenue CRC. The officers of Synod appointed a committee of delegates to attend.[30] Included were his nephew, Frank Klynsma; an elder from Classis Pella; and a dear friend from his early days in Maxwell, New Mexico.

Danhof, Stated Clerk of the CRC, offered these sentiments: "A sturdy oak has fallen. Brother Zwier served the Church with honor. The exceptional gifts of brother Zwier were appreciated by the denomination and were utilized. He was a rare exegete of the Word of God.…When he spoke at Synod or a classical gathering, his remarks were worthy of careful consideration.…Many came to pay their final respects at the hour of burial.… A pilgrim has gone home."[31]

Like a sturdy oak, Reverend Zwier's legacy remains secure, sometimes unnoticed but indelibly written on the pages of CRC history.

Endnotes

1. Related by Daniel G. Zwier, a grandson of Zwier, who heard the story from a woman who lived next to the Maple Avenue CRC parsonage.

2. Idzerd Van Dellen, *In God's Crucible* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1950), 56.

3. Peter De Klerk and John Van Boven, "The Boldest of Swindles--The Alamosa Disaster," *Origins* 4:1 (1986), 22–26.

4. Angie Ploegstra and Paula Vander Hoven, "Early Members in the Maxwell Christian Reformed Church," *Origins* 26:2 (2008), 13–21.

5. See Angie Ploegstra and Paula Vander Hoven, "The Congregation of Tuberculosis Sufferers: Maxwell Christian Reformed Church," *Origins* 26:2 (2008); and, Reverend Daniel Zwier Eulogy, "Carrier Pigeons," by Idzerd Van Dellen, June 20, 1946.

6. Maple Avenue Christian Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan, 50th Anniversary booklet, 4.

7. John D. Cox, *The City in Its Heart—The First 100 Years of Maple Avenue Ministries, Holland, Michigan, 1913–2013* (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2014), 15, 27–28.

8. 50th Anniversary booklet, 5.

9. *The City in Its Heart*, 16.

10. Sermon by Zwier at the Maple Avenue CRC, 4 September 4, 1927 (Manuscript in the possession of Daniel G. Zwier).

11. *The City in Its Heart*, 25.

12. Daniel Zwier, "A Few Remarks on Higher Christian Instruction," *The Spectator* 2:1 (March 1, 1916), Published by the Alumni Association of the Young People's Societies of the Third Christian Reformed Church, Chicago, Illinois.

13. *Acts of Synod* 1934 of the Christian Reformed Church, Supplement II A (2) 205.

14. *Acts of Synod* 1934, Supplement II B (1), 214–215.

15. *Psalter Hymnal*, Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1934. D. Zwier is listed as part of the committee (forward, page v). Also see *Acts of Synod 1932*, 189.

16. *Acts of Synod 1928*, Article 29 X.

17. Zwier's work was done in his parsonage office, according to an oral history complied by Anne Zwier Ofsink in which she interviewed Donald Zwier, the youngest son of Reverend Zwier (June 30, 2000).

18. Zwier's letter to the children and grandchildren of his late maternal uncle, Jan de Jong, in the Netherlands (February 29, 1940). Copy (in Dutch) in the possession of the authors, who translated it into English.

19. See a letter from Zwier to his sister Effa (April 6, 1946) shortly before his death. Authors' digital copy: it was scanned by Daniel G. Zwier from a letter in the possession of Dan Joldersma, a son of Agnes Zwier Joldersma, a daughter of Reverend Daniel Zwier. Dan holds a large collection of Zwier family memorabilia.

20. Material recorded in a small booklet by Reverend Zwier, now in the possession of his grandson Daniel G. Zwier.

21. Zwier quoted by Edward J. Tanis *The Banner*, July 5, 1946, 838. Tanis said that the late Zwier was noted for his good judgment and that he spoke the quoted words on the floor of Synod in 1944. However, those words are not recorded in the *Acts of Synod 1944*.

22. Harry Boonstra, "Theology in Court: Holwerda v. Hoeksema," *Origins* 20:1 (2002), 39 ff.

23. *Acts of Synod 1924*, 193–194.

24. John Bolt, "The CRC and Rev. Herman Hoeksema: An Apology 75 Years Too Late?" *Outlook* 51:6 (2001).

25. Cornelius Van Til, "Common Grace II," *Westminster Theological Journal* 8.2 (May 1946); see 168–177.

26. An oral history conducted by Anne Zwier Ofsink with her uncle and aunt, John and Alice Zwier (June 30, 2000).

27. *Acts of Synod* 1941, 138.

28. *Acts of Synod* 1942, Supplement I-a-PS of the Stated Clerk.

29. *Acts of Synod* 1946, 70.

30. Ibid, 63.

31. R. J. Danhof, *The Banner*, July 5, 1946, 843.

A Dutch Immigrant Family & the CRC in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia

G. H. Gerrits

Netherlands to Emigration

My parents, Johanna Marsman and Berend Jan Gerrits, hailed from the northeast corner of the province of Overijssel. When they got married in 1928, my father wanted to emigrate to the Canadian prairies, but my mother was not, for family reasons, prepared to do so. Had my parents settled on the prairies at that time, they would no doubt have been faced with very trying times because of the Great Depression that set in 1929 and the dust-bowl conditions on the prairies in the 1930s that were very similar to what was happening on the Great Plains in the United States.

Berend Jan Gerrits and Johanna Marsman, wedding photo, 1928. Courtesy of the author.

Instead, in 1928 my parents bought a smallish farm but later were able to rent additional land, a necessity as the family grew in size. For between 1928 and the German invasion of the Netherlands in 1940, when my father saw military action, six children were born. Four more followed in the 1940s.

After the war, in the early 1950s, the family's thoughts again turned to emigration. The lease on the rented land was about to expire, and losing it would cut considerably into the family's income. My oldest brother wanted to emigrate to Canada, as did my brother-in-law, married to my oldest sister.

We were members of the *Gereformeerde Kerk* (GK). During the war, the GK had fallen into conflict over doctrines related to baptism, covenant, and election, leading a group labeling itself *Vrijgemaakt* (Liberated), to separate from it in 1944.[1] My parents did not secede, but some of their siblings did, which led to tensions in my extended family.

By the early 1950s emigration offered not only the promise of land to farm but also perhaps a way to escape uncomfortable family relationships. In Canada, my parents said more than once that they were happy to have left those church conflicts behind.

Gerry Gerrits is retired from the Department of History and Classics, Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia. His research specialty is late medieval spirituality, particularly that of the Devotio Moderna *(Modern Devotion).*

Emigration and First Two Years in Canada

The Christian Emigration Central in the Netherlands (a Protestant organization) and the Immigration Committee of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) helped my parents find a farmer in Ontario who was willing to sponsor the family for a year. A sponsor was a Canadian immigration requirement at the time. For reasons that were never quite clear, the sponsor withdrew the offer, however. A farmer in the eastern end of the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia soon agreed to sponsor my family.

The new sponsor was the owner of a large firm that was engaged in various branches of agriculture, one of them being egg production, with a flock of 200,000 laying hens. He offered work to my father and my four older brothers. They were not the only Dutch employees, as he had had positive experiences with Dutch immigrants before.

The family sailed from Rotterdam on 15 April 1953, arriving in Halifax a week later. From there it was just a two-hour train ride to Port Williams, our destination. On arriving, we were first taken for dinner to a restaurant in nearby Kentville and then driven to what was to be our home for the next year, a rural community named Woodside. A pleasant surprise awaited us in that the house assigned to us had most of the modern conveniences, none of which we'd had in our farmhouse in the Netherlands.

During the next year, the length of the sponsorship contract, my father and one brother worked wherever they were needed. Two brothers worked in one of the large hen houses, and one drove truck collecting eggs from the hen houses that were spread over a fairly large area.

After a week our mother told my older sister, younger brother, and myself to follow some children coming by on their way to school. It was a one-room school, grades one to six, with some twenty-five to thirty pupils. The toilet was an outhouse, and for drinking water the teacher delegated two children each day to fetch a pail of water at the nearest house. We drank with a dipper. In winter heat came from a wood stove.

The first few days other students asked me many times: "Want to play ball?" I did not know what those words meant, as we did not play baseball in the Netherlands. Once I got used to the sound of the English language, I began to hear similarities between it and Dutch.

What struck me before long was how well the students behaved in comparison to those, I had gone to school with in the Netherlands. There also was a more relaxed atmosphere at school all round. In the Netherlands, we had attended what was known as a "School with the Bible." The school was *Gereformeerd* in everything but name and was attended by the children of the *Gereformeerde Kerk Synodaal* (Synodical) and those of the *Gereformeerde Kerk Vrijgemaakt* (Liberated). The children could not but have been affected by the tension that existed between these two denominations.

The house in which we lived in Woodside was a large farmhouse that had been turned into a duplex. In the other part lived a young English family that had arrived in Canada two years earlier. The mother of that family had coffee with our mother every weekday morning. She very patiently taught my mother her first English, albeit with a British accent.

Our parents also visited back and forth with some of the other neighbors, although conversations must have been a struggle for all of them. At times our mother would bicycle to the nearby village of Canning—a number of bicycles had been brought over from Holland—to buy some groceries, and that meant crossing a railway that ran through the village. One day she stopped for an approaching freight train, but the engineer of the train—obviously not a long one—stopped the train and waved to her that she could go first. A single woman—a teacher—who was one of our neighbors took us children for a swim in the Minas Basin, an arm of the Bay of Fundy, several times that

Gerrits family photo taken for Canadian sponsor, 1952. Back row: Hendrick Wittenberg (brother in law), Gerhardus and Albert (Dutch Marine Corps), Gerrit William, Gezina, Gezinus, Front row: Gerritdina Wittenberg, Berend Jan, Johannes, Jentina, Johanna, Berend Jan Jr. Courtesy of the author.

summer, although our daily life was not all play for us. We also picked strawberries on a farm in Blomidon that overlooked the beautiful Minas Basin. The farm's owner picked us up in his truck.

As experienced by all immigrants, settling in a new country means adaptation and a steep learning curve. For example, our mother, not being able to read English, bought cornflakes one day and cooked them. Generally, apart from the new language, we encountered no major difficulties. Fortunately for the family, one of the older boys had completed high school in the Netherlands. Because education in foreign languages was of a high caliber in the Netherlands, he was reasonably functional in the English language. This was an invaluable skill in that first year.

In late 1953 a disaster nearly struck the family. The neighbor living in the other half of the house we were living in was one of our sponsor's foremen. Early one December morning when he was taking Father and a brother to their assignment for the day, the pickup truck he was driving went off the highway due to icy conditions, rolled over a few times as it went down an embankment, and ended up in the Habitant River. Fortunately, the truck landed right side up, and no one was seriously hurt.

The contract with the sponsor was to end in April of 1954, and Father, not being a happy employee (after having worked his own farm in Holland for 25 years), began looking for a farm in the fall of 1953. Around Christmas the sponsor visited, as he did more often, and offered to put our family on a dairy farm in some sort of partnership. However, my father did not like the limits that this would have put on his freedom of action. After Father turned down the proposal made to him by the sponsor, the latter did not visit again.

In March, the family purchased a non-operating farm in Sheffield Mills-Atlanta, a rural community some miles from where we were living then. It bought the farm with the help of a loan from the Nova Scotia Land Settlement Board. This body made loans available under very favorable terms, and at the time no other province in Canada had a similar loans program for farmers.

The purchase of the farm meant that my sister, my brother, and I had to change schools; this one was a three-room school with proper facilities. On our first day there the son of a neighbor, who was my own age, took me under his wing and greatly eased the adjustment to the new school; my older sister had a similar experience with a girl her age. In fact, my new friend very much became my model, so much so that, when he trapped muskrats in winter, I also trapped muskrats. He also got me to join Boy Scouts and the 4-H Calf Club, and at times I went with him to the United Church. Altogether, the neighbors in our new location were very welcoming, and the father of my friend said to my father that, as farmers, they could learn from one another.

At the end of 1955, the family bought a second farm just down the road, one that was still being worked. To finance the purchase of this farm, we sold our farm in Holland, although we did not make that decision without some heartache. At the time of emigration, we had decided to rent the farm instead of selling it, in case it should turn out that adjusting to life in Canada was more difficult than we had anticipated. My mother's concern at the time was that we would miss out on a Christian school education by not returning to the Netherlands. I was quite happy and content with the school I was in, however, and had no desire to return to the Netherlands.

Start of CRC in the Annapolis Valley

After World War II, the vast majority of the Dutch immigrants entering Canada settled in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. Consequently, those areas were where the CRC, through its Immigration Committee for Canada and its Home Missions Board, concentrated its efforts toward establishing new congregations. It was not until 1952 that the CRC turned its attention to the Maritime provinces of Canada.

The Immigration Committee had been receiving requests from some Dutch Reformed families in the Maritimes for financial aid to help them resettle in Ontario so that they might be near a Christian Reformed Church. However, there was no economic reason for immigrant farmers to move to Ontario, as farms were relatively inexpensive in this part of Canada, and Nova Scotia had a loans program for farmers that was second to none in Canada. Furthermore, the policy of

Rev. Ralph Bos and Katherine Vander Stel Bos, home missionaries for the CRC in the 1950s. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

the Canadian government at the time was to prevent an overconcentration of immigrants from the same country in any one part of Canada. Finally, the province of Nova Scotia, especially on the part of its deputy minister of agriculture, was interested in bringing more Dutch farm families to the province.

In the summer and fall of 1952,

"fieldmen" of the CRC's Immigration Committee, who helped to find sponsors for immigrants and to settle them in after their arrival, visited the Maritimes to study the prospects for Dutch farm families. Their goal was to attract enough of them to the most promising agricultural regions of the Maritimes so that CRC might establish congregations in those locations.

Encouraged by the findings of the fieldmen, and by the promised cooperation and support of the government of Nova Scotia, the CRC appointed Herman Lam as fieldman for the Maritimes in February of 1953. That year saw one of the largest, if not the largest, group of Dutch immigrants settling in the Maritimes. This wave of immigrants led, in that same year, to the formation of four church groups in Nova Scotia and one on Prince Edward Island. Two years later a group organized in New Brunswick as well. In just a few years all these groups became formally instituted congregations. After that, the CRC instituted only one new congregation in the Maritimes, in Milford, Nova Scotia, an offshoot from the congregation in Truro.[2]

Only a month before the arrival of the Gerrits family, a small number of Dutch Reformed immigrants had gotten together to organize a church group in the Annapolis Valley in western Nova Scotia. From the outset this church group, and later the organized church, counted members from three or four different Reformed denominations in the Netherlands. These diverse origins never appear to have led to any problems. Perhaps Old World religious conflicts meant less among the small number of Dutch folk in the Maritimes.

To what extent my family knew about the church situation in the Annapolis Valley is not clear. My parents may have known through the Christian Emigration Central, which was a well-oiled and well-informed organization, that during the previous year the CRC had started to lay the groundwork for founding congregations in Nova Scotia. The absence of an established congregation does not appear to have been a deterrent to our settling in Nova Scotia, as it was to many other Dutch Reformed emigrants at the time. In Holland my fourth-grade teacher had asked me whether there was a Christian school where we were going, to which I did not know the answer.

The first Sunday morning in Canada we could hear church bells in the distance, which gave us—my parents at least, as they wrote to relatives in Holland—a forlorn feeling. Only a few days later, however, a member of the newly established CRC church group showed up on our doorstep and told us about its existence. and the following Sunday we were able to attend its worship service. The large Gerrits family was a welcome addition to the recently created church group, and its size may have been one reason the pastors of the Baptist and United Churches, in the nearby village of Canning, also wooed the family and were ready to welcome it with open arms. What the Gerrits family needed, however, as did most Reformed immigrants from the Netherlands, was a church home that felt like home, for social and cultural reasons as much as for religious ones.

In strictly theological terms, most Dutch Reformed immigrants may have been able to fit in with the Presbyterian and United Churches of the day, especially with the former. However, at the time there were no longer Presbyterian congregations in the Annapolis Valley. They

Church group in Port Williams in 1953. Rev. Bos is on the left edge of the photo. The photo was taken by Mrs. Bos and developed by Rev. Bos. Photo courtesy of the author.

Young People's group, 1953, taken at Victoria Harbour on the Bay of Fundy. Courtesy of the author.

had all joined the church union of 1925 creating the United Church of Canada.[3] Furthermore, to Dutch Calvinists like us, and to *Gereformeerden* in particular, Nova Scotians seemed to wear their religion lightly. This led some immigrants to question the depth of their religious convictions.

For the first few months the small group of Protestant immigrants met in people's homes for worship services. In June of 1953 it rented the community hall in Port Williams, located at the eastern end of the Annapolis Valley where most of the immigrants lived. It held Sunday services only in the mornings. And that summer, church members—all men, needless to say—led most of the services. On a few occasions, we had CRC pastors lead services; they were touring the Maritime provinces looking into the feasibility of appointing a home missionary for the region.

The reports of these pastors must have been favorable. Already in late October, Rev. Ralph Bos and his wife, Katherine Vander Stel Bos, arrived in the Maritimes to serve as home missionaries. In the previous four years they had served as home missionaries in the Owen Sound area of Ontario and therefore were familiar with the idiosyncrasies of the Dutch immigrants. Their calling church was Roseland CRC in Chicago.

Rev. Bos led the first service in Port Williams on November 1, and after the service his wife took a picture of the church group. It shows that there were some seventy people in attendance. A day or two earlier the Boses had already visited my family. When my mother asked how they had found us, they explained that the window curtains had given us away. Curtains apparently were a foolproof method of locating recent Dutch immigrants.

After that first Sunday, Rev. Bos conducted services in Port Williams every third or fourth Sunday. He served all five church groups in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, doing so by rotation. Home Missions had bought a house for Rev. and Mrs. Bos in Truro, in central Nova Scotia, which also placed the Bos family centrally with respect to the churches they had to serve. An optimistic man, Bos was good at getting people to work together. During the first year or so after his arrival, he emphasized from time to time that as a North American Reformed church the CRC could not be equated with any Dutch Reformed denomination. This was perhaps somewhat of a debatable statement, but the CRC was at this time loosening its ties to Dutch denominations.

Church life was slow in developing. The congregation was spread out over a fairly large area, transportation was often unreliable in those early years,[4] and we did not have a full-time pastor. The summer of 1953 did see the formation of a Young People's Society, and two years later a Women's Society, but there was already a Sunday school for children after the morning services. Our church group became an officially instituted congregation only in June of 1955, however, and there were no regular catechism classes until 1959. That year Rev. John van Dyk accepted a call to what was now the Kentville CRC.

The church group in the Annapolis Valley also created a Christian School Society at a fairly early date. But while the desire to have a Christian school was real, the practical obstacles standing in the way seemed insurmountable. Furthermore, many parents appear to have been largely satisfied with the school system as they found it.

It was a public school system, but within that system teachers had considerable liberty to place their own stamp on the school in which they taught. The principal of the high school that I attended (some four hundred students) was a committed Baptist. Our school day began with

a program that consisted of singing "O Canada," the Canadian national anthem, the reading of a passage from the Bible, and the singing of a hymn. Whether we recited the Lord's Prayer I do not remember.

Classes took turns leading this program from the gymnasium, using the PA system, for a week at a time, with students doing the Bible reading. We sang the same hymn for an entire week, and each week a new hymn was copied out on the chalkboard so we could learn it. That is how I learned "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Why this American national hymn?

Kentville CRC church building, 1962. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

Until about the last quarter of the twentieth century Nova Scotians felt a strong attachment to New England, in some respects, one could argue, stronger than to the rest of Canada. After their arrival in the first half of the seventeenth century European settlers in New England and Nova Scotia (which until 1784 included the province of New Brunswick) soon established close connections across the Bay of Fundy. Those connections grew and deepened in subsequent centuries.[5] In keeping with the morning's devotional program, lunch in the cafeteria was begun with the saying of grace, teachers doing this for a week at a time on a rotation basis. One teacher, an avowed atheist, would mumble something in Latin.

Feeling at Home in Nova Scotia

The Dutch immigrants generally felt welcomed by the people of Nova Scotia. (Apart from British and Dutch immigrants, there were very few in Nova Scotia at the time.) We fairly quickly fitted in. Some of the Dutch immigrants thus were reluctant to start what might have been regarded as a standoffish "Dutch" school. Furthermore, a greater number of church families would have been needed to make a school feasible. My father worked together with Lam, the CRC fieldman for the Maritimes, to bring more Reformed immigrants to the Annapolis Valley. Boosting church memberships was their primary goal; establishing a Christian school was a secondary objective at this point, and not one that all held to be equally important. The placement of immigrants required the cooperation of Allen Foley, the local Canadian Immigration Placement Officer. A Catholic, he told me decades later that he had always had a positive working relationship with my father.

To recruit more immigrants, Father sometimes took the train to Halifax to meet boats with Dutch immigrants. As a result, our family regularly took in young single men and families until they had found work or moved on because they could not find work locally. By this time the requirement to have a sponsor had largely been lifted. A visitor from the Netherlands called my mother "a mother in Israel"[6] in an article in a Dutch publication because of the welcome she extended to these strangers and the care she gave them.

The continued growth of the Port Williams—later Kentville—CRC was due not only to immigrants arriving from the Netherlands but also to Dutch immigrants coming from other provinces, especially from Ontario. They hoped to take advantage of the comparatively low farm prices in the Maritimes and the generous loans program for farmers in Nova Scotia in particular.

As in earlier years, government programs played a role here. To achieve a more even distribution of immigrants throughout the country, Immigration Canada paid the travel costs of immigrant farmers from Québec and provinces further west who wished to explore farming opportunities in the Maritimes. Immigrant farmers from Ontario in particular took advantage of this offer, and this brought a significant number of Dutch immigrants to the Annapolis Valley and considerably boosted the membership of the Kentville CRC. By 1970, nearly thirty percent of its members had come from Ontario. They were in general among the strongest proponents of a Christian school. The Christian school society eventually had the numbers, the support, and the resources to make a Christian school a reality.

The school opened in 1975 in a new building. Before long some parents with no connection to the Dutch community started sending their children to the King's County Christian school. The school's name may have contributed to its acceptance. Baptists in particular—historically, forty percent of the churchgoing population in the Annapolis Valley was Baptist—were more likely to send their children to the Christian school than parents belonging to other denominations.[7] Then a Jewish couple

(the husband was a cardiologist) also enrolled their children in the Christian school. Admittedly, some parents sent their children to the Christian school primarily to have a greater say in their education. Before too many years had passed, a locally born and raised Baptist became its principal, and when the school closed some thirty years after its founding, at least half of the students did not have a CRC background.

Conclusions

While living in Ontario for some six years in the 1960s and 1970s, I found that the integration of the CRC community into Canadian society had, by that time, gone further in Nova Scotia than it had in Ontario. Compared to Ontario, where there were many more immigrants from various countries, Nova Scotia was a much more homogeneous society. As a consequence, there may have been greater pressure to conform.[8] Yet the positive reception that the Dutch generally experienced in Nova Scotia was a definite factor in the rate at which integration took place.

This perhaps accounts, in part, for the noticeably less pronounced desire among Dutch Calvinists in Nova Scotia to build, in addition to the church, separate Reformed organizations and institutions than was the case in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. In these three provinces, the relatively large number of Dutch Calvinists also slowed assimilationist forces and contributed to a longer period of ethnic and religious separatism. This explains in large part why Dutch Calvinists in those provinces, following the ideals of the Dutch leader Abraham Kuyper, founded a farmer's federation, labor union, credit union, retirement homes, and colleges. It was Dutch Calvinists who moved from Ontario to the Annapolis Valley who provided the real driving force in the founding of the King's County Christian School, not those who came straight from the Netherlands.

My family's experience and the historical record reveal clearly that in its formative decades the CRC in Canada was not a monolith. Local conditions partially determined how the Dutch Calvinist immigrants put into practice the religious heritage they brought with them from the Netherlands.

Endnotes

1. Its official name was *Gereformeerde Kerk* (Upholding Article 31 of the Church Order). The information within the brackets was added because the dispute was about the interpretation of Article 31 of the Church Order. In North America this denomination is known as the Canadian Reformed Church and the American Reformed Church ("American & Canadian Reformed Churches" on its website: https://canrc.org/).

2. See G. H. Gerrits, *Immigration, Settlement, and the Origins of the Christian Reformed Church in the Maritime Provinces of Canada, c. 1950—c. 1965* (Kentville, N. S.: Vinland Press, 2015).

3. A union of most of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregationalist congregations in Canada.

4. There is a picture showing Rev. Bos giving two young men a ride in the trunk of his car.

5. Nonetheless, attempts made by American revolutionaries to get Nova Scotia to join the Revolution failed.

6. Judges 5:7.

7. The large number of Baptists was a consequence of the so-called Great Awakening of the late 18th and early 19th centuries that was begun by Henry Alline, a native of Connecticut.

8. Until the 1950s at least, eighty percent of the Nova Scotian population traced its roots back to the British Isles; ten per cent were Acadian French; and the remaining ten percent mostly were indigenous Mi'kmaq, Afro-Nova Scotians, and descendants of eighteenth-century German settlers often referred to as Lunenburg Dutch (Deutsche) from their main settlement.

The Potawatomis, Simon Pokagon, and the Semi-Centennial of Holland, Michigan, 1897

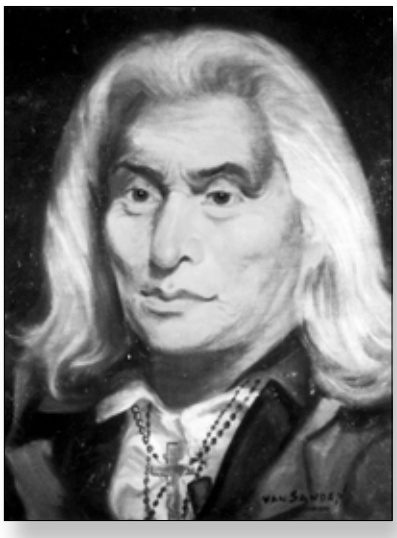
Pieter Hovens

Introduction

In 1847 Dutch immigrants led by Reverend Albertus Van Raalte settled in the area around Macatawa (Black) Lake and in the Macatawa (Black) River Valley in southwestern Michigan. They named their main community Holland. A year later almost all of the Ottawa families from that region departed their ancestral land and relocated to a northern reservation on Grand Traverse Bay. Another Native American presence was the Potawatomi. They also lost most of their homeland but maintained several small communities in the region by privately purchasing land. The Dutch and other European and American settlers in the lower Macatawa River Valley rooted themselves firmly and established thriving communities.

The town of Holland and surrounding region continued to attract Dutch immigrants and Dutch-Americans as settlers. Known for their hard work and thrift, these families generally prospered, as farmers, artisans and craftsmen, and entrepreneurs. Their success over three generations and their sense of achievement led them to stage an impressive Semi-Centennial celebration in 1897. Town leaders organized a four-day program of commemorations and festivities, one that involved many members of the Dutch-American community, as well as Anglo-Americans who lived in the town and region.

A prominent figure to be invited for the event in an official capacity and to make a public address as part of the program was the Potawatomi leader Simon Pokagon. The invitation reflected the state of Indian-white relations fifty years after the Dutch had settled in the area. Native peoples were no longer an existential threat, in Holland or anywhere else in the United States. They had been relegated to isolated, usually small reservations and to the margins of Euro-American society. Now they were regarded in a variety of ways. Some viewed Native peoples as part of the adventure and romance of the conquest and settlement of the frontier, a nostalgic memory of a pioneer past. Others regarded them as the beneficiaries of successful spiritual conquest of their souls



Leopold Pokagon; portrait by Van Sanden, circa 1850. History Museum, Northern Indiana Historical Society, South Bend.

Pieter Hovens studied cultural anthropology in The Netherlands (Nijmegen) and Native American studies in Canada (Vancouver). He worked in ethnic minority policy with the Dutch government and was a curator at the National Museum of World Cultures (Leiden - Amsterdam - Rotterdam).

through Christian missionary labor. Many viewed Native peoples as a vanishing race, their fate the inescapable outcome of the march of progress and Christian civilization. A sense of guilt also lingered among some European Americans about the fate of peoples who had lost their lands and freedom to the newcomers.

Removal, Reservations, and the Pokagons

The influx of mounting numbers of European settlers and domestic American population growth put Native nations in the eastern states under increasing pressure. The government used military means and political pressure to force these nations to sign treaties in which they ceded most or all of their lands, accepted (sometimes temporary) small reservations, or were deported to an undefined Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River and subsequently the Missouri River—out of the way of white settlers. Much of that land would be taken from them too, when settlers demanded it in the 1880s and 1890s. Presidents Andrew Jackson and his Dutch-American successor Martin Van Buren were the main forces behind the policy of forced removal during the 1830s, a measure also supported by the Reformed Church.

Leopold Pokagon (ca. 1775–1841), leader of the Potawatomis of southwestern Michigan, ingeniously evaded deportation of his band. He used treaty payments to purchase private lands in the region for his people. Their main settlement was in Bertrand Township near Niles. A legal challenge to the purchasing of these lands ensued, but the Indians' equal rights as private individuals and landowners were confirmed, and thus the Michigan Supreme Court allowed them to stay. The federal government removed other Potawatomis to reservations in Kansas and, later, Oklahoma.

Simon Pokagon, the third son of Leopold Pokagon, was born between 1825 and 1830 in southwestern Michigan.[1] Little is known about his early life. He later claimed to have attended classes at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, Twinsburg Institute in Ohio, and Oberlin College in Ohio, where African-Americans and women were already granted entry in the 1830s. He probably attended the Academy of the Sisters of St. Mary near Notre Dame. When his father passed away, Simon succeeded him, not because leadership was to a certain degree hereditary among the Potawatomis but because he possessed the appropriate personal qualities in the eyes of the members of his community. Simon married Lodinaw (Angeline) Sinagaw. The couple had three sons and one daughter, and they sent the boys to Haskell Indian Institute in Kansas for their education. After his wife's untimely death in 1871 at the age of 35, Simon married Victoria.[2]

When part of the annuity funds for the ceded Potawatomi Indian lands was not paid on time by the government, Pokagon insisted on meeting President Abraham Lincoln and thus secured the payments. President Ulysses S. Grant received Pokagon to thank him for the contribution of the Potawatomi men to the Union forces during the Civil War. Because of discord about distribution of the annuity payments, the Pokagon band split up, and some family groups relocated to other parts of southwestern

Birchback wigwams of "Penobscot Indians–Official Views Of The World's Columbian Exposition." American Indian Village, Midway Plaisance, north-west, near 59th Street/Ingleside Ave. 1893. Wikipedia Commons.

Michigan. In 1896 the Potawatomi obtained a significant back payment after a legal struggle ultimately resolved by the U.S. Supreme Court.[3]

In 1893 Simon Pokagon attended the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, a world fair that commemorated the four hundredth anniversary of the landing of Columbus in the Americas (in 1492). Native Americans figured prominently in the exhibition, with life-sized dioramas including bark covered lodges and wigwams of the indigenous peoples of the northeastern woodlands and the Great Lakes region. Current Indian affairs also received attention, and a government Indian school was recreated, where groups of visiting Indian students were attended to. These depictions of indigenous peoples received a mixed response from Native Americans and white visitors. Some Native peoples used the event to revive their traditions; others protested the stereotyping and commercialization of their traditions.[4]

Pokagon was one of the critics. At the fair he distributed a booklet he had authored, *The Red Man's Rebuke*. It became an instant success. The second edition had a friendlier title, *The Red Man's Greeting*, and was printed on the bark of white birches, "out of loyalty to my own people, and gratitude to the Great Spirit," as Pokagon explained. The birch tree was of great material and symbolic significance to the Potawatomis and other Native nations from the Great Lakes area.

Pokagon was critical about the treatment of the indigenous peoples by the Euro-American newcomers, yet accepted the inevitability of their fate. He emphasized that surviving Native peoples needed to give up their traditional lifestyle as hunters, fishers, and gatherers. They should become farmers and ranchers instead, although some valued cultural traditions needed to be retained. He also stressed that land claims needed to be settled fairly. Native children required Western education to become economically independent and socially accepted. His people were intellectually equal to whites and should be aided in securing Western education. Their communities and kinship networks needed to be replaced by full American citizenship, the ultimate goal.[5]

In the fall of 1896, the Potawatomis of southwestern Michigan received individual payments of $437.70 from the federal government for lands ceded under duress. The *Holland City News* and other Dutch-American newspapers in the Upper Midwest reported on this news. This is how they depicted the Potawatomis:

> Thirty-five miles from south of Holland a small community of ten families lived in wood frame and bark homes on a forty-acre piece of woodland in Allegan County, occasionally visited by Simon Pokagon, their chief. Many of the Potawatomis came into Holland and Allegan to spend their compensation money. Some were in a drunken state during their visit, the papers reported, perhaps accurately, perhaps reflecting stereotypes. The reports ridiculed their behavior of paying greatly overpriced goods, up to 50 and even 200 percent more, for horses, carriages, hardware, clothes, and groceries. No editor criticized the unethical business practices by white entrepreneurs. Some Potawatomi spent their money wisely or saved the funds for future needs.[6]

Holland's Semi-Centennial, 1897

In August 1897, Holland, Michigan, celebrated its Semi-Centennial. It invited people from many other Dutch communities of immigrants for a four-day celebration that received widespread attention in the local, regional, and Dutch American press. The *Holland City News* headlined its report about the festivities "Holland's Golden Anniversary: The Most Glorious Celebration Ever Witnessed." The other local newspaper, *De Grondwet*, also published an extensive report of the festive events, headlining the commemoration as "Magnificent, Cheerful, Dignified, and Fitting." The festivities ran from Wednesday to Saturday. The celebration began with a long parade of marching bands and horse drawn floats on which scenes from the Netherlands and life in the new country were displayed, all showing American and Dutch flags. No Indian-themed float was reported.

The organizing committee for the Semi-Centennial had planned to recreate an Indian village for the occasion, and about one hundred Potawatomis were expected to populate the camp. Such artificially staged presentations had become popular during commemorations and celebrations in the United States on the national and regional levels. The World Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and the St. Louis World Fair in 1904 included substantial exhibitions on Native American peoples (and indigenous peoples from other parts of the world). As no newspaper reported about this type of staged exhibition regarding Hollands's Semi-Centennial, the plan likely did not materialize.

The number of visitors on the first day was estimated at twenty to thirty thousand. After the parade, community leaders gave speeches. Among the guests was the Potawatomi leader Simon Pokagon, then about seventy years old. He delivered the final address to the people assembled that afternoon in City Park. "Chief Simon Pokagon of the Pottawatomies was introduced as the last speaker," wrote local historian Gerrit Van Schelven in the *Holland City News*. "The grand old Indian, standing there as he did

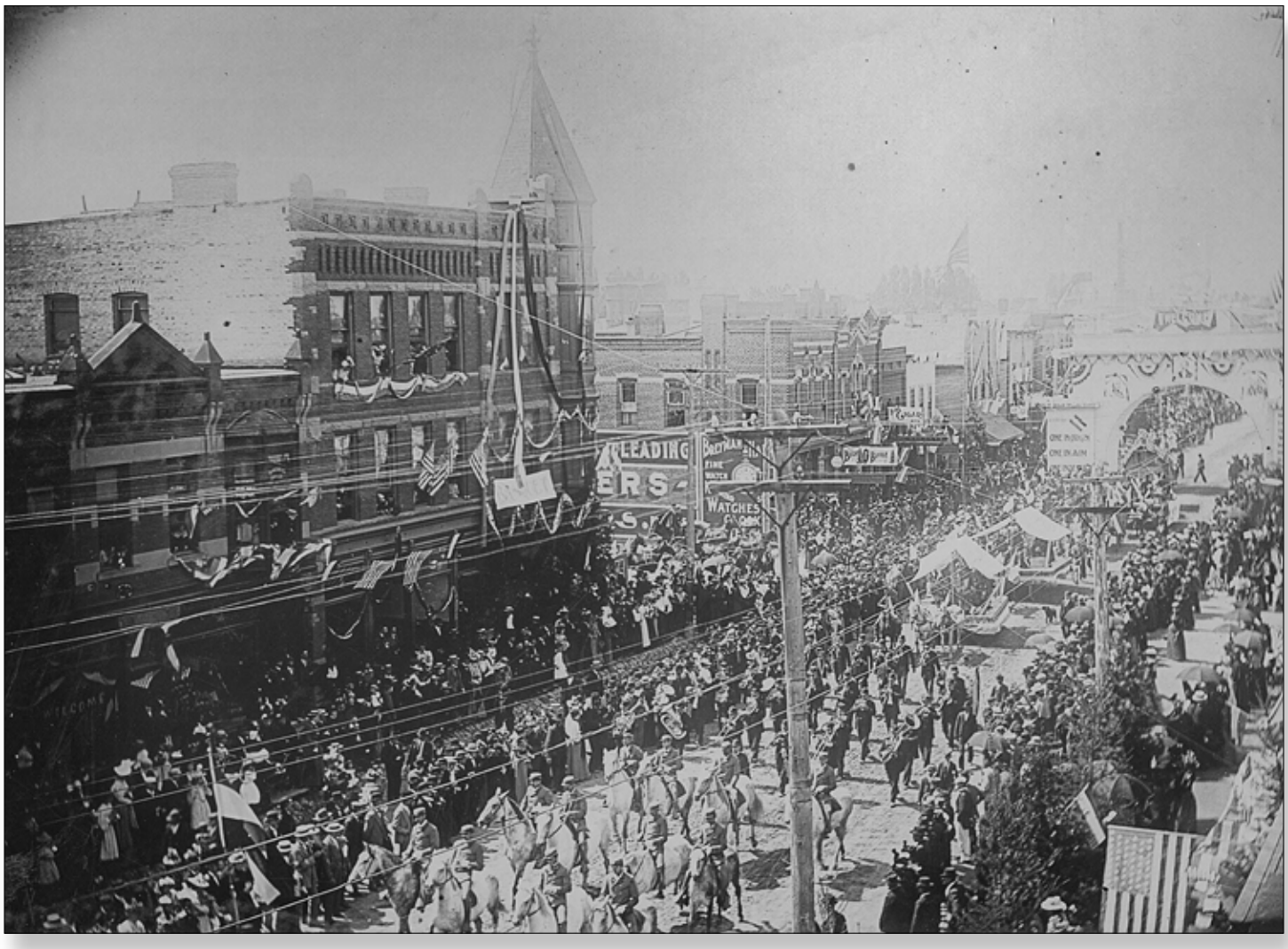
in his cheap clothes, wearing rubbers instead of leather shoes. He is 80 years of age and represented the down-trodden aborigines before the magnificent audience."[7]

One can only speculate about why the organizers of the Semi-Centennial invited Pokagon to be part of commemoration and celebration. People involved with the program might have had varied motives.

Native peoples had been an obvious part of the chain of events from the early establishment of the settler community to the present day. It was appropriate to include them. The two Native nations that lived and hunted in the region had never posed a threat to the Euro-American newcomers and had moved out of the way. Moreover, Leopold Pokagon had always tried to maintain friendly relations with the American authorities, and his successor, his son Simon Pokagon, was known for promoting Indian adaptation to Western civilization. Nothing could have commended Simon and his people more than that.

Some people on the organizing committee might have felt a sense of guilt at having benefitted from the Pottawatomies' loos of ancestral lands, their forced displacement, and their duress while trying to adapt to the new realities of life as a small and often despised minority. Others likely felt nostalgic about the past, romanticizing the frontier and adventurous pioneer days. And there were those that celebrated the conquest of the "heathen Indians" and their gradual adoption of Christianity, a potential basis for future equality.[8]

Simon Pokagon made his presentation at Holland's Semi-Centennial after decades of advocacy to address the plight of Indians generally and of his Potawatomi in particular. He had done so in speeches across the eastern states and in published essays. His audiences usually were generic and anonymous in the sense that he had no direct personal connection to them. In Holland in 1897, however, he was close to home, actually facing his neighbors, including people he knew personally. Even more than



Semi-Centennial Parade, Holland, 1897. Joint Archives of Holland.

on previous occasions, he had to act carefully.

Pokagon likely did not want to antagonize his neighbors and jeopardize interracial relations, potentially damaging the interests of his people. Likely, however, he also wanted to be clear about the disastrous unfolding of the history of Indian-white relations—the tragic fate of his people, the responsibility of the government and American society to make amends, and the willingness of his people to adapt to the new realities of modern life. He managed to accomplish these goals in a public address that stands out among his writings and other speeches for its brevity and force.

Pokagon took the stand and delivered the following address:

> Ladies and Gentlemen: I welcome you, one and all as the true nobility of this land. I am indeed glad to meet you at this important gathering of the Fathers and Mothers, who have reclaimed from an unbroken wilderness a paradise, if such there is on earth.
>
> I would not have you think that I flatter myself in having been invited here on account of my reputation of intelligence, as I most keenly realize you have looked forward to my coming with a sort of novel pride, that you might point me out to your children and say, "Behold a living specimen of the race with whom we once neighbored, a race that we once loved, and yet with that love was mingled distrust and fear."
>
> Our people who sleep beneath your soil, came here from the coast of the Atlantic. They were pioneers in their time, as you are today, and when they first entered these beautiful woodland plains they said in their hearts, "We are surely on the borderland of the happy hunting ground beyond."
>
> I pray you, do not covet the narrow ground they occupy and thereby desecrate and hide their last resting place, for the good of yourselves and your children, you had better erect some simple monument over their remains and engrave thereon, "An unknown Red Man lies buried here."

Simon Pokagon portrait, 1890s. Courtesy of Hope College Archives.

> Our fathers here found game in abundance: the buffalo and the deer had not yet learned to fear the face of man, and they startled at the twang of the bow.
>
> Here our people built their wigwams, and their children played under the green pavilion of the nightly forests, as happy as your children now play in the open field, or on your decorated lawns.
>
> I speak of this not complainingly, for I have always taught my people not to sigh for years long gone by, nor pass again over the bloody trails their fathers trod. I fully realize that, as pioneers of this land, you had mountains of difficulty to overcome, of which your race knew not.
>
> The same forest that frowned upon you, smiled upon us; The same forest that was ague and death to you, was our bulwark and defense; the same forests you have cut down and destroyed, we loved, and our great fear was that the white man in his advance westward would mar or destroy it.
>
> I realize fully how hard you labored, day in and day out, year in and year out, to reclaim your farms from the unbroken forests, until your labors were crowned with success, and the wilderness budded and blossomed as the rose. Indeed, you deserve great credit for what you have here accomplished, and I pray that your children may fully appreciate the goodly inheritance they have, and will receive from your hands.
>
> As I survey the face of this country I cannot refrain from saying to your sons and daughters, do not forget the command, "Honor thy father and mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord, thy God (The Great Spirit), hath given thee." To do them honor you must be good to yourselves; keep your mouths clean from profanity; and as your parents cut down the mighty forests that covered this land, so may you push forward the great car of reformation, until all enemies that press down the right, and uphold the wrong, shall be overthrown.
>
> Fathers and mothers—How dear those names! And while I have here stood among strangers, my heart has continually whispered in my ears saying, "Pokagon, your father and mother a century ago passed and repassed this very spot, along their winding trails."
>
> My parents once lived near Plymouth, Indiana. Mr. Prentice, an honored citizen of this country, who has just gone into the world beyond, were he alive and here today, would tell you that when he was a young man, lost and starving, he found our wigwam home, and how he shared

our simple meals, and beds for many moons. We loved him dearly, and when he left us, we all wept. It rejoices my heart to feel that he and my father are in that great wigwam, where there are many rooms prepared by our Heavenly Father. I am getting old and I feel that one foot is lifted to step into the world beyond.

I have stood all my life as a peacemaker between your people and my people, trying to sooth the prejudices of the two races towards each other. Yes, without bow or gun I have stood as one standing between two armies advancing towards each other for the fight, receiving a thousand wounds from your people and my people.

In conclusion permit me to say, I rejoice with the joy of childhood, that you have granted "A son of the forest" a right to speak to you; and the prayer of my heart shall ever be so long as I live, that the Great Spirit will bless you and your children, and that the generations yet unborn, may learn to know that we are all brothers, and that God is the Father of all.[9]

This narrative of Indian-white relations was full of wisdom and tolerance, and it carried a sense of history that few European-Americans from his time could have equaled. "His touching words brought exultant applause for the old hero," Van Schelven reported.

The editor of *De Grondwet* stated that Pokagon's words impressed all those present, especially those who felt sympathy for the fate of Native peoples because of conquest and forced removal from their ancestral lands. He noted that Pokagon spoke without bitterness.[10] Reverend Cornelius Van der Meulen of Zeeland reminisced, saying:

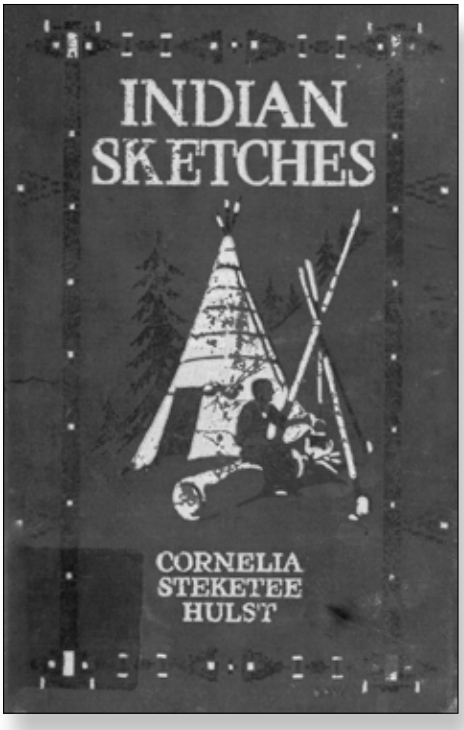
> I think I never have heard a speech in which so much was felt that was left unsaid. Beneath the beautiful language there was an undertone of sadness, a nostalgic longing for those beautiful forests in which he had roamed and which had been so ruthlessly felled and replaced by rather drab farmyards and the rather ugly artifacts of civilization … a bewilderment perhaps, as to why, in grasping for the future, we crush so much of the beauty of the past.[11]

At the evening banquet in the Ottawa Beach Hotel, Simon Pokagon was asked to give a short speech and propose a toast. Van Schelven in the *Holland City News* of 28 August 897 reported: "Simon Pokagon expressed his gratitude in being permitted to join with them. He related that the proper course would be pursued in teaching the children industry, faith, hope and charity, and if these essential elements are planted in their hearts the coming centennial would be an occasion of great rejoicing." A Chicago newspaper observed that during the speech Pokagon's voice was quavering, that the "old chief" was unable to finish the toast and had to stop and sit down, his son taking over to complete the well wishes.[12]

In his two speeches at the Holland Semi-Centennial, Pokagon had addressed all the relevant historical and contemporary issues in Indian-white relations. By emphasizing their common humanity and future plight, and through his conciliatory tone and personal expression of admiration of what the Dutch had achieved in Michigan, he captured the minds and hearts of his audience.

In later issues *De Grondwet* published short news items about Pokagon's plans to terminate his leadership because of his age, his successful attempt to claim former Potawatomi land from the city of Chicago, a fire that had destroyed his house and many of his possessions, a collection organized by Holland councilman (and later mayor) Henry Geerlings for the aging chief, and his death.

Pokagon passed away in January 1899 in Hartford, Van Buren County, Michigan, near Watervliet. He found a final resting place at the Rush Lake Indian Burial Grounds, where he was interred next to his first wife, Lodinaw. That same year his semi-autobiographical novel *Queen of the Woods* was published, originally written in Algonqiuan.[13] Pokagon's second wife, Victoria, who had sustained the family by the sale of birchbark containers after the fire had destroyed their home, passed away in August 1899. Because she was a divorcee, the Catholic Diocese had refused Pokagon's burial in an official church cemetery.



Cover of Indian Sketches by Cornelia Steketee Hulst, 1912.

De Grondwet characterized Pokagon, stereotypically, as "a respectable and soft-natured man whose savage Indian characteristics were remolded by education and civilization into a wonderful serene personality."[14]

Throughout his life Pokagon had impressed white Americans by his wisdom, diplomacy, oratory, and literary work. He was (erroneously) regarded as the hereditary and last chief of the Potawatomis and received an admiring accolade as the "Red Man's Longfellow." Despite all this admiration, Pokagon has never been honored with a monument. Educator and author Cornelia Steketee Hulst of Grand Rapids published a biographical sketch of him in 1912.[15]

Simon Pokagon: an Appreciation

Pokagon and his actions have been criticized and applauded, both in Native American and in white circles, during his lifetime and after his death. And the debate continues today. Like most other Native leaders in his time, he was unable to retain the land of his ancestors in the face of waves of invading Euro-American settlers, the firepower of American armies, and repressive government policies. He was a keen advocate of the interests of his people, however, and successfully pressured the government to pay compensation for lands lost. He creatively used these funds to secure individual ownership of land for the families in his band, an example set by his father. That the redistribution of such payments resulted in some discord in his community was not uncommon among Native American peoples. There is no indication that Pokagon profited personally from his position.

In his speeches and writings Pokagon adeptly played with the mythology of the "vanishing Indian" that was prevalent and popular at the time. He used this mythology not merely to demonstrate the devastating consequences of the confrontation between Native Americans and white newcomers but to make his listeners and readers aware of their responsibility in this history.

Pokagon stressed the value of Indian traditions and the need to retain at least some of these because of their intrinsic value to indigenous peoples and white newcomers alike. He particularly was keen to preserve tribal languages, oral traditions, and arts and crafts. He emphasized the common humanity of both races in the face of the supernatural and urged compassion, fair treatment, and justice.

While advocating Indian interests, rights, and traditions, Pokagon also acknowledged the inevitability of change. Native peoples had to live amidst the practical realities of the majority settler society to survive. In purchasing land on behalf of his people and encouraging them to take advantage of property rights, for example, he was promoting adaptation to the American legal system and market economy to face the new challenges and make use of new opportunities.

In short, Pokagon was a visionary and a diplomat, a true leader of his people. His celebration of Indian life in speeches and publications and his advocacy of aboriginal rights won admiration from Native Americans and Euro-Americans in his time: politicians, churchmen, literary figures, and a wider public. Perhaps he still can speak to the diverse audiences of the twenty-first century.[16]

Endnotes

1. Because of the uncertainty of Simon Pokagon's exact year of birth, one should take mentions of his exact age in newspapers, articles, and books with caution.

2. Buechner, 318, 328. Winger, 70-73. John N. Low, *Imprints: the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians and the City of Chicago* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2016), 40–44.

3. Clifton, 78–81, 86–90. Raymond C. Lantz, *The Potawatomi Indians of Michigan, 1843–1904* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1992). Larry M. Wyckoff, *Payments to the Potawatomi of Michigan under the Cadman and Taggert Rolls*; 2016 (www.academia.edu/29654307; retrieved Jan. 2, 2023).

4. Melissa Rinehart, "To Hell with the Wigs: Native American Representation and Resistance at the World's Columbian Exposition," in *American Indian Quarterly* 36:4 (2012), 403-442.

5. Pokagon's major writings are collected in: *The Birch Bark Books of Simon Pokagon* (Westchester, NY: Mint Editions, 2021). Jonathan Berliner, "Written in the Birch Bark: The Linguistic-Material Worldmaking of Simon Pokagon," *PMLA* 125/1 (2010), 73–91. Blaire Morseau, "The Birch-Bark Booklets of Simon Pokagon," *Michigan History Magazine* 102/4 (2018), 50–54. Pamela J. Dobson, *The Tree that Never Dies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids Public Library, 1978), 9–16, 27–31. Simon Pokagon: Address at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893; in Simon Pokagon Papers, col.nr. T88-0153 (Holland Museum, Holland MI). Lisa Cushing Davis, "Hegemony and Resistance at the World's Columbian Exposition: Simon Pokagon and The Red Man's Rebuke," in *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 108/1 (2015), 32–53. Rosalyn LaPiere and David Beck, *City Indian: Native American Activism in Chicago, 1893–1934* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 17–34.

6. *Holland City News*, Jan. 30, 1897; *De Volksstem* (De Pere, WI), Feb. 10, 1897.

7. *Holland City News*, August 7 and 28, 1897.

8. or some of these motives, cf. "The Pottawatomie's Old Home" in *Holland City News*, May 1, 1897.

9. Greetings from Chief Pokagon: Semi-Centennial Address, Holland, MI 1897; in: Semi-Centennial Reminiscences File/Nicholas Boer Papers (W16-1436.50), Joint Archives of Holland, MI.

10. *Holland City News*, August 28, 1897; Sep. 4, 1897. *De Grondwet*, August 31, 1897: 3–4.

11. Chris Kleinjans, "Chief Pokagon's Words of 1897 Remembered," in *Holland Sentinel*, Sep. 27, 2008.

12. "Pokagon Memorial Tribute," in: *Chicago Tribune*, May 7, 1899.

13. Fred Dustin, "Chief Pokagon and His Book," in *Michigan History* 6 (1922), 565–-572. Low, 48–59. Recent editions of the autobiographical novel were published in 2011 by Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, MI, and in 2018 by Pierian Press of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, MI.

14. *De Grondwet*, Jan. 30, 1899.

15. Steketee Hulst, Cornelia, *Indian Sketches: Père Marquette, and The Last of the Pottawatomie Chiefs* (New York, NY: Longmans, Green and Company, 1912), 78–111.

16. The Potawatomi maintain a presence in southwest Michigan on three small reservations at Dowagiac, Gun Lake, and Fulton. They are thriving economically, cherish their cultural traditions, and are proud to have endured as a vibrant Native people.

The author acknowledges the kind and effective assistance received in the preparation of this article by staff at Heritage Hall Archives and the Hekman Library of Calvin University, and the Public Library History Center in Grand Rapids, MI; and in Holland, MI, the Joint Archives at Hope College, the Holland Museum, and the Herrick District Library; and The History Museum of South Bend, IN. In the Netherlands, Hans Krabbendam (Roosevelt Study Center, Middelburg) and George Harinck (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam) were instrumental in obtaining a travel grant for research on (Protestant) Dutch-Indian relations in the Upper Midwest.

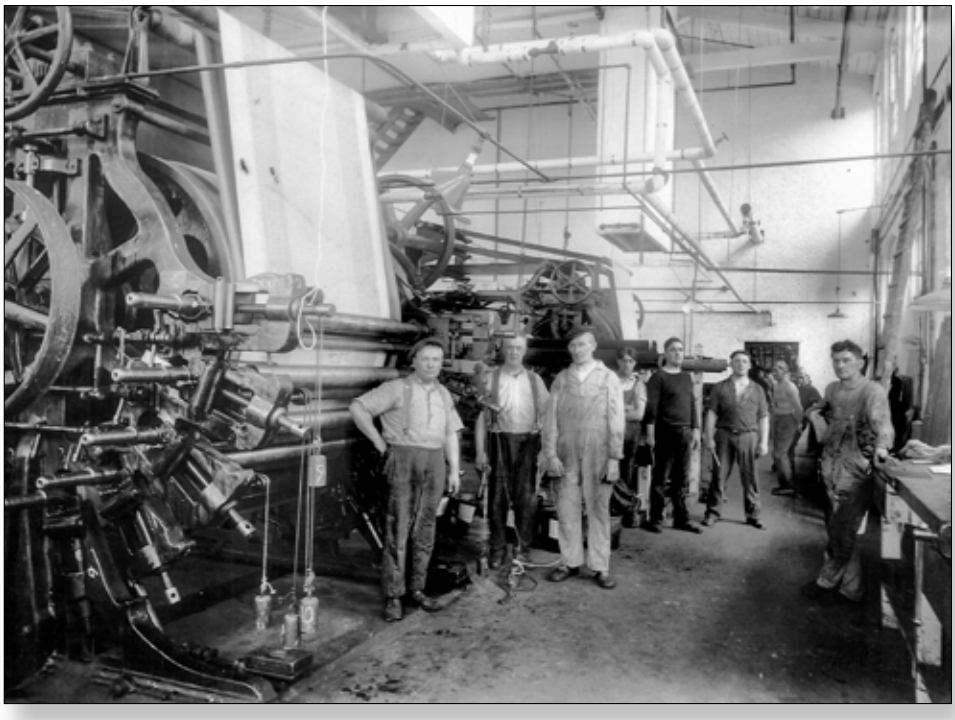
From Scab Hill to the Communist Party and Beyond: Lini Moerkerk de Vries's Search for Social Justice

Robert Schoone-Jongen

In July of 1948, Elizabeth Bentley, dubbed the "Spy Queen" in the press, appeared before House and Senate committees to allege that she had been a Communist agent working in collaboration with high officials of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. During her testimony she swore that someone named Lini Fuhr had recruited her into the party in 1935. In the frenzy that was the second Red Scare, Lini, now a public health nurse in Los Angeles, found herself instantly ostracized, unable to work. Her story might seem unusual for a Dutch American, and perhaps it was. But it also was in line with her Dutch heritage, as she found out later in life.

Lini's journey to notoriety began in Paterson, New Jersey's thriving Dutch immigrant community, a neighborhood of unfriendly neighbors called "Scab Hill." Her journey from a Dutch Reformed upbringing to the Communist Party and then exile in Mexico began with domestic abuse and proceeded through Paterson's often hellish textile mills and dyehouses in the early twentieth century. Through it all, Lini searched for a reason to live and found it in a social conscience that made her a champion for the underdogs, wherever she encountered them.

The Borough of Prospect Park, where Lini spent most of her young



Silk Mill, Paterson, New Jersey, early 1900s. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

Robert Schoone-Jongen is an emeritus professor of history at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His research is on Dutch immigration to the US since 1850, currently focuses on northern New Jersey.

years, was a formidable looking place from the outside. Along with roughly eight adjacent blocks in Paterson's First Ward, it was the solid square mile home to several thousand Hollanders, a group well known for crossing picket lines during the city's frequent labor disputes. The inhabitants were pegged as religious, insular, and self-satisfied. Lini recalled that her mother regarded anyone not Dutch Reformed as foreign—*drek*, to use her Dutch pejorative.[1] From the inside, the neighborhood could be forbidding. It was not just the residents' contempt for outsiders but fissures that lay below the surface—between the churched majority and the skeptical minority, between the devotees of the various versions of Dutch Reformed tradition present, and between the Hollanders and their non-Dutch neighbors. While its voters overwhelmingly supported the Republicans, the borough was known to harbor atheists, Marxists, and even an anarchist or two.[2]

Survival meant working in the dyehouses and textile mills that lined the Passaic River, and the industries that supported the textile businesses, like the local gas works. Here the Dutch encountered Italians, French Canadians, Alsatians, Syrians, and Jews from the Pale in Russia as fellow workers. Then there were the mill owners, their sons, and the managers, who mostly lived in fine houses on Paterson's Eastside. They had reputations for routinely harassing and groping their female employees—the "mill dollies."[3]

Leendert Moerkerk, Lini's legal father, was numbered among the borough's religious skeptics. His birth had been registered in the village of Dirksland in the Dutch "Bible belt," but Leendert had lived on a small freighter that plied the Rhine Estuary. He was the only survivor among his 12 siblings; the others succumbed

Paterson Hebrew Mission, ca. 1911. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

to tuberculosis in the boat's cramped family quarters. He never attended school, either in the Netherlands or in Paterson, after the family immigrated in 1887.[4] In Paterson, going by "Leonard," he worked in the gashouse.

Lini's mother fell into the "deeply religious" category. Elisabeth de Vries had been born in 1876 to an observant Jewish family in Amsterdam. The de Vries clan was immensely proud of two things: their Sephardic roots in Spain and their Dutch citizenship. Elisabeth was the third of fifteen children. As the oldest daughter, she was tasked with caring for her younger siblings. By most accounts Elisabeth had been a rebellious child with a mean streak. In 1902 she immigrated to the United States by herself, found work as a domestic in Westchester County, New York, and became pregnant in 1904. She then moved to Paterson, where she met and married Leonard Moerkerk. Lena (Lini's legal given name) was born there on July 27 and baptized in the Sixth Holland Reformed Church on October 1.[5]

Lini's baptism indicated that Elisabeth had converted from Judaism soon after she had arrived in Paterson. Elisabeth's newfound religiosity contrasted with Leonard's stalwart nonbelief. He viewed his church-going neighbors as hypocrites. Elisabeth's zeal, her mean streak, and likely her residual guilt over Lini's irregular birth, led to Lini's becoming a scapegoat. To Elisabeth, Leonard, the sooty, barely literate gas house worker, owed her every pay envelope; she had somehow elevated him by their marriage, as he fell below her social status.[6] Little Lena's fate was worse. Elisabeth commonly called her daughter a "whore" and confined her to the basement coal bin for the tiniest infractions, or for no reason at all. When the Moerkerks lived on East Main Street, down in the Passaic River's flood plain, the cellar also housed rats attracted by Shortway and Vander Wall's butcher shop that occupied the building's street side.

Lini attended three grammar schools. First came North Fourth Street Christian School, until her mother's refusal to pay tuition. Lini transferred to Prospect Park School #1. During the family's two-year

"The Pageant of the Paterson Strike." Strike poster, 1913. Wikipedia Commons.

stint living on East Main Street, she attended Paterson's School #12. In all three schools. the student body would have been predominantly from Dutch households. But in the public schools the teachers decidedly were not of that background. At school Lini began to learn the English language and socialize with children of other backgrounds—much to her mother's anger.

These unwanted associations prompted mother Moerkerk to place Lini in the hands of the man who served as director of the recently organized Paterson Hebrew Mission, which Lini remembered as a converted store. "Dark, shabby green curtains stretched in front of the store window," recalled Lini. "I dreaded to enter the somber green cave and feel his fat, oil hands on me. Fearing my mother's more, I entered." When she complained of the mission worker's sexual abuse, Elisabeth blamed her daughter, summoned an agent of the Florence Crittenden Home, and accused Lini of being "bad."[7]

Lini began to understand that the source of her miserable home life lay in her mother's uneasy past. The first hint came during surreptitious visits the two of them would make to a mysterious gentleman in Dobbs Ferry, New York. These excursions improved Elisabeth's disposition, if only for a day. The gentleman was Lini's biological father, Abraham Bernardas Polak, who had emigrated from Amsterdam with his family as a child. Then, in 1910, Elisabeth brought Lini on a trip to the Netherlands.[8] There she met her mother's Jewish parents. Lini's most vivid memory of the visit was seeing her grandparents' horror when their little granddaughter recited the Lord's Prayer for them. Elisabeth enjoyed provoking her parents through their granddaughter.

Lini's longsuffering legal father provided what little solace there was in the Moerkerk home. Although Leonard was barely literate, he would sit by the table while Lini did her schoolwork. Recalled Lini, "[H]e spoke like a book about his youth on the boat, and of Holland. He had never been back to Holland, and he longed to return."[9] Lini then heard Elisabeth berate Leonard: "I married beneath my class. You were a sickly bum, a drunk. I made a man out of you, a respectable man." When Leonard kept a few cents for cigarettes, Elisabeth called him "a thief." [10] When Paterson's' silk mills shut down during the 1913 strike, Lini went with Leonard to the union rallies in nearby Haledon, where they listened to the likes of Big Bill Haywood denounce capitalism.[11]

Lini graduated from the Prospect Park school in June 1917. Elizabeth lied about Lini's age (she was shy of twelve) to get her a job in the mills. She began as a bobbin girl, one of the laborers who lugged the loaded spools from the winders to the weavers to make the cloth that made Paterson famous as the world's foremost silk producer. What she remembered most was the noise: "Machines roared. Belts whirled. Workers shouted at one another over the noise of the clacking looms." Her preteen arms struggled to carry the loaded spools to the looms. And Elisabeth demanded every cent of Lini's wages as payment for what Lini had cost to feed and clothe since birth. When Lini protested that it was her back that ached from the work, Elisabeth granted her five cents of every dollar she earned: thirty-five cents per week.[12]

Over the next few years Lini met new people and encountered new ideas: ideas about labor unions and churches that were not Dutch. She went on excursions to places like Bear Mountain Park in Rockland County, New York, and she began questioning all she had been taught in church and heard from her mother. Lini reduced her thoughts to two questions: "What sort of God was this who hated all who were not Dutch Reformed? How could there be room in hell for all who were not God-fearing Dutch Reformed?"[13]

When one of the neighbors objected to Lini singing a "sacrilegious" song on a Sunday, Lini severed her ties to the Reformed church. She began attending the Bethany Chapel, sponsored by Paterson's prestigious First Baptist Church in the Dutch immigrant "over the river" enclave.[14] Here Lini encountered the Girl Scouts, and from a new friend, Eva Veenema, the Paterson Public Library. There was a whole different world outside the Dutch immigrant community, and Lini enjoyed it. When Lini would be escorted home by a friend, Elisabeth would greet her with, "Is your belly full?" Lini's escorts reassured her, "Don't worry, we all know that your mother is crazy."[15]

When Lini dreamed of attend-

Lini Fuhr, War Nurse, Speaks At Rally Here

American Nurse To Bare Spanish War Horrors At Drive To Raise Hospital Funds

Miss Lini Fuhr, first American nurse t return from the American Base Hospital at Taracon near Madrid, will speak tonight at the State Street School, Hackensack, at 8:15. She will give a first-hand account of the horrors of the civil war now raging in Spain.

WORKED WITH DR. FRIEDMAN

The mass meeting, free to the public, is being sponsored by the Bergen County Chapter of the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy, a charitable organization attempting to send medical supplies to the under equipped Loyalist medical forces.

Miss Fuhr, who is head nurse at one of the four American hospitals established by the Medical Bureau in Spain, left the United States January 16 with the first American Medical unit headed by Dr. Edward H. Barsky, New York surgeon now in charge of all American medical work in Spain.

She worked together with Dr. A. I. Friedman of Little Ferry who gave up a lucrative practice there to go as a volunteer to fight the medical war waging behind the lines in Spain.

It is reported that the American Base Hospitals around Madrid are all crowded almost beyond their capacity and that more cases are being created daily.

In addition to supervising the work of the American personnel,

SPEAKS TONIGHT

LINI FUHR

Image and story about Lini Fuhr in the Hackensack Record, 1937, during a speaking tour after her return from serving as a nurse in the Spanish Civil War.

ing Paterson High School, she was told that she still owed for her years at home. And so, for four years she toiled in various mills. While working in the Cedar Cliff silk mill in Haledon (two blocks from where she spent Sundays with her father at union rallies), Lini was befriended by a fellow Hollander, Carrie Niekerk, who worked to help her family save the money they needed to return to the Netherlands. From Haledon Lini descended to the oldest mills, the ones located between the river and the lower mill race. From two sides water seeped into the basements, forcing the workers to walk in wet shoes and to dodge rats.

Here Lini witnessed a coworker's long braids being snagged by the belt that connected a loom to the drive pulleys near the ceiling. "She was being scalped before my eyes."[16] Refusing to return to the mill's dank basement, Lini found work in the Riverside Silk Mill. From the second floor she looked at the river, befouled by the discharges from the gas works and dyehouses. "At the falls it was still clean, but here (two miles down) it was plain dirty. I dreamed of how the river must have looked when the Indians lived on its banks."

The mills changed Lini's view of humanity. While her mother denounced all things not Dutch Reformed, Lini began to see what she held in common with those "other" folks. Poles and Syrians shared lunches with her, a piece of sausage or a bit of pastry for a piece of seeded cheese. The women all endured sexual assaults. Knowing that the company nurse doubled as a "stool pigeon," the workers reported none of their grievances. During one of the frequent strikes, when Elizabeth commanded Lini to cross the picket line, Leonard objected. "She will not scab; she will strike like the others. She will not be a strikebreaker."

Lini now saw herself as a worker, not a Dutch immigrant girl. This gave her a sense of solidarity. She reported, "We mill dollies had this feeling of shame. We tried to avoid admitting that our parents spoke no English. I was not as bad off as some of the others, since my parents were Hollanders and were higher on the immigrant scale." Those with darker skin and darker hair were looked down upon by Paterson's industrial leaders. "We were nothing; we were foreigners, mill workers. God, I was confused! I wanted to be and live like the Eastside, and yet my loyalty went to my co-workers."[17]

Yet all was not gloom for the Moerkerks. Her father rose from renter to owner, owning two homes in Prospect Park, selling the first one when its basement flooded and moving up the hill. Lini did have friends in the borough who hosted her fifteenth birthday party. On at least one occasion, the Moerkerks hosted some of Elisabeth's relatives from Connecticut, as well as Lini's biological father, by then known as Bernard Pollack.[18] Lini would swim with her friends in the ponds that accumulated at the bottom of the area's stone quarries. But she wanted something better than working in the mills.

In 1920, Lini secretly took a job secretary for a detective agency. Elisabeth intervened through a lawyer, who threatened to sue the gumshoes for a labor law violation, since Lini was not yet sixteen. That led Lini to simply leave home and take a room at the YWCA on the east side. Lini traded the smokestacks under which she had worked and lived for a clean room, which she paid for by working the night shift as a telephone operator. She spent her days in the public library.[19]

Without her domineering mother demanding every dime earned, and without a weekly hail of brimstone from the pulpit on Sundays, Lini found herself drawn to her non-Dutch companions and their non-Reformed ideas. Amid Paterson's stew of labor agitators and political radicals, Lini began to consider the possibility that the world could be improved by social and political action, not by making everyone Dutch Reformed. People with those different ideas were close at hand, even in Prospect Park.

Labor unrest in the United States after World War I led to a "red scare" in late 1919. The Bureau of Investigation, with J. Edgar Hoover leading its Radical Division, arrested some 1000 communists and other labor activists and deported almost 250. In a second wave of roundups of "undesirables" in February 1920, Hoover himself accompanied the officers who arrested a leading anarchist just around the corner from the Moerkerk home.[20]

A trip to the Netherlands with her mother and younger sister in 1923 introduced Lini to her de Vries relatives in Amsterdam and The Hague.

Advertisement for Lini Fuhr speaking tour, Whiting, Indiana.

It revealed to her that not all the Dutch were like the ones she knew in Paterson. Lini's grandparents regaled her with their family history, a heritage that linked them to the radical seventeenth century Jewish intellectual Spinoza. She traveled to Goeree-Overflakkee, where her father had come from, to meet her friend Carrie Niekerk, whose family had traded a home on a Paterson alley for an isolated house at the end of a muddy path. But they were happy there. Carrie and Lini earned some cash sorting shrimp on the dock in Ouddorp. An elderly local told Lini that the Moerkerks, who had all left the island, had arrived there from Scotland during the 1600s, Catholic refugees from the town of Muirkirk.

Lini fell in love that summer and became engaged to a young Dutch journalist. But the betrothal abruptly ended when he died from diabetes complications soon after she returned to the United States.[21]

Lini entered adulthood with a growing sense of being cosmopolitan, someone with gifts, someone who could make a difference in the world. This led her to the nurses' training program in New Rochelle, New York, where she could gain admission despite lacking a high school diploma. After a few years of being "Dutchy" to her colleagues, Lini was forced to spend one final stint in Prospect Park as she recovered from a bout of rheumatic fever.

Sitting on the front porch, Lini saw the borough's inhabitants through new lenses. "I had never been aware of the strangeness of it before." Here were 5,000 Hollanders with their churches and two-story houses, thrifty manual laborers, Republicans living on what others called "Scab Hill." "What had happened to them in the New World?" Lini pondered. They were different from the Hollanders in Holland; they had changed. This was not a bit of Holland, and it was not America, either. It was nothing yet, like me."[22] In her despair she contemplated suicide, only to find the resolve to return to school and live a different life—far away from the Dutch Reformed immigrant world of Prospect Park.

In New Rochelle Lini graduated from school, married Wilbur Fuhr, and became a mother. While working with a visiting nurses' service, she confronted the impact that poverty and heavy manual labor had on people's health. As the Great Depression began and deepened, she saw these health issues increase. Then her husband was diagnosed with a fatal heart condition. By early 1931, Lini was a single mother. She enrolled in Columbia University to sharpen her nursing skills.

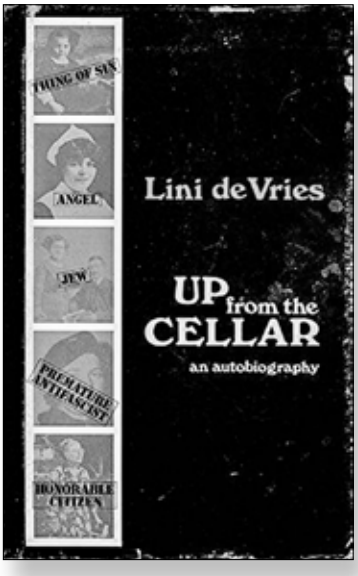
Living in New York brought Lini into contact with members of the Communist Party. Impressed with their idealism, she joined the party and became a recruiter. That led to her encounter with Elizabeth Bentley in 1935. Like many others, Lini became disenchanted with the party's authoritarian leadership and wandered away from the cause. Yet she retained her zeal for social betterment. In that spirit she volunteered to serve as a nurse for the republican side in a Spanish Civil War that leaned communist on one side and fascist on the other.

After spending several months in a field hospital in central Spain, Lini returned to the United States and set off on a speaking tour to rally public support for the Spanish republicans. She addressed audiences from Washington to Minneapolis, upstate New York to Chicago, Cincinnati to Bergen County, New Jersey. Her audiences varied from garden partiers to labor union members and social activists. In Chicago she shared the stage with the radical poet and journalist Carl

Sandberg. Her theme never varied: The Loyalists in Spain deserved financial and moral aid as they faced Franco's fascists with their use of dum-dum bullets and indiscriminate aerial bombardment. What Lini did not realize at the time was that all her public words placed her on the watch list of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, now run by Hoover. The Loyalists' ties to the Soviet Union tinged the bureau's view of American support for the anti-fascist side. Lini could not erase what the bureau held in file folders bearing her name.[23]

Lini did not return to Spain, but instead resumed her public health work. That led her to assignments in places like New Mexico, Puerto Rico, and southern California. In 1944 she married a second time, to Louis Clyde Stoumen, and became a mother for a second time.[24] During 1948, while living in Los Angeles with her second husband and daughter, Lini read about Elizabeth Bentley's testimony.

Now publicly identified as a one-time Community Party recruiter, Lini found herself unemployable. The nature of public nursing meant that her employers were often dependent on government funding. Faced with unemployment, a disintegrating marriage, a young daughter to support, an older one in college, some long term medical challenges, and the likelihood of being subpoenaed to publicly testify before a congressional committee, Lini chose to leave the United States and took up life in Mexico. During this period, she began using the name de Vries.



Cover of Up from the Cellar (1979).

From 1949 through the mid-1970s, Lini Moerkerk Fuhr Stouman de Vries directed public health programs among the indigenous people of the Mexican states of Veracruz and Oaxaca. In honor of her work, the Mexican government conferred citizenship on her in 1962. The following year the United State government revoked her citizenship. Apparently, she did not attend the funerals of either her mother or father, who died in 1955 and 1964, respectively.[25]

But Lini did return to the Paterson area when her health betrayed her during the late 1970s. In 1979 she published a lengthy autobiography that the *New York Times* characterized as "grim."[26] She identified with her Jewish relatives, adopting the de Vries surname. When she died in a New Jersey hospital in 1982, her family received friends at a funeral home on Haledon Avenue, the border between Prospect Park and the City of Paterson.

For all that the course of her life made her unusual among Dutch Americans, Lini's family laid her to rest next to her Moerkerk parents, in a cemetery where most of most of the borough's Dutch immigrants had been laid since the 1890s.

Endnotes

1. Lini de Vries, *Up From the Cellar* (Minneapolis: Vanilla Press, 1979), 25–26, 42.

2. Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880–1945*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 145. Kenyon Zimmer, *Immigrants Against the State: Yiddish and Italian Anarchism in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 153.

3. Ibid 27, 38–39.

4. Ibid 52-4. *S. S. Rijndam* passenger manifest, 10 August 1887.

5. Ibid. Letter summary of Sixth Holland Reformed Church baptism records dated 25 June 1919 (Lini de Vries Collection, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University).

6. Paterson's Union Gas Works, where Leonard worked (later owned by the Public Service Electric & Gas Company), manufactured the city's gas supply from bituminous coal. James C. G. Conniff and Richard Conniff, *The People of Energy: A History of PSE&G* (Newark: Public Service Electric and Gas Company, 1978), 29–32.

7. *Up From the Cellar* , 11-12.

8. Passenger register for *S.S. Noordam*, 26 July 1910 (ellisisland.org).

9. Ibid, 9–10.

10. Ibid, 34–5.

11. Ibid, 15.

12. Ibid, 14.

13. Ibid, 17.

14. Annita Zalenski and Robert J. Hazenkamp Jr., *Ecclesiastical History of Paterson, N.J.: A History of Paterson's Churches, Synogogues and Missions, 1792–1942* (Paterson: Passaic County Historical Society Genealogy Club, 2011, 5, 189). The Bethany Chapel building still stands on Haledon Avenue, directly across from what was the Ebenezer Netherland Reformed Congregation. First, Second, and Third Christian Reformed Churches were all located within sight of Bethany (if you looked closely).

15. *Up From the Cellar*, 17–20.

16. Ibid, 22–23.

17. Ibid, 27.

18. *Paterson Morning Call* 24 February 1917, 15; 28 February 1920, 6; 11 August 1920.

19. *Up from the Cellar*, 33–4.

20. *Paterson Morning Call* 16 February 1920, 1; *Paterson Evening News* 16 February 1920, 1–2. Zimmer 153–5. Guiglielmo, 199–205. Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in Its First Age of Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 211–4. Ludovico Caminita, the editor of a Paterson-based anarchist newspaper, was arrested in his apartment at 12 Planten Avenue, Prospect Park, and imprisoned on Ellis Island in preparation for his deportation from the United States. The Moerkerks lived at 360 N. 8th St., six doors away from the intersection with Planten Ave. Caminita's arrest was part of what came to be called the "Palmer Raids."

21. Ibid, 46–62. *Paterson Morning Call* 17 October 1923, 6. *Paterson Evening News* 12 October 1923, 22.

22. *Up From the Cellar*, 87–88.

23. *Chicago Tribune* 19 June 1937, 12; *Hammond Times* 20 July 1937, 1; Pittsburgh Press 30 May 1937, 3; *Wisconsin State Journal* 22 August 1937, 6; *Washington Evening Star* 10 June 1937, 31; *Cincinnati Enquirer* 3 June 1937, 26; *Ithaca Journal* 31 July 1937, 3; *Buffalo News* 29 June 1937, 19; *Minneapolis Star* 21 June 1937, 6; *Ottawa Citizen* 24 July 1937, 4; *Kenosha News* 10 September 1937, 7; *Vineland* [NJ] *Daily Journal* 9 June 1937, 6; *Camden* [NJ] *Courier-Post* 12 June 1937, 11; *Windsor* [ONT] *Star* 23 July 1937, 23; *Lancaster* [PA] *New Era* 11 June 1937, 14; *Bergen Daily Record* 1 July 1937, 4.

24. Marriage license #783, Manhattan borough register, p. 520.

25. *Paterson Morning Call* 8 February 1955, 19; 12 May 1965, 19.

26. *New York Times* 11 September 1983, NJ, 11.

for the future

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

The Spring 2024 issue will have essays on a variety of topics: A Navajo student from New Mexico who studied in Calvin College's preparatory school program in the 1910s and became chairman of the Navajo Nation's Tribal Council in the 1950s; part II of the story of Wilma and Walter Lagerwey and their World War II letters; a German American Reformed immigrant pastor and con artist; and more!

The image is five students at Calvin College in about 1917. They include (from left to right) Lum K. Chu (a student from China), Oets Bouwsma, Jacob Bruinooge, Eisse Woldring, and Paul Jones. Jones later became chairman of the Navajo Nation's Tribal Council. The students have spoons and small dishes in their hands and look like they are eating a dessert. It is not clear what the dessert is. It is in a large glass jar with the spoon on the table. I wonder if it's the Dutch treat for special occasions, brandied raisons, boerenjongens (literally, "farmer boys"). Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

contributors

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