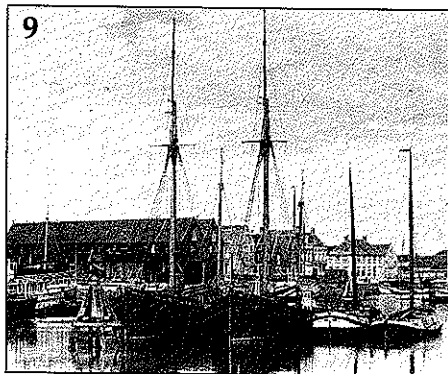


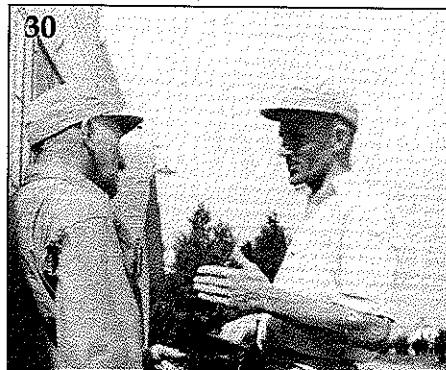
# ORIGINS



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



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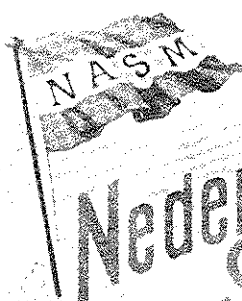
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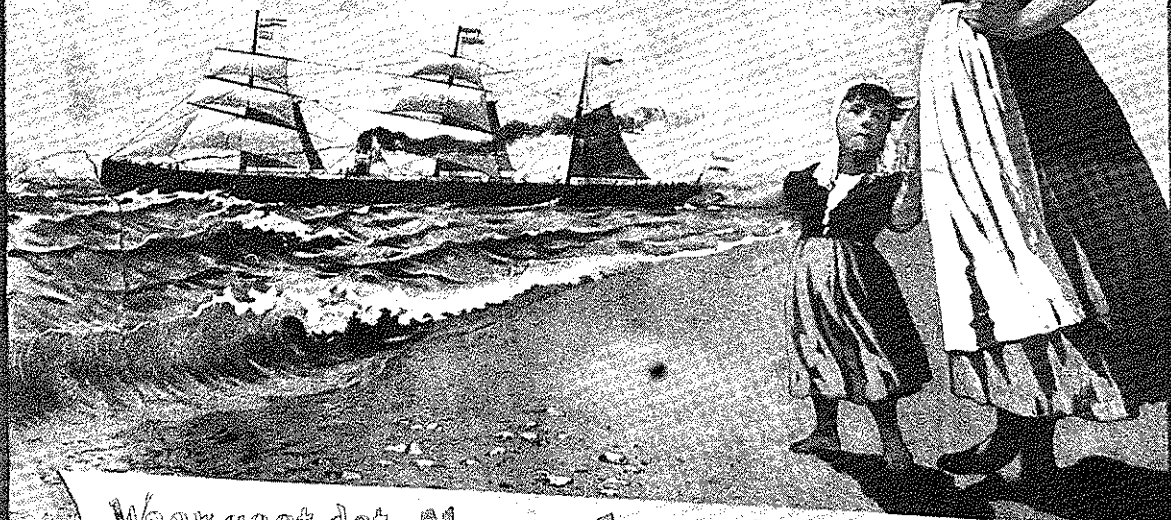
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Wekelijksche Vaart met de Stoomschepen der



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*Rotterdam.*

Biljetten worden  
naar alle plaatsen  
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afgegeven.



Waar gaat dat  
schip naartoe? **Naar Amerika, mijn Kind!**

W. A. Schellen.  
Rotterdam.  
Schiedam.  
Leiden.

P. A. van der  
Amsterdam.  
Londen.  
Holland.

# OCEAN VOYAGE

## ACCOUNTS 1856 - 1920

BY H. J. BRINKS

The current restoration of Ellis Island, America's major depot for newly arriving immigrants between 1892 and 1954,<sup>1</sup> has kindled urgent efforts to recover the stories of those who passed through that institution's doors, hallways, and examination rooms. Often such accounts are imbedded in travel reports which new entrants penned for their relatives in Europe. These are among the most interesting writings contained in the typical immigrant's correspondence. But it is significant that few Dutch-American accounts contain more than passing references to Ellis Island; most of these cite only neutral or favorable impressions of the experience.<sup>2</sup> In fact, for most immigrants of all nationalities, the sea voyage, with its melodramatic departure from native shores and the excitement of entering New York's harbor, overshadowed the temporary tedium and distress experienced at Ellis Island.

It seems probable that the trauma of passing through Ellis Island has been overdramatized by some authors.<sup>3</sup> Although the island certainly was an "isle of tears" for some people, that could have been true for only a small minority, since 80 percent of the new arrivals passed smoothly through the bureaucratic loops and a full 98 percent ultimately became New World residents.<sup>4</sup> For such people Ellis Island symbolized hope more than despair. Consequently, travelers were more inclined to describe the rigors and uncertainties of ocean travel than the rather undramatic encounters with minor officials and clerks. Bureaucratic red tape could be encountered in every European town or country. But the ocean was novel—even for Netherlanders, whose land and culture

were molded by coastal waterways, canals, and interoceanic trade.

Geography did, however, provide Dutch voyagers with special advantages. Because they usually traveled in Dutch ships, they were able to communicate effectively with quayside officials and the ship's personnel, and consequently they were less disoriented than many other passengers. Even as third-class travelers they could select their quarters and separate themselves from the more destitute third-class passengers. Such folk, generally Russian Jews and eastern Europeans, were not only segregated within their third-class compartments and dining halls but had already experienced the status of strangers long before boarding. As soon as they left their native lands, they became recognizable foreigners as they trekked across Europe and depended on the goodwill of others, who usually could not understand their languages. Difficulties in obtaining fair, to say nothing of favorable, treatment plagued these foreigners long before they reached Rotterdam or the New World. And it is obvious that even some Dutch travelers reacted to these strangers with distrust and revulsion when they clustered together at dockside and later aboard ship.<sup>5</sup> Ethnic prejudices, it seems clear, were well established prior to departure and merely persisted after the immigrants settled in the towns and cities of the United States.

The four travel accounts selected for this article span the period from 1855 to 1920 and include arrival experiences both before and after the opening of Ellis Island in 1892. The first account, written by Jan George Zahn, contains a tale of the complications he encountered in New York City. The 1883 letter of Marchien De Jong provides revealing glimpses of travel across the Netherlands, and Roelof Ruiter's 1906 memoir describes the Ellis Island entry process in considerable detail. The

girlhood experience of J. Vander Veen in 1920 exemplifies both the vulnerability of young travelers and the abusive behavior of Ellis Island's personnel.

These accounts also illustrate the changing modes of ocean travel as early nineteenth-century sailing vessels were replaced by ships powered by a combination of steam and sails. By 1920 large propeller-driven ocean liners replaced these slower vessels. Each change entailed improved quarters for third-class passengers, who, by the twentieth century, were no longer herded into the ship's hold without provisions for privacy.

The first travel account below, that of Jan Zahn in 1856, demonstrates that even in the 1850s first-class passengers enjoyed rather comfortable accommodations. But Zahn's mercurial mood swings certainly distorted some of his information. His judgments about the United States and its people ranged from praise and devotion to despair and hatred. His difficulties were partly due to his first-class traveling status. First-class travelers were not permitted to enter the country through Castle Garden (the immigrant reception center before Ellis Island), because they were considered self-sufficient. Consequently, they gained no benefit from the guidance Castle Garden offered to third-class passengers. Thus, during his first days in New York City, Jan Zahn suffered the greenhorn's vulnerability to misdirection, over payment, and outright deception. In addition, he was overconfident and paid a stiff price for that arrogance. Zahn encountered many difficulties before reaching his destination, but after settling in Iowa, he continued to find cultural adjustments rather difficult.

He opened a cigar store in Muscatine, Iowa, and married Wilhelmina de Heus. The birth of his child Eliza in 1858 was recorded in the 1860 census, but no record of the family exists after

that time. Zahn served in the Civil War but did not return to Muscatine, Iowa. His correspondence, eight letters (1856–1858), contains exceedingly candid characterizations of his American neighbors. In 1857 he wrote to his brother Gerhart, "You asked me to tell you about the book business here—and you mentioned that you wished to come here. I will tell you that it would be absolutely no good. I'll tell you the best way to sell books here—if you could come up with a collection of bad books, including, for example, how to learn the best methods of picking pockets, cheating, stealing, swindling, and the like. Or if you would sell religious books. You are probably saying that is a strange combination. Yes, indeed. But people here are astonishing creatures. American religion consists of this: to acquire many acquaintances, to dress attractively, and then not to sin openly but in the dark and on the sly. Americans exhibit one obvious virtue, and that is that only about 10 percent of them are slaves to strong drink."

Despite this largely negative assessment, Zahn's next letter that same year (Sept. 20) declared, "America is and remains a wonderful country. You would stare your eyes out if you came here. By now I have become so accustomed to it that I almost feel these circumstances to be normal."

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate* (New York: New York UP, 1975) ix, indicates that 75 percent of the immigrants entered through Ellis Island.

<sup>2</sup>In the 1,500 collections of immigrant letters in the Calvin College and Seminary Archives about 200 contain travel information, but only 22 of these mention Ellis Island or its predecessor, Castle Garden.

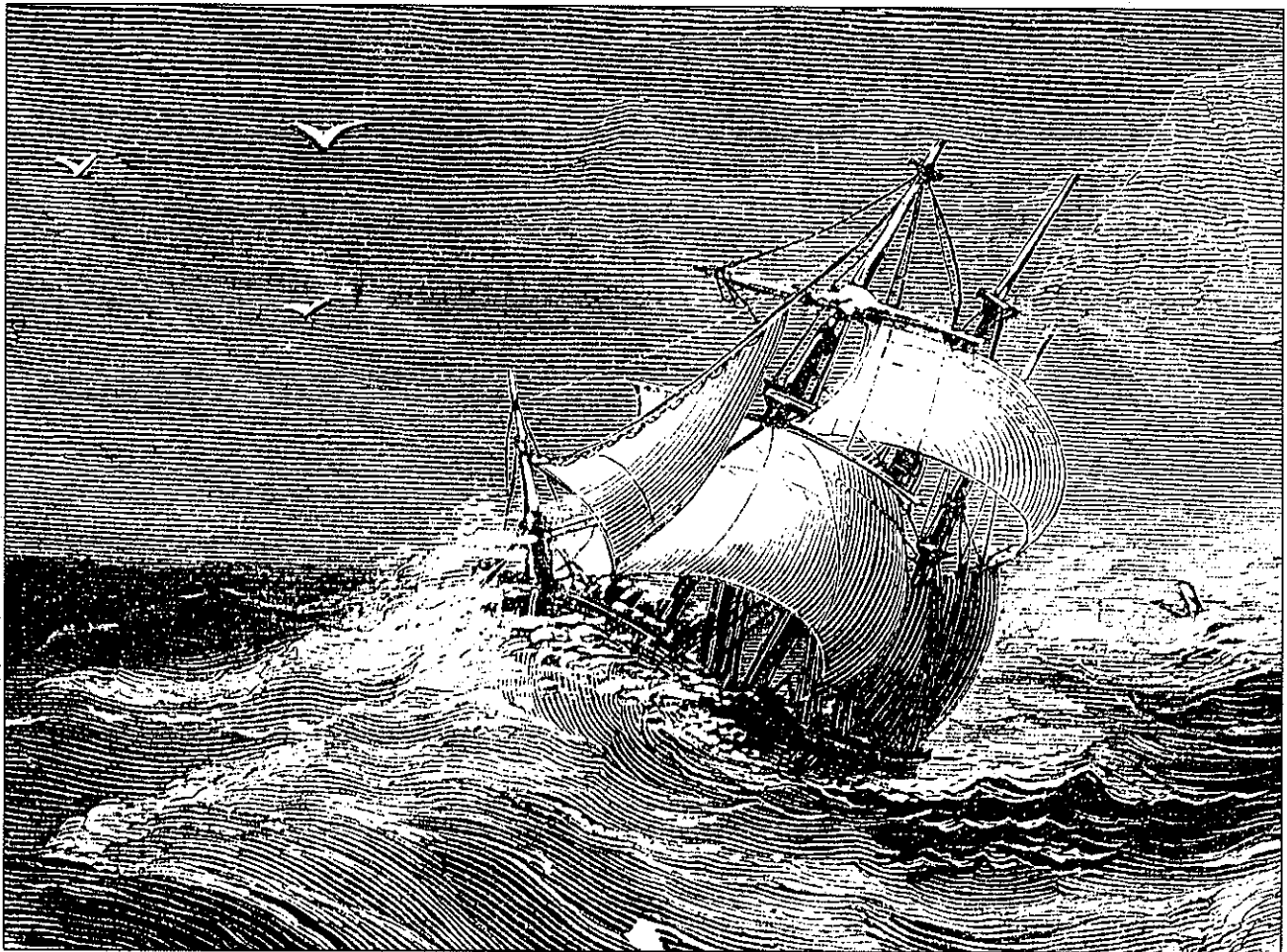
<sup>3</sup>Pitkin 45–46.

<sup>4</sup>Pitkin 45–46.

<sup>5</sup>See pages 26–29 in this *Origins* for examples of interethnic perceptions.

# JAN GEORGE ZAHN

## 1856



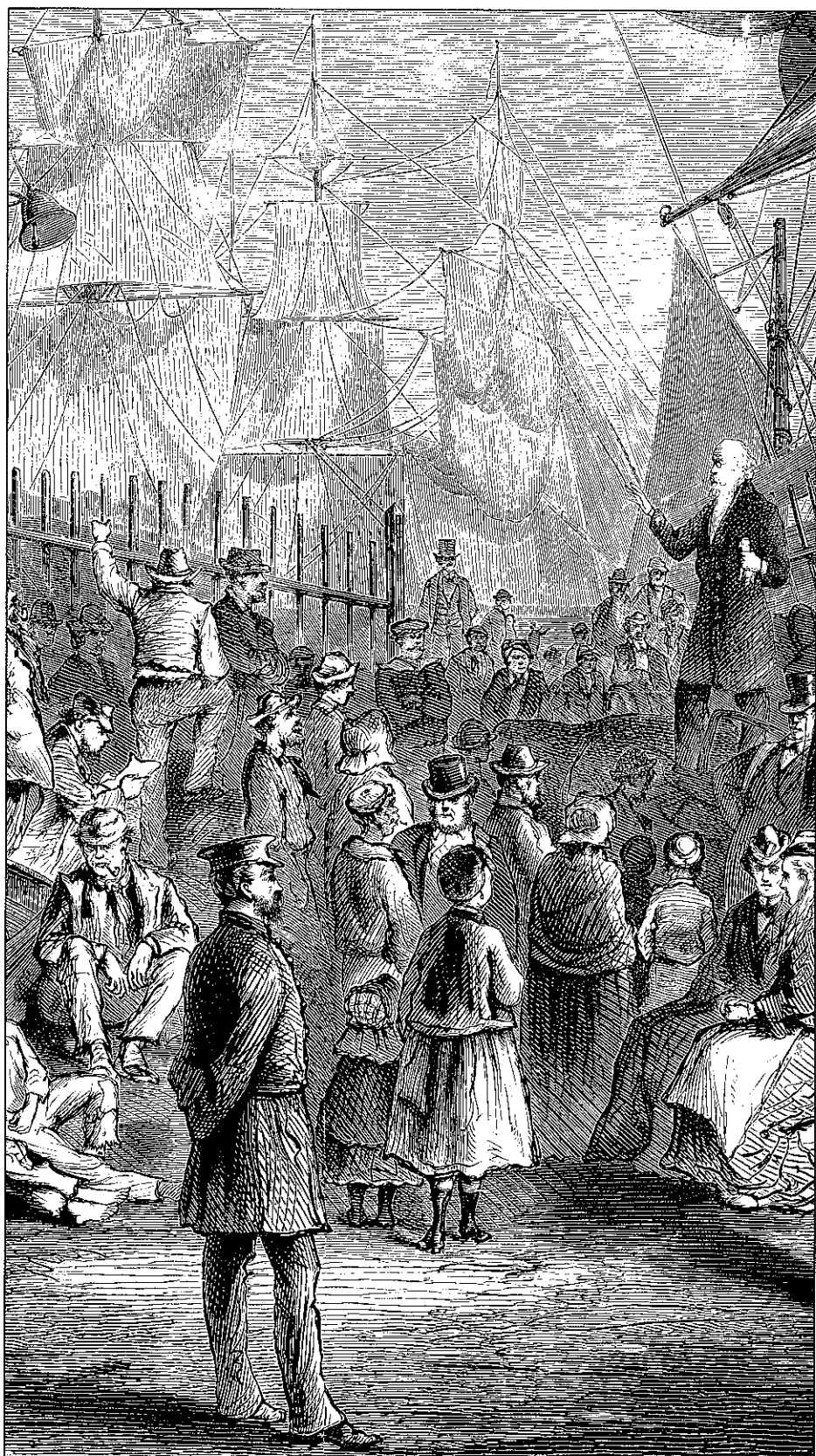
*Sailing vessel in 1850—Harper's Weekly, Dec. 1859.*

"I left Hellevoet on June 9 at 4:00 A.M., when a steamboat took us to the North Sea. The island of Walcheren was the last bit of the Netherlands I could see, and when I lost sight of it, my heart nearly broke. I felt like flying back to Amsterdam. You cannot imagine what an impression it made on me to be leaving the fatherland, probably forever, and never to see my relatives again. But I determined to think no more of that and focus instead upon the wonderful future which awaited me. And with that thought in mind, we sailed into the wide ocean."

\*\*\*

"We were on the ocean for such a long time (49 days) that I thought we would never leave it. We had contrary winds by night and day, but I must admit that life at sea agreed well with me. It would be pleasant punishment to spend my whole life at sea. And I suppose that is why our tough captain was so friendly with me. I became so attracted to him that I was sorry to bid him farewell in New York. Many times he said to me, 'Zahn, if there is anything you want, just speak up. I'll give you anything you wish.' . . . He helped me make enough progress with English so I could understand almost everything and make myself understood.

"We had just one storm at sea, but that was real trouble; all the sails were taken down, and the distress sail was hoisted. The waves were as high as houses, and often three or four dashed across the deck at once. Any one unfortunate enough to be caught in these would have a hard time of it. Luckily, I was struck only once by such a wave, and, of course, I was knocked onto the deck, dizzy and soaked. One experience like that puts you on your guard. In good weather the evenings at sea were wonderful, but at times the mist was so thick you could not see people walking on the



other side of the ship.

"The food was plentiful and good, but at first everything was strange because all I heard was English. Later I learned enough to talk as much as I wished. In short, I got along very well on ship, and I will never forget the captain, a truly fine man.

"Finally, on the 27th of July, we sighted land. But that was not entirely pleasant for me because I thought, 'Why did I go so far from home?' If I could fly, I would have flown home gladly. We sailed past an island and returned to the open sea until the fol-

Nothing is more pleasant, delightful, beautiful, or glorious (words fail me) than entering New York. The setting of the city from the river is beyond human comprehension. At 10:30 we were directly in front of the city, and there another boat came alongside to take the passengers to the immigration house, Castle Garden. Cabin passengers [Zahn was one] could not join them. They must take care of themselves. Castle Garden was organized as an immigration house by right-minded Americans who could no longer condone the swindling and atroci-

ties inflicted upon strangers. The immigrants come there by boat, and then the company sees to it that the strangers reach their destinations without the danger of being swindled. Passengers may remain in Castle Garden as long as they wish and can eat and drink for no more than twenty-five cents per day. Cabin passengers are not permitted there, for

we are told that we can care for ourselves well enough."

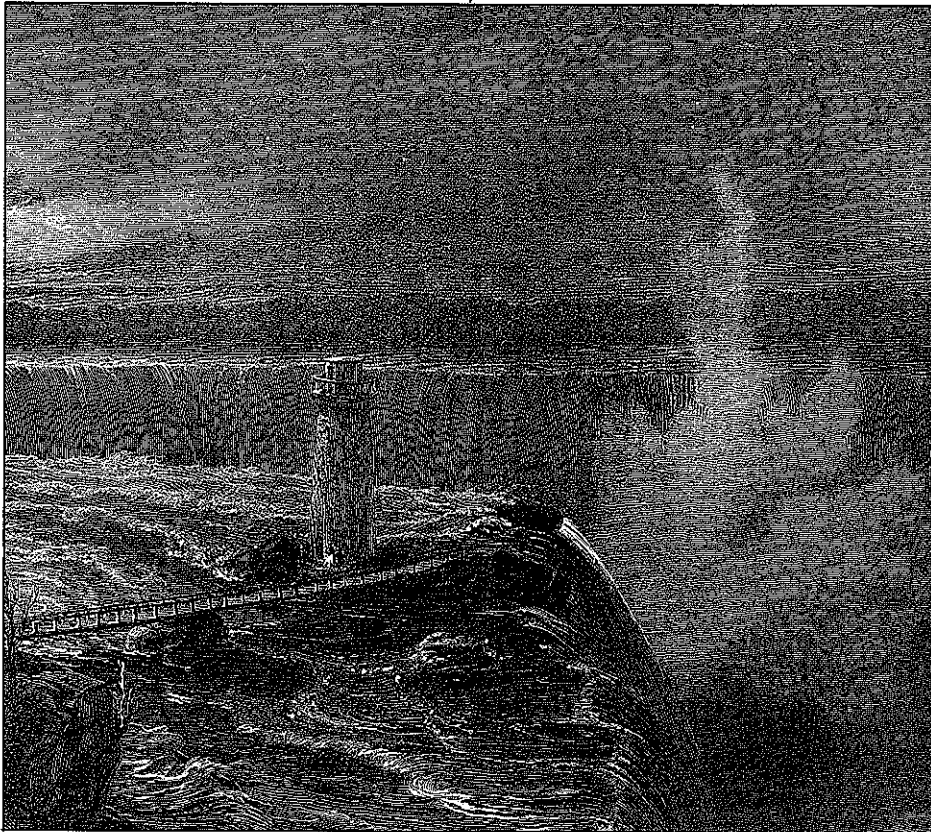
J. Zahn remained aboard ship with the friendly captain for another day but then decided to remove his baggage and begin the overland journey to Muscatine, Iowa, where he planned to settle. His trouble began when he passed through customs, mainly because he was importing a stock of cigars to sell in Iowa.

"My trunks were recovered and placed on deck," he wrote, "but there I ran into real trouble. They were opened and inspected to see if they contained anything subject to duty, and it did no good to say that they contained only gifts. The trunks were taken to the import-duty office, and piece by piece, everything was removed. Then I was asked what the value was. My tobacco and cigars were worth 200 f\*, but I reported 95 f. I also had to pay 85 f for my clothes—the shirts alone cost 45 f. . . . In the end I was obliged to pay fifty dollars. When this was all completed, I was allowed to have my trunks, which I sent to the railroad baggage room immediately. For that I hired a Negro, who was the best person I had thus far met in New York. The real Americans seemed to be rascals and swindlers."

\*\*\*

"The next day I purchased a first-class ticket for twenty-six dollars to travel from New York to Muscatine. I had my personal trunk taken from the ship by horse and wagon to the railroad station. I also boarded the wagon and was jostled through the city in a terrifying manner. Finally, trembling and shuddering, I arrived not at the train but at a boat. I shouted, 'No! No! Not the boat; to the train. Ride on or I won't pay!' Cursing, the man answered, 'I'll throw you from the wagon and ride off with your trunk if

\*f—florins, or guilders



(left) New York Harbor area—Harper's Weekly, Oct. 1871, p. 996. (above) Niagara Falls at night—Harper's Weekly, July 1859, p. 436.

lowing evening, when we approached the American mainland.

"The sea became smaller and smaller until finally, at 12:00 midnight, we cast anchor in the East River.

you don't pay!' In a short time a crowd of thirty men gathered, including the cook from the ship, who said I was in the right place. He claimed I must take the boat to the train. I was persuaded and, after getting my trunk, paid the driver. My trunk was placed on the ship, but within fifteen minutes the cook said to me, 'My friend, you are in the wrong place,' and with that he laughed heartily. If we had been alone, I would have choked him, but there were so many rascals and pickpockets standing around that I had to watch out and also keep an eye on my trunk. Then I dragged my trunk from the ship and looked for another wagon. I found one, but the ship's cook followed me and interrupted when I began to bargain with the driver. The cook shouted, 'John, you know it's two dollars from here to the train.' 'Go to h...', I answered. 'I can get there for fifty cents.' Then he took my trunk and threw it into the street. I didn't know what would happen, but I'd already been in New York for nine days and had to get to the train, so I told the driver, 'Don't worry. You will get your money, but if the train has left, I'll not pay you.' Then he whipped

his horses, and again I sat trembling atop the wagon. You must not imagine that the streets of New York are all paved. Only three are paved, and the others have bricks and rocks poking up, sometimes two and even three feet. We reached the train on time, but I could neither hear nor see because of the commotion. And you can't imagine the problems I had taking care of my trunk. At last the train began to move, and within half an hour we were out of the city. Thereafter we traveled at unbelievable speeds, and I sat shuddering as we passed through tunnels, woods, and along mountains. I was dizzy at times as the scenery passed by. We passed cliffs of sheer rock, and at times rocks bounced against the train because of vibrations. When we came to Niagara Falls, the train was fourteen hundred feet above ground level—a frightening sight."

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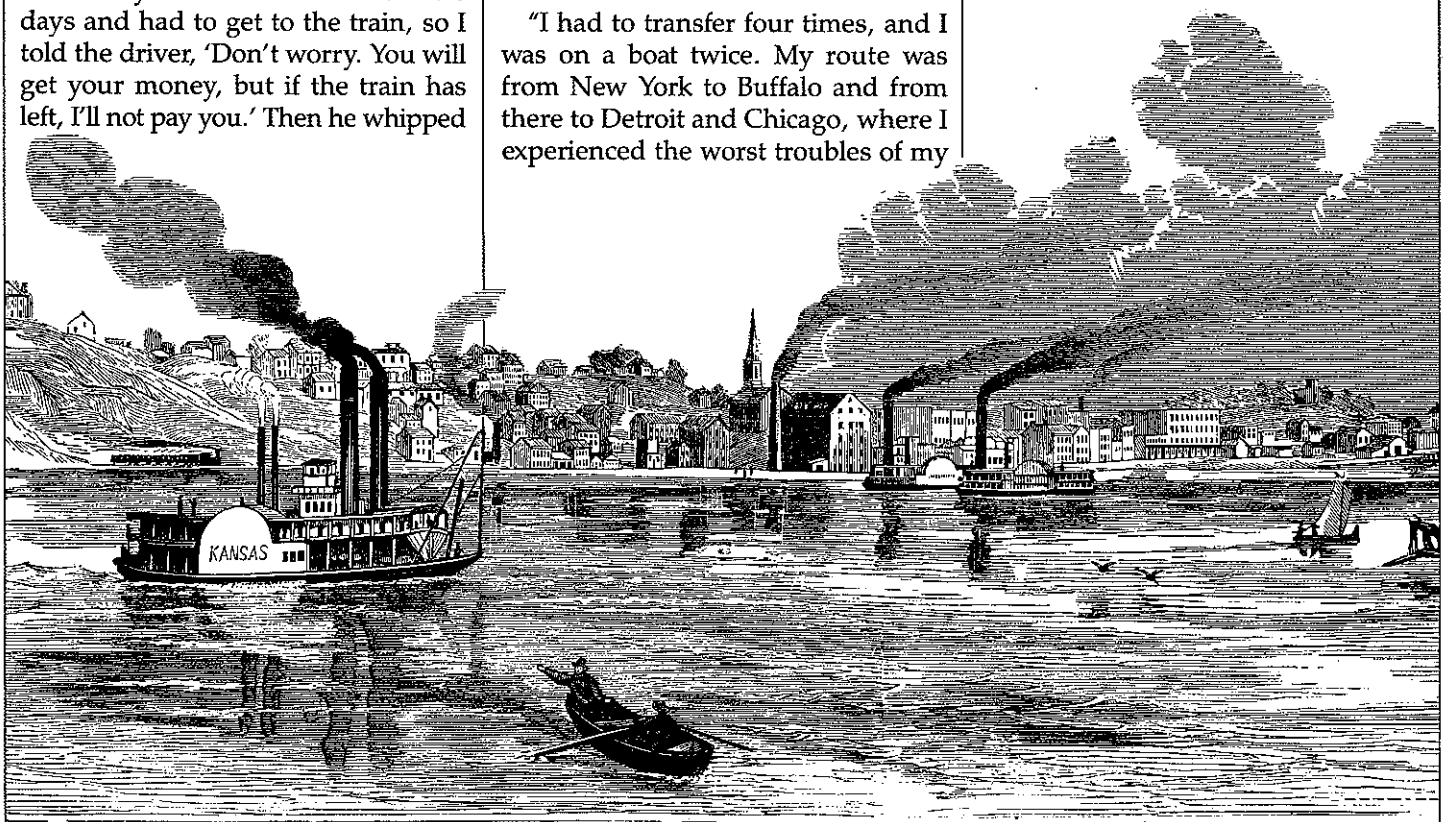
"I had to transfer four times, and I was on a boat twice. My route was from New York to Buffalo and from there to Detroit and Chicago, where I experienced the worst troubles of my

entire trip. From Chicago I went to Rock Island and finally to Muscatine. It was a load off my heart when I turned in my last tickets.

"I spent the nights quite comfortably, but many people do not think of sleeping on a train. The warning is 'Watch out for pickpockets!' and in Chicago I had a bad experience with a pickpocket. The people there are the dregs. I was cheated out of 12.5 cents in Chicago; I didn't do so badly in comparison to others, like the Heus family. Things can really be terrible.

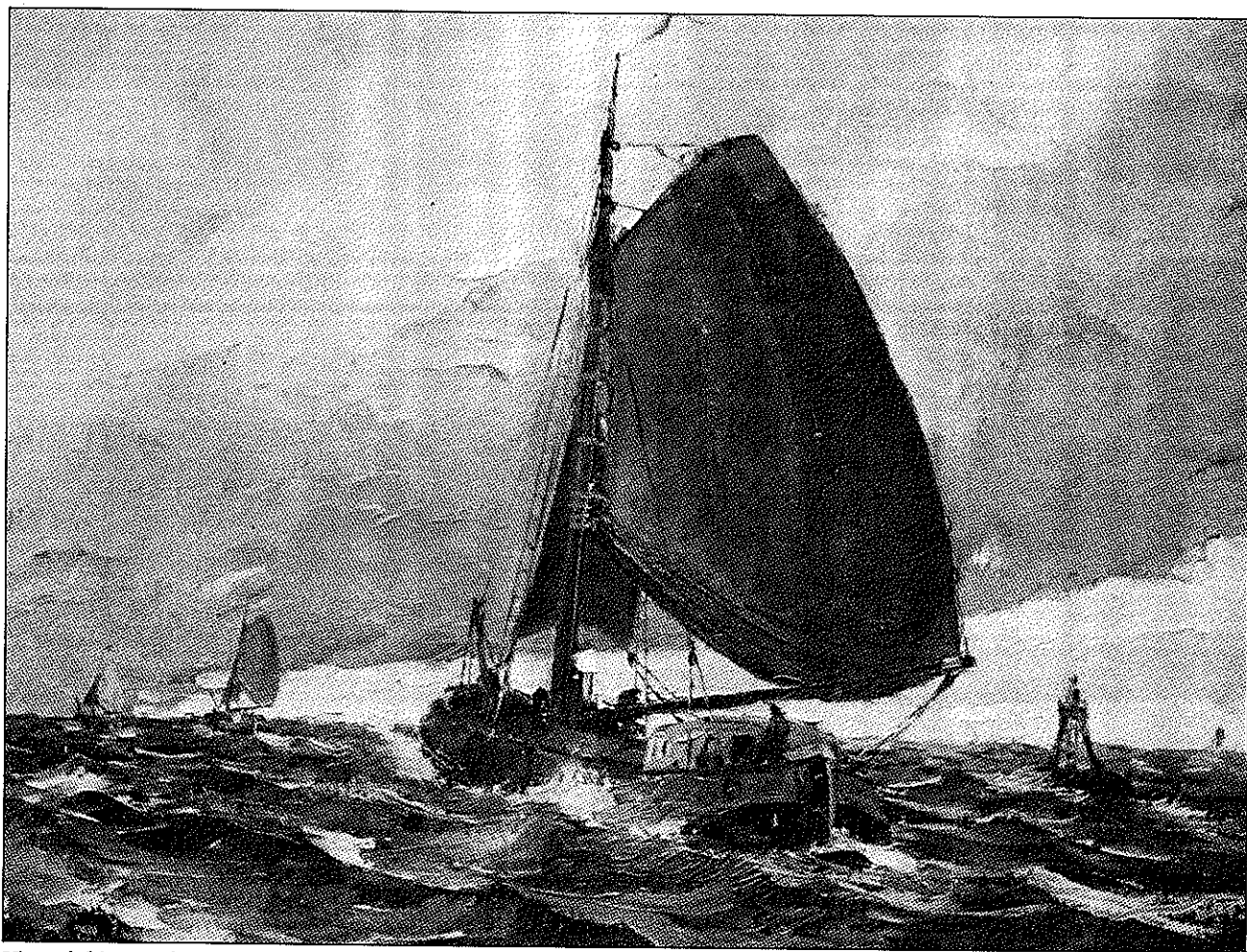
"When I reached Muscatine, it took a lengthy search to find the Heus family, where I am staying, but I was heartily received. Nothing more could have been desired. But the truth is that things do not always go well here, and the Heus family readily admit that they were better off in Holland. Some succeed very well; others do not."

*Muscatine, Iowa, 1850s—with permission from the Iowa Historical Society.*



# DE JONGE FAMILY

## 1883



*View of ships on the South (Zuider) Sea, De Strevende Zuiderzee, p. 9.*

With several children, Marchien and Harm De Jong traveled from the sandy soil of Drenthe to Chicago in 1883. By then two relatives, Anthony and Peter, had already arranged for Harm's employment, and he went to work the day after their arrival. Marchien set up housekeeping in her brother Anthony's house, and his wife, Jacoba, oriented Marchien to the new surroundings. She reported, "We are now living with Antonie. There is only a door between us. Jacoba and I bought a stove, and we went to the store together to buy meat. This morning I baked my own bread—of course she helped me. The beds cost us \$3.00 altogether. A table cost \$1.25, and the stove \$9.00 secondhand, but it is as good as new."

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"Jacoba and I have been to town three times already. The streets are so busy it seems like Christmas. . . . We see colored folk here every day—Chinese and people of all colors. I don't even know how many things I have seen here. . . . Harm earns \$9.00 every week and works with brother Peter. Women do not work here in America. They are highly respected. But Harm has to work as hard as he did in Holland. Men go to work, and the women are the ladies. They dress very differently than in Holland."

The travel account which accompanied Marchien's report of her first days in Chicago follows.

Marchien De Jonge, letter to her parents, from Chicago to Drouwenemond, Drenthe  
May 3, 1883

Dearly beloved Father and Mother,

Let me tell you about our trip. After leaving you in the morning, we boarded a towboat going to Groningen, which we reached at 10:00 P.M. Immediately we went to Zwanen-

burg's office, where we paid four guilders for freight charges, bedding, and one night's lodging in Amsterdam. Then we went back to the towboat, but even at 12:00 o'clock there was little opportunity for sleeping, as people were singing and playing harmonicas.

In the morning we took a train to Harlingen. Jaap v. d. Kaap took us to the Groningen station, where we shook hands for the last time—an emotional moment. But we had to go on. At Harlingen we boarded a steamboat to Amsterdam. The trip was

beautiful, and many people were on the boat. We sat on deck the whole way as sail ships, steamboats, and fishing vessels passed us on all sides.

We reached Amsterdam in the evening and went ashore. They led us to a large building, and there we stood—a crowd of people with bags and baggage standing in the street like a flock of sheep. The men went into the building to deposit our trunks, but by then it was dark, and we didn't know how to find the hotel. Someone led us to the hotel Zwanenburg, where our rooms were on the top floor. They



smelled like a pigpen, so we all walked out and gave the clerks a piece of our minds. We said we wouldn't stay there and went out to get a warm meal. But at eleven o'clock, when it was dark, we had either to stay on the street or return to our pigpen. So we returned to the room but could not

(top left) Drouwen, Drenthe; De Jonge's home area—G. T. Nijland, *Ons Eigen Land*, p. 174. (bottom left) canal entering Groningen from Drenthe—ATS Meijer, *Zo Fotografeerden Zij Groningen*, photo #73. (below) Harlingen port area.

sleep. We sat on some benches until morning and then hurried out. As we left, each of us began to gag because of the odor. So we were on the street without shelter until noon.

We boarded our large ship at about midday. Then they raised the flags and set sail. For the first few days the weather was fine, and with calm seas we could hardly notice that we were at sea. But on the third day the waves rose up, and we became seasick one after another. Our children vomited all night and could not eat. Little

Aaltje vomited up twenty tapeworms. I was seasick for only one day, and the others, Harm and the children, also recovered quickly, but they had little appetite.

To give them some energy, we bought eggs every morning because the food on board was generally poor. They served unpeeled potatoes (about five of them) without gravy and a half bowl of thin soup with a small piece of meat. That was all we got for the money we paid. But the people became very clever at stealing more



food, and our Peter saw to it that we got something extra, too. In the morning they served some black coffee with two pieces of white bread, grits with syrup, and some sugared tea.

During our third day at sea we were frightened by a violent storm which tossed the ship about like a cradle being rocked as violently as possible. We were all certain that we would perish. The tin dinnerware was thrown all about the ship. We could not lie in our beds without being thrown on top of one another. Often we said to each

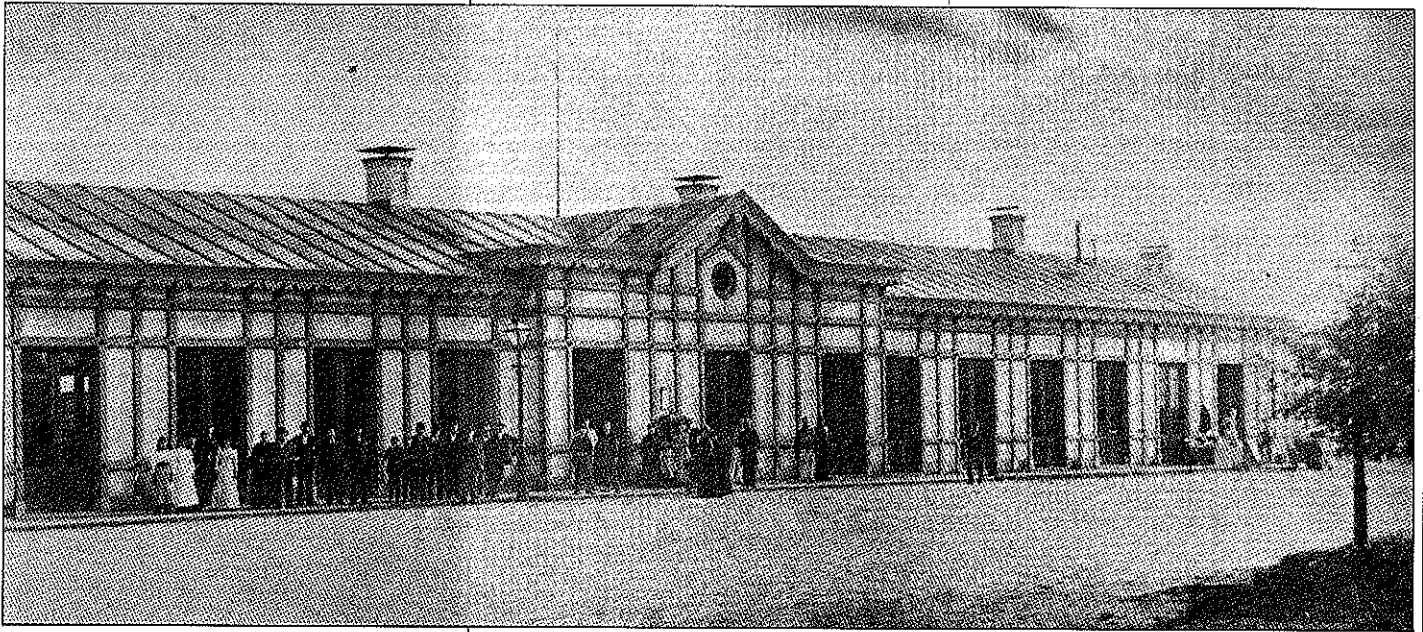
Christmas Day. We, too, were up on deck every day. I used up all the yarn which I took with me.

The ship's bedding consisted of straw mattresses, straw-filled pillows, and horse blankets. Some people used their own bedding on board, but we didn't want ours to get filthy. We were not cold, but we slept poorly. Often, when the children were asleep, Harm and I went on deck to watch the sea and weather.

Next to us an elderly man of sixty-four died, and two children also died

during the trip. They were placed in wooden caskets with holes in them so that they sank when lowered overboard at night. Four babies were born during the passage, so you can easily imagine the kind of activity which was going on. Every morning the ship's doctor made visits to see if anyone was sick. And so the days passed one after another. Finally, during the last days, the sea became more calm, and we could notice that we were nearing land.

To our great joy, a pilot came aboard



other, "I wish I had never thought of going to America." But we had to go on. After a time we grew more accustomed to the storm, but it also became progressively less severe, until finally the sea was calm again.

There were several Germans on board. They were on deck much of the time, singing, dancing, and playing a fiddle by moonlight until as late as ten P.M. . . . The ship was full of movement and commotion. While one person sang, another cried, and a third might be playing a flute. As you can well imagine, with one thousand passengers, people were walking about all night long. It was like a perpetual



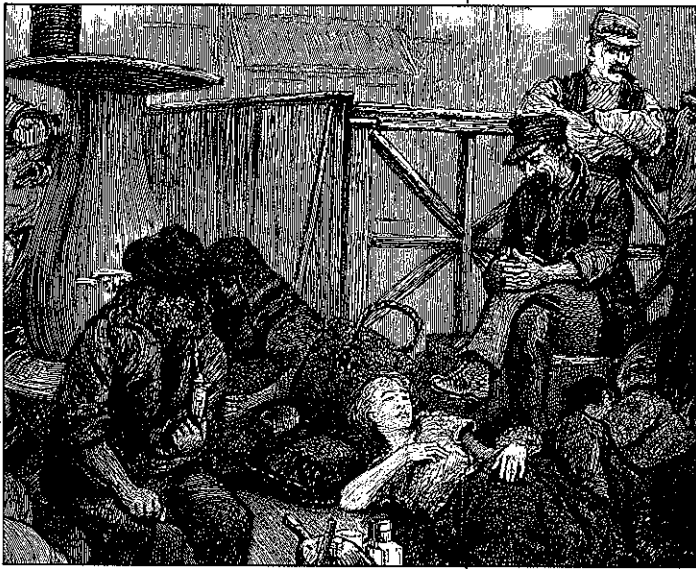
on Saturday, the 29th of April, and on the 30th we were on Staten Island. A doctor boarded the ship to examine the passengers for sickness and to determine whether or not we could debark. After the examination we could proceed farther.

What a beautiful sight Staten Island is. Large buildings are located on hills at least sixty feet high. As you can imagine, everyone was standing on deck. We reached New York at eleven o'clock and were transferred to a smaller boat. That was the only way to come ashore. There all our trunks and baggage were inspected. But a quarter slipped into the inspector's hands shortened the process. A little lid was lifted and replaced—that was all.

boarded the train Tuesday afternoon, May 1. Our trunks had been weighed and loaded in the morning, but we did not leave until evening.

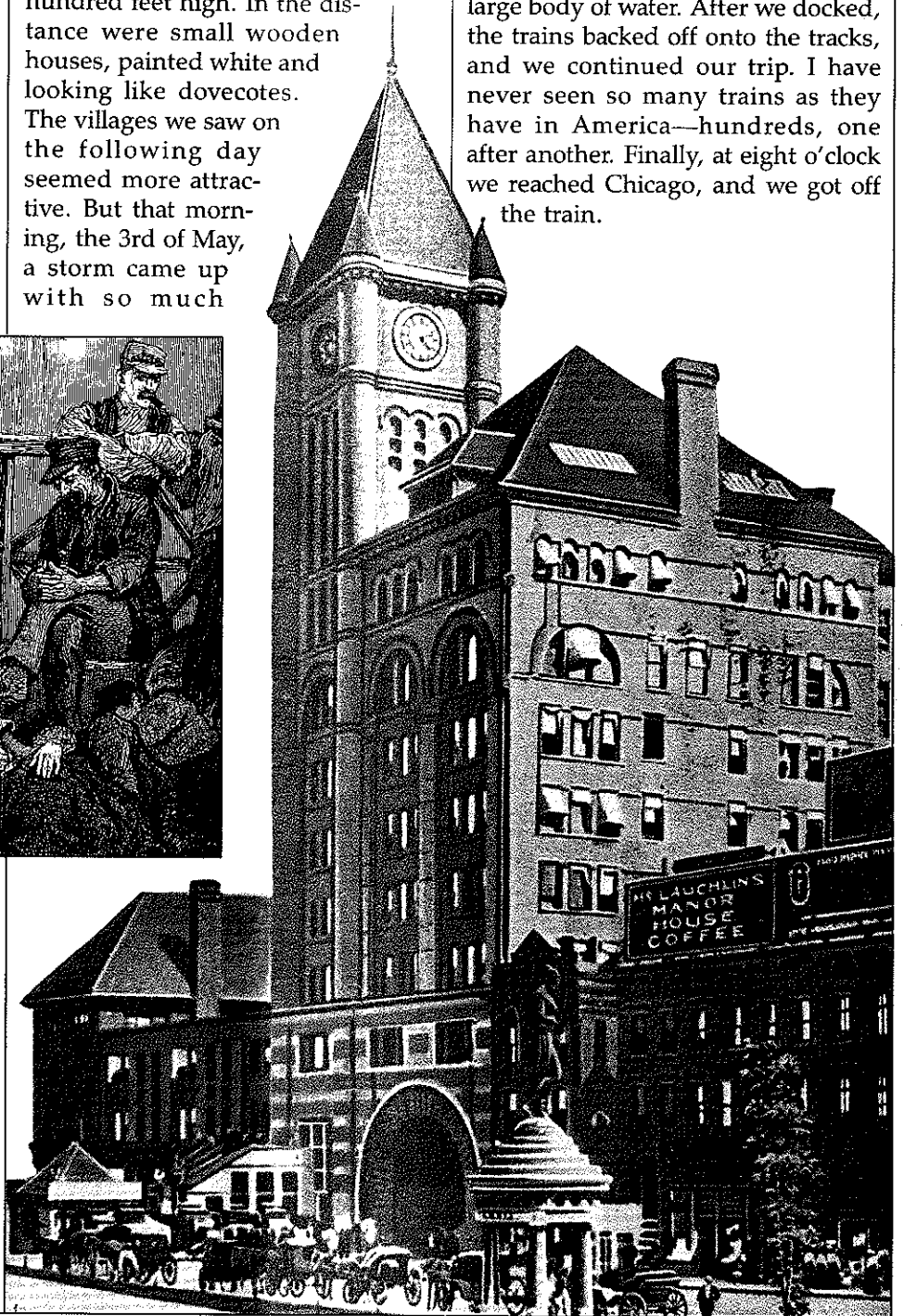
We were sorry it was dark and we could not see anything. We longed for daylight, when much was to be seen. We rode between hills more than one hundred feet high. In the distance were small wooden houses, painted white and looking like dovescotes. The villages we saw on the following day seemed more attractive. But that morning, the 3rd of May, a storm came up with so much

thunder and lightning that we thought the world was coming to an end. Later we came to a large bridge which contained three trains, side by side. Then the bridge opened behind us, and a large steamboat came along. The train went smoothly onto the steamboat, which brought us across a large body of water. After we docked, the trains backed off onto the tracks, and we continued our trip. I have never seen so many trains as they have in America—hundreds, one after another. Finally, at eight o'clock we reached Chicago, and we got off the train.



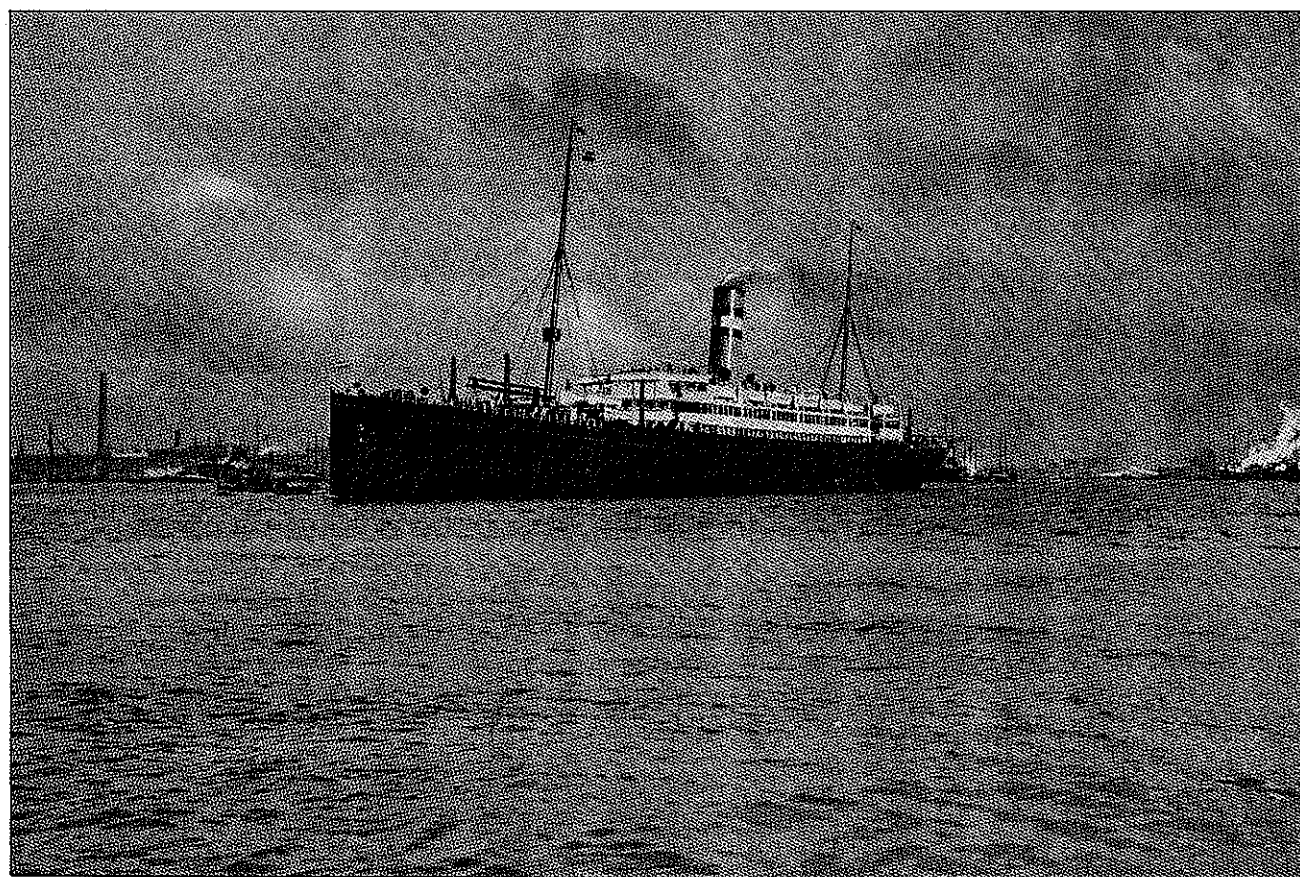
(top left) Central Station in Groningen until 1890—Tammeling and Vogt, *Kijk op de Stad Groningen*, p. 23. (bottom left) *Amsterdam Canals, rooms for rent, Destijds in Nederland*. (above) Castle Garden, overnight lodging in waiting room—Harper's Weekly, May 26, 1883. (right) Chicago's 12th Street Railway Station, 1890s.

After midday the small boat crossed the harbor and brought us to Castle Garden. Our trunks were already there, to be picked up the next day. We remained at Castle Garden over night and left on Monday A.M. We



# ROELOF RUITER

## 1906



Roelof and Lammechian Ruiter came to Grand Rapids from Vroomschoop, Overijssel, in 1906. Roelof's description of his Ellis Island experience is exceptional in the detail and the order with which he describes the varied steps of examination required of the immigrants. Although he considered the ordeal "our most uncomfortable day," he also asserted that he had "never seen the like of it" for practicality and "good order."

R. Ruiter—letter from Grand Rapids to Vroomschoop

April 28, 1906

Dear Brother, Sister, and Children,

On March 10 we boarded the ship in Rotterdam. I first saw the ship from the opposite shore of the Maas, and as

room for each group. In addition there were kitchens, bakeries, and large storage places for equipment and the passengers' luggage. The engine room and boilers were below in a central section of the ship. And besides all these there were hospitals and a pharmacy. In short, everything you can think of—like a city. But there was no place for worship. All were free to do their own thing in their own way, but no one made fun of those who sang psalms and hymns—at least in my experience.

And, oh, what a lot of people—all the hustle and bustle of the children of men on earth. With all of them on board, the ship certainly was like a city.

After we had been assigned to our rooms, we deposited our baggage and went on deck to await departure. We stood together for a little while, say-

ming each other of our eternal hope, and we pray still that it may continue to be your comfort now that we are far away from you.

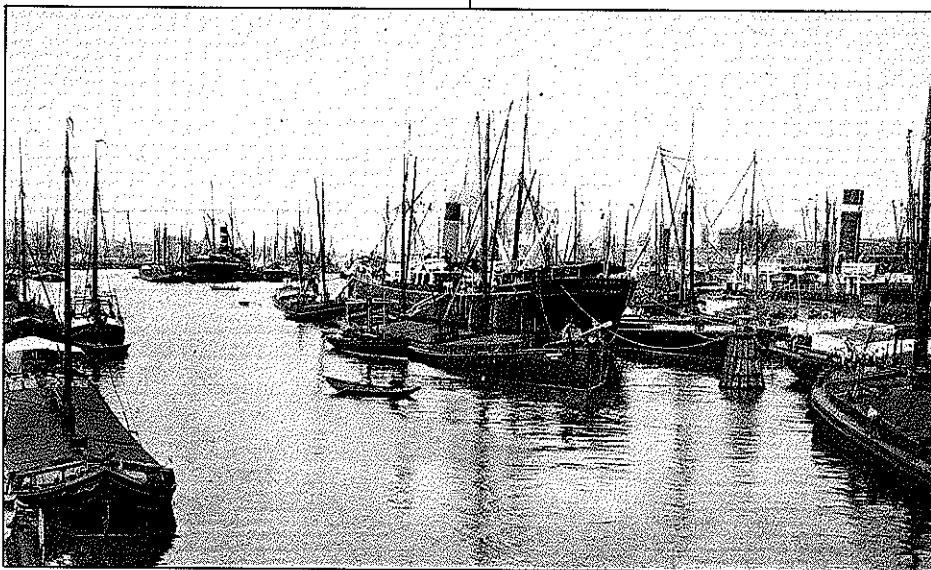
After all the visitors left the ship, the gangplank was raised, and the engineer gave the signal to turn on the steam. The whistle gave three deafening sounds. Then, while the ship's band played the national anthem and several lively tunes, the ship moved slowly away. It left the shore very smoothly and entered the channel while several hundred people watched. Some of these, Russian Jews with signs of hardship and suffering on their faces, would have liked being on board but could not be because the ship was full.

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The ship moved faster. Before long, familiar faces were beyond sight, and we could see only waving handkerchiefs and hats. A prayer rose in our hearts for all of those left behind and for ourselves during the long journey ahead of us.

Altogether there were 2,300 people aboard the ship. Not a cabin was empty. In a short time the Netherlands was out of sight, and we entered the North Sea. The weather was fine with a brisk breeze facing the ship. It moved ahead steadily.

Before long, though, we discovered what the wind and the sea can do. Over the side we saw a broken ship's mast sticking up from the water and later the wreckage of a ship on the rocks. It looked terrible. I also noticed a Spanish fruit ship which was stranded and destroyed by the beating waves. Seeing these wrecks had an unfavorable effect on many of us, but . . . we knew that without the will of our heavenly Father, no hair could fall from our heads and that we were safely in the Lord's hand both at sea and on land. So we went in and had our first dinner aboard ship.



(left) ocean steamer, Holland-American line, *Ons Eigen Land*. (above) Rotterdam Harbor area.

we drew near, it appeared larger and larger. The ship was 180 meters long, 78 meters wide, and 35 meters high. The entire ship was divided into small rooms for first-, second-, and third-class passengers, with a large dining

ing whatever was on our minds until the signal was given for all the visitors to leave the ship. Our parents, my brothers and sisters, my uncle and aunt from Rotterdam, and another uncle from Breukelen near Amsterdam accompanied us on the ship. The farewell, thank the Lord, went well and without a great deal of nervous reaction or emotional display. We re-



Ellis Island terminal—with permission from the New York Public Library: The William Williams Papers.



During the night, at about 2:00 A.M., we reached Boulogne, where the mail came aboard and more passengers joined us. I heard what was going on but was too sleepy to get up and look. When we awoke, it was eight o'clock in the morning, and we were on the open sea with no land in sight. A few fishing vessels and other boats were visible, and it was wonderful to see how those little ships rode the waves. At one moment they were out of sight, and then they were high up on the waves.

Gradually the winds became stronger. Our ship began to rise and fall, and before long we heard nothing but the sound of vomiting. It was a very unpleasant sight, but I, Lammechian, and the children were not affected. We went up on deck together and visited with some of the people we met. We also found people who knew the Lord and wished to worship. Before long we were singing psalms, and even though we had no minister to preach the gospel, we enjoyed a Sabbath blessing. We were only a small group of ten or twelve third-class passengers, although

there were about 250 Hollanders and Germans aboard. I thought how very few there are who wish to worship the Lord. Nor could we detect any religious activities among other nationalities.

One heard all kinds of languages: Dutch, German, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Finnish, French, Flemish, Bulgarian, and Serbian—a great mixture of third-class passengers. The Hollanders and Germans were grouped together. We were under the foredeck, and the others were on the lower level of the third-class section. They did not sit with us at meals either. But they did pass through our dining room going to their cabins. The unpleasant thing about that was that those among them who were seasick vomited as they went out through our dining hall. Before long the unpleasant odor made eating impossible. It was so disgusting that my wife stayed in the cabin with the children and I took their meals to them. But I couldn't touch the food, and sometimes I felt dizzy, as if I had been smoking.

As you read this, you are probably saying, "What a life!" Fortunately, it didn't last long—only about three days, as I wrote earlier. Gradually, as people became accustomed to being thrown back and forth, things improved.

The farther we went on the ocean, the higher the waves became. It was really a beautiful sight when viewed from the deck. The crests of the waves were like snow. The scene often reminded us of the poet's lines "Let the

(below left) immigrants arriving at Ellis Island. (below middle) registration area. (below right) Ellis Island detention room circa 1906—Century Magazine, 1903, Vol. 43.



foaming sea roar . . . " And so we went on, day after day, the same life and the same scene. Several times ships passed but always at a distance. It was monotonous, and we could do little but sit or lie down because walking was difficult. . . . Still, everyone was quite cheerful. We sang, did some reading, and talked to one another. We tried to sleep late, and in the evening almost everyone went to bed by nine o'clock. We went to bed regularly at 6:00 P.M., after dinner, and tried to

sleep until 6:00 A.M. We slept well on board—just as peacefully as on land.

On Wednesday, after ten and a half days, we saw land in the distance. What joy! Everyone began to prepare for landing; some put on their best clothes. We passed an island that evening, and the word spread that we would be in New York in one hour. But I knew better—we were still a day's journey from New York.

The following afternoon we reached New York and were moored. After all the baggage had been taken from the ship and the first- and second-class passengers were unloaded, we were taken to a large shelter where we found our trunks and opened them for inspection. This takes much time. We were not finished until four o'clock, and it was too late to go on to Ellis Island because they close the doors at five o'clock. One group left, but about two-thirds of us remained with the baggage. We asked, "Now what?" because we could not spend the night in the shelter. It was too cold. There was nothing to eat and no place to sleep. As we expected, we

went back to the ship. The crew was angry. They were expecting an evening of leisure, but almost all the people were back on board. The crew had to go back to work. It took a couple hours before the meal was served, and everyone attacked the food like wolves. That was the most enjoyable evening on ship—it didn't move.

The next morning, after sleeping well, we ate an early breakfast, and by 5:30 we were back in the baggage area. Our trunks and other items were loaded onto the boat with us, and we were taken to Ellis Island. We entered a large building on the island which was crowded with people because all the immigrant ships unloaded there. In addition to our ship, others had arrived from Hamburg, England, and Italy. I was told that one thousand people were in the building. I have never seen such commotion and busyness in my life. But it must be said that everything was arranged in such a practical way that it ran smoothly and in good order. I've never seen the like of it.

Everyone passed through to be examined by the doctor and the officials.



Everything was examined. A doctor looked in our eyes and ears. One officer asked how much money we had, and our papers were gone over by another, who gave out a certificate to indicate that everything was satisfactory. Then we went to another department, where we exchanged the certificate for a railroad ticket. Getting the railroad ticket could have taken a long time because so many people were in the room waiting their turn, but the strongest get the best service, and the officials were unable to control the crowd. So I shouldered my way through until I found the right place for my tickets.

Next we went to the department where all the trunks and bags were piled up. We were told to find our own trunks, load them onto a small cart, and, with the help of porters, take them to the scale. This was a disappointing delay. I thought that every-

thing had been cared for, but with thousands of different kinds of baggage and only English being spoken, it was very confusing.

But money speaks in every language. I found one of my trunks and could not find the others. Then I met a man whose task it was to help people bring their trunks to the scale. I took ten cents from my pocket and pointed from myself to him—indicating that he would receive ten cents if he found my three other trunks. "All right, sir," he said. In a short time he had arranged everything on the little cart. I still can't understand how he found the baggage so easily.

I had to pay \$7.55 in overweight charges, and then we were ready to leave Ellis Island. By that time it was 3:00 P.M. A little boat took us to a station which looked like a large barn\*. It was filled with people, but pleasant, and we were able to get something to eat and drink. After about three hours another boat took us to another

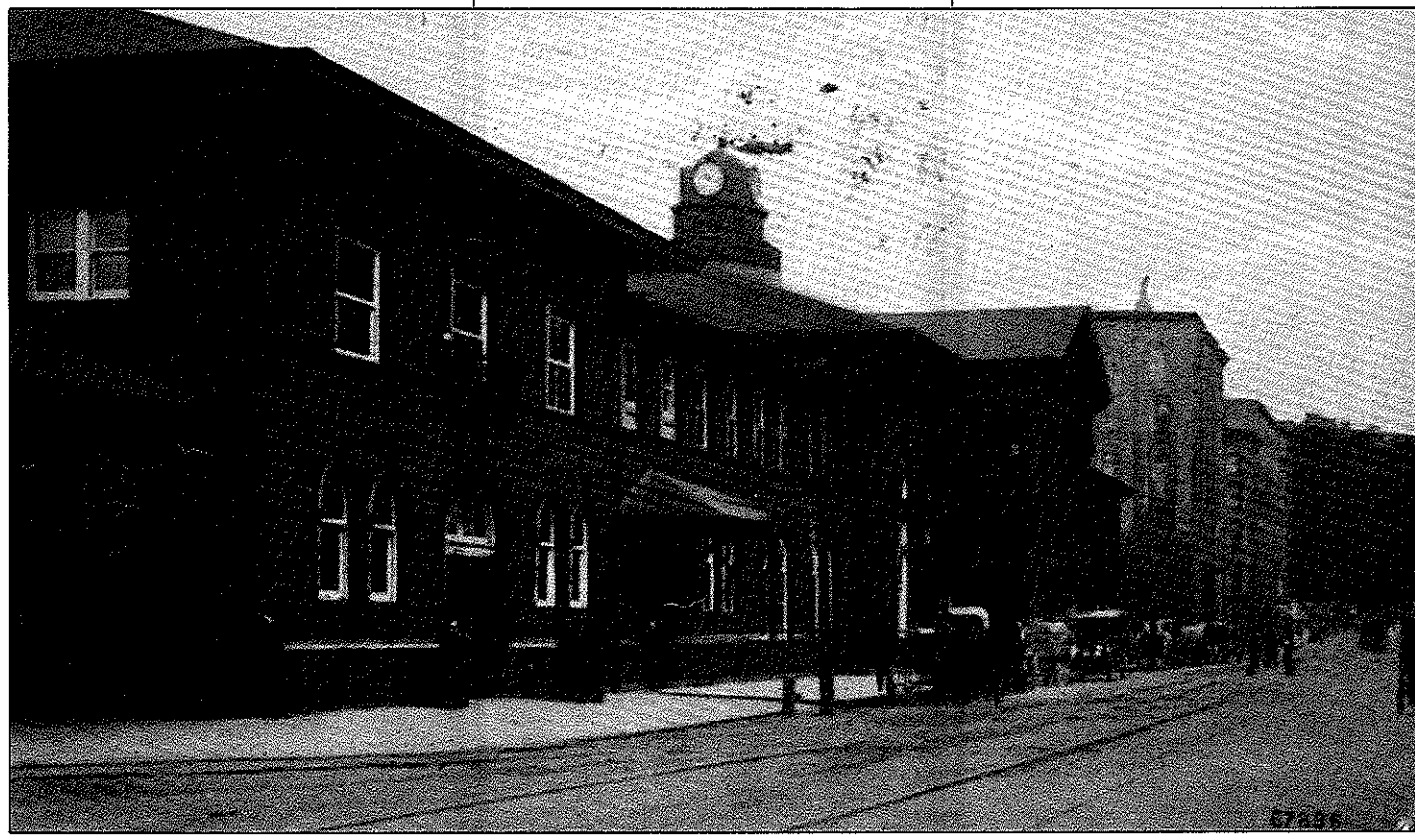
crowded building, and we waited there for five hours. . . .

We sat there on our trunks and were able to observe what was going on. A boat arrived carrying an entire train filled with people from the other side. After the boat was moored, the engineer blew the whistle, and the train moved from the boat to a bridge. The bridge was then elevated, and soon we heard the train roaring by over our heads. In America everything is operated by electricity, and it is like a sea of lights.

By nine o'clock we were brought to our train, which we found very nice. The seats were like the first-class coaches in the Netherlands. We were at ease and at rest after our most uncomfortable day, but soon we were sleeping comfortably on the cushions while the train sped along to our destination.

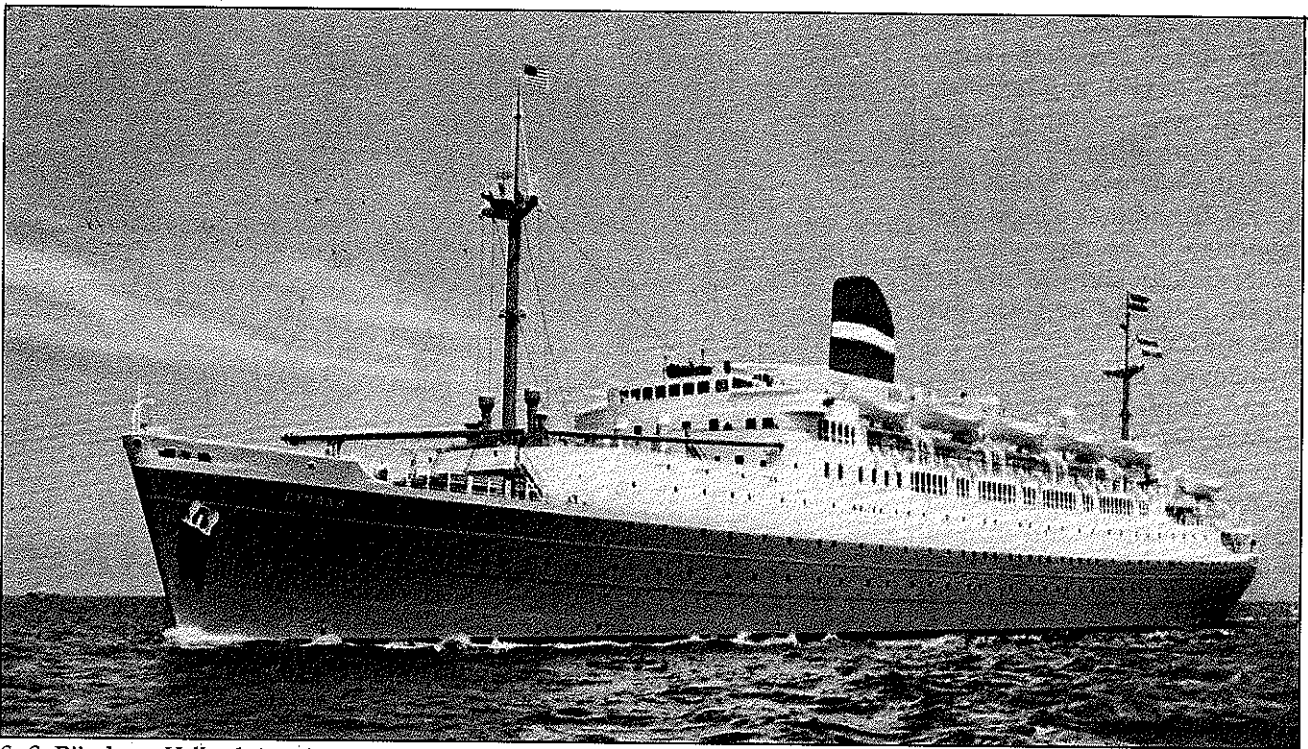
\*This was the Barge Office, the point of debarkation after passing through Ellis Island.

*Grand Rapids Central Station*



# MRS. J. MEDENDORP

## 1920



*S. S. Rijndam, Holland-American Line.*

Mrs. J. Medendorp came to the United States in 1920 to learn English and to gain some work experience. Her destination was Englewood, Illinois, the home of her uncle Jacob Jeltema. Although she ultimately arrived at his 7128 Union Avenue address, the complications she experienced at Ellis Island were etched in her memory as a nearly disastrous occasion. After several years in Englewood, Mrs. Medendorp returned to the Netherlands. Her story, written in 1987, appears below.

"My Trip To America, 1920" (2nd class) by Mrs. J. Medendorp v. d. Veen. Written in November 1987.

I made the great ocean voyage on the S.S. *Rijndam* when I was fourteen years old. The ticket agent, Kruize and Son, arranged for me to travel with a Mrs. Zigterman who was bound for Paterson, N.J. We shared a nice second-class cabin, and the trip itself was swift and uneventful. We arrived in New York after ten days at sea.

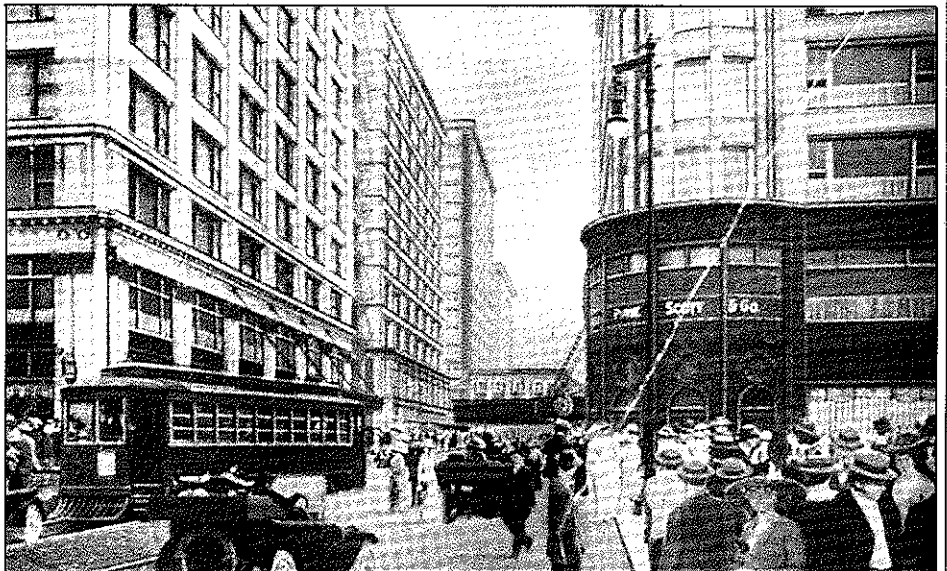
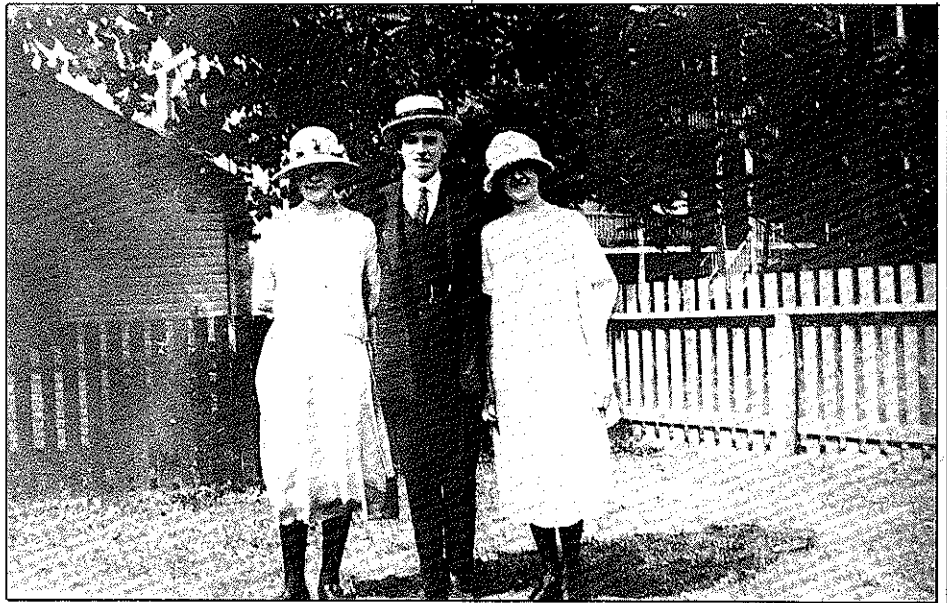
At that point Mrs. Zigterman left with her family, and I received a letter from the hand of Rev. T. Jongbloed, who assisted newly arriving immigrants. The letter from Chicago informed me that my aunt, Mrs. Jacob Jeltema, was ill, and it also requested Mrs. Zigterman to accompany me to Chicago. Naturally, she was not inclined to do that, and so I was left behind on the ship.

Meanwhile, the cabins were being vacated and cleaned by the house-keeping crew. So there was no place for me to stay. I had already asked some officers and Rev. Jongbloed to telegraph my relatives and inform them of my situation. But there I sat, lonely and in tears, when a ship's officer came to me. After hearing my story, he said, "You just come along with me, and I'll take care of you until your relatives arrive, and if they don't come, I'll take you back home."

A German woman who knew me because of my shipboard friendship with her daughter saw me going away with the officer, and, as I was going into his cabin, she stepped between us and forced me to stay with her. She said that I belonged with her and told me to make that known to others as well. And so it happened that when a boat came alongside to take the third-class passengers to Ellis Island, I joined the German family. At the island we entered a huge room lined with wooden benches which were

filled with people from many nations. Here all of our papers were examined and an interpreter questioned us. They wanted to discover if the immigrants had enough money to get along or if they were being properly assisted, to prevent the possibility of their becoming dependent.

After this questioning I was sent to another room with wooden benches along the walls, rows of bunk beds, and washbasins—all equally dirty. In this place people waited for long periods. In the evening we stood in long



lines to receive bedding, and we also lined up for meals, which were anything but delicious. Periodically, names were called, and these people appeared before a committee, but mostly they returned looking disappointed. The committee asked every kind of question, but their main concern was money [financial status].

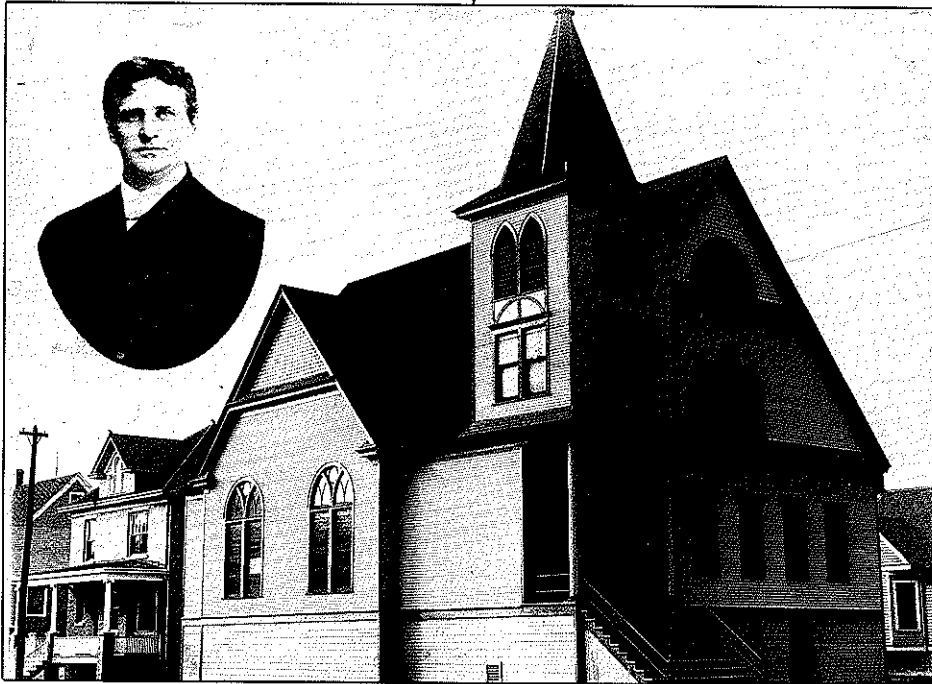
We were regularly sent out in groups for fresh air and exercise in a fenced area located on the edge of the ocean. During one such outing, while going along the hallway to the out-

that place. But again the German woman interceded and asked what was going on. The next time we went out for fresh air, she kept me away from the windows and sent the young men away. I learned later that they were stowaways from the *Rijndam*.

Meanwhile, my telegram arrived in Chicago and my aunt decided that she would have to get me from New York. People who had relatives on shore were leaving Ellis Island every day, but it was not easy. When my aunt arrived, she met with a committee

The next morning she returned to Ellis Island and announced that she would not leave the place without me. That was a difficult time for her, but that evening I was called before the committee and released after answering many more questions. I remember, though, that, after all these difficulties, the man who brought me to the door said to my aunt, "Now, this is certainly worth something, isn't it?"

Although unbelievable, this is a true story.



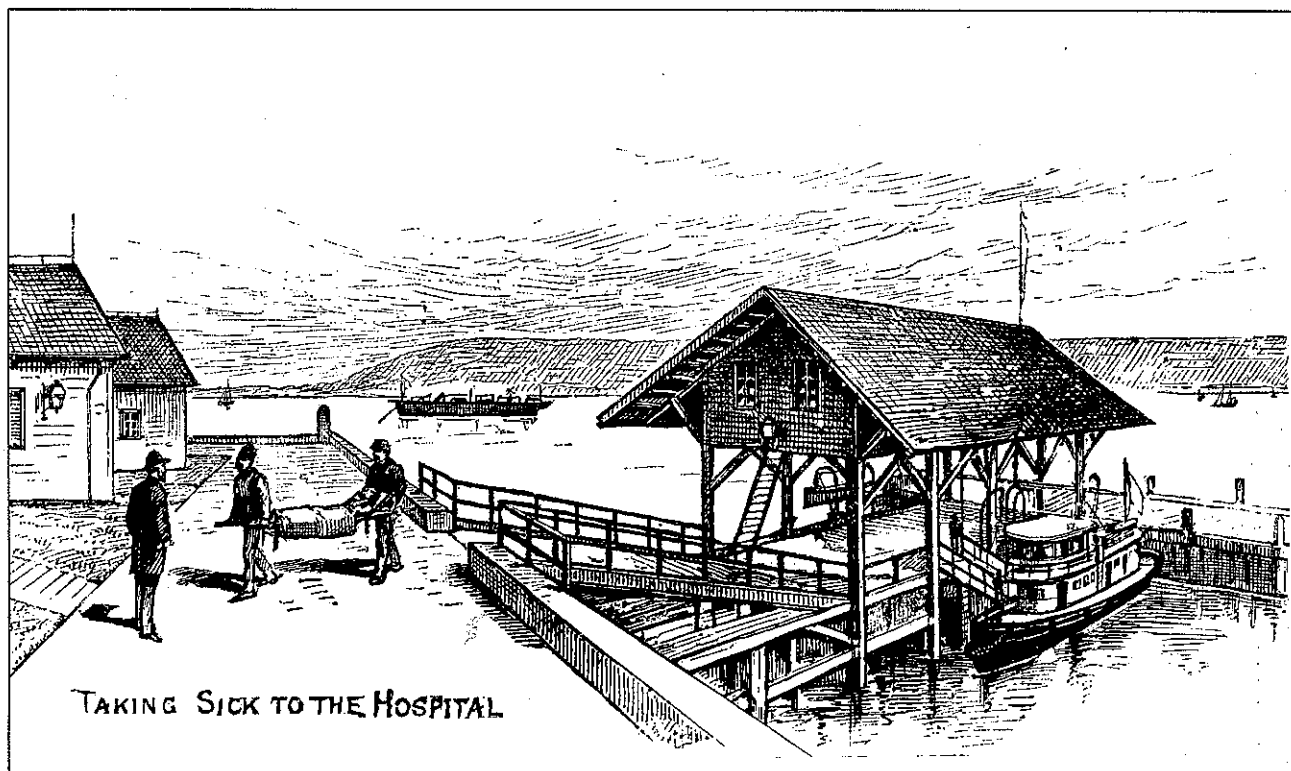
(top left) picture labeled "Jake, Jennie, and I," Englewood, IL. (bottom left) Chicago: State and Madison, 1920s. (above) Englewood Second Christian Reformed Church, 1912, Rev. J.R. Brink.

door area, I heard someone calling in Dutch, "Are you a Hollander?" Two young men were standing by a window, and I stopped to tell them my story. They said, "If you would like to get away, give us the money for your train ticket, and we will help you." I was only fourteen and easily persuaded to trust them because they spoke Dutch. And, of course, I was almost crazy with the desire to leave

and answered many questions, and then her name was placed on a waiting list. Because she was worried, she asked if, at the very least, she might see me. But the official said, "And how much is that worth to you?" My aunt was outraged and became even more indignant when she learned that others in the waiting room had paid to see their relatives. She was astonished further when she returned to the hotel and discovered in telephone conversations with Mr. Jeltema that he had received a telegram demanding payment for my lodging costs on Ellis Island. That was the last straw.

# WARD'S ISLAND

## THE HOSPITAL 1906



Before 1892, when Ellis Island's facilities tended the full range of immigrant needs, the state of New York assumed responsibility for enrolling new arrivals and tending those who were ill. Immigrants who were detained for various ailments were assigned to beds in the Ward's Island hospital. A glimpse of that activity is provided by I. M. L. Bunnemeijer, who worked as a translator for the physicians at Ward's Island in 1882. Bunnemeijer had deserted the Dutch Army in 1881 and was reporting his

whereabouts to an uncle in 1882. The twenty-year-old deserter explained,

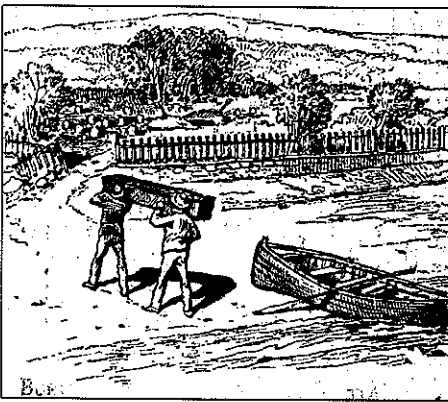
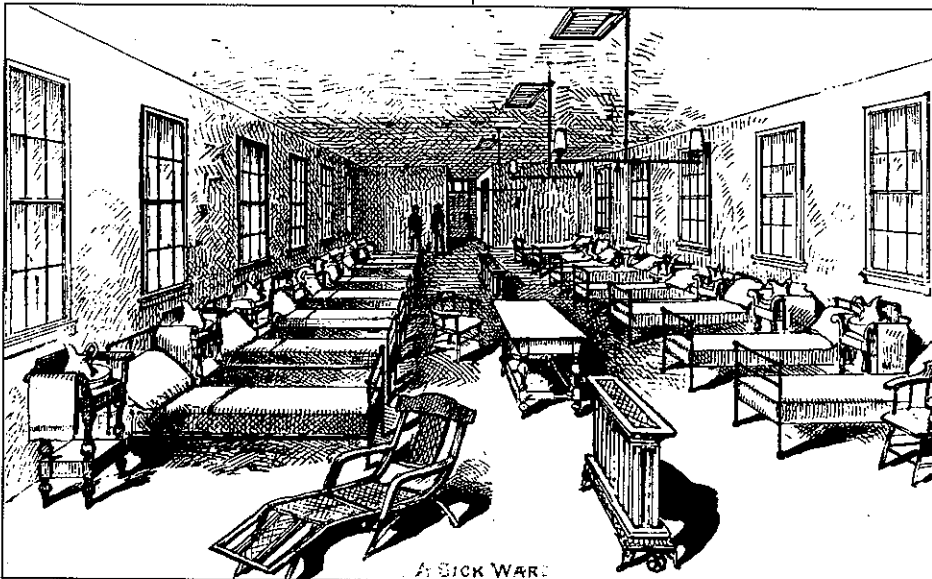
"I know that I have been guilty of some foolish behavior, but some of the things which looked bad at first have turned out well. Indeed, I cannot say that I have been sorry for one moment to be here. . . . America is just the right country for me. A person does not have to be ashamed of any kind of work, and that is what I like.

"You can see from the letterhead that I am now at the emigrant hospital. My work is not difficult, consist-

o'clock in the evening. If we are not needed, we may read or do as we please, but we must be available. I am there to translate from Dutch, Frisian, and German. Another fellow translates Italian and Russian, a third knows the Slavic languages, and the fourth works for Spanish and Turkish immigrants. Among ourselves we speak English because we are, besides myself, a Spaniard, a Turk (Armenian), and an Italian.

"However, we live a life here such as I have not enjoyed for years, and at such a low expense. We are supplied with all our necessities and treated with consideration.

"I have been offered other positions which would be better paying, but I do not know if they would be as satisfying. At any rate, even though I was offered a thousand dollars a year, I would still stay here until the summer of next year. By then I will be able to speak more correctly and be able to obtain a better position than this one."



(left) Hospital Island. (top) quarantine station. (bottom) burial grounds—Harper's Weekly, Sept. 3, 1887.

ing mainly of this: whenever the doctor makes his rounds, I go with him, and when he wishes to talk to Hollanders, Frisians, or Germans, I translate into English for him. They promise to pay me according to what is taken in, which is not much, since the hospital is poor. But I enjoy it here. People do not seem to be as restrained as was the case in Holland.

"Our hospital is located on an island. It is like a beautiful garden. Four of us live here in a small garden house which is very conveniently arranged. Our meals are brought to us from the kitchen, and a maid takes care of our housekeeping.

"We are required to begin our work at nine o'clock and are finished by five

# EMIGRANTS MEET

## 1850-1910



*Italian immigrants at Castle Garden, 1891—  
Harper's Weekly, Oct. 24, 1891.*

Netherlanders were not generally exposed to the wide variety of Europe's national groups because international travel was unusual until the present century. Understandably, then, the emigrants found their first encounter with "foreigners" especially remarkable, and they recorded their impressions with utmost candor. It is particularly interesting to notice that their descriptions of these foreigners conformed rather precisely to the stereotypes which have often been attributed to the various national groups. Thus, the Germans were "happy," the Irish "jumped about." This evidence suggests that ethnic prejudices were well entrenched before emigration and that hopes for realizing a "melting-pot" society in the New World were seriously compromised long before the emigrants boarded their ships or passed through Ellis Island.

The following selections disclose a succession of Dutch reactions to members of other emigrant groups—English, Irish, and German from 1850 to 1870, Italians, Poles, and Jews predominating between 1880 and 1910.

**1856 Jan George Zahn, Cabin Passenger**

"At first everything seemed strange to me on the ship. All I heard was English. During the first few days I could not carry on a conversation, but later I could talk as much as I wished. In short, I got along remarkably well on the ship. I will never forget the captain, that fine man."

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"He lived in Boston, where, he said, he owned a large farm, and since he was making his last voyage, he urged me to go with him. He helped me make enough progress in English so that I can understand all the English people on board and they can understand me."

**1873 M. Schoonbeek, Third Class**

[On board you can see] "a group of Hollanders here and a group of Germans there—and yonder a party of Irishmen. All speak their own language. The Irish sing their own ditties with accompanying dancing, jumping, and laughing. It is a commotion from which anyone who is a little nervous would want to walk away."

**1881 Johannis Van Dijk, Third Class**

"There are 956 passengers—twelve in first class, twenty-four in second class, and all the rest below deck in third class. It is like a floating neighborhood. You hear different languages spoken because about six hundred are German and forty English. Here and there people play and dance while others sing psalms and hymns. In other places people play cards or dominoes. Some people read, and others stand around smoking pipes. . . . The Germans who sleep in the middle bunk place their beer mugs on the floor, and all night long you hear the mugs rolling from side to side."

**1885 Henry Zylstra, Third Class**

"The following day we went to the Rotterdam wharf, where a very old ship, the *Coland*, was waiting for us. We obtained a cabin in the bow of the ship—the only one with a door. All the others were open cabins, but my father arranged for ours in advance. . . . There were very few Hollanders on board—not more than twenty-five of the three hundred passengers. We traveled in steerage. Many of the passengers were Polish Jews. They did not look very attractive to us. There were also quite a few Germans. We had enough to eat but

couldn't be very particular. We and a few other Dutch families sang songs, and some of the English joined us. Below deck people were dancing until late in the evening. . . . There was a large group of Germans on board, and they were a very happy bunch."

**1887 Sierd Veenstra, Third Class**

"There are lots of Germans, Norsemen, and Italians on board. Fortunately, the Italians are in the lowest part of the ship. There are twenty-six of us in our part of the deck—mostly Frisians and other decent folk."



Slovakian mother and child at Castle Garden—Harper's Weekly, Oct. 24, 1891.

**1906 Roelof Ruiter, Third Class**

"About two hundred people remained ashore in Rotterdam who would gladly have come along but could not join us because the ship was full. Those were all Jewish people driven out of Russia. Their faces showed the marks of suffering and deprivation. About one thousand of these refugees were on board the ship. No one knows how much they have suffered. Yet their appearance and behavior suggest that many of their problems are self-inflicted, because most of them were dirty, careless, and disreputable in behavior. But some of them were not like that."

**1910 N. Van Andel, Third Class**

"In warm weather it is interesting to peek into the lounging area of the Poles and Russians. Although they are generally lazy, it is worse today. . . . They lie around in groups of about ten—yawning, giggling, and snoozing—seemingly not at all concerned about the future. Others, not quite so bad, sit around quietly playing cards on blankets. Drinking Russian tea is their favorite pastime. You see them carrying warm water in tin kettles all day long. Now and then I have seen them adding drops of red wine to the cups of tea. I don't know what it is, but I'll not ask to taste it. They don't understand me anyway. It's a strange bunch of people—mostly barefoot, with grotesque loose-fitting clothes. But still, there are some fine folk among these people. Some, too, are very old. I wonder if they will be admitted at Ellis Island.

"It seems that Poland and Russia are strange countries with little concern for raising children. They are left to themselves with little attention, and they are so dirty. It's a good thing they are kept practically isolated. But, still, people tell me that when they come to America these people know how to spruce up like dandies—so that you would not recognize them as lazy, shabby Poles or Russians."

"We had scarcely left Rotterdam when we heard a song being sung softly. . . . Our ears were soothed by the sweet melody. Some forty girls from the third-class passengers were grouped together on the port side and singing simple, beautiful songs which, at that important moment, left a deep impression on me. Was it a song of farewell to Europe? A lament? A sad song dedicated to relatives left behind? Or was it a song for the future—a prayer for safe arrival? I didn't

know, but I listened. The melody increased in volume, and each stanza ended with a low tone. It was touchingly beautiful, and other passengers seemed to feel as I did. The language was strange, but the simple beautiful melody sung in unison was more impressive than the poorly dressed singers with cloth over their heads would lead you to expect.

"On Sunday, July 3, I found a number of women and girls squatting with their knees crossed, all in a cir-



cle. They were reading from a book, and the reading was interspersed with a softly sung tune similar to that which we heard while leaving Rotterdam."

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#### *Postscript*

"I discovered later, in conversation with a Russian Jew who spoke Dutch fluently, that the songsters had undoubtedly sung religious songs and

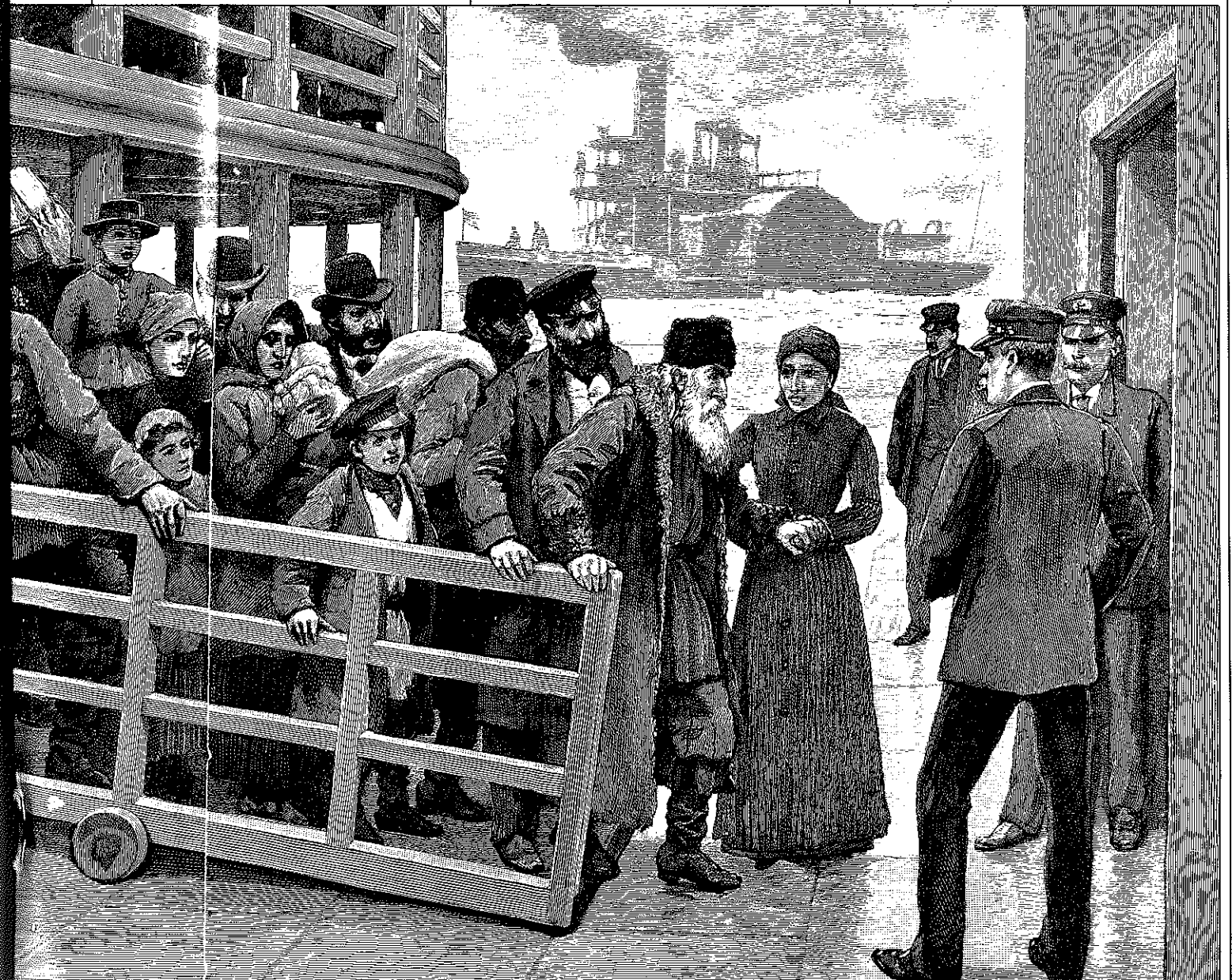
that they most certainly would have been prayerful songs. So the singing which took place on deck—at times more than once daily—was actually religious worship.

"I learned, too, that the tall lean man wearing a long black swallowtail coat and a light skullcap, who accompanied the women, was a rabbi.

"What these people did makes me feel humble. While they poured out their hearts for our safe arrival in simple song, the rest of the passengers

seemed unconcerned about anything. They danced and frolicked about while at a distance the simple, beautiful, and prayerful songs of the Russian daughters of Abraham could be heard. Their behavior was clearly exemplary."

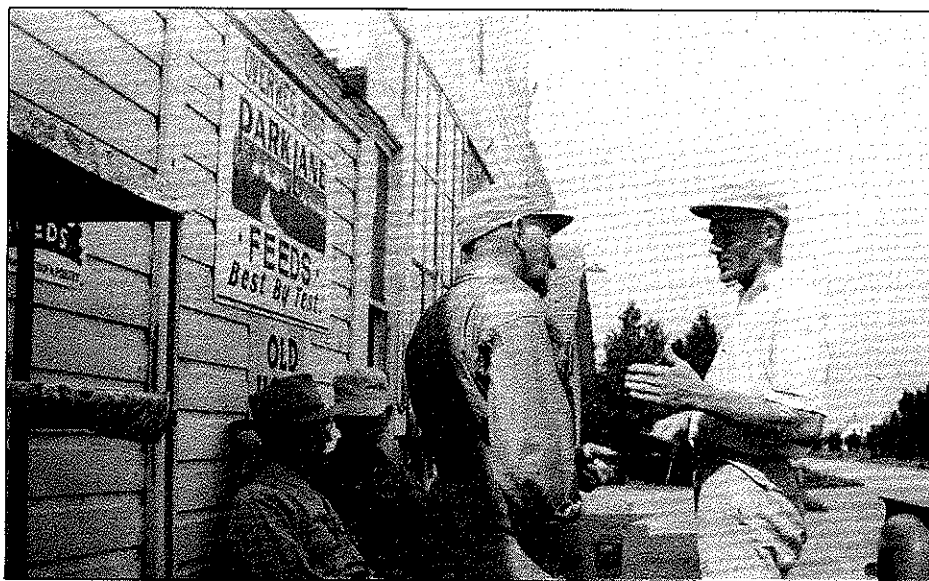
*Russian immigrants entering New York, 1892—Illustrated News of the World, March 19, 1892.*



## My First Year

# AMERICA

Mins Reinsma



Main Street, New Holland, S.D. Standing (l-r), G. H. Veurink, Mins Reinsma.

Mins Reinsma, the author of "Painting the Church" and other tales, immigrated to New Holland, South Dakota, from the Netherlandic village of Andijk in 1950. He and his family lived in South Dakota for only about one year, and his initial encounter with the New World occurred in that rural setting. In the Netherlands he had been a retail grocer but in New Holland he became a painter and carpenter. These were temporary endeavors which he replaced when he became a jeweler in Seattle, Washington, for twenty-five years. But however successful he became in these later years, his first year in New Holland provided the "greenhorn" episodes which he recalls below. They are sometimes poignant, unfailingly humorous, and occasionally hilarious.

### PAINTING THE CHURCH

The advertisement's wording was simple and held great promise. I read it twice. "Bids requested for painting the Christian Reformed Church of

New Holland, S.D. For further information, please contact Clarence Timmer at Timmer Hardware, P.O. Box 13, New Holland, S.D."

I pushed the *Corsica Globe* across the table to Tryni, my wife, and said, "Read this."

After studying the advertisement, she observed, "You don't know how to paint. Besides, look at that building." She pointed at the window. I didn't have to look; I knew.

This church was located across the street from the house which we had rented. It stood as a monument to Calvinist conviction and orthodox construction. The church was built in the days when churches and steeples reached up to heaven. This philosophy of building the house of God would test my faith and physical endurance to its very limits, but of this, later. . . .

Tryni, knowing that I was hooked on the possibility, said somewhat mockingly, "What are you going to bid? How much paint is this going to take, and with what are you going to

paint; you don't have a single brush, let alone ladders."

I nodded in agreement to all the logical but, to me, non-essential particulars. I was thinking, "This is America and Americans can do anything. Didn't they build the Golden Gate Bridge and the Empire State Building? This project is peanuts."

Next day I went to see Clarence Timmer. Clarence was a deacon in the church and the contact man for the Building Committee. When I voiced my proposal, he looked surprised and said, "Have you seen the church? I mean, really seen it?"

I replied, "Ja," but this did not seem to satisfy him.

"Come along, let's have a look."

When we walked around the church building it appeared much bigger than before. I had the feeling Joshua must have had when he walked around Jericho. I considered a short prayer but since this was strictly a money business, decided against it. I was soon to change my mind on this, however. Clarence pointed out that the gable reached up sixty feet and the steeple to eighty feet. Everything needed two coats of white, including the bell tower. When I remarked that the tower was now green, he said, "That is just one of your problems. I hope you noticed that the tower is not only green but shingled on all sides. Have you ever tried to paint green shingles white?"

I didn't need to say that I had never painted shingles. He knew. We sat down on the front steps of the church. He then asked, "Are you sure you want to make a bid?"

All I said was, "Ja."

He looked at me as if I'd announced my intention to walk around the world in ninety days. "All right, if you get the job, that is 'if,' I will help you with

ladders and such. I advise you to make a bid for labor only; it is difficult to estimate how much paint these dry boards will suck up. Put your bid in writing, and I will present it to the church council. I don't know what will happen. The only things that are in your favor are your membership in the church, your, hopefully, low bid, and the fact that you are a recent immigrant."

After some bewildering guesswork I wrote the bid: "Two coats of white paint on church building and bell tower, labor only, \$400.00."

How I arrived at the \$400 figure is to this day a mystery. I needed to be below the others to get the job but also, with this one project, I planned to become financially independent. Four hundred dollars seemed to me a figure that would satisfy both requirements.

I don't know what happened at the council meeting. Elders and deacons never, ever reveal their discussion to non-council members. I heard, however, that a lively debate had taken place.

Three bids were received: one of \$1800, one of \$2200, and mine.

Clarence told me, in strict confidence, that some members felt it unwise to discourage an overly optimistic brother in the faith in this, the land of the free and the brave. I am sure, however, that among some of the members, the faint hope that this job, postponed for years, could be done for \$400 made them vote in favor. They may have kindled the hope that I was predestined to complete the job for the amount of the bid. However, the amendment to the motion to accept my bid reflected some of the sentiments. It stated: "In case of incompleteness, the job will be finished by another party."

I started to paint in the early summer of 1950. For the first time in my life I became acquainted with ladders, brushes, paint, and scaffolds. Within a short time white paint and I became so closely related that my paint coverall could stand up by itself.

Our letters to Holland provoked an array of questions: "How could this be?" my mother asked. "Being a 'schilder' requires years of trade school training."

I responded, "This is America, Mother. In this country the purpose of paint is to keep the weather from the lumber. They don't expect to comb their hair from reflections in under-coated, sandpapered, pumiced, re-coated, and glossy-painted surfaces on the front door. If they did things like that here, George Washington would still be on the wrong side of the Delaware."

I started on the west side of the church, since it was by far the easiest. Two extension ladders with scaffold hooks and some long four-by-six boards made the work possible without doing gymnastics. The other side, with the imitation glass and lead gothic windows, would not cause much of a problem either, but the gables—I laid awake at night thinking about those gables. My Dutch arithmetic in grade school assured me that a forty-foot ladder, fastened to a twenty-foot extension would give me roughly fifty-five feet and that a person of average height with a reasonable sense of balance should be able to paint to the very top of the formidable gables. Raising this contraption against the wall was my problem. There was no way I could do this.

One day, going home, I looked up at the gable again and suddenly the little, triangle-shaped window in the very top jolted me into the solution of

the problem. I didn't know if the triangle, the very foundation of my Calvinistic upbringing, was the inspiration or if the discovery was strictly secular. To this day I hope it was the former. The solution was simple: a block and tackle fastened through the window opening to the rafters, enabled me to raise my ladder contraption. Never mind that the whole affair had to be lowered and raised innumerable times, that this side was facing south, and that the temperature was ninety-eight degrees.

Then the unexpected happened. Totally new to me in origin and destruction, a hailstorm hit the area. It was like an Egyptian plague. Fortunately for most of the farmers, the hail was limited to a narrow strip of land but it struck the side of the church which I had just finished. I was astonished about the damage this brief hailstorm had caused to farm crops, houses, cars, and my paint job. Each hailstone had left an indentation of splintered wood the size of a silver dollar.

Clarence inspected the damage and said, "The insurance adjuster will have a look at it. You have to make a separate bid to re-paint this side."

Early mornings were precious to me. The cool air and the peacefulness of the small farming community, devoid of any traffic on the otherwise noisy gravel road, was soothing to the soul. The view was beautiful, especially when I was painting the loftier parts of the building. I sang often in those early morning hours when no one was around. My favorite songs were Dutch psalms and certain hymns. One morning, while painting the side opposite the parsonage, the hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"—no doubt inspired by the fortress-like building before me—erupted from the simple joy of the early morning tranquillity. Suddenly, the window of the parsonage bedroom opened. The sleepy, drowsy

head of Reverend Van Kooten appeared. He shouted, "Will you hush up? It is not even six!"

The day of reckoning finally arrived. After four weeks of hard work and sixty-five gallons of paint, the bell tower was the only thing left to do. Again, the narrow windows, one neatly above another, on all four sides of the tower solved the problem. By removing the windows and sticking four-by-six boards through the openings, I could cover most of the green shingles. Not that all this was much fun. From my precarious perch, the

by-fours. It was wearisome, frustrating, and slow.

I almost cried when, after two coats of paint, Mrs. Hoekman, our neighbor who kept a close watch on everything that went on in the village, remarked, "You can still vaguely see green coming through when you stand at just the right angle an hour before sunset." I looked, keeping all the particulars in mind. It was true; so, out with the windows and one more coat of paint.

After six weeks of work and using ninety-eight gallons of paint, the job



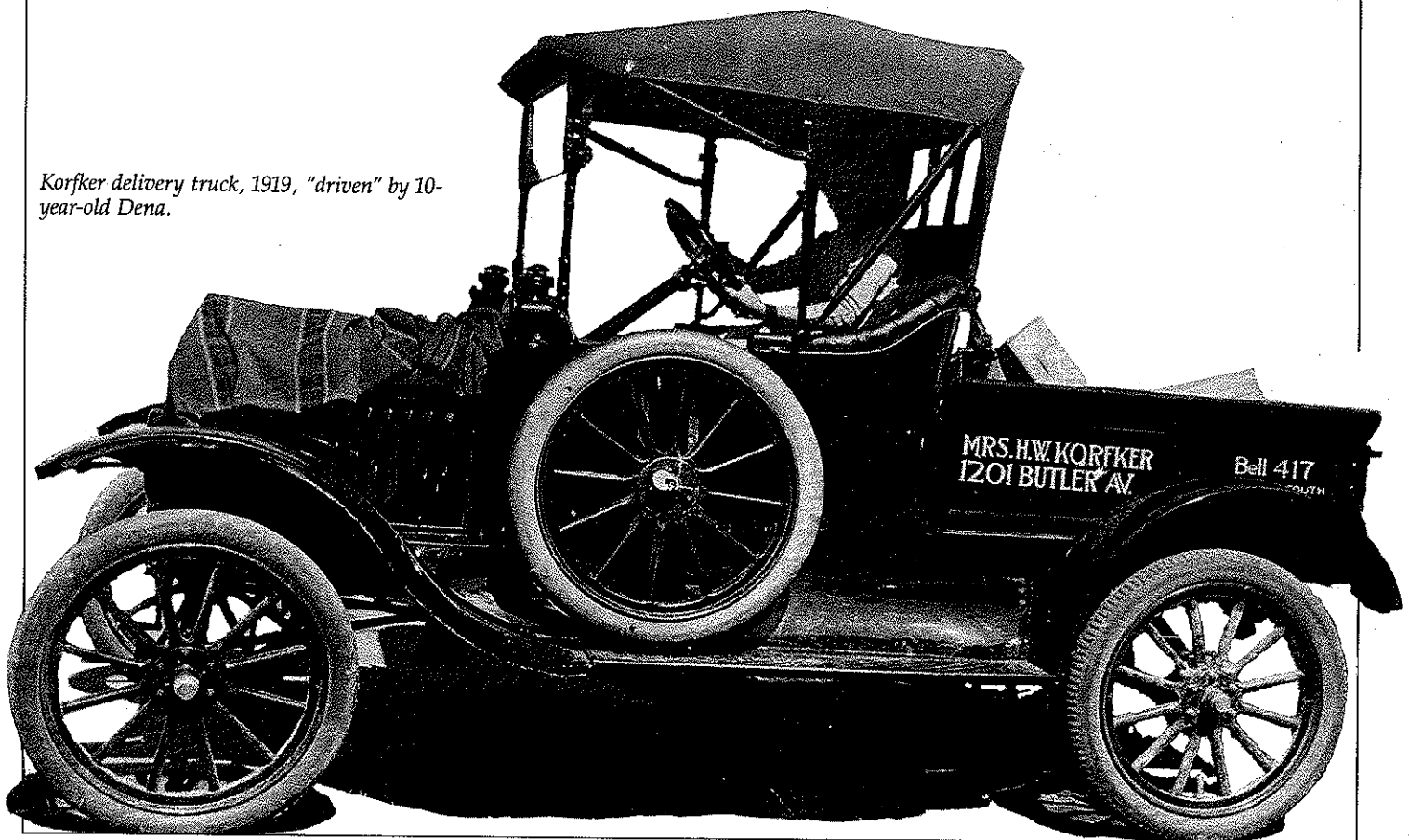
*New Holland, South Dakota, CRC.*

parking lot seemed far, far away. The parts of the tower I was unable to reach, I painted with a brush tied to an old broomstick. This did not look very professional but then, neither did I. Painting the green shingles was frustratingly slow and, due to the fact that towers tend to have four sides, endless. Every time I had finished painting the shingles I could reach, the boards had to be removed, pushed through another window, and braced on the inside of the tower with two-

was completed. The building committee inspected my work and found it in good order. The \$600, minus a small draw, gave us a fine start towards the American dream of independence. When I think back on those days and that particular job, I sometimes wonder if the green is coming through again and can be seen if one stands at the right angle one hour before sunset.

# oakdale park

*Korfker delivery truck, 1919, "driven" by 10-year-old Dena.*



# oakdale park

H. J. Brinks

**T**he Oakdale Park neighborhood, which took shape near the turn of the last century, was incorporated into the city of Grand Rapids in 1901. Until then it was part of Paris Township and more agricultural than urban. In 1901, Grand Rapids contained 87,500 residents, many of them clustered in ethnic neighborhoods. German, Italian, Polish, and Irish areas were marked by characteristically ethnic churches, shops, and languages. Historian David Vanderstel has identified twelve distinctively Dutch neighborhoods in that era. Among them the East Fulton and West Leonard enclaves dated respectively from the 1850s and 1880s, and Oakdale Park was the most recent Dutch-American sector.<sup>1</sup>

Bounded by Alexander Street to the north and Boston Street to the south, the Oakdale neighborhood clustered west and east along Kalamazoo Avenue, which angled into the city. That street originated as a plank road which, upon its completion in 1855, linked Grand Rapids to the city of Kalamazoo. It also served as a market route for agricultural products raised in Oakdale and to the south.<sup>2</sup>

Information from the census reports of 1900 indicates that about 63 percent of Oakdale's Dutch populace were new immigrants who arrived between 1884 and 1894. A near majority of these came from the province of Groningen.<sup>3</sup> They, with their neighbors, built homes in the local oak

groves and spurred demand for the services of grocers, blacksmiths, barbers, and a host of door-to-door peddlers. Eventually the local business district took shape as stores, shops, and backyard enterprises dotted the streets. The long surviving Kuizema Hardware store, together with a cluster of other businesses at the intersection of Oakdale and Eastern Avenue, dates from this era. Additional shops and trades peppered the route along Oakdale Street eastward to Kalamazoo, where the business district spread out both to the north and to the south.

By 1900, then, the community's essential components had come together. Two ethnic denominations, the Reformed Church in North America in 1889 and the Christian Reformed Church in 1890, sponsored local congregations to serve religious and social demands. In addition, the Oakdale Christian Reformed Church established a parochial school in 1892. By 1906 this school was incorporated as a private institution, although it remained closely linked to the Oakdale CRC. By 1924, when the school had grown to include five hundred pupils and sixteen teachers, the Oakdale Society for Christian Education erected a sixteen-room schoolhouse. The school's growing constituency could be measured in part by the organization of new churches. In 1916 Neland Avenue CRC grew from the Oakdale congregation, and a second daughter, Fuller Avenue CRC, organized in 1925. Neither of the new churches

used the Dutch language, but their parent church offered some Dutch worship services until about 1954.

Cutting through the entire neighborhood, the Pere Marquette rail spur supplied a number of lumber and coal yards. They, with the Grande Brick Company, provided employment which attracted new residents. During the boom economy of the 1920s, the Oakdale neighborhood's southern limits flourished with the construction of the Boston Square business sector, which remains the most vital remnant of the old community. There, for example, the Standard Lumber Company, which also expanded rapidly in the twenties, continues to employ more than seventy-five people, many of whom reside on nearby streets.

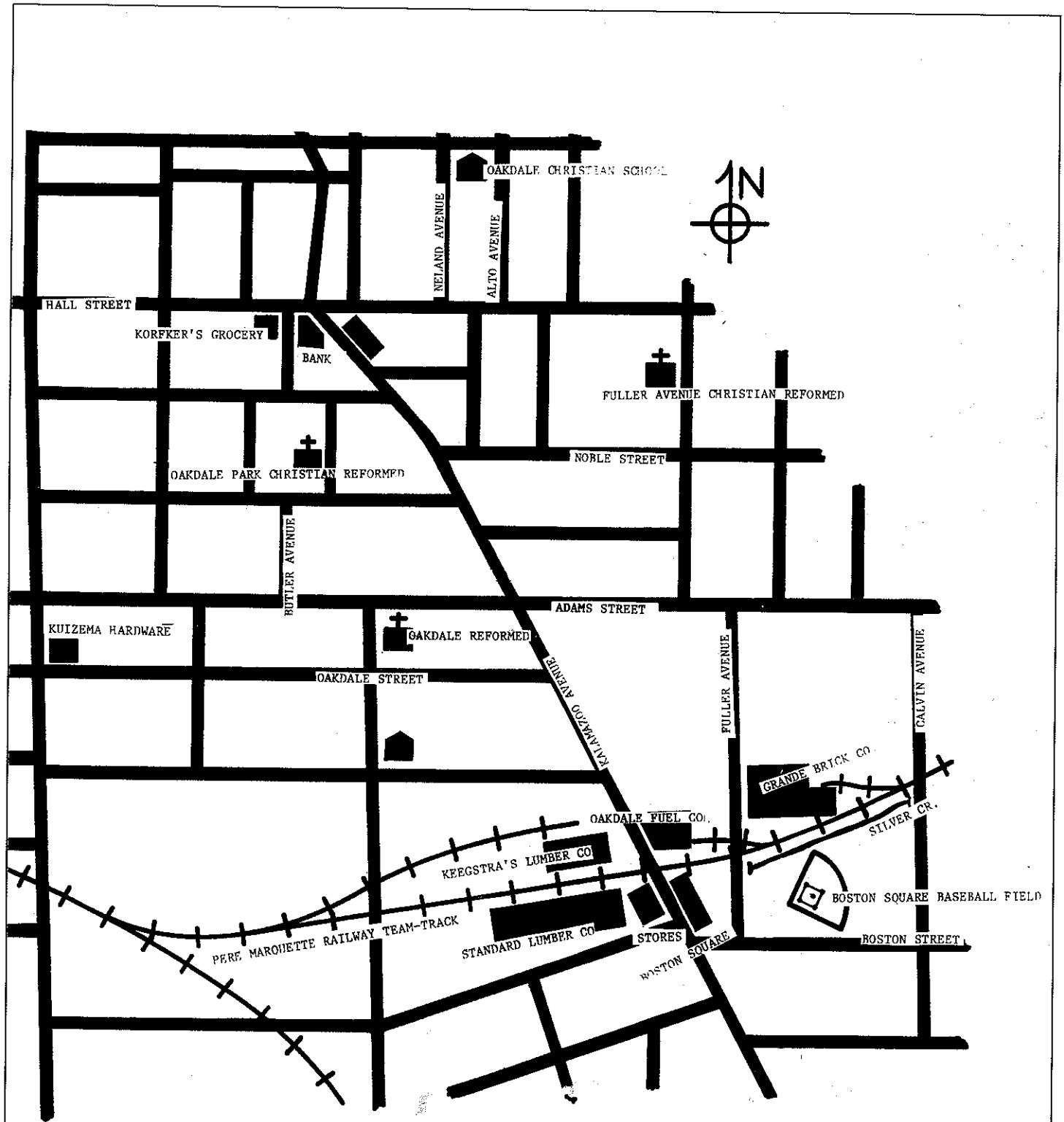
These homes, schools, shops, and stores, together with landmarks like the churchyards, railroad, and Silver Creek, provided the setting for a thousand dramas—the days and ways of the immigrants and their children. Below, the recollections of several Oakdale “old timers” recapture fragments of bygone decades—what was then ordinary but seems now surprising, what seemed then exceptional but has now become commonplace.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>David Vanderstel, *The Dutch of Grand Rapids Michigan 1848–1900* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984), pp. 180–243.

<sup>2</sup>Lydens, *The Story of Grand Rapids* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1967), pp. 48–49.

<sup>3</sup>Vanderstel, pp. 239–43.



THE OAKDALE-BOSTON SQUARE AREA IN THE 1930's

Area map, drawn by Carl Hoerth.

# childhood memories of oakdale park

*Dena Korfker*

I was born on Marshall Street between Temple and Adams. My father, Henry William Korfker, came to Grand Rapids to study for the ministry after selling his grocery store in Muskegon. On March 4, 1904, while walking home from Calvin College, then located on Franklin and Madison, he observed a tornado sweeping through Oakdale Park. Oakdale Park CRC was badly damaged by that storm, and a large beam from the church sailed two blocks to crash into our living room. It lodged in the ceiling, preventing entry into the house. After the storm our front porch was gone, and the outdoor toilet leaned against our back door. Neighbors had rescued my mother and her two small

children.

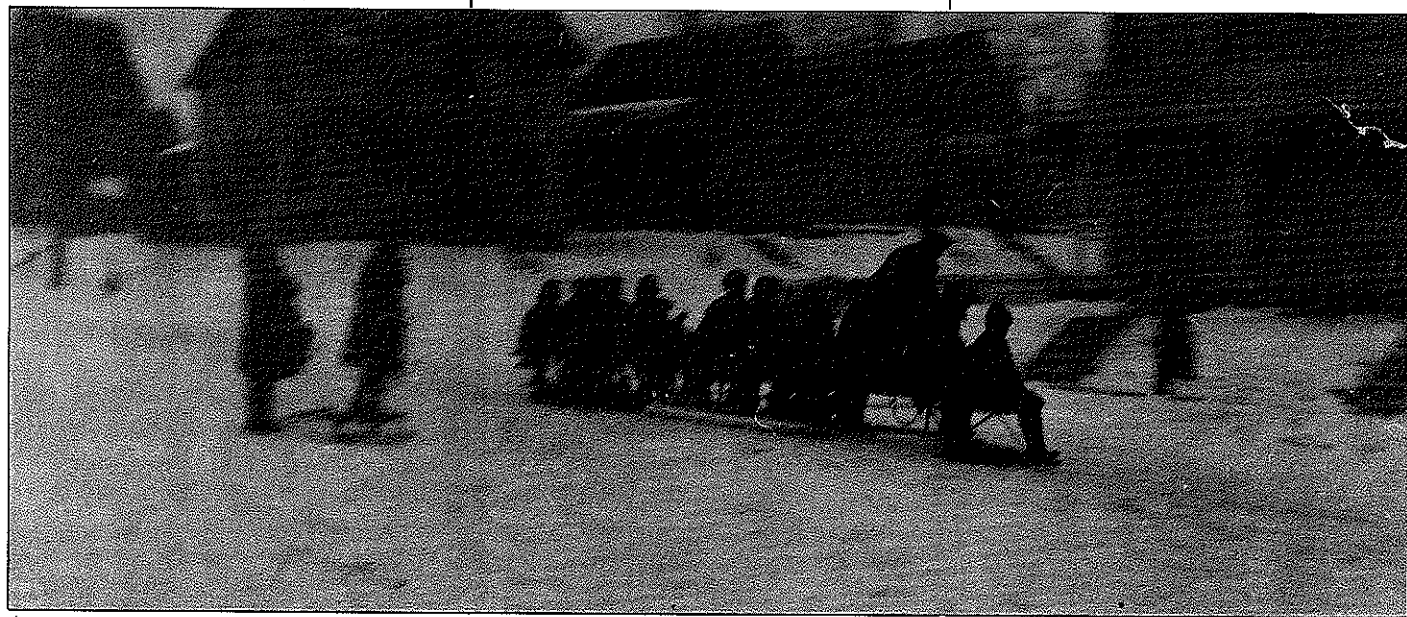
My father taught catechism at Oakdale Park CRC. He never reached his goal of becoming a minister, however. After finishing high school and college, he passed away, as a result of kidney disease. The late Dr. John B. Schooland often told me about my father's funeral. Schooland, being the shortest freshman at Calvin, headed the long line of college students who marched behind the horse-drawn hearse from Oakdale church to Garfield Park Cemetery on Kalamazoo Avenue.

I and a twin sister were born the following spring. Being premature, we weighed, including a blanket, only five pounds. The other twin died in August from fumigation poisoning when the other children had a con-

tagious disease. When I was one year old, my mother borrowed money and built a one-room grocery store next to her house. When I was four, she traded the house and store for a house on the corner of Hall Street and Butler Avenue, where Kalamazoo Avenue turns southeast. There was a store in the front room of the house. When I was eight, she had the house moved back and a good-sized grocery store with a large basement built in front of it.

Hall Street was quite a steep hill between Marshall and Kalamazoo Avenue, where it stopped. It went no farther east until I entered Calvin College in 1925. At that time it was known as Korfkers' hill. I recall that Mr. Bouman, who lived next to the Oakdale Christian School and worked for

*Bobbed, 1913.*



the city, often opened the fire hydrant on our corner to flood the snow-covered hill. During the day the children would slide on their sleds lying on their stomachs (we called it "going belly-flop"). It was a rather dangerous thing to do because horse-drawn wagons were constantly going back and forth on Kalamazoo Avenue. I recall steering my sled neatly between the front and back legs of a horse. How I ever missed him, I'll never know. My guardian angel must have been vigilant.

At night the young people would

Ewing, run by George Oppenhuizen. If the going was very good, they reached Boston Street. After Old Year's night church service, they rode out the old year. We watched them from our bedroom windows.

I also recall standing on the front step of our store at two different times watching a storm come up and seeing a ball of fire go through the steeple of our church without setting it on fire.

Our store was not the only one on that corner. There were also a meat market and a grocery store store on the northwest corner of Hall and Kala-

moved away from the building in 1934, but we did not close the store until my brother Bill retired in 1965. Fifty-six years is quite a record! The meat market became a drugstore and an ice cream parlor. And Herrema's grocery store became a bank. I'll never forget the Friday night my brother deposited my first savings for me in that bank. A very kind Indian clerk tried to warn my brother not to deposit the money, but he didn't get through to Bill. The owner of the bank was standing too close. The following Monday the banks closed, and my

money went down the drain. The Great Depression had hit.

While the bank was in operation, three doctors had their offices upstairs. Dr. Cornelius Geenen was the first. He was a member of Oakdale Park church for many years. Dr. Stuart Bergsma was the second, and Dr. William Vander Ploeg was the third.

There was one more store on that interesting corner. Mr. David Vander Til, who lived two doors from us on



*Tornado destruction of Oakdale Christian Reformed Church, March 24, 1904.*

come out with their large bobsleds, which held about ten. Often a boy would sit in front of the driver. He was called the "head light." One night when Fred Koster had that honor, the driver misjudged the turn onto Kalamazoo and ran into the fire hydrant; Fred broke his leg. If the going was good, they went as far as "the bologna station," which was the meat market on the corner of Kalamazoo and

mazoo, and another store on the east side of Butler and Kalamazoo. The three families who ran the stores all belonged to Oakdale Park church. The Monsma family, whose daughter Cora was my first teacher at Oakdale Christian School, was the first, the Heslinga family the second, and the Stephen Herrema family from Lucas, Michigan, the third. All these families lived above their stores, as we did above ours.

The Korfker store was the only one to survive for many years. Our family

Butler, built a little lean-to shack against the south wall of our store. He ran a shoe-repair shop there. I can still see him with his magnetic hammer in his hand and a mouth full of nails. He would raise the hammer to his mouth, capture a nail, and hammer it into the shoe. I also recall playing ball over the roof of his building with my friend Grace Flokstra-Vander Klay. Sometimes the ball went through the open window, and Mr. Vander Til would sit on it and tell us he hadn't seen it.

Today both the bank building and

our store have been abandoned by their last owners. The neighborhood children have broken all the windows, and the city has boarded them up. What a sad ending to a wonderful memory.

Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church is also a big part of my childhood memories. When I was very young, there were stables behind the south wall of the church. We could hear the horses neigh during the services. The pews faced west, and the pipe organ was against the south wall. There was a low door beside the organ. Mr. Barney Vander Veen played the organ. The boys of the church would go behind the door to pump air into the bellows. Sometimes the boys would stop pumping to tease the organist. Mr. John Folkema, today a man in his nineties, told me he was one of the pumpers. At the wedding of one of the Bouma brothers he pumped the bellows very full so he could peek through the crack in the door to see what was going on. The bellows emptied and gave a horrible sound.

I also remember Mr. Flonk, the tailor, who lived a few doors from us on Cromwell. He would stand beside the pew he was about to enter, hold his black derby hat in front of his face, and say a prayer. All the men did that. He always laid his hat next to him on the pew. One morning a heavy-set late-comer came in and sat on the derby. It cracked with a loud noise.

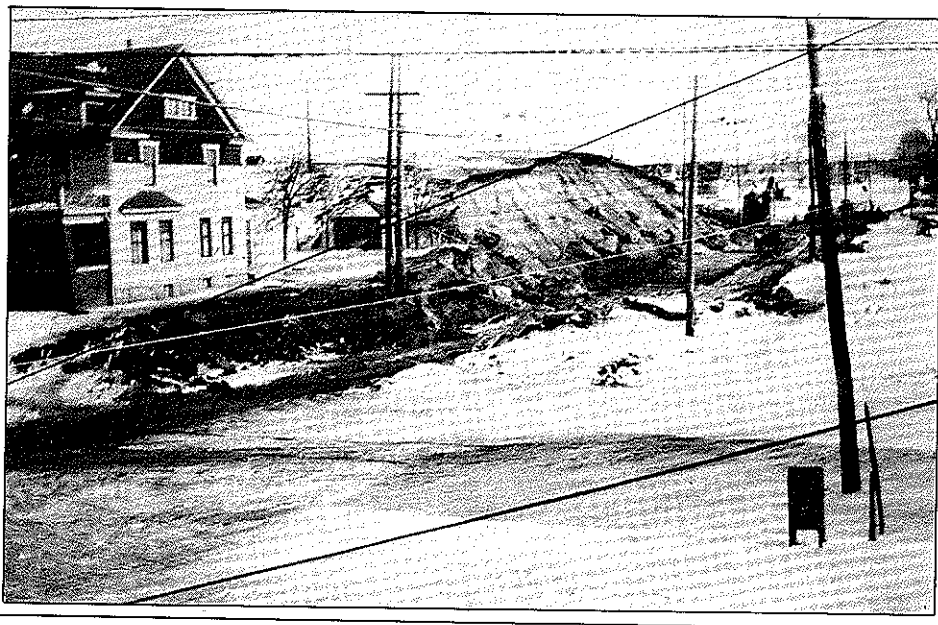
Rev. William Van Wyck was a very interesting man. His daughter Ida was my friend, and I would often call for her on the way to school. The dominee would invite me in to wait while Ida ate her oatmeal. Since my mother never had time to see to it that we ate a warm breakfast, he insisted I eat some of his oatmeal. I also remember the time he interrupted his sermon to ask my mother, calling her

by name, to go home with her son, who was coughing. There was a small annex at the back of the church, where the teenaged boys sat. On occasion he would order an elder to go to the annex, called the "chicken coop," to stop the boys from playing cards.

The celebration of communion was quite different in those days. The non-professing members, even the children, sat in the side pews, and those who would be taking communion sat in the center. They went forward and sat at a table to participate. It was a very solemn occasion. They dressed

in black, as if they were attending a funeral. The consistory members and former consistory members went to the first sitting. No one else dared to go. No one wanted to go to the third sitting. That was too humiliating. So almost everybody tried to rush down to the second sitting. I remember that I was not allowed to talk to my mother on the way home. I had to walk sedately and silently. I had no idea that one could celebrate as well as commemorate the glorious act of our Savior's redemption.

By the time I was in high school, our



(top) Korfker Store, 1918. (bottom) Hall Street construction circa 1920.

church was becoming too large for one minister to handle. There were a Dutch and an English service in the morning, another Dutch service in the afternoon, and the second English service at night. It was like having two congregations in one. So in July 1925, thirty-seven families from Oakdale CRC and two from Sherman Street CRC began the English-speaking congregation located on the corner of Fuller and Noble.

Rev. Herman Kuiper was the minister at Oakdale at that time. I made profession of faith before I entered high school but had no idea what that entailed. At the last catechism class

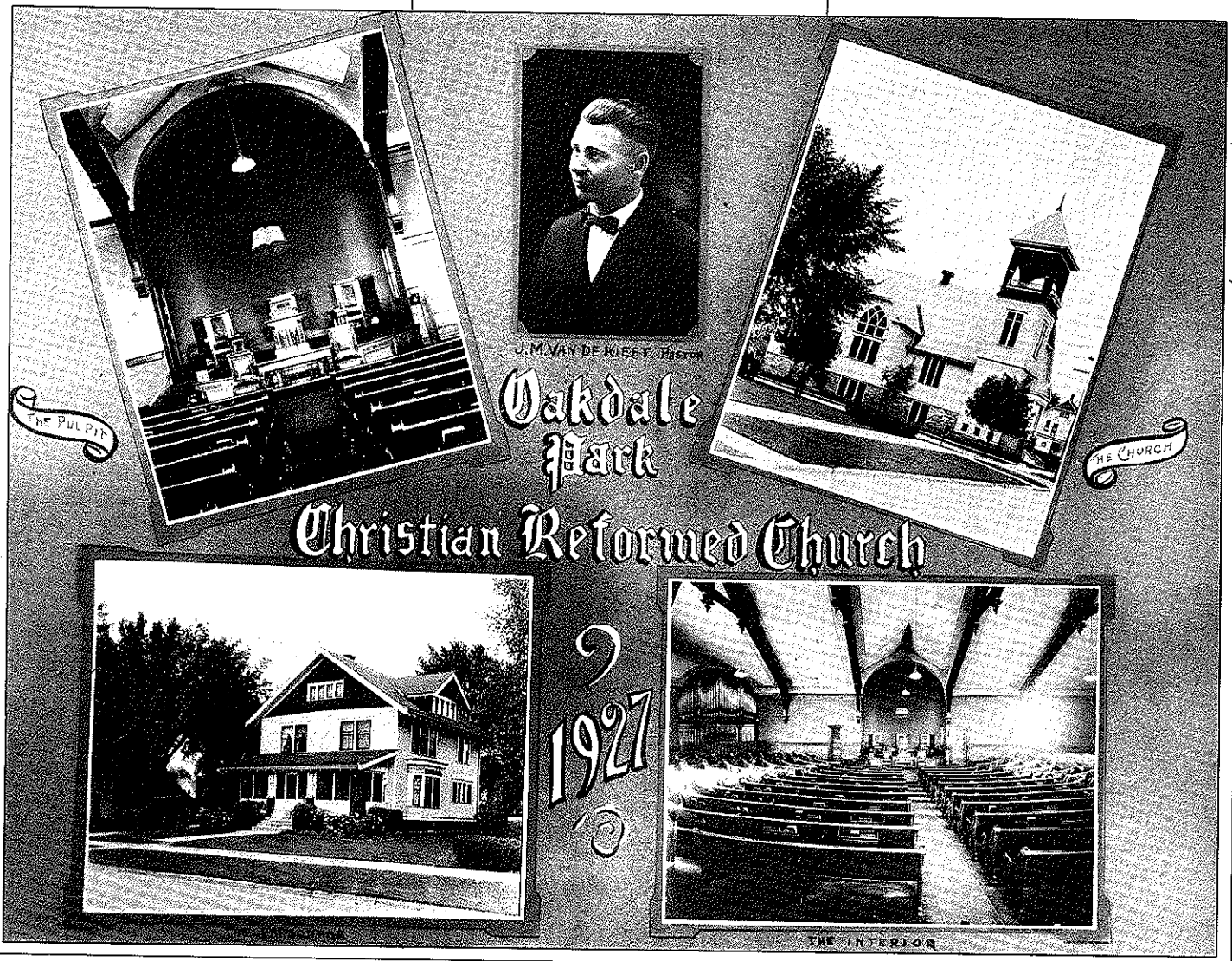
for the year our pastor had announced that those who wished to make profession of faith should come to the parsonage at a specified time. I recall pacing the floor while baby-sitting at a teacher's home. I was filled with fear at the prospect, but I went just the same—without telling my mother. The only thing we did at the consistory meeting was answer questions from the Heidelberg Catechism which we had memorized in class.

The only personal question asked was "Do you go to shows?" When the answer was "No," one girl was asked, "Why don't you go?" She answered, "Because my father won't let me." She

was praised for that answer! I shall never forget the good feeling I had when elder J. B. Hulst shook hands with me and told me how happy he was that Henry Korfker's youngest child was joining the church. He said he had prayed for my father's children for a long time.

And what do I remember about Oakdale Christian School? It was started eighteen years before I was born. At first it was run by the Oakdale Park consistory. In 1906 a school board was formed. The first school was built on a large lot at the end of

*Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church.*



East Butler, just beyond the parsonage. All the teaching was in Dutch. My first teacher (first grade) was Miss Cora Monsma. I can still see the large abacus in front of the class, from which we learned our arithmetic. I also recall the pretty white half aprons she always wore over her black skirt. They were edged in beautiful lace. But when she took a naughty child to the front of the class for a spanking, she turned her apron to the back so she wouldn't get it wrinkled. Also, I'll never forget the day she told the Bible story about Jacob's daughter Dinah. In Dutch that name is pronounced Dena. There was another girl in my room with the same name as mine. We both laughed together when we heard her say our name. We had to stand in the corner, with our faces to the wall, for the rest of the morning.

My first two years at school were completely in Dutch. In the third grade I had to know how to read in English. I wonder how I managed that. For several years Mr. John De Jager, our principal, came into our room every Friday to tell us stories in Dutch so we would not forget our parents' native tongue.

I can still envision and recall the name of every teacher I had at Oakdale. I can also see where I sat and in which direction the seats faced. I particularly remember my seat in fourth grade. Miss Jennie Van Wesep was my teacher. Oepie Oppenhuizen sat in front of me. One morning he cried because he had a sore throat. The teacher sent him home, but his grandmother sent him back again in the afternoon. A few days later we heard he had diphtheria. All the children who had sat near him also came down with the disease, including me. There were many empty seats in that room the rest of the year. I was one of two who survived.

A sixth-grade incident also stays in my mind. On November 11, 1918, when

World War I ended, I was sitting in Anna Van Dommelen's room when someone opened the door and shouted the news. We were all overjoyed and ran from the room. But our teacher stood still and burst into tears. We learned later that her fiancé had been killed in combat.

I can still hear the piano playing as the pupils marched into school each day. There were two long poles on the ground next to the sidewalk on Butler. We had to march double file between the poles, across the long playground, into the school, and to our own rooms. On Halloween night the boys would pull up the poles and lay them on Mr. De Jager's front porch. However, they were always returned to their place.

When I graduated in June 1921, my sister Trena came from Calvin College to teach at Oakdale. She was there until she married. I was teaching at West Side Christian School at the time. In the fall of 1934 I transferred to Oakdale. I taught first grade there for one year and kindergarten for the next thirty-eight years. Except for the few years I was at West Side Christian School, there was a member of our family at Oakdale from 1906, when my brother started school, until the summer of 1973, when I retired. We often felt that our family was a permanent fixture there, as was our store on Hall Street.

**T**he Kuizema hardware business, dating from 1905, has been the venture of three generations. The founder, Harm Kuizema, immigrated in 1881 and moved to Oakdale Park in 1900. That era, the family records show, was a time of unpaved streets, wooden sidewalks, and the clomp of horseshoes, a time when horse-drawn wagons and surreys disseminated their own peculiar sounds and smells—the creaking of leather harnesses, pungent odor of manure, and the wheezing of horses at labor.

Oakdale Street, which is noticeably wider than its neighboring cross roads, served in the 1930s as the streetcar cul-de-sac, where the cars turned around before rattling back to the city. From 1900 to 1930 the Oakdale and Eastern intersection (Oakdale Corners) was the region's focal point. Wagoneers freighting hay and oats weighed in on Kuizema's scale before distributing their goods to city destinations. On foot and with bicycles and pushcarts, local residents paid daily visits to Kuizema's hardware, De Vrugt's blacksmithery, and Brander's grocery store. Zoning restricted little, and two families, the Koopses and the Stoeppers, raised, butchered, and retailed rabbits from their garages. Nearly everyone cultivated vegetables, and backyards were as likely to serve small business ventures as to offer recreational pursuits.

A walk down Oakdale Street, Harold recalls, was an adventure in door-

# oakdale corners

Mr. Harold Kuizema



(top left) Henry Kuizema at work in 1919. (bottom left) Harold Kuizema at work today.  
(top right) Kuizema Hardware at Oakdale Corners.



to-door smells. One family raised and canned chickens for sale; others specialized in a variety of repair services. When Harold was twelve years old, his newspaper business took him through the whole region. There were no assigned routes. Each distributor purchased papers at a depot on East-

ern Avenue and managed the business independently. His own venture ended abruptly in 1938, when the child-labor law forced his retirement. Thereupon he sold out for fifty dollars.

Harold remembers particularly the celebration which accompanied the installation of new streetlights on Oakdale Corners. Oscar Allen, a wealthy local landlord, was also a vaudeville performer, and he, together with his trapeze-artist wife, staged a grand show for the ceremony. Everyone attended—all the lo-

cal merchants, whole families (Black and White), some city officials, and kids from all over.

The handsome boulevard lights of that era were replaced long ago, and much else has changed on Oakdale Corners. The old Mollema Coal Company is now occupied by a window distributor, and the corner's southeastern quadrant, which displayed in succession new Hudsons, Nashes, Studebakers, and Volkswagens, now offers glass mirrors. But Kuizema Hardware remains. It is, as the *Grand Rapids Press* reported last year, "an honest-to-goodness nuts and bolts hardware store," a place not only for galvanized pipe and tools but also for mechanical consultation and advice—one of Oakdale Park's landmark institutions.

—HJB

# oakdale park

*Mr. John Vandenberg*

Oakdale Park CRC was a large congregation of some three hundred families in the early thirties. The large church building probably seated 750 persons. There were three entrances to the sanctuary, each one accessible only from a substantial flight of cement steps on the outside of the building followed by another set inside. Two features of the interior are particularly sharp in my memory: the "chicken coop" and the consistory room. The "chicken coop," a small annex of four or five rows of short pews at the very back of the sanctuary, was a favorite place for older, probably late high-school age, boys. All of the benches were well carved, and some even had holes bored clean through their backs. Behavior in the chicken coop was sometimes less than desirable, and it often received appropriate response from the preacher—usually a dark scowl.

The consistory room was a forbidding place. All the furniture was dark, there was little or no natural light, and the pictures of past ministers were somber. Still worse, the room was a foul-smelling place, for most members of the consistory smoked cigars. Imagine the discomfort of a young man or woman going into this room to seek membership in the church. The chief activities of the youngsters in the church were attending two worship services each Sunday, going to Sunday school class to recite the "golden text" for the week, and attending cate-

chism classes on Saturday mornings.

Some of the CRC youth also attended the Christian Endeavor meetings of the Oakdale Park Reformed Church. There, unlike in the CRC, boys and girls attended meetings together, a significant attraction. At that time there were no groups such as Cadets, Calvinettes, youth groups, or choirs. Church was for church services and doctrinal instruction. Social and recreational life for young people was to be found elsewhere.

Some of that social and recreational life was experienced at Oakdale Christian School. When our family first arrived in Grand Rapids from Sioux Center, Iowa, in 1924, Oakdale Christian School had just moved into a new building on the present Fisk Street site. The old school building was still standing on the corner of Temple and East Butler, immediately across the street from Oakdale Park CRC. As I recall, it was used mostly for church-related activities.

Most of the classes at Oakdale Christian were large, often with forty to forty-five students in a class, except for the middle-year classes, which tended to be much smaller. Discipline was rigorous, and students were expected to behave. Behaving included staying in line when they marched from one classroom to another. Teachers encouraged reading by reading stories aloud and with assignments in the Elson Readers. Academic drill was a daily activity. Classes were drilled in arithmetic and spelling, and each



week there were tests in arithmetic. Then there were the spelling bees, both intra- and inter-class, and, thanks to Mrs. William Heyns (later married to Professor Louis Berkhof), music became an important part of the Oakdale curriculum. The spring pageant became a major presentation at either South High or Ottawa Hills High School auditorium. Oakdale students also attended Grand Rapids Symphony Orchestra programs at South High School.

Oakdale Christian made a large contribution to recreational sports in the early 1930s, largely because of Jack Boelema, who came to teach there. He

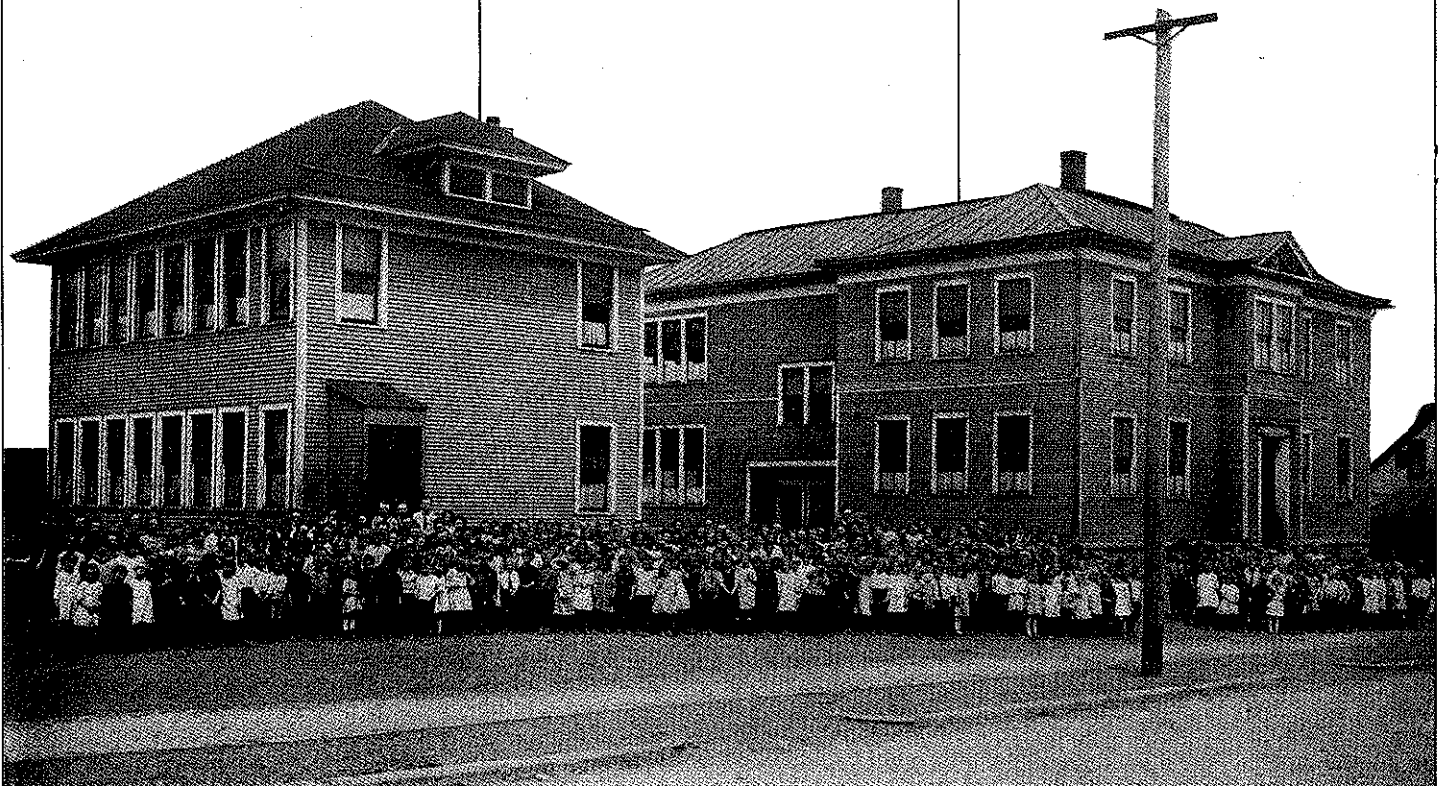
began basketball practices with three different grade levels soon after he arrived. The Oakdale gym, with its low ceiling, forced the players to shoot line drives. The Franklin Park Pavilion was a better practice court. Many of the kids, particularly the younger ones, played in their stocking feet. Equipment was gathered in various ways. On at least one occasion, the entire school community collected Blue Valley Creamery butter cartons, which could be exchanged for basket-

*(left) The staff of Oakdale Christian School in 1922. First row: J. Timmer, Ida Dragt, Elsie De Young, Marie Vos. Second row: Trena Korfker, Miss Smit, Jean Boersma, Wilhelmina Brink. Third row: Mr. G. Van Wesep, Mrs. Anna Van Wesep. (below) Oakdale Christian School building at the corner of East Butler and Temple.*

balls. A goodly number of basketballs (some of them rather lopsided) were obtained through this project. One year the varsity team was outfitted in a potpourri of red shirts and shorts which had been plucked off a sale table at Goebel and Brown's sporting goods store, each player paying for his own uniform. I am convinced that Boelema laid the groundwork for what subsequently became a most successful basketball program at Grand Rapids Christian High School. Christian High teams won a state championship in 1938 and seven consecutive regional crowns from 1938 through 1944.

The 1930s were tough times, and if kids were going to have fun, they had to make it themselves. And fun we

did have. My recollections of the 1930s are happy. We were always occupied with something interesting and adventuresome. At home we played a lot of games (Caroms, Ping-Pong, Rook, Monopoly), worked on puzzles, and read books (Joseph Altshelter's books about the colonial days or the Civil War). We listened to many radio programs, including "Little Orphan Annie," "Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy," "The Green Hornet," "The Lone Ranger," "Fibber Magee and Molly," "Amos and Andy," "The Carnation Hour," and "Roses and Drums" (a Civil War drama). It was an exciting experience because one used his or her imagination a great deal to create an image of the characters and of the action taking



place.

It should be noted that in the 1930s there were very few, if any, jobs for ten- to fifteen-year-old kids. Fifteen-year-old boys might be able to caddy, pick early summer peas, peddle newspapers, or cut lawns, but even these opportunities were scarce. Kids had to entertain themselves, but what a playground we had. The entire neighborhood was a place to play. Families were large (in one block on Kalamazoo there were families with six, nine, eight, and ten children); hence, it was not difficult to play team sports—softball, football, basketball, shinny, and volleyball. We played in the back streets and backyards, on school grounds, or in Franklin Park.

Franklin Park was the site for much of this recreational activity. And the city parks department sponsored weekly league competition in softball, volleyball, and swimming in different age or weight categories. Playing in these weekly contests was the highlight of a week's recreational activities. City-wide competition was also held in tennis and horseshoes. In addition to its park leagues, the city sponsored church leagues in softball, and the Oakdale Park CRC-Sherman Street CRC rivalry was one of the hottest in the league, for both churches fielded very good teams.

Another place for great fun and adventure was the territory located at what is now the corner of Fuller Avenue and Ramona Streets, approximately a block north and east of the Boston and Kalamazoo intersection. There the railroad ran east and west along Silver Creek, serving the local neighborhood businesses and going all the way east to Reeds Lake. Walking the rails was a frequent adventure, and making "swords" out of double-headed nails was something special. To do the latter, one would tie a string around the nail between the two heads, place the nail on the railroad track, and control the other end of the

string at a safe distance from the track. The train, probably a locomotive and a few cars, would take care of the rest when it rolled over the nail. One needed only haul in his nail, much like catching a small fish, and he would have his sword. Walking the tracks all the way out to the lumber company near Reeds Lake was a real adventure.

Immediately next to the railroad tracks was Silver Creek, another place of great fun. Pollywogs abounded and were caught with excitement, only to be released or taken home for a very short stay. Vaulting the creek with a pole was also great sport. One of the more creative activities was making

There were two in the Oakdale neighborhood, one on Eastern Avenue and another on Hall Street, and it was intriguing to poke through the junk, hoping to find something of value. One did have to be careful because the dumps' smoldering fires could be dangerous.

Often the kids from the neighborhood would walk to Reeds Lake, about three miles away, where swimming was a primary activity. On the south end of the lake open swimming was possible, but it was not very good. More popular places were Jack's place on the east side of the lake and Rose's on the west end. Rose's place charged a small fee, so we went mostly to Jack's



*Ramona Park pavilion circa 1920.*

slippery-willow whistles. I don't think I could make such a whistle today.

The Grande Brick Company, also located on the corner of Fuller and Ramona, was interesting enough by itself, but its greatest attraction was the huge piles of sand, which the company used as raw material. Running up and down the sand hills was fun, but sledding and skiing provided greater excitement.

The city dumps offered an unusual source of fun for kids in the thirties.

place.

Fishing from the docks, particularly from the main dock on the north end of the lake, where the steamboat *Ramona* docked, was also popular. Great was the excitement when someone would catch one of the numerous turtles which swam around the dock. Sailing on the *Ramona* was a special treat. Although it was probably not very large, it seemed huge to a ten-year-old. Captain Charlie Poisson, a

strong, portly man, sailed the *Ramona*. A lap around the lake cost a nickel. Hot dogs and pop were sold on board with background music from a honky-tonk player piano which spewed out an almost endless barrage of foot-tapping tunes.

During the summer months an added attraction at Reeds Lake was the weekly balloon ascent. This usually took place on Sunday nights, but fortunately for church-going kids, it was toward dusk, so one could still see the ascent after church from some vantage points in the Oakdale Park neighborhood. Unlike the modern multicolored hot-air balloons, the balloons of the 1930s were little more than dirty soot-covered canvas sacks. The best part was the upending of the balloon after the rider had come down in his parachute; the balloon turned over, spewed black smoke, and fell

lazily, often atop the roof of a house, with occasional damage to the roof.

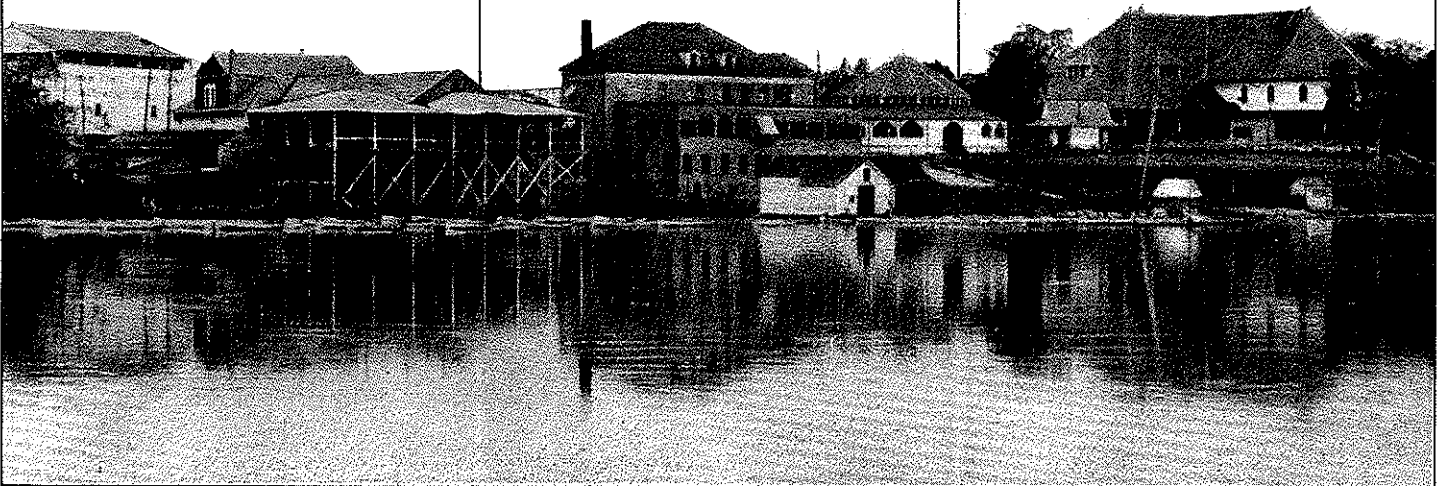
Probably the most fascinating place for a kid to go near Reeds Lake was Ramona Park, a major amusement park, recently described in the *Grand Rapids Press* as the "Cedar Point of its day." The park contained all kinds of rides, including the roller coaster, the mystic shoot—something like a boat ride in a dark tunnel—the merry-go-round, and bumper cars. There were also the fun house with its weird mirrors, a host of games and concessions, and a big pavilion which included a summer theater. An annual summer event at the park was the marvelous *Grand Rapids Press* picnic, given for its carriers. Each *Press* carrier, all boys, I think, was given a batch of tickets entitling him to a host of rides and enough concessions to make any kid happy. Because the *Press* was so gen-

erous with its carriers, it was not difficult for a noncarrier to pick up a ticket or two for a free ride or a hot dog.

Adjacent to the Ramona Park carnival was the baseball field. Its board fence was well supplied with knotholes for observation. For a short time minor-league baseball teams played at Ramona Park. A really big exhibition game featured the New York Yankees, including Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. Seeing that game, even though it was through the knotholes, was a big thrill.

I can say with enthusiasm that it was great to be part of the Oakdale Park neighborhood in the 1920s and 1930s. Oakdale Park CRC, Oakdale Christian School, and the natural neighborliness of the people fostered a genuine sense of community.

*Reeds Lake waterfront circa 1920.*



# boston square in the depression

by G. G. Harper

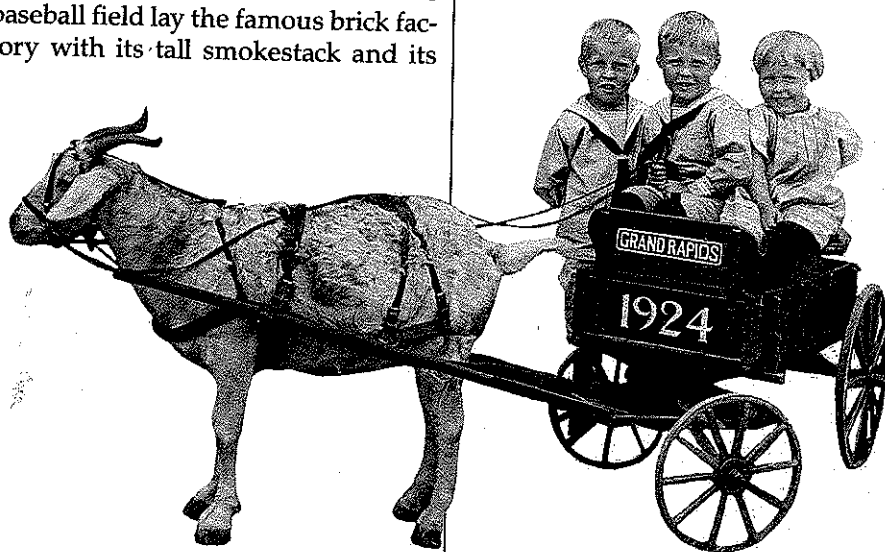
**T**he Boston Square district, a distinct part of the larger Oakdale area of Grand Rapids, arose from the oak forests and farms east of Kalamazoo Avenue and south of Boston Street during the twenties. Most of the streets were paved, but some were in various stages of completion at the end of the decade. Some had sewers and manholes, some had curbs and gutters, some had subpaving, and some were still earth: but the grid was visible, and by the end of the decade, a few houses stood on most of the streets; only a few streets were fully built upon by 1930. The crash of 1929, however, meant the end of building; as a consequence, houses in various states of completion could be found: some merely dug-out basements, some with basement walls but no floor, some with complete basements and the first floor roughed in, some with complete roof and framing but no siding, and some complete. Many of the finished basements with first floors had been finished off temporarily with decking roofs and partitioning, with an exit up a stair. The Boston Square area, then, was left in 1930 with the appearance of a cutting-edge of the prosperity of the twenties, but the cutting-edge had large nicks in it, and it provided a graphic image of the failure of the economy. Beyond its southern and eastern limits stood farms and golf courses and cemeteries.

Boston Square itself stands at the junction of Kalamazoo Avenue and Boston Street. On the west side two blocks of buildings built during the twenties still stand; on the east side stood an old two-story wooden building with a grocery store on the main floor; and further south stood a gas station with an open lubrication pit. The team track of the Pere Marquette Railroad bisected Kalamazoo Avenue just north of the square, and on each side of the track to the west stood lumber yards and coal yards; the pattern was repeated exactly on the east side. To the east of Kalamazoo Avenue, north of Boston Street, was a field which became the baseball field for the Boston Square merchants, a very good local team. The rest of the square was open fields, some with billboards on them. To the north of the baseball field lay the famous brick factory with its tall smokestack and its

huge brick kilns, in which the bricks were baked in superheated steam. The rhythmic susurrus of steam being vented from the kilns was the dominating sound in those days.

One feature of the area was the scattered Hoovervilles that sprang up at the onset of the depression. These were small colonies of shacks, some of tar paper over wood; some of tin siding made of old signs, their lettering intact but rusting; and some of finished lumber with tin or tar paper additions. Most of these shacks were heated by wood stoves, the fuel coming from raids on the oaks in the area

*Photo taken by door-to-door photographer picturing (l-r) Peter, John, and Stella Steensma, 1924—courtesy of Dr. William Huizingh.*

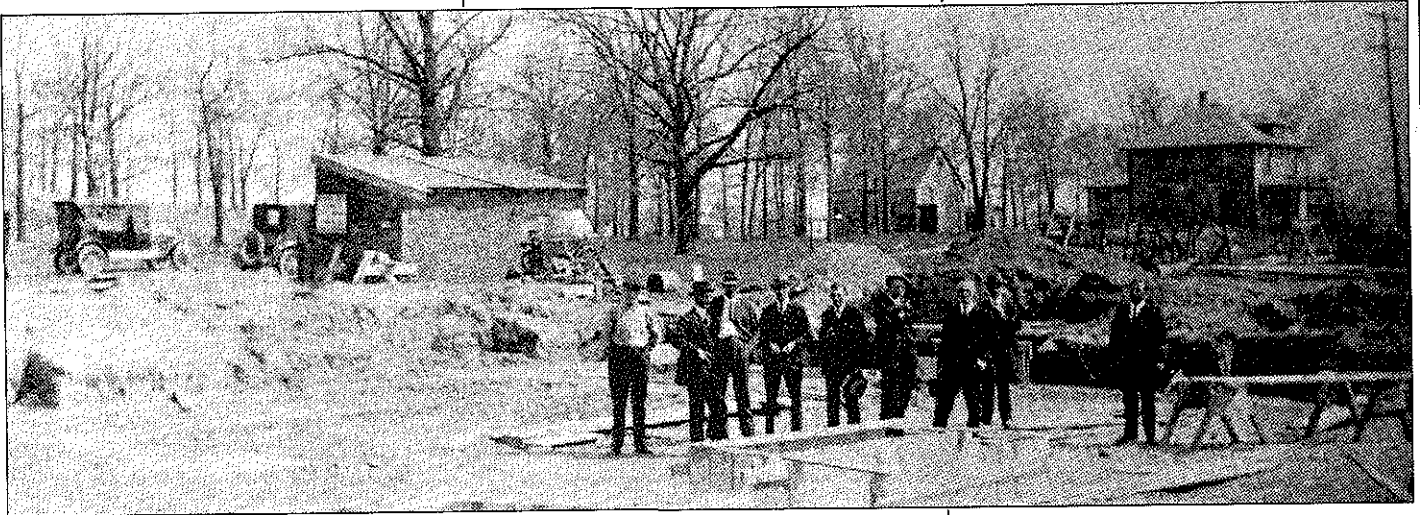


or from cutoffs from the lumber yards, with some help from coal scavenged from the railroad tracks. The inhabitants were desperately poor, and some were thought to be thieves; but most were decent people caught in the nightmare of the depression.

The incomplete buildings, the unfinished streets, the mixture of commercial enterprises and dwellings, and the variety of dwellings as well as the great variety of economic and social levels among the residents were matched by the unsettledness of the lives of many of them. Salaried people

lived next door to those who had no income but were scraping by or, with much swallowing of pride, living on the dole, then considered a shameful state. Thieves, or reputed thieves, lived next to solid citizens, keepers of cows and chickens next to well-off keepers of neat lawns and well-scrubbed sidewalks. On one block of Dickinson Street, for example, one family of thirteen children lived on the dependable income of the father and the older brother, who were teamsters. Their two teams of draught horses were stabled behind the house, and

the manure pile dominated the alley. But a mere three or four houses to the east a well-kept house sheltered an auto mechanic with a salaried job, who repaired cars until well into the night, with much noise and racing of engines, to amass the funds to purchase his employer's business. Between these two houses stood the dilapidated house of an unemployed carpenter, his old car on blocks in the yard, his children dressed in rags, his ill wife coughing out her life in the warm months, his despair growing. Just to the east of that block was a



(above) Fuller Avenue construction. (left) Fuller Avenue Christian Reformed Church, 1937.



chicken farm, its beasts stinking and crowing and occasionally escaping (it was thought fair to keep and eat any that found their way into one's yard). But in the same block was the big and well-kept house of the hero of all youths, a railroad engineer, who was said to be a regular on the passenger run from Grand Rapids to Detroit. He had a late-model car, could paint his house when it needed paint, and provide for his wife to have her hair done into marcel waves at an establishment farther north on Kalamazoo Avenue. That block also housed a dentist, a small-time cookie merchant, a plumber, a machinist, and

one family, living in a roofed basement, whose source of income was thought to be thievery, especially thievery of bronze bearings from railway cars parked on the team track to the north.

The area, in short, was not exactly a settled neighborhood, not an ideal middle-class suburb. Yet there were features of the area that made it almost ideal for growing up in, as John Vandenberg indicates in his recollections of life in the Oakdale area. The failure of the real estate schemes and the street construction firms left remarkable places and objects behind for the young to play in and on, with much opportunity to use the imagination, so that an abandoned steam shovel easily became a mighty battleship, a vacant lot the site of Custer's Last Stand or the Battle of the Marne (our fathers provided helmets, gas masks, and their war souvenirs, as well as tales of war), and the easily accessible sewer system, which magnified yells and whistles, was both mysterious and frightening. Open fields to the south and east teemed with pheasants and rabbits, the creek held minnows and tadpoles, and the brick factory provided broken bricks for forts and garden paths. The railroads were busy and dramatic; even the switch engines on the team track alongside the brick factory and the track crews, all Hispanic, were objects of close observation and wonder. Fire engines visited the area often in dry weather, when fields caught fire and threatened nearby houses or shacks, and the black maria of the third precinct police station was often about, either picking up obstreperous hoboes from the lumber yards (they were thought to account for the many fires in the yards, though the cynical in the area laid the fires to the depression and the fact of insurance) or to serve as a bone-destroying ambulance for victims of auto wrecks. The streets in warm weather were visited often by

vocal pushcart and one-horse merchants and collectors of rags and old iron, and once a day in summer an ice-cream wagon with a piercing whistle came down the streets, shortly after the daily drive-by of the block-ice truck. In the winter the hills provided good surfaces for sliding, and the pond at a nearby greenhouse, a good rink for hockey. The rich mix of people ensured no boredom (except the incredible boredom of Sunday, which in that area meant no movement except to or from church; ball games and

kitchen towels; yet another, various kinds of food thought to be healthful but notably bad tasting—wheat germ, bran, and the like.

Even the ethnic mix was interesting: mainly descendants of immigrants and some actual immigrants from the Netherlands, the mix also included Irish, Swedish, Italian, and, at the top of Boston Street hill, a single Black family, although the neighborhood witch, an old woman who wove rag rugs for a living, was found after her death, when her relative



even slow walking not to church were out).

The fact of the depression was palpable in the area, not only in the Hoovervilles and the homes of the desperately poor on each block but also on the streets in that area, located as it was close to the main railway to Detroit. Hoboes often came up the streets begging and leaving their chalked signs on gates and porch rails. Often they were fed, sometimes after a suitable chore had been done, though there was, after all, just so much wood to split and just so much grass to cut. Mendicants also appeared at side doors with regularity. One well-known figure was an old woman who offered, in her brogue, to sell "half a wheel"—i.e., half a *veal*; another person offered dustcloths and small

*Madison Square, nearest neighborhood to Oakdale Park, circa 1920.*

came to claim the body, to be Black also. She was not, of course, a real witch, but her tiny house, oil lamps, and general eccentricity caused her to be given that role. A few Lebanese also lived on some of the streets, and one old German immigrant was noted for guarding his squash patch with a big stick and a fierce dog. Named Wasserman, he was called Mr. Watermelon by the children, which his shape helped make appropriate.

Perhaps the strongest fact to be reckoned with in the area, then, was the fact of the Great Depression. Men who would ordinarily be at work all day were seen in their yards, tinkering with inoperable cars or feeding hunt-

ing dogs. Poverty was visible in unpainted houses (some of them built only a few years before the crash) and cars on blocks. At the grocery stores municipal scrip money was offered as often as green and silver money. Children's clothing was patched and worn, and some youths wore their fathers' overcoats for special events. Strange smells filled the air in the winter from the various substances used as fuel: sawdust from the planing mill down Kalamazoo Avenue, which required a rota of shovelers all night long to feed the quick burning substance into the furnace; horse manure; old tarpaper; and cheap coal. Ashes were not hauled away but were used to build up the unpaved alleys. Food was often of low quality, bought with the municipal scrip, which was not negotiable for good food; some of the families ate what could be gleaned from the fields of friendly farmers or even from the trash barrels behind the groceries. Men walked to the woods to pothunt for rabbits and squirrels (and the odd escaped chicken near a farm). The general level of health was low, and carious teeth were common;

even at their cheap rates medical persons were a luxury, and the "city doctors," whose services were free at the municipal building, were not trusted. Yet stealing was not often heard of, though it may have gone on without much public attention being paid to it—people were very understanding when poverty was the spur to petty crime, not the greed of later times or the thrill of the various kinds of petty lawbreaking. The Great Depression produced a generation of very ambitious young people—indeed, the area was the nursery of at least one millionaire. And, it should be added, also of preachers, medical people, and academics. Many of the survivors learned and retained a kind of radical bias in their political and economic thought for the rest of their lives: radical in one direction or the other—left or, perhaps more often, right.

As has so often been observed, the approach of World War II brought with it some amelioration of economic

distress, and that was true also for the Boston Square area. Gradually, uncompleted houses were completed, and vacant lots were built upon. The unpaved streets received their blacktop, and the sites of mighty battles became the well-kept lawns that they had been destined for before the crash. Men revived their dead automobiles or, increasingly, bought new ones and went off to their new jobs. Many of the young men who had joined the National Guard or the Naval Reserves went off to be trained, and scrip disappeared in the stores. Indeed, the area, like any other in the country, was a microcosm of the larger world in more ways than one; history in small is as instructive as history on the grand scale and, one might add, sociology also. The Boston Square area, like many other distinct areas, had its own identity, though it was not unique, and it was a good place to have grown up in.

*Oakdale Christian School, Class of 1913.*



## remembering boston square:

Mr. Jay Van Andel

In 1928 the James Van Andel family moved to a new home on 1249 Dickinson Street. It was part, then, of a new subdivision known as Boston Square which featured hilly streets and many vacant lots. Until after World War II the neighborhood changed little because the 1929 Depression halted the boom-time prosperity of the twenties. Yet, for most children, and particularly for pre-schoolers like Jay, the onset of the depression did not seem particularly burdensome. His father lost his job, but repaired cars and trucks in the backyard garage to survive. More interesting for the children was the asphalt paving of Dickinson Street, which became, with almost no auto traffic, a vast roller skating terrain and a perfect place to play ball. Playmates abounded as large families were common. Near neighbors included the Harpers, the DeKleines, the Gritters, Dykhouses and Penning. At play after school, and on every free day but Sunday, the kids interacted comfortably with no special regard for religious or social differences.

During school hours and on Sundays the neighborhood's distinctions became more evident. Public school students sorted themselves out as they walked along Kalamazoo to Evergreen street while the Christian schoolers trod the opposite side of Kalamazoo to their destination on Fisk Street. For CRC kids Saturday's catechism classes cut into their weekly

free day while on Sundays they were generally restricted. In addition to attending two services (and sometimes Jay joined his grandfather at a Dutch service) the kids wore church clothes throughout the day. That alone kept most children out of puddles and football games. Like others from the Oakdale CRC the Van Andels read *The Banner* on Sunday but on Saturdays Jay's father also picked up the *Chicago Herald Examiner*; its week-end comic strip provided a secular moment in an otherwise sacred day. Then, in addition, the Van Andels and other CRC children attended a neighborhood Sunday School class taught enthusiastically by Miss Goossens.

The major ecclesiastical varieties around Boston Square were Protestant Reformed, Christian Reformed and Reformed Church in America. In that order they enforced a diminishingly less restricted set of sabbath observances. Denominational distinctions were evident in other matters too. The PR's saw no movies whatever while the CRC's, although not all of them, viewed movies sponsored by the Christian Ex-Servicemen of World War I. The RCA's, and again only some of them, were known to enter regular theaters which featured Hollywood productions. Movie attendance functioned as a kind of litmus test, quite apart from doctrinal views, to measure orthodoxy. Occasionally some of the film classics like "Little Women" were shown at the Christian school and then the principal, George

Van Wesep, censored offensive segments. One line, mouthed by a British officer in a Revolutionary War film, became famous because it often slipped past the censor. "Disperse ye damned rebels" entered the vocabulary of nearly every Oakdale pupil.

The school, Jay Van Andel asserts, was generally good and also provided excellent choral instruction and a successful athletic program. The depression did, however, cause some parents to send their children to the public school. Tuition was burdensome and often it was paid weekly by students who carried some dollars and a few coins to their teachers. While school was memorable, the recollections of adventures after school hours remain more vivid.

The route to and from school—past houses, stores, shops and cross streets—opened an ever-widening world. Vern's gas station, for example, offered ice-cooled pop for five cents. The rarity of the occasions when Jay or others carried a nickle for pop made the selection extremely important. Red, green, orange or cola—the choice could require fifteen minutes. Hoxie's soda fountain and Kinsel's candy store offered similar dilemmas. Kuizema's hardware, at the far edge of the Oakdale neighborhood, stocked a good supply of model airplanes—a serious attraction for Jay.

On Saturdays and during summer vacations leisure time permitted more lengthy excursions—along the railroad tracks, up and over coal piles,

and down into Silver Creek. After closing hours the empty strap-rail carts at the Grande Brick Company provided tame versions of a roller coaster ride. Restrictions were few and children gawked and clustered around work places without much hindrance. Shoemakers, auto mechanics and backyard chicken butchers entertained while they worked. Several WPA projects employed numbers of local residents. Chipping mortar from discarded bricks, which were used to pave streets, kept many hands at work. More dramatic, the encasement of Silver Creek in a huge 6x10 underground tunnel attracted steady attention. After its completion the dark tunnel invited great adventures. With candles lighting their way neighborhood kids followed the underground stream for blocks and emerged into the bright daylight with pinched and blinking eyelids.

Smaller excursions, either to the pump in Boersma's coal yard to drink from the communal tin cup, or to the Feenstra farm on Burton Street for a tin pail of raw milk, punctuated the daily

routine. But more memorable than these were the ice cream cones scooped full and high at the East End Creamery. For these, people stood in lines and some waited in cars.

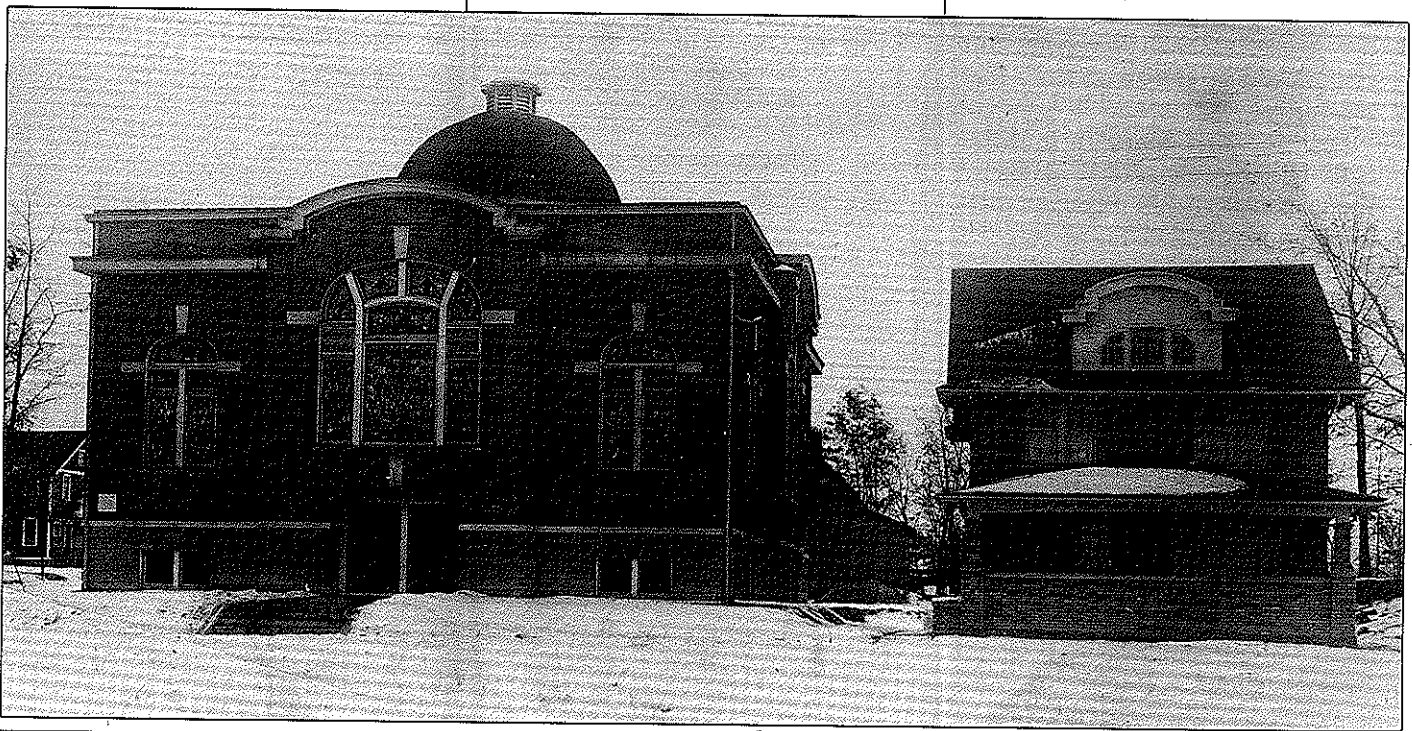
Medical care provided by a dentist and a physician reflected the lean simplicities of the era. Dr. Hunderman, who treated many on credit, kept accounts from a huge brass cash register with keys to punch and with numbers that popped up like those on the cash box in the grocery store. Physicians did better than dentists during the depression as teeth were often let go until they needed extraction and few clients troubled Dr. Kuizema with concerns about a perfect smile or irregular overbites. Dr. Hunderman specialized in the removal of tonsils and adenoids—a medical fad which continued into the forties.

Boston Square's streets, with their schools, churches and nearly numberless back yards, still populate Jay's memories. But for him and his generation the War closed out the era. Kuizema's model airplanes were replaced by the tougher and more dan-

gerous products of Boeing and Lockheed. Today the coal yards are gone and with them the many storefront grocers and craftsmen. They and their children have moved on, but Boston Square has recently acquired a face lift and continues to provide essential service to a viable neighborhood.

—HJB

*Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church*



# oakdale's "service economy"

*Dr. William Huizingh*

In recent times it has often been said that we now live in a "service economy." Those who make such a statement refer to the fact that an ever larger proportion of our work force is engaged in activities that do not produce anything tangible. But if we think of a service economy as an economy that provides excellent on-the-site services to the average consumer, then we find that the level of services today is not remotely comparable to that which existed in Oakdale Park in the 1920s and 1930s.

Consider, for example, these instances of in-the-home services:

Bill Korfker not only delivered the groceries each Saturday but also picked up the order early that morning.

Our "banana man," a middle-aged Italian, delivered bananas by the dozen from his pushcart, bellying to announce his arrival.

In season, Mr. Vandenberg, the local huckster, brought us freshly harvested fruits and vegetables, marketing them from the back of his specially equipped truck.

A wide range of creameries provided home delivery of dairy products.

Each week we had a visit from our "egg man," a one-product retailer and producer.

Also weekly came our "cookie man," a Mr. VanDyke. Talk about specialization!

For a variety of baked goods, one

could rely on the black-horse-drawn wagon of the Colonial Baking Company.

Pickup and delivery of laundry and dry cleaning were available from several purveyors.

Ice delivery was available at least twice a week.

Piano lessons from Mr. Ryskamp were available in either your home or his.

For merchandise not procurable from any of the above, we could rely on Ray DeGroot, "the blind man," who appeared periodically to take orders for an amazing range of goods, which he subsequently delivered personally.

In the depths of the depression,

unemployed barbers would canvass the neighborhood, offering their services in the home for whatever one was willing to pay.

Occasionally a photographer with a Shetland pony or other prop would solicit business, offering to take pictures of the children in his irresistibly exotic setting.

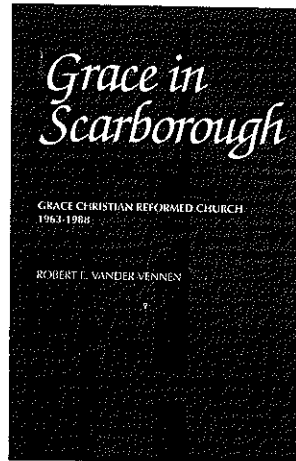
And there was always the ice-cream purveyor during summer vacations.

*Pie-Delivery wagon—courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Bud Stehouwer.*



# BOOKS

by C. J. Bult



**Grace in Scarborough.** By Robert E. Vander Vennen. Toronto, Ontario: Morning Star Press, 1989. \$9.95.

In this short illustrated history, Robert E. Vander Vennen, a staff member of the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, writes with affection and candor about Grace Christian Reformed Church, a congregation of 104 families located in Scarborough, an eastern suburb of metropolitan Toronto. As a member of this church since 1974, the author has shared in much of its history, knows its people well, and as he observes, must live with those whom he portrays in print. For these reasons Vander Vennen considers his anniversary chronicle of the congregation's first twenty-five years (1963-1988) to be a backward glance accompanied by personal reflections about events he considers significant. Although the author offers the reader few critical or evaluative comments, he does not gloss over those aspects in this community's quarter-century which in various ways exhibit human frailty or lack of determination.

Vander Vennen's book discloses both the humorous and serious sides of congregational life. Jacob Geuzebroek (1964-1970), the first minister,

was Dutch-becoming-Canadian, both progressive and orthodox, and he intangibly showed the congregation how in a communal way it, too, could take that path. (p. 26)

Also, he doled out peppermints to children who dubbed him the "pep-

permint-dominee." Once while gardening he severed a telephone cable that serviced 10,000 people. Members of the church have not forgotten this incident and often remind him of it. Pastor Jacob Vos's (1971-1983) sermons were prepared with care and demonstrated thoughtful consideration of Scripture. Woodworking and fishing were his hobbies, and while on a fishing expedition, Vander Vennen reveals, he caught an out-of-season bass which he had thought to be a beautiful pickerel. Simon Wolfert (1985-), previously a missionary pastor in Brazil for eighteen years is, consequently, well prepared to serve a church with an increasingly diverse ethnic membership drawn from areas surrounding the church.

Notable in this volume are Vander Vennen's remarks about congregational activities and in particular his comments about public worship innovations, diaconal ministry, youth ministry, church fellowship, local evangelism, ecumenical outreach, and the struggle for a Christian school. Youth ministry and consistorial responsibilities for calling and caring are discussed in ways which reveal the congregation's concerns for lapsed

adult church members and young people no longer constrained by social and family pressures to attend church regularly or participate in mid-week youth programs. Also troubling to Vander Vennen is Grace Church's declining membership, caused in part by skyrocketing real-estate values in the Toronto-Scarborough area. Young couples cannot afford to buy houses near Grace Church, and consequently its membership grows older and older. Often those who do purchase homes in the vicinity are immigrants from Hong Kong.

After you have read what Vander Vennen has to say, you will conclude that those who occupy the pews in Grace Church remind you of those sitting around you in your own house of worship. Often the author writes about Grace Church as a family of believers, but he also mentions by name many parishioners without whom Grace Church would not be the vibrant congregation it is today. Particularly valuable to those who study current developments in the Christian Reformed Church are Vander Vennen's remarks about demographic changes in Grace Church's urban environment, a situation far from unique among Christian Reformed congregations.

The stuff of denominational history is found in narratives such as Vander Vennen's, in which the people of Grace Church come alive as believable flesh-and-blood members of a congregation where God's grace has become a reality for all who worship there and work in God's world.

# FOR THE FUTURE

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

Henry Stob: "Recalling Englewood, 1910-1920"

Northern Michigan: Lucas, McBain and surrounding area

Memoirs of Rev. Arnold Brink

Letters to Canada, G.G. Harper

*Courtesy of Zeeland Historical Society*

The South African Boer War, H. Ippel

Christian Education in Northern New Jersey

Additional notes on the Civil War

The Yff Family—from Amsterdam to Chicago

F. W. N. Hugenholtz, a Liberal Dutch Minister in America *by* Walter Lagerwey

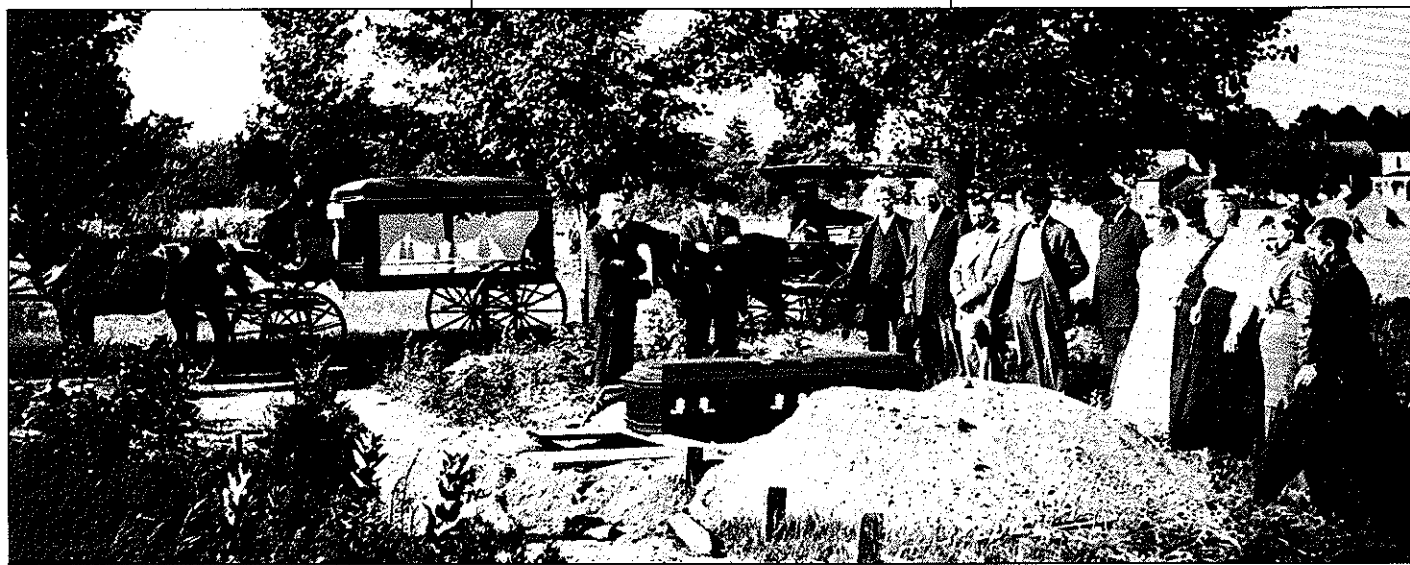
M. Schoonbeek—Hard Times in Grand Rapids, 1873-1890

Sport and Sabbath Desecration *by* John Byl

Mins Reinsma: Stories of an Immigrant in the 1950s.

Reports of Death in the Netherlands and America. H. Brinks/S. Sinke/H. Westra

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# NEWSLETTER UPDATE

In December 1988, the Friends of the Archives Endowment Fund was established to "assist the publication of *Origins*," and to support the "occasional publication" of books and pamphlets. At that time \$30,000, an accumulation of contributions from our Members, Sponsors, and Founders, was deposited in a separate interest-bearing account.

The following year, an appeal addressed to our members and selected charitable foundations attracted an additional \$16,200. The Endowment, which now stands at \$49,500, includes \$3,300 earned from investments.

The first response to this campaign was an especially gratifying \$5,000 gift from the Jay and Betty Van Andel Foundation. That donation equaled nearly a third of 1989's accumulated assets.

With the Endowment Fund now well established we have formulated objectives to put these contributions to work in a three-phase program which is outlined below.

## I. The acquisition of additional letters for the Immigrant Letter Collection:

This collection, now numbering about 4,000 letters, provides a solid basis for research in North American immigration history. But these holdings must also be enlarged to gain a more balanced and representative fund of evidence. Consequently we are seeking special assistance from selected donors to conduct a three-month search for additional letters in the Netherlands this year.

We can also report a good beginning on funds donated specifically for the 1990 letters collection program in the Netherlands. Donors to this effort

include Meijer Inc., Witte Travel, The Dutch International Society, Russell and Julia Bouws, along with half-price flight arrangements with Martinair Services, North America.

## II. The translation of the "Immigrant Letter Collection":

This phase of the program requires the ongoing translation of the letters we already possess and the translation of those we expect to acquire. Of our current letter collection, at least 3,000 remain untranslated, so much work needs doing.

Our recent request for volunteer translators has produced an overwhelmingly gratifying response. Over forty persons have agreed to assist us, and their excellent work is already being returned to the Archives.

### Volunteer Translators

Mr. Floyd Antonides  
Mr. and Mrs. Jack Appel  
Mr. William Baker  
Mr. Bill Berghoef  
Rev. John Blankespoor  
Rev. Harold Bossenbroek  
Rev. and Mrs. Gerard Bouma  
Mr. William Brons  
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Rev. Charles Greenfield  
Dr. George G. Harper  
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Mr. Ralph Vunderink  
Miss Betty Wiersma  
Dr. Enno Wolthuis  
Mr. M.J. Woudenberg  
Mr. John H. Yzenbaard

## III. The publication of "Letters From Dutch Immigrants: 1850-1960":

After a sufficient number of immigrant letters have been translated (perhaps by 1992), we plan to publish the first in a series of books under the general heading "Letters from Dutch Immigrants." This, we believe, is necessary for general readers and professional scholars alike. Dutch is read by increasingly fewer North Americans, and almost no scholars can use the Dutch language. Unless these letters are published in English, they will be useful to but few. Even now most of our immigration researchers are Netherlanders. It is important to make our history available to other ethnic groups and especially to our own descendants. Income from the Friends of the Archives Endowment Fund will be used to finance the publication of the "Letters from Dutch Immigrants" series.

In March this year we were invited by the Cornell University Press to submit a proposal for a volume of Dutch Immigrant letters which will (if accepted) accompany Cornell's current and planned volumes on English and German immigrant letters.

It seems fair to say, then, that we are moving forward in each of our three objectives—the acquisition of new letters, the translation of current files, and an English-language publication of translated letters.

# ORIGINS

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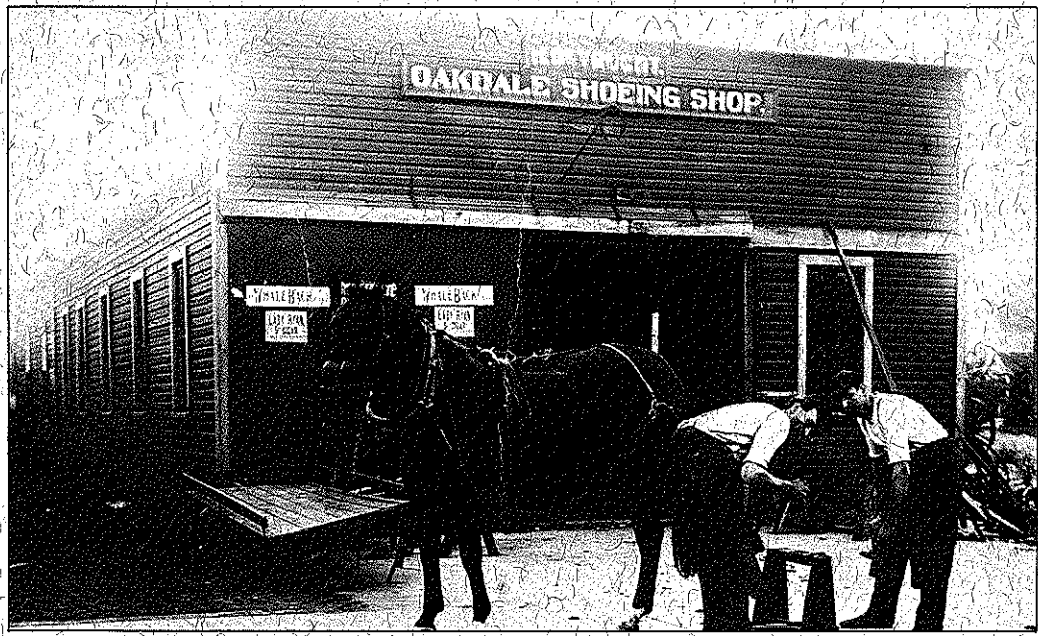
The Calvin College and Seminary Archives is a division of the Schools' library which contains the historical records of the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin College and Seminary, and other institutions related to the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands and North America. The Archives also contains a wide range of personal and family manuscripts.

# ORIGINS

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